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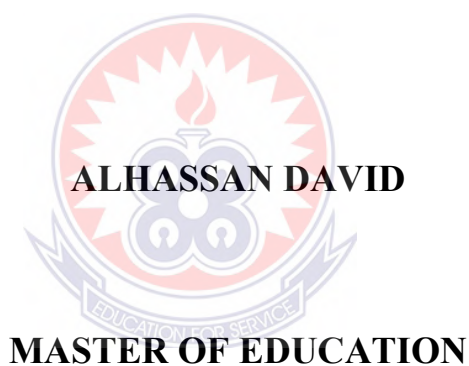
READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES AMONG FORM ONE STUDENTS OF ZAMSA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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MASTER OF EDUCATION

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READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES AMONG FORM ONE STUDENTS OF ZAMSA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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**A dissertation in the Department of Applied Linguistics,
Faculty of Foreign Languages Education, submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies, in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education
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JULY, 2023

DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, **Alhassan David** hereby 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 original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: ……………………………….

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SUPERVISORS' DECLARATION

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

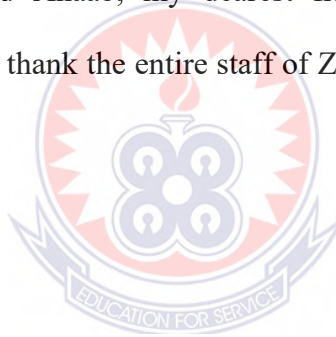Name of Supervisor: …………………………………

Signature: ………....................……

Date: ……………………….............................

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension plays an important role in learning a foreign language but it is also a very difficult subject. The current study examined reading comprehension difficulties among Form "1" students of Zamsa Junior High School. Also, the study specifically aimed at assessing various methods used by the teachers in teaching reading comprehension to the students and identified the main problems encountered by students in reading comprehension. The study was theoretically grounded in the traditional theory, cognitive theory, and Schema theory. The case study design with qualitative research approach were adopted for the study. Purposive and random sampling were used to select twenty-five (5) students and 2 teachers for the study. Data collection for the study was done using documentary review, interviews, and classroom observation. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that phonics method was the commonest method used by most teachers. Furthermore, it was revealed that most students encountered problems such as poor vocabulary mastery, poor fluency and issues with background knowledge when reading in reading comprehension. The study recommended that teachers should make frantic efforts to ensure that students gain interest in reading, both at school and outside the school environment. More so, strategies such as dictation and pronunciation drills must be infused in language teaching to ensure that students improve their language competency through reading.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter presents background to the study; statement of the problem; purpose of the study; objectives; research questions; significance of the study; limitations and delimitations; definitions of terms and organization of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

English being an international language has been playing an important role in bringing people in close contact worldwide and assumed a key role in social, economic and scientific development of the world (Teevno & Raisani, 2017). Khan (2007) believes that English has been playing a major role as an important source of communication globally. In Ghana, English language has received the status of official language and is taught as a compulsory subject from lower primary to senior high school level (Ankrah et al., 2017; Owu-Ewie, 2014). English reading itself is sometimes difficult to understand. Researches have indicated that 'reading is thinking' is a popular notion in the area of literacy instruction (Cunningham & Allington, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). It is a stepping stone in the walk of knowledge. Reading is an activity which involves comprehensions and interpretations of ideas symbolized by written or printed page. It is clear, without this ability readers would find themselves confronted with strange and weird symbols which would make no sense for them. Very low-level ability of reading allows a reader to differentiate the letters of a particular language from non-linguistic marks. According to Qrqez & Radzuwan (2019), reading is the most complex skill of the four English skills for students, and it requires continuous practice. In the same vein, it is a cognitive process by which a reader decodes marks on a page with the purpose of deriving meaning from written material. Reading also requires activating

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prior (given) knowledge or experience to understand the (new) written material. It requires using useful reading strategies such as context clues to discover the meaning of unfamiliar words.

However, reading difficulties in English exist in all countries including the United Kingdom (UK) as well as the United States of America (USA), not only in the Ghanaian education settings (Ankrah et al., 2017; Owu-Ewie, 2014; Iqbal et al., 2015). Most Ghanaian students struggle with reading difficulties mainly because they do not practice English in their daily lives, only in school. Their poor use of working memory leads them to be unable to follow meaning in English texts proficiently. However, the low level of background knowledge also affects their reading comprehension. Al-Jarrah & Ismail, (2018) assert that lack of understanding may be as an outcome of deficient knowledge of vocabulary. In reading itself, the limitation of the students' knowledge in vocabulary gives the implication that the key to get the meaning of the text by how many words in English that students know. It will make their ability to comprehend the text easier. Thus, the basics of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills is vocabulary. This indicates that there is a strong correlation between reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. In this regard, EFL learners who fail to connect their previous knowledge and predict the possible meaning of the text can face difficulties in understanding the text. This might be due to lack of in-depth knowledge of English derivation. Nezami (2012), the most noticeable issues faced by the teachers today is insufficiency in reading comprehension among students. This deficiency might affect their academic performance.

A great number of students without sufficient vocabulary knowledge or effective learning strategies mostly face reading comprehension difficulties (Nor & Rashid, 2018). They mostly encounter a series of continued failure during their studies due to

bad experiences they had from the beginning (Hart & Risley, 2003). This connection seems logical since students need high level of vocabulary in order to comprehend reading materials. Researchers pointed out that the degree of learners' vocabulary knowledge, prior knowledge, and grammatical knowledge are some of the significant difficulties influencing the reading comprehension (Koda, 2007). Nergis (2013) posits that deepness of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic consciousness and metacognitive recognition are some of the important factors influencing the reading comprehension.

Other studies have shown that grammatical knowledge plays a vital role in reading comprehension (Antonis, 2022; Ngure et al., 2019; Zhang, 2012, Nyarko et al., 2018). In addition, Shiotsu, & Weir (2007) stated that the learner's level of syntactic knowledge plays a role in their understanding of reading materials. In other words, learners with insufficient knowledge might not be able to achieve a higher level of reading ability. Therefore, readers need L2 syntactic knowledge to integrate their background knowledge and word meaning (Koda, 2007). Based on the condition highlighted, this study aims to examine reading comprehension difficulties among students, particularly form one students of Zamsa Junior High School.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Ghana, it is common knowledge that most students are quite weak in English in general and reading in particular. As a result, they still find difficulties in reading comprehension. They also rely on word-to-word translation when reading English. On the contrary, the current problems of students such as poor performance in examinations as well as poor speaking and writing of English have been attributed to lack of reading and thinking (comprehension) skills amongst them. Poor reading skills in the junior high schools have become an issue of great concern among parents, government and educationists in the country. The performance of students writing Basic Education

Certificate Examinations (BECE) in the country has been deteriorating for some time now in Ghana. This deterioration has been attributed to poor reading skills among students. For instance, the Chief Examiner's report for the BECE examinations for 2012 and 2013 revealed a percentage failure of 31.19% and 19.15% respectively. The report attributed the poor performance to lack of intensive and extensive reading, poor communication skills, and lack of understanding of questions, poor orthography or spelling skills (Chief Examiners Report, 2013). Similarly, another report by Ghana Education Service in 2014 also indicated a fall in students' performance in English. Only 45.2% passed the subject to qualify for tertiary education with 20.9% of examination candidates getting Grade 9 in the English language in 2014.

Rahimi & Talepasan (2012) emphasized that there are two main reasons that stand behind students' poor comprehension skills. Firstly, when teaching reading, most of the EFL teachers concentrate on assessing students' comprehension at the word and sentence levels rather than concentrating on teaching reading comprehension. Secondly, students' lack of reading comprehension strategies is also considered a major cause of students' poor comprehension skills. Considering the challenges and difficulties of foreign language reading, especially the cognitive, cultural and linguistic aspects, all prove that EFL language reading is much more difficult and complicated than that in L1. In order to help learners better in enhancing their reading comprehension and tackle their reading comprehension problems, students need to identify their problems first and then think of appropriate strategies in order to improve their reading comprehension.

In the Ghanaian context, studies have considered various aspects, for instance, Arthur (2006) researched the reading habits of children in the Sunyani Municipality, Owusu-Acheaw (2014) looked at reading habits and academic performance of students of the

Koforidua Polytechnic, Kwadjo-Pobi (2016) investigated the reading habits of secondary school students. Similarly, Afenyo (1999) examined the reading habits of undergraduate students, and most recently Ankrah et al., (2017) used phonic method to improve poor reading ability of pupils at Techiman Senior High School Form One while Nyarko et al., (2018) delved into English reading strategies and their impact on students' performance in reading comprehension. Besides, no Ghanaian studies have looked at reading comprehension difficulties among students in Builsa South District where Zamsa Junior High School resides.

Furthermore, as students transition from lower to higher grades, their coursework becomes progressively more demanding, requiring them to comprehend complex texts and synthesize information effectively (Adusei-Bonsu, 2020). Unfortunately, some students at Zamsa Junior High School encounter obstacles in developing strong reading comprehension abilities, affecting their performance across all subjects, with English being particularly impacted. One contributing factor to this issue lies in the methods employed for teaching reading comprehension. Teachers may unintentionally adopt ineffective strategies or lack access to updated and evidence-based instructional approaches. This could lead to a disconnect between the teaching methods employed and the diverse learning needs of the students, impeding their progress in mastering reading comprehension. Moreover, specific challenges and problems related to reading comprehension have been observed among the Form One students. These challenges include difficulties in understanding context, grasping main ideas, making inferences, and effectively using reading strategies. Such obstacles hinder students from fully engaging with academic materials, leading to reduced motivation and lower academic achievement (Swanson & Jerman, 2007). The urgency of this issue necessitates a comprehensive investigation to identify the root causes of reading comprehension

difficulties among Form One students at Zamsa Junior High School. Therefore, this study aims to assess the existing methods used for teaching reading comprehension at Zamsa Junior High School and delve into the specific challenges faced by Form One students in mastering this critical skill.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the reading comprehension difficulties among students of Zamsa Junior High School.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study include:

1. To assess various methods being used for the teaching of reading comprehension to the students.
2. To identify the main challenges/problems encountered by Zamsa Junior High School Students in reading comprehension.

1.5 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the various teaching methods used in teaching reading comprehension to the students?
2. What are the main problems encountered by Zamsa Junior High School Students in reading comprehension?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study carries immense significance from a number of aspects. It will yield useful data relating to reading comprehension skills. Suggestions and recommendations from this study are expected to be very useful for the improvement of reading comprehension and teaching reading methodologies. The research will go a long way to improve

English reading skills in schools. Again, the study will help syllabus setters to add suitable reading materials in the books, which may prove helpful in improving reading comprehension. Furthermore, the findings of this study will help the Ghana Education Service (GES) to make arrangements to evaluate reading skills, so that students pay more heed to reading skills. Hence, enable English teachers to analyse the difficulties, problems and factors blocking the way of reading comprehension among their students. Finally, the study will serve as a resource material to other future researchers who will be interested in working in this area.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

The study was conducted in Zamsa Junior High School. The focus of this study is to examine reading comprehension difficulties among form one students of Zamsa Junior High School. The researcher is interested in investigating the causes of poor reading ability, understand the various methods used for reading comprehension in the school and how to improve the reading skills of pupils. The study will be limited to the form one students and English teachers of Zamsa Junior High School.

1.8 Organisation of the Study

The study comprises five (5) chapters. Chapter one comprises the background to the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, research questions and significance and scope of the study. Chapter two also entails the review of relevant related literature to the study while the third chapter also outlines the methodology and procedures for conducting the study. These include research design, population, sample and sampling technique, research instruments and procedures for collecting and analysing the data that will be gathered.

Chapter four deals mainly with the results and analysis of the data collected. Finally, the chapter five consists of summary of key findings, conclusion and recommendations as well as suggestions for future research.

1.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter gave a brief introduction of the study and presented the statement of the problem; purpose of the study; objectives; research questions; significance of the study; limitations and delimitations; definitions of terms and organization of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The chapter gives details of the theoretical framework (traditional bottom-up, cognitive view), empirical review, and conceptual framework which make up the literature review. The chapter features definitions of reading and reading difficulties, importance of reading, causes of reading difficulties among students as well as other issues pertaining to the topic under study. Finally, the empirical review however, is composed of findings of some studies conducted that are related to the topic under study.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by three theories namely the traditional theory, cognitive theory and schema theory. The researcher chose these theories for the study, because of their relevance to the study's objectives.
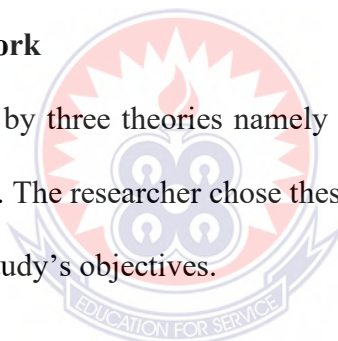
2.1.1 The traditional theory

The traditional bottom-up method is a behaviorist perspective, which gained prominence in the 1950s, exerted a significant influence on reading instruction by considering learning as a process of habit formation through stimulus-response associations (Omaggio, 1993). According to behaviorism, language learning was viewed as a system of conditioned responses, where certain patterns of language were reinforced and preserved while others were not (Omaggio, 1993). This behaviorist view had a profound impact on the development of the audio-lingual approach to language instruction. The audio-lingual method aimed to establish second language habits by employing repetitive drills and rigorous error correction (Omaggio, 1993). The

underlying assumption was that through continuous practice and reinforcement, learners could develop automatic and accurate language production skills. The audio-lingual approach heavily relied on behaviorist principles to shape learners' language habits (Omaggio, 1993).

According Gray & Rogers (2004), the traditional bottom-up approach to reading instruction, considers reading as a sequential process of deciphering individual words before integrating them into meaningful phrases and sentences. This approach primarily focuses on word-level decoding and fails to explain the cognitive processes involved in making sense of the text. Comprehension, according to this perspective, is the result of combining word meanings to derive clause meanings (Anderson, 1994). Stanovich, (1980) asserts that the bottom-up theory portrays readers as passive recipients of textual content. It emphasizes recognizing graphemes and translating them into phonemes, treating language as a code to be deciphered (Stanovich, 1980). This approach neglects the role of the reader's prior knowledge and expertise in understanding the text. Activities influenced by this viewpoint prioritize literal comprehension and give little consideration to the reader's background knowledge or engagement with the subject matter (Omaggio, 1993).

The traditional theory of reading instruction has faced significant criticism for its limited focus on formal aspects of language and word-level processing (Kucer, 1987). Anderson (1994) argues that reading comprehension involves more than just decoding individual words and comprehension requires a broader understanding of language, including its contextual and semantic dimensions. Kucer (1987) emphasizes that the importance of contextual and semantic understanding in making sense of written text. Comprehending a text requires readers to connect words and sentences to their broader meaning, drawing on background knowledge, making inferences, and engaging in

critical thinking (Anderson, 1994). By solely focusing on word-level decoding, the traditional theory neglects these higher-order cognitive processes that contribute to comprehension. The cognitive approach to reading emerged as a response to the shortcomings of the traditional theory, aiming to integrate both form and meaning in reading instruction (Samuels & Kamil, 1988).

Reading and writing are closely interconnected skills, and reading proficiency has a significant impact on writing development (Samuels & Kamil, 1988). The traditional bottom-up theory, with its emphasis on decoding skills, may inadvertently limit students' ability to engage with text meaningfully and express their ideas effectively in writing. Developing higher-order reading skills, such as vocabulary knowledge, text comprehension, and critical thinking, is essential for enhancing students' writing abilities (Kucer, 1987). The traditional theory's focus on decoding skills often neglects the broader aspects of reading comprehension that are essential for developing strong writing skills. Writing is not simply a transcription of decoded words; it involves the synthesis of ideas, coherent organization, and effective communication. By primarily emphasizing word-level decoding, the traditional approach may hinder students' ability to comprehend texts holistically and extract meaning beyond surface-level word recognition. To enhance students' writing abilities, it is crucial to develop higher-order reading skills that go beyond decoding. Vocabulary knowledge plays a fundamental role in effective writing, as it allows students to use words precisely and express their ideas accurately. A robust vocabulary helps students convey their thoughts with clarity and precision, enhancing the overall quality of their writing (Kucer, 1987).

2.1.2 The cognitive theory

The cognitive theory brought about a significant shift in the field of cognitive sciences during the 1960s (Omaggio, 1993, p. 57). This new theory provided fresh insights into

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how individuals acquire their first language and, in the process, questioned the validity of behaviorism. As a result, the study of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) experienced notable impacts, with psycholinguists focusing on elucidating the development of internal representations of a foreign language within learners' minds (Omaggio, 1993, p. 57). An essential distinction was drawn by Ausubel between meaningful learning and rote learning, underscoring the importance of contextual relevance and connection to existing knowledge (Omaggio, 1993, p. 57). Rote learning, exemplified by memorizing isolated words or rules in a foreign language, leads to transient knowledge that is susceptible to being forgotten. Conversely, meaningful learning occurs when new knowledge is presented in a relevant context, intertwined with the learner's existing cognitive theory (Smith, 1994). According to Omaggio (1993, p. 58), this type of learning is more likely to be retained over time. Consequently, the emphasis on meaning influenced the top-down approach to second language (L2) learning, prompting a surge in teaching strategies and activities in the 1960s and 1970s that prioritized students' experiences and knowledge (Omaggio, 1993, p. 58).

These advancements in cognitive theory and top-down processing techniques have significantly transformed the way learners acquire reading skills (Smith, 1994). According to Tierney & Pearson (1994), reading goes beyond extracting meaning from text; it involves making connections between the information in the text and the reader's prior knowledge. It is an interactive process between the reader and the text, heavily reliant on the reader's existing knowledge to comprehend the material (Tierney and Pearson, 1994). Reading, from this viewpoint, is an intentional and rational activity that relies on the reader's past knowledge and expectations, as opposed to being a passive and mindless endeavor. Successful comprehension of written language necessitates not

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only decoding the print into sounds but also constructing understanding through active cognitive processes (Smith, 1994, p. 2). In essence, reading becomes a psycholinguistic guessing game, where readers sample the text, formulate hypotheses, test them, confirm or reject them, and then generate new ones.

In relation to this study, the impact of reading skills on students' writing becomes evident (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2005). The cognitive theory and its emphasis on meaningful learning and the activation of prior knowledge highlight the crucial role of reading in developing writing abilities. When students engage in meaningful reading experiences, connecting the text to their existing knowledge, they acquire a deeper understanding of language structures, vocabulary, and rhetorical patterns. This enriched linguistic and conceptual framework then becomes a valuable resource for their writing endeavors (Omaggio, 1993, p57). By actively processing the text and making cognitive connections, readers develop stronger writing skills, as they are more adept at organizing and expressing their thoughts coherently. Reading not only enhances students' language proficiency but also exposes them to diverse writing styles, genres, and ideas, which they can draw upon in their own written compositions. Additionally, the psycholinguistic guessing game involved in reading fosters critical thinking and analytical skills, further benefiting students' writing abilities.

2.1.3 Schema theory

The Schema theory, closely connected to the top-down processing approach, also had a significant impact on reading instruction (Smith, 1994, p. 14). According to Smith (1994, p. 14), this theory provides detailed insights into how a learner's background knowledge interacts with the reading task and h ighlights the essential role of a learner's knowledge and prior experiences in comprehending a text. According to the Schema theory, past experiences contribute to the development of mental frameworks,

known as schemes, which aid readers in making sense of new experiences (Anderson, 1994; Smith, 1994, p. 14). Schemes represent extensive representations of general patterns or regularities derived from our experiences. For example, an individual's generic scheme of an airplane allows them to comprehend an airplane they have not previously encountered. This indicates that prior experiences are connected to new experiences, encompassing knowledge of objects, situations, events, as well as procedures for retrieving, organizing, and interpreting information (Kucer, 1987, p. 31).

Research by Anderson (1994, p. 469) demonstrates that a reader's schema significantly influence the recall of information from a text. Anderson explains that comprehension occurs when a reader can activate a schema that accounts for the objects and events described in the text. Comprehension involves the process of activating or constructing a schema that provides a coherent explanation of the content within a discourse (Anderson, 1994, p. 473). According to Anderson and Pearson (1988, p. 38), comprehension involves the interaction between old and new information. They emphasize that comprehension is achieved when a reader finds a mental "home" for the information in the text or modifies an existing mental framework to accommodate new information. Consequently, a learner's schema adapt and restructure themselves to incorporate new information into the existing system (Omaggio, 1993).

In the context of the study on the impact of reading skills on students' writing, the Schema theory highlights the importance of prior knowledge activation and its influence on both reading comprehension and writing proficiency. When students possess relevant background knowledge and schemas related to a particular topic, they are better equipped to comprehend written texts, extract key information, and develop a coherent understanding. Furthermore, their existing schema serve as a foundation for organizing their thoughts and effectively expressing themselves in writing.

2.2 The Concept of Reading

Reading is a necessary component of a productive study routine that will enhance learners' academic achievement. Reading is the key to success, not just in academic settings but also as a way to continue learning throughout life (Oriogu et al., 2017). Academic and professional success are both fuelled by reading. Therefore, reading is the best way for a person to persistently delve deep into knowledge and its enduring gift. According to Karim and Hasan (2007), reading is a process that involves numerous complicated skills, including the capacity to recognize written words, skim for information, and then maybe read extensively. Okebukola (2006) asserts that reading gives people the means to pass on knowledge to each successive generation and does enable one to hear the wisdom and experiences of the past. Additionally, Aina et al. (2011) affirm that reading is a talent that must be developed from a young age, and the habit of reading should start early and be ingrained throughout one's career. Reading, however, is a daily practice that persists and develops into a habit before becoming ingrained in society. According to Okwilagwe (1998), it should involve more reasoning and require all sorts of thinking, including critical, analytical, creative, imaginative, evaluative, judgmental, and problem-solving. This involves the meaningful interpretation of words, phrases, and sentences. Reading requires work and frequently involves a choice; motivation is essential for reading engagement (Wigfield et al., 2004). In his paper on creating a reading culture, Paulson (2006) suggested that:

> *"If we identify an important goal of … reading programs for college*
>
> *readers as providing a foundation of life-long reading, a study-skills*
>
> *approach to college development reading falls short. Instead, we*
>
> *must focus on encouraging and instilling in … students the belief that*

> *reading has intrinsic value. It is through this approach that solid*
>
> *academic progress can be obtained as well".*

As a result, developing a reading habit is essential for children to enhance their intellectual potential and capabilities. Developing the habit of reading, which "develops a capacity for concentrated attention and growth," is one continual strategy to learn new things (Obada, 2011). Shen (2006) defines reading habits as the frequency, volume, and content of reading. In his study of reading habits, Onyejiaku (2010) found that when students develop good reading habits, their knowledge retention, comprehension of the topic being studied, and ability to process information during tests and exams all significantly increase. Additionally, according to Onyejiaku (2010), an individual is motivated to perform at a level that is consistent with his or her current habits and that people's achievements are correlated to how they perceive themselves. Roth (2002) posits the success of an educational system depends on the learning of its students. Since developing strong reading habits can help kids properly comprehend with high levels of focus, this depends on them. According to Caverly et al. (2014), "college performance hinges to a significant extent on students' capacity to engage in strategic reading of large academic". Any educational institution whose central mission is to grow people in character and excellence via teaching and research has as one of its essential goals the enhancement of student academic performance.

Though there are different forms of reading, the common forms of reading include; skimming, scanning, intensive reading and extensive reading. For the case of skimming, it involves learners going through a text hastily to get the main idea of the text. For scanning, the learner reads the text quickly to fish out a specific information. The intensive reading involves the learner closely reading a text with the aim of accurately comprehending the text for academic purpose. The extensive reading lays much

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emphasis on fluency and less on accuracy. Mostly, extensive reading is out-of-classroom activity. Example, reading of newspapers, story books etc.

According to Nssien (2007), a lack of reading interest and habits, as well as a lack of interest in and access to relevant reading materials, are the causes of Ghanaian students' poor reading skills, which have been identified as a problem. These factors include: a slow rate of comprehension and reading, difficulty separating important points from unimportant details, a lack of vocabulary or word power. According to a study done in Nigeria by Henry (2004), 40% of adult Nigerians have never finished reading a non-fiction book from cover to cover. In fact, only 1% of successful men and women in Nigeria read one nonfiction book each month on average. The ordinary Nigerian reads fewer than one book a year. According to the same study, 30 million high school graduates in Nigeria have subpar reading abilities. As a result, there is a fundamental societal gap between individuals for whom life is an accumulation of new experience and knowledge and others for whom aging is a process of mental atrophy. The National Endowment for the Arts (2004) claimed that reading is declining significantly among students and that it is also becoming less common in America. Additionally, studies in Malaysia revealed that extremely few Malaysian students read (Kaur and Thiyagarajah, 2009). In Ghana, Antwi (2006) came to the depressing conclusion that the culture of reading is rapidly deteriorating.

Reading is the ability to interpret anything meant to communicate a message or to facilitate communication, not merely printed material (Onovughe, 2012). The introduction of the Internet has completely changed how students read, and its domination is fairly common among young people. The availability of more digital information has led to an increase in the amount of time that people, especially young ones, spend reading electronic items (Liu, 2005). However, the Internet has produced a

platform that makes it possible for students to access knowledge resources from anywhere in the world. There is also a large deal of research exploring for changes in reading habits brought on by the widespread use of the Internet and other reading resources, particularly those that use hypertexts and multimedia resources (Liu, 2005). Despite the fact that the Internet is a text-heavy environment, reading from an online screen differs dramatically from reading from a printed page, according to Cull (2011). Numerous studies have demonstrated how much students prefer Internet resources, but there is still a troubling issue: the Internet has adversely affected students' reading habits, as they now spend more time on social media chatting with friends and engaging in activities unrelated to academics. This has made them "reluctant readers," which invariably compromises their academic performance. As a result, academic libraries should make an effort to offer sufficient information resources (both print and non-print) and maintain a friendly, conducive environment that allows students to study and read without interruptions. They should also make an effort to put Internet monitoring policies into place so that students would carefully use it for academic purposes. Camp (2007) asserts that, just as all teachers are teachers of reading, all teachers must also encourage and model the habit of lifelong reading and learning. This presents a challenge for educators, who must first support students who have the habit of reading and are motivated by this habit before motivating unmotivated students to develop the habit. In order to create more responsible citizens, motivating and encouraging pupils to read should be a joint effort of libraries, teachers, and parents.

In Zamsa Junior High School, a close observation made on the learners in general, about their attitude towards reading revealed that about 90% (form one to form three) of the learners do not have interest in reading at all. A Further probe revealed that the learners

have some challenges in the reading process. This situation has prompted the researcher to launch a serious investigation in the school, particularly in form one.

2.3 Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Numerous researches have been conducted on students' difficulties with reading comprehension. In 2008, Chawwang looked at Thai EFL students' challenges understanding English. The study found that the majority of students had problems comprehending English-language literature. One of the main issues was noted to be a lack of vocabulary understanding (Gunning, 2002). Vocabulary proficiency is necessary to comprehend challenging reading materials like textbooks, especially those that contain technical phrases (Carlisle, 2000). This is because children with low vocabulary skills find it challenging to understand technical terms like "superordinate," "synonyms," "antonyms," or words with a variety of connotations (Carlisle, 2000; Vilenius-Tuohimaa, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2008). Text complexity has an effect on reading comprehension. Meaning that linguistic competence aids students in more fully understanding texts. As a result, because students learn new words by hearing, oral aptitude is crucial for determining a reader's proficiency. Students that have a sufficient vocabulary may be able to understand unfamiliar concepts by relating them to their context (Dennis, 2008). But this is rather not the situation in with learners in Zamsa Junior High School. They have low vocabulary skills and morphological background.

EFL students also struggle with reading comprehension because they struggle to understand words that are difficult to understand. Multiple clauses and conjunctions like though, since, additionally, and still are examples of complex sentences (Scott, 2009). Reading comprehension problems among EFL learners can also be caused by cohesive conjunctions, prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and nominalizations. They are complex and thus complicate the reading of the texts, making it more difficult

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for readers to comprehend what they are reading (Nuttall**,** 2000). Trehearne and Doctorow (2005) did list additional factors, such as effective reading comprehension strategies, reading habits, useful study strategies, and text structure.

Other elements that influence reading comprehension skills include exposure to the subject matter, organization, and focus (Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2004; Meniado, 2016). Davoudi & Yousefi (2015) assert that a variety of learners may experience reading challenges due to environmental, pedagogical, and biological variables. According to the Author, students who struggle with reading have comprehension problems for a variety of reasons, and for certain individuals, these comprehension problems may be brought on by incorrect or subpar word recognition and decoding strategies. The learners' environment has an impact on their capacity to understand what they read. They could have a very difficult time understanding what they are reading in a hectic environment. However, it's possible that people can read more well in a relaxed, organized setting. Also, when youngsters are in safe environments, their reading comprehension efficacy typically increases. It has been shown that in noisy settings, such as those with loud televisions or radios, pupils lose concentration while reading comprehension (Dennis, 2008).

Others may have linguistic or cognitive processing issues that make it difficult for them to understand what they are reading. Additionally, effort and focus are elements that could affect comprehension because some readers may have trouble understanding lengthy sentences despite being able to understand simple words or expressions (Laing & Kamhi, 2002; Anmarkrud & Brten, 2009). The capacity of students to recognize and rectify syntactic errors is correlated with reading comprehension, according to several research. In syntax, subject-verb agreement is a common instance. It illustrates how words (subjects and verbs) interact to generate sentences (Franck et al., 2007).

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In Zamsa Junior High School the researcher discovered that some factors are really causing the difficulties in reading comprehension. These factors include lack of English text book and lack of library facilities. Also, as a result of lack of English text books, teachers result to the use of archaic books containing difficult and ambiguous passages. These factors have also resulted to low vocabulary acquisition and oral skills which do not promote good reading habit among the learners.

2.4 Importance of Reading

To become proficient, one must have mastery in the English language. These abilities fall under the receptive or productive categories. Writing and speaking are productive skills, but reading and listening are receptive skills. Receptive skills are acquired by language learners through exposure to oral or written material. Learners in this instance decode the meaning in order to understand the receptive material. Reading is a language skill that should never be taken for granted. It is one of the most important ways to get knowledge, especially for educational purposes. One of the most often used language competence abilities around the world is reading. Additionally, students that struggle to read fare poorly academically. Due to their reading deficiencies, they also encounter a number of difficulties outside of the classroom (Mundhe, 2015).

Reading cannot be enjoyable for those who do not comprehend a text. Additionally, inadequate knowledge of vocabulary may also contribute to a lack of understanding. This suggests that vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are highly correlated. EFL students must therefore acquire sufficient vocabulary knowledge to understand text. Students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who have a pattern of disliking the language typically struggle to understand reading materials that are related to the language. Additionally, Nozen et al., (2017) posit that previous knowledge (schema) aids in the comprehension of reading materials and the

construction of meaning for learners. As a result, EFL students who are unable to make the necessary connections between their prior knowledge and the text's potential meaning may have trouble understanding it. Lack of in-depth comprehension of English linguistic ancestry could be the cause of this. According to Nezami (2012), the main problem that teachers are currently dealing with is that students in higher education institutions do not have adequate reading comprehension skills. They may perform worse academically as a result of this deficit.

Many students struggle with reading comprehension because they lack adequate vocabulary knowledge or efficient learning techniques (Nor & Rashid, 2018). Due to negative experiences, they experienced from the start, individuals typically endure repeated failure during their studies (Hart & Risley, 2003). Given that EFL students require a strong vocabulary to understand reading content, this connection makes sense. The level of learners' lexical knowledge, prior knowledge, and grammatical knowledge are some of the major challenges influencing reading comprehension, according to researchers (Koda, 2007). According to Nergis (2013), some of the key aspects influencing reading comprehension are the depth of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and metacognitive perception.

This implies that for learners to be able to climb the academic ladder to the highest level, they must be able to read and make meaning of all kinds of texts. This is because all the subjects that students learn are written in English. This makes reading the key to academic success.

It has been demonstrated in other studies (Mehrpour & Rahimi, 2010, Zhang, 2012) that grammatical knowledge is essential for reading comprehension. Shiotsu & Weir (2007) added that a learner's syntactic knowledge degree affects how well they

comprehend reading information. In other words, students who don't have enough background information might not be able to read at a higher level. In order to combine their prior knowledge with word meaning, readers must possess L2 syntactic knowledge (Koda, 2007). Based on the discussion above. This study intends to investigate reading comprehension difficulties among students, particularly students at Zamsa junior high school, hence the study is anticipated to offer reliable results that can aid in identifying the issue and offering potential remedies.

2.5 Causes of Reading Difficulties among Students

There are several justifications offered for reading difficulties or inadequacies. Academics and reading specialists label students who experience severe reading difficulty as retarded readers. Mule (2012), for instance, discovered that the Okongo circuit's students' inability to read in English as a second language was due to their lack of access to reading materials. According to the study, the lack of textbook posters is one of the factors that keeps students from participating in class and, as a result, restricts their capacity to learn. Mule (2012) maintains that the barren wall does little to promote learning because the Grade 4 syllabus specifies that posters are an essential component of young pupils' learning materials.

According to a related study by Nehafo (2011), teachers find it challenging to give each student the individualized attention they need to help them enhance their reading and writing skills. Nehafo also noticed that there is a severe scarcity of reading materials and access to a library with a wide range of books for students to choose from. The results of the study show that irregular homework assignments by teachers, along with a lack of and ineffective parental oversight of students' homework, hinder the growth of students' fluent reading ability. According to the researcher, kindergarten is where

the foundation for proficient English reading is laid, yet the majority of study subjects did not receive a quality kindergarten education.

In Zamsa Junior High School, the lack of English text books makes teachers teach reading comprehension lessons in abstract. After which they ask the learners to answer question based on what they have heard. This makes students partial learners thus making understanding very difficult.

Reading in English is the most crucial skill to master for everyone studying the language, from pre-school to university students (Alsamadani, 2011). The capacity to read offers readers and listeners enjoyment while also offering an escape from mundane issues. English Language Learners (ELL) who struggle with reading can improve their comprehension and learn crucial vocabulary that they need to thrive in school (Asamadani, 2011). Understanding the meaning of a particular passage is greatly influenced by one's capacity to read and comprehend what is being read in English. Despite the fact that English may not be the most widely spoken language in the world, a sizable number of nations have made it an official language, according to Crystal (2003). He continues by saying that since English is the main business language, it has become crucial for individuals to be able to speak and read it. It is crucial to understand that knowing English gives readers access to material from around the world because most nations have made it the language that is taught in schools and that most of the biggest publishers publish their books in. Although learning English might be difficult, unpleasant, and time-consuming, it is still highly important to do so because it opens up a lot of options for individuals who can read and write. On linguistic difficulties, the Urban Trust of Namibia (UTN) sponsored a consultative workshop. The workshop revealed that Namibia's educational outcomes are poor since there aren't any defined policies to translate into activities. This study, which takes the aforementioned into

account, intends to analyze the causes of reading challenges among grade 4 students at a school in the Zambezi region (Harris, 2011).

Harris (2011) claims that one of the causes of Namibia's subpar educational outcomes is the absence of defined policy that is converted into actions. He goes on to say that Namibia does poorly in literacy tests compared to other nations in East and Southern Africa, and that this has been attributed to difficulties with language that have arisen when implementing the language strategy for schools. Lower elementary phase (grades 1-3) is taught in the students' home tongue or the most common local language, according to the Ministry of Basic Education, Sports, and Culture (MBESC) Language Policy for schools in Namibia for 2003. According to Harris' (2011) study, there has been opposition to the policy's full implementation from political figures, educational administrators, school boards, and some parents who think English is the key. The Ministry of Basic Education, Sports, and Culture (MBESC) mandates that the lower primary phase (grades 1-3) be taught in students' mother tongues or the most common local language, as stated in the Language Policy for Schools in Namibia (MBESC Language Policy for Schools in Namibia, 2003). By the end of the phase, the majority of students have the skills necessary to read and write fluently in their native language. Additionally, he contends that throughout this stage, the development of reading and writing abilities in English is encouraged, though it is not given priority as it is with the dominant local tongue. Reading difficulties seem to have a wide range of causes. Reading difficulties can be caused by neurological or environmental causes, according to some studies. The possibility of psychological or neurological issues contributing to reading difficulty has been discussed (Maruyama, 2007). It is exceedingly difficult to pinpoint the root causes of reading difficulties.

Three theories support the idea that neurological variables can contribute to reading difficulties (Maruyama, 2007). Disorientation and disorder of visual patterns are two examples. Mando (2008) contends that inability to develop abilities in alphabetical coding is the primary cause of reading difficulties. According to Ojanen (2007), ineffective teaching strategies might contribute to reading problems. Teachers must put in a lot of effort to help students develop literacy skills so that they can become proficient readers. Environmental factors, which include both the school and home environments, can also make reading challenging. A child will find it quite challenging to be interested in reading if she or he is not inspired at home or school. Teachers also have their own theories or causes for why students have trouble reading. The family environment, which can have a favourable or bad impact on the child, is said to play a part in a learner's capacity to read (Paananen, 2009). Numerous concerns in the family setting can make it difficult for a child to read. These include mother tongue interference, a lack of reading materials, textbook shortages, and a lack of enthusiasm. The parents' literacy level and poverty, such as lack of appropriate study furniture, poor nutrition, lack of support from parents or guardians, and the general community

The situation in Zamsa is not different because the community is predominantly a farming community. Also, there is a high illiteracy rate in the community where the school is situated. As a result, learners are not encouraged to learn at home. In the raining season, some parents sent their children to farm. This really affect their academic work and for that matter their reading abilities.

2.6 Different Teaching Methods

Teachers can select from a variety of various instructional strategies. Teachers are still interested in which is the most efficient, though. Gonzarez et al. (2006) claim that all strategies have had some degree of success, some of which are listed below.

2.6.1 Phonics

The speech is broken down into component sounds and represented by letters in the phonics approach (Alderson, 2000, p.132). It demonstrates how letters correspond to the sounds they stand for. The sounds of individual letters or groups of letters are taught to children, along with how to look at the letters and combine them to create a fluid sound. Children are taught, for instance, that the sound represented by the word "cat" is k, a glottal sound, followed by a /ei/ and a /t/, which together form the letters k-a-t.

In order to teach phonics, there are two methods, according to Lerner (2000). In the first, called analytical phonics, students are taught to examine a word's entirety before dissecting it to compare its pieces for the letter-sound associations they have already encountered. In synthetic phonics, students are taught to associate a single letter or group of letters with the correct sound before blending the sound to create words. They are carefully taught the alphabet's letters as well as the letter combinations that are used to represent each sound; for instance, the word "father" is made up of the letters f-a-t-h-e-r.

2.6.2 The look and say or whole-word method of reading

Levine (1994) asserts that the "look and speak" or whole-word style of reading teaches kids to read by teaching them to recognize patterns rather than breaking words down into individual letters. When using this technique, flashcards with words and an accompanying image are frequently used to help students develop a high-frequency sight vocabulary until they memorize the pattern of letters, phrases, or sentences. For instance, students are shown an image of a ball without the letter that goes with it to symbolize it. The teacher then places the letters string (b-a-l-l) beneath the image after asking the class to describe what they see and label it. Other items that start with the same letter sound and even words can be included in the exercises.

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2.6.3 The whole language method of reading

According to Lerner (2000), the wholeness and connection of spoken language, reading, and writing underlie whole-language. It emphasizes the active expression of ideas through writing and vocal language, as opposed to the phonic method's concentration on letter-sound correlations. According to Lerner (2000), the whole language approach is predicated on the idea that all kids will naturally learn to read as they learn to talk and walk. According to Goodman (1990), who pioneered the whole language approach, a beginning reader need little guidance as they decode the letters and construct sentences that embody the visuals and sounds of language.

Reading strategies that emphasize meaning rather than sound-to-symbol correspondence enable kids to begin reading books right away without having to utilize phonics. According to the whole language approach, kids need to be immersed in engaging literature in order to develop fluency as readers. These books should intrigue kids and make learning new words exciting.

2.6.4 Combining phonics and whole-language in teaching reading

Reutzel and Cooter (2010), Stanovich (1980), and Rumelhart (1977), who advocate for merging the phonics and whole-language approaches, recommend teaching phonics to learners independently, directly, and methodically rather than in the context of reading literature. Reutzel and Cooter (2010) hold that mastering the three skill areas of decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension, which are thought to lead to competent understanding and, in turn, enable proficient and independent reading, is how one learns to read. According to Rumerhalt (1977), while processing letter features and spelling patterns, a reader is simultaneously paying attention to the overall context, syntax, and the semantic and syntactic environment in which the words occur. But according to Stanovich, in order for students to acquire reading abilities, they must regularly engage

with high-quality literature through reading aloud, talking about stories, and being exposed to new information and language. In order for students to develop their reading skills, phonics instruction should come first, followed by consistent reading practice. But this is not the case in Zamsa Junior High School. The teachers rather use the teacher-centred method where they teach in abstract. They read passages alone and ask students to read after them without any reading materials for the students to interact with. In effect learners do not see the words and sentences they read. The students also answered questions based on what they hear and not what they see. When the researcher investigated to know why teachers taught that way, it was revealed that the school did not have English text books. Another reason was also that the teachers were not exposed to the appropriate teaching techniques. This the researcher believe is the reasons why learners are going through the current reading challenges.

2.7 Related Previous Studies

This section of the study presents a summary of findings of previous studies conducted by different authors or researchers from all over the world in relation to reading comprehension difficulties. For instance, Iqbal et al., (2015) looked at factors and the remedies on how to strengthen English reading comprehension among secondary school level students. The study revealed that different factors like poor command of vocabulary, habit of cramming, no interest to learn creativity in reading but the sole goal was just to pass the examination which are found responsible for poor English reading comprehension. Similarly, Trang (2021) investigated the difficulties in reading comprehension that the first-year English majored students encounter and the most common difficulties they face. To handle the issues, the study selected 126 first-year English majors at a public university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. The study results revealed that lacking of background knowledge, inadequate vocabulary, time pressure

and inappropriate use of strategies are the four most popular factors causing reading comprehension difficulties. By contrast, the findings revealed that the participants could deal with grammatical structures of the reading texts and have no problem in understanding them.

In 2021, Alharbi used 54 female undergraduate Saudi students to investigate the effect of the Flipped Learning Strategy (FLS) on developing university students' English reading comprehension. Results from the study revealed that FLS had a positive effect on developing university students' L2 English reading comprehension. Further the findings also showed a statistical difference at ($α=0.05$) between the control and experimental groups in the post-reading comprehension test in favour of the experimental group. In addition, the findings pinpointed that student in the experimental group showed positive attitudes towards the use of FLS. In a related study, Qarqez and Ab-Rashid (2017) examine English as a foreign language (EFL) reading comprehension difficulties faced by students at Yarmouk University, Jordon. The findings from the study revealed that students are motivated to learn as they are in dire need for acquiring English. However, they face several problems in the reading process, such as ambiguous words, unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited available time to cognitively process the text.

In Malaysia, Al-Jarrah and Ismail (2018) studied on reading comprehensions difficulties among EFL learners in higher learning institutions. Findings from the study indicated that the major difficulty faced by the Arab EFL learners is inability to recognize the types of text. The researchers concluded that the reading comprehension difficulties faced by Arab EFL learners in the higher learning institutions could affect their English language proficiency and academic performance. To find solutions to these difficulties, the researchers recommended that there should be a need for shared

efforts of English language teachers, instruction policy makers, public and private bodies responsible for educational policy learning and implementation, and the EFL learners. In a similar study, Nurjanah (2018) assessed the difficulties faced by students in doing reading comprehension to find the perfect technique or method to overcome the problem. The researcher distributed questionnaires to students to find out their expectation to the class. Findings of the study show that students face problems related to vocabulary knowledge or mastery. These problems were related to poor habit of reading and less interesting reading comprehension course they have in the classroom. Finally, the study suggested that students need more interactive learning activities to be applied in the classroom such as games, or audio-visual media to keep them interested in the lecture or reduce the anxiety. So here, the teachers should be more aware of problems faced by students and provide more interactive teaching techniques.

Imam et al., (2014) carried out a study among randomly selected 666 first year student-respondents from 18 identified public and private high schools in the Division of Cotabato City, Central Mindanao, Philippines. The study aimed at identifying the six elements of reading comprehension skills, i.e., understanding vocabulary in context, identifying main idea, noting details, making inference, predicting outcomes, and drawing conclusion, and students' performance in science from the two school types. The study results showed that the overall students' performance in reading comprehension and science was indexed at low mastery level. Generally, four out of six reading skills such as understanding vocabulary in context, noting details, predicting outcome, and making inference made up the overall reading skills that positively correlated with science performance of students although the strength of relationship was considered weak.

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In a related study in Nambia, Nalisa et al., (2019) investigated the causes of reading difficulties in English as a second language at a school in the Katima Mulilo Circuit. The study employed a qualitative design because of the nature of the topic, i.e. to understand the causes of reading difficulties in English as a second language. Data for the study was purposefully selected using interviews as a data collection instrument. The study revealed that the teacher-learner ratio at the school is higher than the one prescribed by the Ministry of Education. This had a negative impact on teaching and learning. Another finding of the study was that there was no relationship between learners' reading abilities in mother tongue and the acquisition of reading abilities in English as a second language. According to the study, Pre-primary education did not lay a strong foundation for these learners as they and teaching aids. Further indicated that the lack of facilities such as libraries, computers laboratories as well as textbooks, and posters were also mentioned as causes of the reading difficulties experienced by learners.

Ankrah, Nyanta and Opoku (2017) also reported on the use of phonic method to improve poor reading ability of pupils at Techiman senior high school form one. The study used test items as its research instrument. Also, the researchers used all the pupils in the form class of Techiman senior high school to take the same test thus, pre-test to gather data baseline information before the research was carried out on them. Based on the findings, the study revealed the areas in which the pupils falter when reading and the appropriate techniques and strategies were used to control its occurrence. Finally, the study recommended that Teachers should have mastery over the subject matter and also use the appropriate methods in the teaching of the topic and also, they should make their lessons child centered to avoid scaring the pupils off.

A study conducted by Owu-Ewie (2014) determined the readability of comprehension passages in Junior High School (JHS) English language textbooks used in Ghana and also examined what can be done to improve L2 text writing in Ghana to make materials readable. Using 48 comprehension passages from four different sets of JHS 1-3 English language textbooks. It was found that most of the passages were above the age of learners and were therefore difficult for them to read and comprehend. Through interviews, the study examined ways that writing of JHS English textbooks can be improved to enhance readability. It was revealed that readability can be improved by the use of simple, precise and unambiguous sentences, well-structured text and use of familiar or cultural-friendly texts/genres. Above all, Ameyaw and Anto (2018) examined reading habit among students of Eastbank Senior High School, Greater Accra, Ghana and its effect on academic performance. A questionnaire was employed for data gathering. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyse the collected data. Findings of the study revealed that 45.19% of the respondents recognized the importance of reading in their studies. The study revealed further that reading habits have affected the majority of students in their learning. Again, the findings reported that the lack of conducive home environment hinders their reading habit when they are at home. Based on the findings, the study concluded that the school should design a timetable for library hours to allow students to go to the library at least one and half hours in each day.

Based on the following elaborations and discussions from previous pieces of literature, there is no singular context that focuses on the current study's perspective. Also, there was no particular study that dwells on the idea locally. With this in mind, the researcher pursued such a study.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the literature review of the entire study. Under this, the following subheadings were thoroughly discussed; the introduction, which points out what the whole chapter entails. This was the followed by a discussion on the theoretical framework of the study; this was where the early approaches to reading was discussed. Some of these approaches include the Traditional Bottom-up view and the Cognitive View (top-down processing).

Other subheadings discussed were the Concepts of reading, reading comprehension difficulties, Importance of reading and causes of reading difficulties among students.

Then, the different teaching methods of reading were discussed. The methods included the phonics method, the look and say or whole word method, the whole language method as well as the combined methods of the phonics and whole language teaching techniques.

The chapter concluded with a discussion on related previous studies. And this comprises a summary of findings of previous studies conducted by different authors all over the world in relation to reading comprehension difficulties.
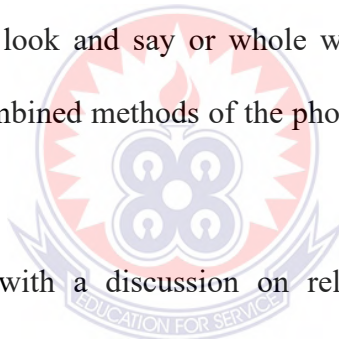
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHOD

3.0 Introduction

This chapter principally focuses on the various methods employed in this study. The chapter is organized under research approach and design, data source, population, sampling and sample size, and data collection. The rest are data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Approach

Rodolo (2008:15) defines research approach as "a study of a research process in all its broadness and complexity". It embraces the various methods and techniques that are employed, the rationale that lies behind the use of such methods, the limitations of each technique, the role of assumptions and presumptions in selecting methods and techniques, the influence of methodological preference on the type of data analysis employed and the subsequent interpretation of findings (Creswell, 2014:46). In this context, the researcher adopted a qualitative research approach for the study, defined by McMillan and Schumacher (2016:315) as of use in when researchers "collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their setting". Creswell (2014:46) defines qualitative research as a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of the participants, asks broad and general questions, collects data consisting largely of words or text from the participants, then describes analyses and conducts an enquiry in a subjective, biased manner.

The researcher employed the qualitative research approach because it is based on a constructivist philosophy that assumes that reality is a multi-layered, interactive, and shared social experience interpreted by individuals (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the

researcher infiltrated the worlds of the participants, observed and described in detail what was happening in the environment while behaving as naturally as possible, listening to the accounts and narratives of participants and constructing explanations of events. In this case, qualitative approach helped to identify the underlying factors that contribute to reading comprehension difficulties among students, as well as the potential strategies for addressing these challenges. Thus, the approach helped to uncover the underlying factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties, such as students' cognitive abilities, motivation, and prior knowledge (Patton, 2015). By understanding the complexity of the factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties, it may be possible to identify potential interventions that address these factors.

3.2 Research Design

Mouton (2005:55) describes a research design as a plan or blueprint of how one intends to conduct research, while for McMillan & Schumacher (2016:22) describes it as how the study will be conducted. It summarises the procedure for conducting the study including when, from whom and under what conditions the data will be obtained. It is also a general plan of how the research is set up, what happens to the subjects and what methods of data collection are used. Creswell (2014:297) refers to the research design as "distinguishing features used by the researcher to collect, analyse and interpret data using either a qualitative or quantitative approach.

The various designs used by qualitative researchers will differ, depending on the purpose of the study, the nature of the research questions and the resources available to the researcher. For this study, the researcher employed a case study as a mode of enquiry. Creswell & Creswell (2018:475) defines a case study as an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection. Additionally, Yin

(2018) defines a case study is a qualitative research method that involves an in-depth analysis of a single case or a small number of cases in their natural context. In a case study, a particular individual, programme or event is studied in-depth for a defined time. Case study researchers may focus on a programme, event or activity involving individuals rather than a group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:465).

For this study, the researcher collected extensive data on the study's participants. Such data often includes observations, interviews, documents, past records and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2014:465). The researcher spent an extended time on the site and interacted regularly with the participants, record details about the context surrounding the case, information on the physical environment and any historical, economic or social factors that have a bearing on the situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018:135-136).

As part of the data collection process the researcher chose a multiple instrumental case study in which the researcher described and compared multiple cases to provide insight into reading comprehension difficulties among JHS 1 students, to develop an in-depth understanding of the cases by collecting multiple forms of data and locating the 'case' or 'cases' within their larger context. This was achieved using interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis (Kothari, 2007). Interviews was conducted with Form 1 students and teachers to explore their experiences and perspectives on reading comprehension difficulties. While classroom observation was conducted in the classroom to gain a better understanding of the learning environment and the teaching strategies used to promote reading comprehension (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, documents, such as students' academic records and reading materials, was also analyzed to provide additional insights into the factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties. The case study design was also allowed for the exploration of the social context in which reading comprehension difficulties occur. By examining

the interactions between students and teachers, it may be possible to identify social factors that contribute to reading comprehension difficulties, such as lack of support from parents or negative attitudes towards reading among peers.

Conclusively, this design will provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties and inform the development of effective interventions to address these difficulties.

3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Zamsa Junior High School, which is located in Builsa South District in the Upper East Region, Ghana. Zamsa is a public school that caters to students from the surrounding community who are transitioning from primary school to junior high school. The school is divided into three grades, with the focus of this study being on the Form One students. The school has a diverse student population from different socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities.

Zamsa was chosen as the study area for several reasons. Firstly, the school has a large number of junior high school students, who are at a critical stage in their academic development (UNESCO, 2015). Secondly, the school has a diverse student population, which allowed for the exploration of how different factors such as socio-economic status and ethnicity may impact reading comprehension difficulties. Finally, Zamsa was easily accessible to the researcher and provided a suitable context to explore the research questions.

3.4 Target Population

The target population according to Burns and Grove (2013) is the entire aggregation of respondents that meet the designated set of criteria. It is a group of potential participants to whom the researcher wants to generalize the results of a study (Owu-Ewie, 2014:23).

Therefore, the target population for this study was 154 JHS 1 & 2 students and 6 teachers of Zamsa Junior High School in the Builsa South District of the Upper East Region, Ghana, who are considered as having low academic performance or very bad results in their examination.

The rationale for selecting this group is that it represents the entry point for students into junior high school, and it is a critical stage where students are expected to have a good foundation in reading comprehension. In addition, the choice of teachers as the target population is based on the fact that teachers are the primary facilitators of learning, and their knowledge and experiences can contribute significantly to understanding the factors that contribute to reading comprehension difficulties among the students. Similarly, the students are the direct beneficiaries of the education system, and their experiences and perceptions of reading comprehension can provide valuable insights into the problem.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

Sampling is one of the vital parts of every research. Sampling helps to locate the sites for the study. According to Tuckman (1999), sampling is the method of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) also argue that qualitative researchers adopt sampling in order to direct their choice of observations and respondents to particular characteristics to consider. Lindlof and Taylor further state that the effectiveness of a sampling strategy would be how it enables researchers to methodically collect the necessary information without wasting time and resources. This means making sure that the sampled participants have in-dept knowledge which are needed in order to answer the research questions. The researcher applied purposive sampling method to choose or select the participants for the study.

Barreiro and Albandoz (2001) explain purposive sampling as a strategy which the person who is selecting the sample tries to make the sample representative, depending on his opinion or purpose, thus making the representation subjective. Again, Wimmer and Dominick (2003) purport that purposive sampling includes data that are selected for possessing specific characteristics that are in line with the study. Patton (2015) explains that purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. Baxter and Jack (2008) assert that availability of subjects that will provide quality data for the study is an important consideration in purposive sampling. The researcher chose to use purposive sampling because it helped the researcher in the identification and selection of information-rich cases and in this case, it was very convenient for the selection of the students and English teachers. The purposive sampling technique was used because the students and teachers can contribute significantly to understanding the factors that contribute to reading comprehension difficulties among the students that are in line with the study. Purposive sampling was selected for this study based on Schwandt's (2001) description of this method. According to Schwandt (2001), purposive sampling involves deliberately choosing specific sites or cases because there is a compelling reason to believe that the activities or occurrences in those locations are crucial for understanding a particular process, concept, or for testing and expanding existing theories. In the present study, the researcher opted to use 25 JHS 1 and 2 students of Zamsa Junior High School.

3.6 Sample Size

Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) posit that in qualitative study, the researcher must make a clear decision on the number of respondents to recruit which is known as the sample size. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) posit that sample size is usually considered to

be a factor that cannot be decided until much later in the course of a study. Sample size is the number of people or objects in the selected sample (Manheim & Rich, 1999 p.44). The sample size of this study consists of 25 JHS 1 students and 2 teachers of Zamsa Junior High School. According to Opoku-Amankwa (2009), a purposive sample includes subjects selected on the basis of specific characteristics and eliminates those that do not meet the criteria needed for the study. Using purposive sampling method as stated above, 25 students and 2 teachers were selected as the sample size for the study.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

According to Creswell (2014), data collection instruments refer to tools or techniques that researchers use to gather data from study participants or sources. The choice of data collection instrument is an important aspect of any research, as it has a direct impact on the quality of data collected and the overall success of the study. For this study on reading comprehension difficulties among JHS 1 students of Zamsa Junior High School, the researcher employed documentary review, interviews, and classroom observation as data collection instruments.

3.7.1 Documentary Review

Documentary review involves the systematic analysis of written materials such as books, articles, reports, and official documents (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, this involved the examination of documents that were relevant to the study, such as the school curriculum, reading materials, and student performance records. In this study, the researcher reviewed relevant literature on reading comprehension difficulties, educational policies, and best practices in teaching reading comprehension. Furthermore, the research sort for primary source records regarding the subject matter. These include the teachers report in school, subject log books, and schemes of work, lesson plans and lesson notes. Thus, the researcher used the teachers' personal

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documents such as student's records, personal files (portfolios), assessment records and schedules and learners' personal documents such as workbooks and portfolios for the study. The purpose of the documentary review was to provide a theoretical framework for the study and to identify existing gaps in knowledge on the topic. The review also provided an opportunity to explore how the existing literature on the subject can inform the study.

3.7.2 Interviews

Leedy & Ormrod (2018:146) and Creswell (2014:225) write that interview in a qualitative study are rarely structured but rather are either open-ended or semi-structured. Open-ended questions are asked so that participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspective of the researcher. De Vos (2003:302) is of the opinion that semi-structured interviews are used by the researcher to gain a detailed picture of participants' beliefs, perceptions or accounts about a particular topic. In this study, the researcher compiled a set of pre-determined questions on an interview guide, with the interview guided and not dictated by the guide (Bryman, 2016). The purpose of the interviews was to gather information on the factors that contribute to reading comprehension difficulties among JHS 1 students, as well as the strategies that teachers and students use to improve reading comprehension. The researcher regarded participants as experts on the subject and allowed them opportunities to tell their story. The researcher also allowed participants to play a leading role in determining how the interview would proceed. After having obtained consent from participants, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews. In order to reduce tension, the researcher gave the participants copies of the interview guide prior to the interviews so that they know beforehand what would be expected in order to enable them to share their experiences and expertise and respond freely and confidently on what they know. The

researcher worked at establishing and maintaining a rapport with them and was careful not to 'put words into their mouths'.

To ensure effective interviews, the researcher applied the following techniques as cited in De Vos et al. (2005:293). The researcher then asked a clear, single, brief open-ended questions one at a time whilst also avoiding sensitive questions; and the participants did most of the talking. After, the researcher sequenced questions and funnelled them from the general to the specific and from broad to narrow, while encouraging free reign but maintaining control. The researcher repeated key questions and conducted minimal probes throughout the interviews, allowing for pauses in conversation. Finally, the researcher tried to avoid off the record information, to use minimal probes, not to interrupt a good story and to end interviews on time.

3.7.3 Classroom Observation

Creswell & Creswell (2018:221) defines observation as a process of gathering open-ended first-hand information through observing people and places at the research site. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2018:145), observations in a qualitative study are intentionally unstructured and free flowing. In this study, the researcher observed classroom activities and teaching practices related to reading comprehension. The objective of this data collection instrument was to obtain information on the students' reading habits, comprehension strategies, and the challenges they encountered when reading. The researcher observed the types of reading materials that the students preferred, how they interacted with the materials, and the level of engagement during reading activities. Similarly, the purpose of the observation was to gather information on the teaching methods and techniques used by the teachers to improve reading comprehension, as well as the behavior and performance of the students during reading comprehension activities. Furthermore, the researcher used various data recording

strategies such as audiotapes and visited school to acquaint himself with the students and teachers, through discussions and engagements. The researcher kept a diary and notepad to write about events and incidents that unfolded during the observation period.

3.8 Data Analysis

McMillan & Schumacher (2016:364) describe qualitative data analysis as being primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns among them. According to De Vos et al (2005:340), the process of data analysis and data interpretation can best be represented in a spiral image whereby the researcher moves in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. Leedy and Ormrod (2018:150) concur that data analysis, as a spiral that is in view, is equally applicable to a wide variety of qualitative studies. In this regard, the researcher organised the data into file folders and developed a table of sources to help organise the materials by type, site, location and participant. After, the researcher kept duplicate copies of all forms of data. To facilitate analysis, the researcher recorded data in a systematic manner through labelling audiotapes, finding quiet places for note-taking and planning ahead for colour coding those notes. The researcher transcribed the data obtained through interviewing and observations, converting audio-tape recordings and field notes into text data. In order to make sense of the text data the researcher used the steps below, as recommended by Creswell (2014:251).

The researcher tried to gain a sense of the whole by reading all transcriptions and fieldnotes carefully, jotting down in the margins some ideas as they came to mind. Thereafter, the researcher went through one document at a time, asking questions and considering the underlying meaning then wrote it down in the margin in two to three words, drawing a box around it. The researcher then divided the text into segments of information and labelled them with code-words or phrases that accurately described the

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meaning the text segment. Codes can address many different topics, such as the setting and the context, perspectives held by participants, processes, activities, strategies, relationships and social structure. De Vos et al. (2005:243) wrote that in the coding process the researcher divides the text data into text or image segments, labels the segments with codes, examines the codes for redundancy and overlap and then collapses these codes into broad themes. The process the researcher followed was similar, making a list of all code words, grouping similar codes and looking for redundant codes in order to reduce them to a smaller manageable number.

The researcher generated themes and patterns by reducing the list of codes to get five to seven themes that would enable me to write a qualitative report. According to Creswell (2014:248), themes are similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the data base. They form a core element in qualitative data analysis. The researcher used themes to reduce the excessive number of codes. The researcher was guided by these steps to analyse data empirically, and allocated keys to common statements which were then clustered under various themes as they emerged. Themes were layered into major and minor themes and the researcher then checked on how these interrelated and interconnected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:252).

3.9 Ethical Consideration

Any research study ought to have a number of ethical dimensions to enrich it. This relates to moral standards that the researcher should consider in all research methods in all stages of the research design. Creswell (2014) indicates that in conducting a study, attention needs to be directed toward ethical issues prior to conducting the study. This study recognized the ethical issues regarding the areas of ethical concerns outlined by Creswell. Prior to conducting this study, approval was obtained from the Department of Applied Linguistics of the University of Education, Winneba to conduct the study.

In developing the central idea of a study, Creswell (2014) states that the deception occurs when the researcher does not disclose the purpose of the study to the participants. Official Letters were obtained from the Department of Applied Linguistics and delivered to the school informing them of this study. Also, all the sources used in this research were duly acknowledged in the form of in text citation and bibliography. The final report reflects a true outcome of the study because the researcher bracketed his biases and analysed the issues genuinely.

3.10 Chapter Summary

The chapter explained clearly how the various methods or procedures employed aid in identifying the difficulties in reading among students. Thus, these methods included research approach and design, study area, population, sampling and sample size, and data collection. The rest were data analysis and ethical considerations.
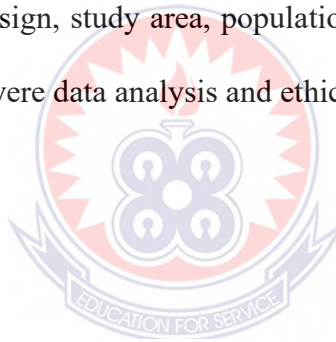
CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the qualitative analysis of data obtained from both students and English teachers at Zamsa Junior High School is presented. The analysis primarily involved categorizing the data into common themes and organizing the results into sections based on the research questions addressed in the study. The data used for this research were collected through document review, classroom observation, and interviews. Each section of the analysis focuses on the data that were analysed and presented in relation to the following research questions:

1. What are the various teaching methods used in teaching reading comprehension to the students?

2. What are the main problems encountered by Zamsa Junior High School Students in reading comprehension?

4.1 Research Question 1: What are the various teaching methods used in teaching reading comprehension to students?

This section explored how teachers at Zamsa Junior High School use phonics and whole-word approaches to teach reading comprehension rules and principles. The researcher conducted classroom observations to examine the teachers' methods and instructional techniques.

During the classroom observations, the researcher observed complete reading comprehension lessons from beginning to end. The researcher identified two main teaching methods employed by the teachers: phonics approach and whole-word

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approach. These approaches were commonly used for teaching reading comprehension skills. The phonics approach involves teaching students to decode words by teaching them the sounds associated with each letter or combination of letters. When applied to reading comprehension instruction, the phonics approach can help students break down complex texts into individual words, identify key sounds, and grasp the meaning of the text effectively. This approach is mainly teacher-centered and focuses on introducing new content. On the other hand, the whole-word approach begins with presenting students with whole words and encouraging them to recognize and understand the meaning of the words. This approach enhances students' ability to comprehend texts through contextual clues and understanding the overall meaning. This approach is more learner-centered.

The choice of using the phonics approach may be suitable for lower-level learners or students who need a solid foundation in understanding language concepts. It helped them develop their decoding skills and improves their ability to read and comprehend texts. The T_2 opted for the phonics approach as it allows for a more interactive learning process and tends to engage students better compared to other methods. In this approach, the teacher initially taught students the phonics rules, followed by examples and practice. This way, students acquire knowledge of the rules and apply them to their reading comprehension. Additionally, T_1 used the whole-word approach, where students were tasked with recognizing and understanding whole words themselves. In this scenario, the teacher presented examples of words and prompted students to identify the meaning and comprehend the text.

The findings align with Ehri (1998) assertion that phonics approach is slightly more effective than whole-word approach. However, it is suggested that combining both phonics and whole-word approaches can yield the best results. Andrews (2007)

explains that when using the phonics approach, teachers focus on teaching students the relationship between letters and sounds in order to improve their reading comprehension. This approach involves explicitly instructing students on how to decode words by presenting them with rules and patterns. For example, teachers would teach students that the letter "s" often makes the /s/ sound, and they can use this knowledge to sound out words like "snake" or "sun." By explicitly teaching these phonics rules, students are able to better understand and comprehend written texts. On the other hand, the whole-word approach emphasizes the recognition and memorization of entire words as a way to enhance reading comprehension. Instead of breaking words down into individual sounds, teachers provide students with a bank of high-frequency words that they learn to recognize instantly. For instance, students would learn to quickly identify words like "the," "and," or "said" without having to decode them letter by letter. By memorizing these common words, students can read more fluently and comprehend texts more easily. However, the pedagogical treatment of reading comprehension structures by teachers has shown limited effectiveness due to their reliance on a single fixed approach, instead of incorporating different techniques derived from various teaching models. Nevertheless, Byrne et al. (2002) suggest that English teachers should adopt a dynamic approach to instructional techniques for reading comprehension to improve overall writing skills of students.

Furthermore, in some cases where teachers attempted to engage students, they utilized simplistic and unrealistic examples. Consequently, students struggled to relate these examples to real linguistic contexts, making it nearly impossible for them to apply the concepts to their own writing. This aligns with Cain, Oakhill & Bryant (2004) claim that an inadequate pedagogical approach to language instruction has contributed to the challenges students face with reading comprehension. Thus, it becomes evident that

some of the difficulties students encounter in reading stem primarily from flawed instructional materials and the pedagogical deficiencies of teachers. This supports Ehri et al.'s (2001) assertion that students' struggles with reading to identify new vocabularies might be attributed to ineffective teaching methods employed by certain teachers. Furthermore, classroom observations revealed that students were less engaged, showing minimal participation and reluctance to speak up or read aloud. This was primarily attributed to their low confidence levels, which in turn contributed to poor performance in their writing skills.

4.2 Research Question 2: What are the main problems encountered by Zamsa Junior High School Students in reading comprehension?

This research question sought to identify the main problems encountered by Zamsa Junior High School Students in reading comprehension. The researcher used T_1 for the male teacher and T_2 to represent the female teacher. The problems emerged as the following sub-categories: (a) poor in vocabulary mastery, (b) trouble with fluency and (c) issues with background knowledge. Further explanation of these problems is provided in the following sections.

4.2.1 Poor in Vocabulary Mastery

The two teachers were of the view that students who struggle with reading comprehension exhibit a significantly limited vocabulary knowledge or proficiency, which directly hinders their understanding of texts. T_1 stressed lack of vocabulary as a problem for 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 such that they can occur automatically during reading. Comprehension definitely is affected by lack of vocabulary.*

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The statement provided by the teacher highlights the significant impact of vocabulary on reading comprehension. It suggests that the students face difficulties when encountering unfamiliar or insufficiently known words while reading, leading to a negative effect on their overall comprehension abilities. This observation aligns with existing research in the field of education. Cain and Oakhill (2011) found that vocabulary knowledge was a key predictor of reading comprehension skills in both children and adults. They concluded that individuals with a larger vocabulary had better comprehension abilities, as they were able to understand the meaning of more words in context. Moreover, research has shown that vocabulary knowledge contributes not only to comprehension but also to other aspects of language development, such as writing and speaking skills. Nagy and Anderson (1984) emphasized the significance of vocabulary in these areas, suggesting that a rich and diverse vocabulary enhances overall language proficiency.

T_2 described her students by stating that:

> *"They also have limited vocabulary, and so when you introduce a new word, they will not always be able to pronouns, they will not have any experience with the word. They will not even recognize it."*

Here, the teacher's statement highlights the students' limited vocabulary, specifically in terms of pronunciation, familiarity, and recognition of new words. This suggests that the students may struggle with accurately pronouncing unfamiliar words, lack prior experience with the words, and have difficulty recognizing them when encountered. This analysis aligns with the finding of Perfetti and Hart (2002) found that vocabulary size strongly predicted word recognition skills in both children and adults. Thus, students with a larger vocabulary were more likely to accurately recognize and pronounce words due to their familiarity with a wider range of terms. Moreover,

familiarity with words plays a significant role in comprehension. Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) highlighted the importance of word familiarity in reading comprehension. Students who were familiar with a greater number of words demonstrated better comprehension abilities, as they were able to access the meanings of those words in context.

T_2 confirmed that her students lack academic vocabulary, which prevents them from comprehending a text. T_2 pointed out that:

> *"We talk very differently in a school setting than some of these students' homes. Even just the dialect is very different. Yeah, if they are not exposed to academic English, it's going to be a challenge."*

The above statement by the teacher highlights the students' lack of academic vocabulary and the potential challenges they face in comprehending texts due to differences in dialect and exposure to academic English. This observation emphasizes the importance of academic language proficiency and its impact on reading comprehension. The finding is consistent with assertions made by several previous studies. Snow and Uccelli (2009) demonstrated that proficiency in academic language is a strong predictor of academic success, including reading comprehension. Similarly, vocabulary instruction that targets academic words and phrases, along with explicit instruction on the features of academic language, has been found to be effective in enhancing students' reading comprehension (Baumann et al., 2010). Furthermore, dialectal variations, such as differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, can also pose challenges for students when they encounter academic English as indicated by the teacher. Dialectal differences can affect students' understanding of academic texts due to variations in vocabulary usage, sentence structure, and discourse patterns

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(Gee, 2004). This can hinder comprehension and lead to difficulties in fully grasping the meaning and nuances of the text.

Both 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, T_2 emphasized that:

> *With the student, we were reading about something with a forest and a pond and they were talking about the bank of the pond, and when they didn't understand 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.*

Here, the above statement also highlights the challenge students face when encountering words with multiple meanings and their difficulty in connecting those meanings to the appropriate context within a text. This finding aligns with assertions made by previous studies such as Cain & Oakhill, (2011) and Nagy & Anderson (1984). According to Cain & Oakhill (2011) when readers encounter a word with multiple meanings, they struggle to select the appropriate meaning that aligns with the context of the text. This can lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and hindered comprehension (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge and word sense disambiguation skills are essential for successfully navigating multiple meaning words. Students with a robust vocabulary and developed word sense disambiguation abilities

are more likely to accurately discern the intended meaning of a word based on context (McCutchen & Perfetti, 1982).

In this regard, the teacher helped his students by providing them with different example of text and words. T_1 added that:

> *"If I do not show different types of text and words with their sizes, 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 or a different setting, it becomes a problem or challenge and it may affect their comprehension and their fluency, and they won't be able to read and understand."*

The teacher's statement emphasizes the importance of exposing students to different types of texts and words with variations in size (e.g., font size) to enhance comprehension. The teacher recognizes that solely focusing on isolated word meanings may limit students' ability to recall and understand words in different contexts, ultimately impacting their overall reading comprehension and fluency. This perspective aligns with the findings of Beck & McKeown (2001) who found that vocabulary knowledge is not simply the memorization of isolated words but involves understanding how words are used in different situation. Beck & McKeown (2001) highlights the importance of encountering words in context to fully grasp their meanings and usage. range of vocabulary in different contexts, enhancing their ability to understand and use words flexibly. Moreover, the teacher's concern about the impact of word variation on comprehension and fluency is supported by Beck & McKeown (2001). Vocabulary

instruction that includes explicit teaching of word forms, such as different word sizes, contributes to improved reading fluency (Rasinski, 2004).

Harmon (2002) found that students faced difficulties in reading comprehension due to the limited vocabulary. Mastering vocabulary is proved increasing students' ability in comprehending a text. It is therefore, necessary for students to properly comprehend the words or vocabulary in order to be able to decode the message. The relationship of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension is well established, in which vocabulary is a predictor of students' reading comprehension. 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.

4.2.2 Lack of Reading Fluency

Based on the responses of the teachers, inadequate reading fluency among students emerges as another significant obstacle that adversely affects their students' reading comprehension. This poor reading fluency manifests in two distinct forms: fast reading and slow reading. Both interviewed teachers concurred that a lack of fluency and difficulties in decoding words at a slow pace have a detrimental impact on their students' ability to comprehend what they read. T_1 further elaborated on this matter, stating:

> *I think a lot of students that I've taught have a lot of problem with just*
> *decoding. So, in most cases it seems their brain capacity and brain power*
> *are more focused on decoding the word than comprehending the passage*

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or text, so a lot of times decoding actually gets in the way of comprehension.

The statement made by the teacher relates to the common phenomenon of decoding difficulties interfering with reading comprehension. Studies have consistently shown that decoding and comprehension are interconnected skills that rely on each other for successful reading. Dysfunctional decoding processes can hinder comprehension and impact academic performance (Shankweiler and Fowler, 2004; Kendeou et al., 2008). Therefore, the assertion made by the teacher aligns with those studies that have highlighted the detrimental effects of decoding difficulties on reading comprehension. Students who struggle with decoding may allocate excessive cognitive resources to word identification, leaving limited capacity for higher-level comprehension processes.

T_1 describing his students said that:
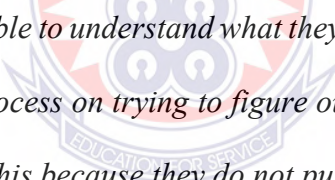
They are just slow reader. They are slow to get the concept. So, when they having difficulties decoding, their reading is so choppy and slow, they begin to lose or forget the meaning of the sentence.

Here, the teacher describes his students as slow readers who have difficulties decoding text, resulting in choppy and slow reading. He also suggests that these difficulties hinder their understanding and they may even forget the meaning of the sentence. He added that:

My students mostly comprehend a reading concept when I read them a story and then we discuss about it. They can answer questions because they are listening. They have the capacity to comprehend, but it is when they are reading in such a choppy way, and so slowly, then they start to lose the meaning.

Here, the statement suggests that the students understand a reading concept better when it is introduced through storytelling and followed by a discussion. By hearing the story, the students were able to listen and grasp the content, allowing them to answer questions related to the reading. However, the teacher also noted that when the students read the same text independently, they struggle with comprehension. This seems to occur when they read in a choppy and slow manner, causing them to lose the overall meaning of the text. The teacher's observation also highlights the importance of different instructional approaches and the impact they can have on student comprehension. It indicates that the students have the capacity to comprehend the content, as demonstrated during the storytelling and discussion sessions. However, when left to read on their own, they encounter difficulties.

T2 also explained how slow readers do not comprehend a text well by sharing that:

> *They are not able to understand what they read because they spend so much energy and process on trying to figure out what the word is, they just lose the meaning, this because they do not put all together.*

The above statement suggests that slow readers struggle with comprehension because they invest a significant amount of mental effort in deciphering individual words, leaving them unable to grasp the overall meaning of the text. Furthermore, it also implies that these readers fail to synthesize the information effectively. This explanation aligns with the general understanding of reading difficulties. Slow readers often face challenges in decoding words, which can hinder their reading fluency and impact their comprehension (Smith & Johnson, 2015). Smith & Johnson (2015) argued that when readers are preoccupied with word recognition and struggle to identify or

pronounce words, they may lose track of the context and struggle to comprehend the text as a whole.

The two teachers together shared that they utilize rereading strategy and modeling in order to help their slow reading students with fluency in order to improve their comprehension. T_1 stated that how he helps his 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.*

Here, the teacher emphasized the importance of providing students with multiple opportunities to reread passages and practice. By reading the text himself and modeling proper intonation and pauses, he helps students improve their reading skills. Additionally, she encourages students to mimic her reading style, allowing them to develop their own fluency and comprehension abilities. T_2 affirmed that:

> *My students and I 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 teacher mentioned that both she engages her students in rereading texts for improved fluency. Additionally, they utilize different techniques such as reading aloud or listening to audiobooks as a class. This approach can help students develop better reading skills by exposing them to fluent reading models and providing opportunities for practice.

The two teachers also highlighted that not only slow reading, but also fast reading might be a problem that prevents their students with reading difficulties from comprehending a text. T_1 stated 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 read.*

This teacher has noticed a student who reads quickly without comprehending the material. The student is able to decode the words but does not understand the content. This suggests that the student needs to work on their reading comprehension skills to fully understand what they are reading. T_2 noticed that:

> *Some of my students read very fast, but they do not understand what they are reading.*

This statement highlights an important issue in reading comprehension. While some students may possess the ability to read quickly, the key element of understanding the material is often lacking. Reading speed alone does not guarantee comprehension (Hudson, Lane, and Pullen, 2005). It is not uncommon for individuals to skim through a text, absorbing words without fully grasping their meaning or making connections between different concepts. This can be attributed to a variety of factors such as lack of focus, inadequate prior knowledge, distraction, or even reading in a language that is not one's first language. Hudson et al. (2005) found that when students read without comprehending, they miss out on the deeper understanding, critical thinking, and analysis that comes with fully digesting the material. This can have a detrimental impact on their academic performance and overall learning experience.

The findings were similar to the finding of Hudson, Lane, and Pullen (2005), who highlighted that "each aspect of fluency has a clear connection to text comprehension". 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 (Speece and Ritchey, 2005).

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 the interruption 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; 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. Reading Fluency allows readers to rapidly process vocabulary units, such as letter sound correspondences into 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.

4.2.3 Issues with background knowledge

The next problem encountered by students 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. T_1 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.*

The teacher's statement highlights the importance of life experience in enhancing one's ability to connect personal experiences to reading and build a knowledge base. This suggests that individuals with more life experience are likely to have a broader range of experiences and knowledge to draw upon when engaging with written texts (Guthrie, Anderson, Alao, & Rinehart, 1999). Guthrie et al. (1999) found that when individuals have a diverse range of life experiences, they can relate those experiences to the content they encounter while reading. This connection allows them to make sense of new information, draw parallels, and deepen their understanding.

T_2 was of the view 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.*

The statement made by the teacher emphasizes the importance of background knowledge in reading comprehension and highlights how it helps students build connections and understand new stories by relating them to their past experiences. This notion aligns with the assertion made by Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) who suggest that when readers connect text to their own experiences, they are more likely to

remember information and comprehend the text deeply. Similarly, Guthrie and Klauda (2014) demonstrated that activating prior knowledge before reading improved comprehension and retention of textual information.

During interviews with the teachers, T_1 said those of his students that encountered challenges when often lacked sufficient background knowledge, hindering their ability to fully grasp a text. He 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 taking about.*

The teacher's statement highlights the impact of limited background knowledge on reading comprehension. The example given demonstrates how unfamiliarity with specific vocabulary words, such as "sailor," "sail," and "oar," can hinder understanding and hinder the overall comprehension of a passage. support this idea, Anderson & Freebody (1981) emphasizes that readers with limited vocabulary knowledge may struggle to understand unfamiliar words, which can impede overall comprehension.

T_1 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

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information hard to understand. He also described 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.*

The teacher's observation highlights the negative impact of lacking background knowledge on students' comprehension and engagement with a text. This was supported by Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) found that readers with more background knowledge on a topic were better able to comprehend and recall information from a text on that topic. In the absence of prior knowledge, students may struggle to understand and make sense of new information, as seen in the example of the student who lacked knowledge about the rules of baseball.

Similarly, William (1993) was of the view that adolescents with learning disabilities brought incorrect or irrelevant information into the story and have difficulty understanding the text. William again 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). Other researchers such as Graham & Bellert (2005) had similarly found that, although some students with reading 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. Therefore, they need to be taught some pre-reading activities to be able to activate their own prior knowledge about a given topic.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the results of the qualitative analysis. The analysis was guided by the research questions formulated for the study. This chapter examined the various teaching methods used in teaching reading comprehension to the students. It was revealed that the phonics method was the commonest method used by the teachers among the other method like the Whole-word approach and the language experience method. Furthermore, the chapter looked at the main problems encountered by students in reading comprehension. The problems emerged among the students were poor in vocabulary mastery, lack of reading fluency and issues with background knowledge.
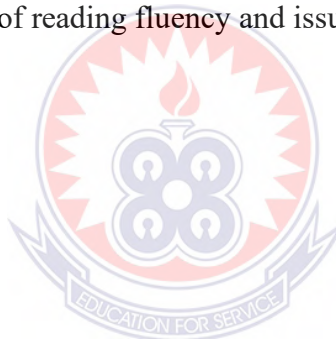
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the research findings. Also, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the research work and its significance. This chapter is structured to highlight the key findings of the study, the conclusions drawn from these findings, and recommendations for future research.

5.1 Overview

The study was conducted to examine reading comprehension difficulties among form one students of Zamsa Junior High School. Specifically, the study aimed at assessing various methods being used for the teaching of reading comprehension to the students and also, on the part of students, the study sought to identify the main challenges/problems encountered by Zamsa Junior High School Students in reading comprehension.

The study adopted a case study design with qualitative research approach. Twenty-five (25) students were sampled from one hundred fifty-four (154) students of the JHS 1 & 2 class. Also, two (2) English teachers were sampled from six (6) teachers of the school. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used for the sampling of the respondents. Data for the study was collected through documentary review, interviews, and classroom observation. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis.

5.2 Key Findings

The various teaching methods used in teaching reading comprehension to the students was the focus of the first research question. The following key findings emerged:

Through classroom observations, several teaching methods were identified. These were phonics method, the Whole-word method and language experience method. It was revealed that the phonics method was the commonest method used by the teachers. Teachers found that this method was particularly effective for students who struggled with organizing their ideas while reading.

Research question two investigated the main problems encountered by Zamsa Junior High School Students in reading comprehension. The findings include:

The main problems encountered by the students in reading comprehension were identified as poor vocabulary mastery, poor fluency and issues with background knowledge. The findings suggest that students who had poor vocabulary had difficulties in understanding texts, particularly unfamiliar words or academic language. The lack of vocabulary mastery led to lower levels of comprehension and poor academic performance. Furthermore, the lack of poor fluency among students also led to disinterest in reading, which further exacerbate reading difficulties. Finally, the findings indicate that students who lacked sufficient background knowledge in a topic struggled to understand the content of the text.

5.3 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were made:

Firstly, based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the most teaching method used by the teachers for teaching reading comprehension is phonics method.

However, there is a need for further training and development of teachers to effectively use these methods improve students' comprehension.

Additionally, the study found that the main problems encountered by students Zamsa Junior High school include poor vocabulary mastery, poor fluency, and issues with background. It is therefore concluded that efforts should be made to address these problems through the provision of appropriate teaching materials and support to students.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations are made for policy and practice:

1. It is recommended that proper training programs should be designed and implemented to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach reading comprehension.

2. The study showed that the lack of reading materials was a major challenge faced by the students. Thus, it is recommended that schools should provide adequate reading materials to students to enable them to practice reading comprehension regularly.

3. Teachers must make frantic efforts to ensure that students gain interest in reading, both at school and outside the school environment. More so, strategies such as dictation and pronunciation drills must be infused in language teaching to ensure that students improve their language competency through reading.

4. The school should provide additional resources, such as books, computers, and other educational tools, to support effective teaching and learning of reading comprehension.

5. Policy makers in the education sector such as the Ghana Education Service and Ministry of Education should review policies and guidelines on teaching reading comprehension in junior high schools to ensure that they are effective in meeting the needs of students.

6. Also, the need for teachers to adopt a variety of teaching methods and strategies that are tailored to the needs of individual students.

Suggestion for Future Research

The following are recommended for future research:

Future studies on this topic should aim to incorporate a large sample size, drawn from different schools, in order to increase the generalizability of the findings. This will also help to minimize the potential for biased results that may arise from a small and localized sample.

Also, it is recommended that future studies should consider using a longitudinal design in order to assess the long-term impact of the interventions and strategies implemented to improve reading comprehension. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of these interventions and the persistence of improvements in reading comprehension.

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APPENDIX

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

Dear Sir/Madam

Introduction

This study seeks to examine the **"reading comprehension difficulties among Form "1" students of Zamsa Junior High School**. You are kindly requested to volunteer information by responding to this interview. You are however assured that information provided to complete this interview would be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me what problems you face when trying to understand what you read?

2. How well do you understand and use new words you come across while reading?

3. Do you find it difficult to read smoothly and at the right speed? Why?

4. Do you have trouble connecting what you read to what you already know or have experienced?

5. Are there any types of texts or subjects that you find hard to understand? Why?

6. What do you do when you come across unfamiliar or difficult words while reading?

7. What kind of help or resources do you think would improve your reading comprehension skills? Is there something specific you would like assistance with?