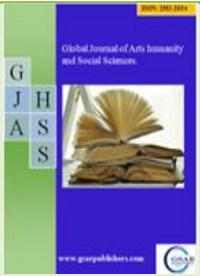
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The Influence of Attitude on Learners' Reading Comprehension Performance in Lesotho: Learners' Perspectives

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill that affects academic achievement; nevertheless, numerous learners in Lesotho face challenges due to adverse attitudes, insufficient motivation, and poor instructional assistance. This research explores the influence of learners' attitudes on reading comprehension performance, employing the Simple View of Reading (SVR) theory as a theoretical framework. A qualitative research methodology was utilised, employing open-ended questionnaires to collect data from 50 Grade 11 learners in five secondary schools in Lesotho. Thematic analysis highlighted that fear of failure, disengagement, and lack of confidence were substantial impediments to comprehension performance, whereas intrinsic motivation and favourable reading attitudes enhanced performance. Numerous learners linked reading comprehension to examination stress rather than ability enhancement, resulting in rote reading practices. The findings underscore the necessity for educational reforms, focussing on interactive reading instruction, vocabulary enhancement, and measures for boosting confidence. Schools ought to cultivate a reading culture by integrating stimulating resources, facilitating guided reading sessions, and employing learner-centred pedagogical approaches. Moreover, teacher preparation ought to emphasise motivation-driven comprehension tactics to assist difficult readers. Resolving these challenges is essential for augmenting reading engagement and comprehension results, hence raising academic achievement and lifetime literacy abilities.

Keywords: Reading comprehension performance, learner attitude, motivation, Simple View of Reading, vocabulary proficiency, instructional methodologies, academic achievement.

Introduction

Reading comprehension (RC) and vocabulary proficiency (VP) are interrelated skill sets crucial for academic success. RC involves the understanding and interpretation of written material, while VP centres on the mastery of word meanings, use, and relationships. The domains are mutually reinforcing: VP improves RC, and excellent RC facilitates vocabulary acquisition (VA) (Gumede, 2018; Likhoeli, 2020). While both vocabulary size and depth are significant, depth generally exerts a more pronounced influence on RC, particularly in tasks requiring inference and contextual

interpretation (Zhang, 2012). A comprehensive grasp of vocabulary and their interconnections enhances the ability to read intricate texts, therefore improving comprehension (Yang & Wang, 2022). Moreover, RC facilitates vocabulary expansion by exposing readers to diverse terminologies across many domains, therefore augmenting their ability to infer and retain word meanings (Likhoeli, 2020).

Regular exposure to word forms enhances vocabulary learning, essential for deciphering intricate texts (Afzal, 2019; Nation, 2006). A restricted vocabulary limits understanding and involvement, whereas insufficient RC hinders the learning of new



words (Hill & Wagovich, 2020; Kameli, 2013). Improvement strategies include regular reading and contextually-based vocabulary development (Dong et al., 2020). The breadth of vocabulary, referring to the number of words learnt, and the depth of vocabulary, concerning sophisticated understanding, are crucial for reading comprehension (Nation, 2013). Studies suggest that knowledge of 8,000 to 9,000 word families is essential for adequate text comprehension (Nation, 2006). Therefore, vocabulary development and reading comprehension are critical elements of language learning that significantly impact academic success.

Research underscores the vital role of motivation in enhancing these skills, with intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting learners' engagement, effort, and persistence (Grabe, 2009; Guthrie et al., 2004; Schneider et al., 2022). Intrinsic motivation, characterised by personal interest and delight in learning, has been shown to improve active and successful vocabulary acquisition (Bakkaloğlu & Pilten, 2023). Intrinsic motivation in learners correlates with strategies such as context-based inference, mnemonic techniques, and consistent reading, which facilitate continuous vocabulary enhancement (Schmitt, 2000; Gunning, 2013). Conversely, learners driven by external incentives or obligations may demonstrate less interest and utilise superficial learning tactics, hence limiting their vocabulary expansion.

The beliefs of learners towards reading significantly affect their readiness to interact with texts. Individuals who regard reading as pleasurable and advantageous typically cultivate superior comprehension abilities, whereas those who consider it arduous or insignificant are more prone to difficulties (Baker et al., 2017). This is a crucial inquiry: How significantly do learners' attitudes influence their reading comprehension performance in Lesotho? Comprehending this relationship is essential for curriculum building, teacher training, and the advancement of reading culture.

Problem statement

Learners in Lesotho often exhibit inadequate reading comprehension skills, resulting in subpar academic performance across multiple disciplines (Lekhetho, 2021). Although some ascribe this issue to restricted vocabulary skills and insufficient pedagogical approaches, the learners' adverse dispositions towards reading represent a crucial yet neglected element. Numerous learners apprehend intricate texts, exhibit a deficiency in enthusiasm to interact with reading materials, and experience a loss of trust in their reading skills (Kiew & Shah, 2020). Furthermore, reading is frequently linked to examination preparation rather than continuous learning, resulting in a passive and mechanical attitude to understanding. This undermines learners' capacity to utilise reading strategies successfully, supporting their belief that reading is a tedious academic obligation rather than an empowering skill. In the absence of focused interventions, these detrimental attitudes will persist in obstructing learners' academic and cognitive advancement.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework: The Simple View of Reading (SVR)

The Simple View of Reading (SVR) theory, formulated by Gough and Tunmer (1986), establishes a fundamental framework for comprehending reading by positing that it results from two separate yet interconnected elements: decoding (word recognition) and language comprehension. The SVR posits that effective RC necessitates proficiency in both decoding abilities, which entail the proper recognition and pronunciation of words, and language comprehension skills, which facilitate the understanding of spoken and written language (Hoover & Gough, 1990). The approach underscores that deficiencies in either component can result in suboptimal comprehension outcomes, irrespective of strengths in the other. A learner with proficient decoding abilities yet restricted language comprehension may articulate words fluently without understanding their significance. A learner with robust comprehension skills and deficient decoding ability may have difficulties in successfully processing written texts. This theory has been extensively utilised in reading instruction to identify reading challenges and to create interventions that address both phonological and comprehension abilities (Snow, 2010).

Within the context of Lesotho, the SVR theory is notably pertinent, as numerous learners demonstrate challenges in both decoding and comprehension, frequently intensified by adverse attitudes towards reading. Learners who lack motivation to engage with reading materials do not acquire robust decoding abilities, hindering their ability to derive meaning from texts (Baker et al., 2017). Furthermore, those who view reading comprehension as a challenging and exasperating endeavour may refrain from employing reading methods such as inferencing, summarising, and forecasting, which are crucial for profound understanding (Kiew & Shah, 2020). The SVR framework offers a perspective for analysing the influence of learners' attitudes on reading performance, highlighting the necessity for interventions that enhance reading confidence, promote voluntary reading, and incorporate interactive teaching methods. Grasping the relationship among decoding, comprehension, and learner motivation is essential for enhancing reading outcomes in Lesotho's educational framework, especially considering the language obstacles and restricted exposure to English beyond the classroom (Mosothoane, 2021).

The complexities of reading

Moon (2017) and Dong et al. (2020) assert that L2 reading poses more significant hurdles than L1 reading, as L2 learners encounter obstacles including translation difficulties, limited vocabulary, and sociocultural disparities. This intricacy underscores the need for targeted interventions to improve L2 learners' vocabulary and reading skills. Yang and Wang (2022) demonstrate a direct relationship between vocabulary breadth and reading competency, highlighting the significance of robust lexical underpinnings for good text comprehension. Research by Sidek and Rahim (2015) demonstrates that lexical proficiency in a native language markedly surpasses that in a second language, consequently influencing

reading comprehension performance (RCP). Farvardin and Koosha (2011), Letsolo-Tafila and Alimi (2019) and Kameli (2013) also assert that vocabulary breadth is a more critical determinant of reading comprehension performance than vocabulary depth, however, many scholars dispute this, arguing that more depth is more requisite than breadth (Afzal, 2019; Likhoeli, 2020; Yang & Wang, 2022). The results demonstrate that an extensive vocabulary enhances comprehension by facilitating improved word recognition and semantic understanding. Dong et al. (2020) and McLaughlin et al. (2000) substantiate the influence of vocabulary on reading comprehension across many linguistic situations and educational tiers.

Motivation and Reading Comprehension

Motivation profoundly influences reading engagement. Readers possessing intrinsic motivation are predisposed to interact with lengthy and complex texts, thereby augmenting cognitive processing through inference-making, summarisation, and critical analysis (Harraqi, 2017; Schmitt, 2008). This technique enhances language breadth and depth and comprehension skills. In contrast, readers driven by external motivation often avoid intricate materials and engage minimally, resulting in diminished comprehension outcomes (Rogulj & Čizmić, 2018). Aligning reading assignments with learners' interests promotes motivation and improves RCP (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Additionally, motivated readers often demonstrate improved metacognitive awareness, employing tactics such as summarisation, re-reading, and questioning to monitor and adjust their comprehension (Pintrich, 2003). The tactics demonstrate a significant association with improved reading comprehension results (Guthrie et al., 2004).

Grabe (2009) and Stavovich (1986) emphasise that desire is a crucial element in vocabulary acquisition (VA) and extended reading, subsequently improving comprehension skills. Stanovich's (1986) "Matthew Effect" illustrates that driven learners who read early and often gain substantial benefits in vocabulary and comprehension, whereas less motivated counterparts risk falling behind (Wahyuningsih, 2020). This cyclical link underscores the significance of fostering intrinsic drive to sustain language development. Evidence suggests that motivation is essential for vocabulary learning and reading comprehension (Afzal, 2019; Diaz, 2016; Gumede, 2018).

Readers driven by intrinsic motivation, characterised by curiosity and own goals, consistently attain superior results compared to those motivated by external influences (Andari, 2023; Wahyuningsih, 2020). Teachers should prioritise tactics that enhance intrinsic motivation, such as integrating learners' interests, offering relevant situations, and promoting active interaction with texts. These strategies increase language acquisition (LA) and understanding, facilitating sustained academic achievement.

Methodology

This study utilised an open-ended questionnaire as the major data collection instrument to explore the influence of learners' attitudes on RCP. The questionnaire aimed to elicit learners' opinions, motives, and obstacles related to reading comprehension in their own expressions. The questionnaire comprised ten open-ended questions, enabling participants to articulate their reading habits, confidence levels, and experiences with comprehension tasks in depth. The open-ended approach was selected to yield comprehensive qualitative insights, circumventing the constraints of structured surveys that may hinder respondents' capacity to articulate their attitudes adequately (Creswell, 2014). Fifty Grade 11 learners from five secondary schools in Lesotho completed the questionnaire, providing a broad representation from various educational contexts (government, church-owned and private institutions). Thematic content analysis was utilised to classify responses into principal themes, including lack of motivation, fear of failure, disengagement with texts, and the impact of teaching approaches on reading attitudes. This method facilitated a comprehensive knowledge of how learners' attitudes influence their reading comprehension ability, establishing a foundation for tailored interventions to enhance engagement and reading results.

Analysis and interpretation of data

Learners' perceptions of their performance

This section systematically presents data on learners' ratings of their RCP in order to draw meaningful conclusions that could guide future instructional practices and support the development of targeted educational interventions. The insights from the data can help in understanding the impact of current teaching methods and identifying areas where further support and resources may be needed to improve learners' overall academic performance.

Table 1: Learners' rating of their reading comprehension performance

School Code	District	Type	Location	Boys	Performance rating	Girls	Performance rating	Total
School A	Leribe	Church	Rural	5	A = 0 B = 5 A2BA = 0	5	A = 2 B = 3 A2BA = 0	10
School B	Leribe	Government	Rural	5	A = 0 B = 5 A2BA = 0	5	A = 1 B = 4 A2BA = 0	10

School Code	District	Type	Location	Boys	Performance rating	Girls	Performance rating	Total
School C	Maseru	Private	Urban	5	A = 2 B = 1 A2BA = 2	5	A = 1 B = 0 A2BA = 4	10
School D	Maseru	Church	Rural	3	A = 0 B = 1 A2BA = 0 Irrelevant = 2 Did not answer = 2	5	A = 2 B = 2 A2BA = 0 Irrelevant = 1	8
School E	Leribe	Church	Urban	5	A = 1 B = 4 A2BA = 0	5	A = 4 B = 1 A2BA = 0	10
Total				23		25		48

Key: A – Average; BA – Below average; A2BA – Average to below average

Positive Motivation

Some learners had favourable answers and attitudes towards VP; nonetheless, their performance and overall competency were subpar. A learner from School E (SEL1) stated:

I feel exhilarated because I relish challenges and also appreciate new experiences.

This study revealed a notable divergence between learners' positive sentiments regarding VP and their inadequate performance. Learners like SEL1 had intrinsic motivation and passion for vocabulary acquisition, driven by own interest rather than extrinsic factors. This optimistic disposition exhibited resilience and a growth perspective; yet, it did not regularly provide improved proficiency. This highlights the imperative for focused assistance to bridge the disparity between motivation and performance.

Additionally, SCL10 (urban-private male learner) stated:

I am enthusiastic about expanding my existing vocabulary, which will enhance my proficiency in English. Upon exiting the test room, I ensure that I verify the definition of the foreign term encountered in the question paper.

This study revealed a notable divergence between learners' positive sentiments regarding VP and their inadequate performance. Learners like SEL1 had intrinsic desire and zeal for vocabulary acquisition, driven by own interest rather than external factors. This optimistic disposition exhibited resilience and a growth perspective; yet, it did not regularly provide improved proficiency. For rural learners, especially girls, mere passion was insufficient to overcome practical obstacles such as poor resources and ineffective educational practices.

Pessimistic attitude

This part examines the impact of learners' adverse views and emotional reactions to language proficiency on their reading comprehension and academic achievement. Frustration, helplessness, and demotivation stemming from new terminology sometimes lead to disengagement and the adoption of ineffective learning practices. Emotional obstacles impede vocabulary learning and diminish learners' confidence in their reading skills, leading to a loop of inadequate performance and decreased desire. In addressing the question regarding attitudes- influenced emotions, SDL4 remarked:

Upon discovering unfamiliar vocabulary, I experience disappointment and occasionally contemplate surrendering.

SDL4's response emphasised the considerable emotional and cognitive challenges associated with discovering novel words, particularly emotions of disillusionment and a propensity to withdraw. The responses underscored the significant impact of language inadequacies and inadequate techniques on a learner's confidence and drive. His discontent stemmed from difficulties in understanding texts and a perceived absence of meaningful development, leading to disengagement and diminished self-esteem.

Furthermore, SEL4 (male learner) articulated:

I frequently have feelings of overwhelm due to my failure to recognise the pertinent term, leading me to employ a common tactic of selecting arbitrary phrases that occupy my thoughts, ultimately choosing the one that resonates as appropriate for the situation.

SEL4's report highlights substantial issues concerning vocabulary acquisition, reading strategies, and emotional responses to foreign terminology. His response revealed the significant tension and worry caused by foreign words, which undermined confidence and motivation. This emotional reaction signified the cognitive load associated with deciphering novel terminology, an essential procedure for effective reading comprehension. Moreover, SEL4's

approach of arbitrarily selecting terms that “feel right” indicates an absence of a systematic strategy for handling novel vocabulary. Expanding on the topic, SEL9 (female learner) remarked:

I frequently experience frustration and irritation when required to invest additional time on an unknown word. This move, however, adversely impacts my performance on questions requiring original expression.

SEL9's response highlights substantial difficulties concerning vocabulary comprehension, reading strategies, and emotional responses to foreign terminology. Her response revealed the significant tension and worry caused by foreign words, which undermined confidence and motivation. This emotional reaction signified the cognitive load associated with deciphering novel terminology, an essential procedure for effective reading comprehension. SCL3 (female learner) articulated:

I experience frustration and powerlessness when confronted with unknown terms during reading, as I am unaware of their meanings and pronunciations.

The feedback from SCL3, SAL8, and SDL3 underscores the significant emotional and cognitive challenges that novel terminology poses to their reading comprehension. The emotions of irritation and powerlessness encountered by SCL3 demonstrate how novel vocabulary can impede reading fluency, increase cognitive burden, and diminish overall understanding. SAL8's propensity to freeze on encountering foreign terminology, coupled with SDL3's finding of substantial declines in marks attributable to these terms, underscores the annoyance and fear these issues engender, negatively impacting engagement and motivation.

Pronunciation difficulties, challenges in meaning inference, and issues with formal English usage underscore inadequacies in vocabulary knowledge and a lack of appropriate ways for tackling unfamiliar terms. The problems were worsened by adverse emotional reactions, such as dissatisfaction and powerlessness, which undermined learners' confidence and drive. The perception of language acquisition as monotonous led to disengagement and insufficient mastery. The findings underscore the imperative for targeted vocabulary training, resilience-building tactics, and a nurturing learning environment to alleviate the emotional and cognitive difficulties faced by learners.

Teachers' perceptions

In this respect, MT2 highlighted:

There are three types of learners: those who have little to no vocabulary and are not motivated to have it at all. They see using vocabulary as a responsibility of a certain group of people, not theirs. Then there is a group that has ambition and vocabulary words in abundance but are unfortunately using it incorrectly. Then we have the last type that uses vocabulary smashingly and their performance reflects that. Those who are nonchalant about vocabulary knowledge obviously perform poorly and the majority of them are boys, though in this Grade 11 cohort, even girls are represented. Those who are ambitious but wrongly use words are both girls and boys, but

girls are dominant and those smashing ones are dominated by girls. You may find one boy or two represented in this group.

MT2 set up a comprehensive analysis of the relationship among vocabulary proficiency, learner motivation, and reading comprehension performance, classifying learners into three groups according to their vocabulary usage and motivation levels. The initial group, mainly composed of boys with some girls, exhibited both limited vocabulary proficiency and a lack of motivation for vocabulary acquisition. The learners perceived vocabulary development as unimportant, resulting in disengagement from language tasks. MT2 associated this disengagement with social or cultural factors that affect attitudes towards language learning. The absence of motivation within this group substantially impeded their capacity to understand and analyse texts, leading to inadequate performance on reading comprehension tasks, where vocabulary plays a crucial role in success.

MT2's analysis examined the relationship among vocabulary proficiency, motivation, and reading comprehension performance, classifying learners into three distinct categories. The second group consisted of motivated learners, primarily girls, who faced challenges with incorrect vocabulary usage. They demonstrated a desire to expand their vocabulary but lacked comprehension of appropriate word application. Their extensive vocabulary, however, was undermined by the incorrect usage of words, which impeded reading comprehension. MT2 emphasised the necessity for learners to expand their vocabulary breadth while also cultivating contextual and nuanced word usage to enhance comprehension effectively.

The third group, defined by proficient learners exhibiting accurate and effective vocabulary usage, demonstrated the highest level of mastery. This predominantly female group exhibited proficiency in navigating complex texts, indicating strong motivation, effective study habits, and a focus on language acquisition. MT2 observed that the gender dynamics, with boys over-represented in the lowest-performing group and girls in the high-achieving group, reflect broader societal and educational trends. The reference to certain girls within the disengaged group indicates a transformation in gender roles related to language learning, implying alterations in educational priorities or societal influences (MOET, 2019). MT2's categorisation highlighted the necessity for differentiated instructional strategies customised for each group: re-engaging disengaged learners, assisting motivated learners facing challenges in application, and enhancing the skills of high-achieving learners. Gender-specific interventions aimed at motivating male learners and supporting female learners' success in vocabulary development are essential for addressing disparities and improving reading comprehension outcomes. This finding is supported by MT4, who stressed that:

Boys don't generally love English, and you find that they possess neither breadth nor depth. There are some girls who have the same attitude, and the numbers of such girls are incredibly increasing, and with each passing year, things get worse.

MT4 emphasised the issue of boys' disengagement from English, leading to a restricted vocabulary breadth and depth, which significantly impairs reading comprehension performance. Vocabulary proficiency is crucial for making inferences, understanding complex texts, and completing comprehension tasks. A lack of engagement negatively impacts this proficiency, leading to poorer academic performance in language-dependent subjects. Moreover, MT4 highlighted concerns regarding an increasing trend of disengagement among girls, who have historically been more engaged and have outperformed boys in language tasks (Dashela & Mustika, 2022). This shift indicates evolving perceptions of English, diminishing motivation for vocabulary acquisition and resulting in superficial lexical knowledge. The observed trends highlight the necessity for focused interventions aimed at re-engaging both genders and addressing the emerging disparities in academic performance that depend on robust linguistic competencies.

CTB indicated that Grade 11 learners appeared indifferent towards their education. Extensive reading for vocabulary acquisition is not a primary focus for them. He added:

They possess no depth because all the time they refer to the vocabulary for difficult words. So, they have a negative attitude towards it. Those who show some breadth, unfortunately do not know how to use it appropriately and they ultimately fail. Basically, at the national level, poor performance is brought by lack of depth and little breadth which is futile because it is not translated into depth. Our learners simply don't read and have a bad attitude towards vocabulary.

CTB identified a widespread lack of interest among learners in activities like extensive reading, which are crucial for vocabulary enhancement. The absence of motivation and prioritisation originated from the view of vocabulary as simply "difficult words," which cultivated negative attitudes and psychological obstacles to engagement. These misconceptions hindered learners from perceiving vocabulary as a functional instrument for comprehension and communication, thereby restricting their capacity to interpret complex texts. This perception intensified limited efforts in vocabulary expansion, leading to difficulties in reading comprehension, especially in tasks necessitating inference or analysis.

CTB characterised learners' vocabulary knowledge as superficial, indicating that familiarity with specific words did not lead to a comprehensive understanding of their meanings, contexts, or applications. This limited understanding impeded engagement with texts at advanced cognitive levels, such as theme interpretation, nuance recognition, and inference drawing. Some learners exhibited a wide vocabulary; however, they struggled to apply these words effectively, indicating a gap between recognition and practical usage. Superficial knowledge, frequently dependent on rote memorisation, exacerbated the gap, hindering understanding and effective communication. The findings

underscore the necessity for strategies that enhance both vocabulary breadth and depth.

Discussions

Gender disparities became evident, as female learners typically exhibited greater involvement in vocabulary acquisition, resulting in enhanced reading comprehension outcomes. This corresponds with the findings of Harraqi (2017) and Rogulj and Čizmić (2018), which indicate that female learners typically excel over males in language learning owing to elevated motivation and engagement levels. In contrast, males, especially those from rural schools, demonstrated diminished involvement and adverse attitudes towards vocabulary acquisition, adversely affecting their comprehension results (Lets'olo-Tafila & Alimi, 2019; Schneider et al., 2022).

These findings underscore the essential importance of language proficiency and learner motivation in improving reading comprehension. Mitigating inequities related to gender and geographic regions, while promoting favourable attitudes towards vocabulary acquisition, is essential for enhancing reading outcomes. By synthesising the ideas of LQH and SVR, teachers must emphasise targeted interventions that harmonise vocabulary breadth and depth, concurrently addressing the distinct requirements of disadvantaged learners to close the performance gap.

Exasperation and apprehension

The analysis of learners' attitudes about language in RC revealed two predominant themes: negative attitudes characterised by frustration and disengagement, and positive attitudes fuelled by motivation and enjoyment of learning. A plurality of learners encountered feelings of frustration, helplessness, and even despair when confronted with new language in reading tasks. This emotional weight often led to disengagement, as seen by learner SDL 4, who articulated a need to capitulate when faced with challenging words. This aligns with the findings of Wahyuningsih (2020), which underscore the impact of limited vocabulary on learners' confidence and performance.

Frustration was often intensified by the lack of efficient language acquisition methods, reducing motivation and engagement. A significant number of learners saw language acquisition as tedious or irrelevant to their academic goals. Boys demonstrated less interest in vocabulary learning, influenced by existing social norms and insufficient engagement. Anxiety and pain were linked to cognitive overload. Emotional discomfort diverted cognitive resources from text processing and comprehension, resulting in reduced reading proficiency. This finding supports Wigfield and Guthrie's (1997) assertion that motivation and emotional engagement are crucial for language acquisition. Inferior lexical quality exacerbates reading challenges, increasing anxiety and disengagement, thereby creating a harmful feedback cycle. Conversely, learners with positive attitudes towards vocabulary learning, often driven by intrinsic motivation, demonstrated enhanced comprehension outcomes.

These findings underscore the critical need for targeted interventions to address negative attitudes towards vocabulary development, particularly among disengaged learners. Strategies that bolster motivation, confidence, and the effective implementation of language acquisition techniques can interrupt the cycle of frustration and disengagement. By addressing the emotional and cognitive barriers to vocabulary acquisition, teachers can enhance learners' lexical competency and, consequently, their reading comprehension skills.

Optimistic perspective

This study highlights diverse learner perspectives on vocabulary acquisition and its impact on RCP among Grade 11 learners in Lesotho. While many learners expressed displeasure and apprehension with unfamiliar language, others had a hopeful outlook, viewing these challenges as opportunities for growth. Learners with negative attitudes often expressed feelings of despair and diminished motivation, which negatively affected their cognitive abilities. Conversely, learners who addressed vocabulary challenges utilised proactive strategies, such as contextual inference, dictionary use, or seeking assistance, which improved their comprehension results.

Positive attitudes towards language acquisition, as demonstrated by learners like SCL 10, were linked to intrinsic motivation and active engagement. These learners considered vocabulary development vital for their academic success, committing effort to the learning and practice of new terminology. This engagement aligns with Andari's (2023) findings that motivation is crucial for vocabulary enhancement and reading comprehension skills. The SVR theory supports this, highlighting that active vocabulary engagement enhances both decoding and linguistic comprehension, hence improving reading proficiency. Learners that actively expand their vocabulary reduce cognitive load, hence freeing resources for deeper comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

The findings underscore the need of fostering positive attitudes towards language acquisition through targeted interventions. Teachers must highlight the importance of vocabulary acquisition and provide engaging and relevant learning activities to motivate learners. Moreover, addressing resource disparities between rural and urban educational institutions is crucial to support learners in underprivileged areas. By aligning instructional methods with the SVR framework, teachers may enhance vocabulary acquisition, elevate lexical quality, and eventually increase reading comprehension across diverse learner groups.

Influence of attitudes on performance

The study reveals an intricate relationship between learners' attitudes towards vocabulary acquisition (VA) and their RCP. Optimistic attitudes fostered internal drive and resilience, encouraging learners to engage with challenging texts and employ effective vocabulary strategies, such as contextual inference and dictionary use. Motivated learners demonstrated a greater propensity to develop higher lexical representations, leading to improved reading comprehension outcomes. However, as

demonstrated by Gumede's (2018) research, intrinsic motivation is insufficient without formal educational assistance.

The SVR premise asserts that reading comprehension (RC) depends on both decoding and linguistic understanding (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Learners with positive attitudes towards vocabulary markedly enhanced their linguistic comprehension by engaging with unfamiliar terms. Nevertheless, without sufficient decoding skills or structured language instruction, their motivation did not consistently lead to improved performance. This dual dependency clarifies why learners with positive attitudes may still face challenges if they lack exposure to diverse vocabulary or explicit teaching in word morphology and usage.

Evidence indicates that learners with negative attitudes towards language often exhibit disengagement and avoidance behaviours, hindering vocabulary acquisition and reducing lexical quality. The SVR asserts that insufficient vocabulary breadth and depth impede both decoding and comprehension skills. These findings align with the studies conducted by Schneider et al. (2022) and Hill and Wagovich (2020), which underscore the importance of language exposure and instructional scaffolding in developing robust verbal comprehension.

The research highlights that although positive attitudes are beneficial, their effectiveness is constrained without suitable instructional methods. Comprehensive vocabulary instruction that includes both breadth and depth—utilizing semantic mapping, morphological analysis, and contextual application—is essential. Participating in activities that foster word associations, root analysis, and mnemonic devices can improve lexical quality and decoding abilities, as suggested by SVR. The necessity for targeted vocabulary instruction aligns with Stavovich (1986), who asserts that motivation must be integrated with systematic learning procedures to attain measurable improvement in comprehension skills.

Implications for Policy and Curriculum Formulation

The findings of this study have considerable significance for language education policy and curriculum development in Lesotho, particularly concerning the vocabulary gap and gender disparities in reading comprehension skills. The existing curriculum employs a standardised method for language instruction, which may inadequately meet the varied needs of male and female learners. The research illustrates that male and female learners exhibit disparities in attitudes, coping strategies, motivation, engagement levels, and vocabulary acquisition techniques. These variations underscore the importance of curricular flexibility in ensuring equitable access to language learning opportunities.

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Lesotho must incorporate gender-sensitive pedagogical strategies into the English Language curriculum. Gender-sensitive instruction is the deliberate design and execution of educational experiences that recognise and accommodate learners' gender-specific preferences and learning habits. This may include the use of multimodal

vocabulary acquisition materials such as games, animations, podcasts, and peer-interaction activities that might motivate male learners to participate actively in vocabulary learning. The curriculum for female learners can improve their engagement by integrating advanced vocabulary skills, such as project-based reading assignments, reflective writing, and vocabulary enhancement workshops.

Secondly, teacher education and professional development programmes must be re-evaluated to equip teachers with the skills required to identify and address gender-based learning gaps effectively. A considerable proportion of teachers in Lesotho lack proficiency in assessing or addressing gender disparities in vocabulary acquisition, mostly due to the inadequate focus on these topics in teacher training programmes. As a result, the unique needs of learners are often overlooked, leading to continued underperformance, particularly among male learners. Educational stakeholders must advocate for and fund ongoing professional development programmes that prioritise inclusive vocabulary education, learner motivation, and strategic training. These workshops should encourage the use of formative assessment strategies that track vocabulary development and comprehension over time for both male and female learners.

Moreover, curriculum design must incorporate language learning as a systematic and intentional component across all subject areas. The current syllabus often considers language as peripheral, assuming that learners will acquire it through exposure during reading. This passive method disadvantages learners, especially males, who struggle with foreign words. Integrating explicit vocabulary targets, outcome measurements, and performance standards into the curriculum would aid teachers in tracking and improving learners' vocabulary acquisition. Textbooks and supplementary materials must be revised to include word lists, vocabulary exercises, and strategic prompts that are inclusive and contextually relevant.

Moreover, authorities must ensure that educational environments promote vocabulary development by offering access to ample linguistic resources which would include making Literature in English a compulsory subject in Lesotho. Educational institutions must be equipped with libraries that provide gender-inclusive and age-appropriate literature, alongside digital resources to mitigate accessibility inequities. Exposing boys with reduced reading motivation to a varied selection of books is essential for enhancing vocabulary and cultivating reading enjoyment. Parental and community engagement activities could elevate knowledge regarding the importance of vocabulary development and foster reading habits outside the classroom, so reinforcing school-based education.

In conclusion, the vocabulary deficiency and its effect on reading comprehension performance cannot be addressed alone within the educational environment. An extensive and inclusive policy framework is essential to acknowledge and tackle the learners' gendered experiences. By developing a language curriculum that is equitable, differentiated, and responsive to the distinct needs of

learners, educational stakeholders in Lesotho can significantly advance efforts to close the performance gap and improve literacy for all learners. Policy and curricular development must move beyond uniformity to recognise the intricate realities of learners' linguistic experiences.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study's findings affirm that learners' attitudes significantly influence their reading comprehension performance in Lesotho. The research demonstrated that negative attitudes, characterised by anxiety, frustration, and disengagement, pose considerable obstacles to reading achievement, whereas good attitudes, fuelled by motivation and interest, enhance comprehension ability. Nonetheless, although certain learners showed a desire to enhance their reading abilities, their performance was hindered by restricted language competency, inadequate reading confidence, and insufficient instructional support.

The SVR model (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) offered a valuable framework for comprehending the interaction among decoding, comprehension, and learner motivation. The study revealed that learners with comprehension difficulties encounter both linguistic obstacles and psychological impediments that hinder their meaningful engagement with readings. Responses from learners indicated that individuals who feared reading comprehension tasks frequently demonstrated avoidance behaviours, hence exacerbating their inadequate performance. Likewise, individuals who were intrinsically motivated and perceived reading as advantageous were more inclined to engage with texts freely, resulting in improved comprehension outcomes.

The study demonstrated that instructional strategies greatly affect learners' attitudes towards reading. Numerous learners indicated that reading was instructed in a method focused on examinations, rendering it mechanical and unenjoyable. This method did not cultivate a culture of reading for comprehension and critical engagement, resulting in poor reading comprehension outcomes.

These findings clearly indicate that attitude is not a singular element but a crucial influence of reading success. Combating unfavourable perceptions of reading necessitates a comprehensive strategy encompassing motivational initiatives, educational changes, and improved reading support frameworks. To cultivate robust comprehension skills among learners in Lesotho, it is imperative to establish learning environments that promote reading engagement, offer sufficient vocabulary assistance, and enhance learners' confidence in their reading capabilities.

Recommendations

Improving reading comprehension among learners in Lesotho necessitates a planned, comprehensive strategy that incorporates pedagogical innovation, resource availability, and learner motivation. Schools ought to foster a reading culture via organised reading initiatives, interactive dialogues, and contextual vocabulary education to improve engagement and comprehension abilities. Pedagogical strategies should transition from examination-centric

teaching to learner-centred practices, including guided reading, collaborative analysis, and individualised feedback to foster confidence and critical thinking. Moreover, teacher training programmes ought to incorporate motivation-based tactics, providing teachers with the resources to enhance reading confidence and skill development. Enhancing parental and community engagement is essential to bolster literacy development outside the classroom, hence reinforcing beneficial reading practices at home. A policy-based dedication to these treatments will guarantee enduring enhancements in reading engagement, comprehension results, and academic achievement.

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