




Using the Strategy Instructions Approach (SIA) in Teaching Reading Comprehension: A Case Study schools in the Amathole East District South in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore the effectiveness of using the Strategy Instructions Approach (SIA) to teach South African children reading comprehension. The majority of language teachers, especially those who teach English as a first or second language, were found to be lacking in the skills needed to impart reading comprehension effectively to their learners. Grade 8 learners were taught reading comprehension using SIA which was basically from the curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) materials. A control group of 60 learners and an experimental group of 60 learners (sampled from three schools in Amathole East District in South Africa) were used to determine the effectiveness of SIA when compared to the traditional teaching approaches used by teachers to teach reading comprehension. The outcomes demonstrated that SIA enhanced performance in reading comprehension. The study recommends that schools especially, those in rural areas should have more reading resources and activities, longer hours on the school timetable for teaching reading comprehension, and higher institutions should train teachers to use SIA.

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INTRODUCTION

Education in South Africa is a significant budget item, but students often score poorly in reading and numeracy.¹ Despite the country's high spending, many students struggle with text comprehension, especially when learning English as their first or second language. This is evident in the 2022 Diagnostic Report, where 47% of matriculants failed to score at least 30% on reading comprehension questions.² The importance of reading and the need to educate learners on various techniques to improve comprehension has been discussed. This is evidenced in President Ramaphosa's State of the Nation's Address (SONA, 2019), where he said his government was going to embark on a massive campaign which would aim at school children reading for meaning.³ Direct instruction, where teachers correct pronunciation errors, is often used to assess students' comprehension in South African classrooms.⁴ Using such an approach to developing skills of decoding when teaching reading

¹ Elizabeth J Pretorius and Nic Spaul, "Exploring Relationships between Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension amongst English Second Language Readers in South Africa," *Reading and Writing* 29 (2016): 1449–71.

² Department of Basic Education. "National Senior Certificate (NSC) Diagnostic Report 2022," Department of Basic Education, South Africa, 2022.

³ State of the Nation Address (SONA). SABC1. 20/06/2019, 19H00 CAT (2019).

⁴ Pretorius and Spaul, "Exploring Relationships between Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension amongst English Second Language Readers in South Africa."

comprehension is not producing the desired outcomes.⁵ Many researchers posit that many South African pupils struggle with understanding what they read, leading to the need for a more effective strategy to motivate students to read for meaning.⁶ There is no doubt that most learners are failing to reach their academic potential because they do not have the skills necessary to help them read and understand what they read hence this study to find a lasting solution to reading comprehension deficiency. In view of that, this study aims to determine if the strategy instructions approach (SIA) can enhance students' reading comprehension abilities. The strategy instruction approach emphasises higher-level thinking, inquiry-driven teaching, social collaboration, and project-based learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Comprehension

Reading is an interactive activity that involves decoding and language comprehension.⁷ It is considered the most crucial skill for students, as it provides valuable knowledge on health, social, cultural, and political issues. However, achieving literacy competency is a significant issue in sub-Saharan Africa, where an estimated 88% of children aged 6-14 do not read proficiently.⁸ In South Africa, grade 8 students are the most affected, with many struggling to communicate effectively in their second language.⁹

Meanwhile, language proficiency is used as a primary measure of school performance, and children who learn to read within the first three years of primary school have higher levels of socio-emotional well-being. However, students who fail to read or comprehend what they read in the early grades are often demotivated and drop out without mastering basic skills.¹⁰

A study by Gumede and Boakye revealed that learning to read for meaning by the end of the third year of primary schooling is widely acknowledged and accepted by many African countries, including South Africa.¹¹ However, many South African children do not receive the support they need to read accurately, fluently, and with comprehension.¹² In this regard, effective instructions and interventions, such as SIA, are needed to equip learners with the skills needed to comprehend what they read and perform in other academic areas. Research in applied linguistics and reading confirms a strong correlation between reading proficiency and academic success at all ages.

Selection of Texts for Teaching Reading Comprehension within the Learners' Zone of Proximal Development

A text can be an example of written or spoken language, from something as complex as a book or legal document to something as simple as the body of an email or the words on the back of a cereal box.¹³ Teachers must choose texts that are appropriate for students' comprehension levels. There are three types of texts which are informational, literary, and graphic. Informational texts provide fresh knowledge or expand on existing knowledge, while literary texts include short tales, poetry, songs, plays, novels, videos, and audio clips.¹⁴ Graphic texts include printed text and visual elements which generally, either add to the information

⁵ Suzanne Beck and Janet L Condy, "Instructional Principles Used to Teach Critical Comprehension Skills to a Grade 4 Learner," *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 8, no. 1 (2017): 1-8.

⁶ Sharita Bharuthram, "Making a Case for the Teaching of Reading across the Curriculum in Higher Education," *South African Journal of Education* 32, no. 2 (2012): 205-14.

⁷ M. Aliyu and H. Yakubu, "Implications of the Sociocultural Theory on Students' Reading Comprehension," *Bulletin of Advanced English Studies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 84-91.

⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). "Global education monitoring report 2019, Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls" (2018).

⁹ Curriculum and assessment policy statement grades (CAPS) 10-12. Department of Basic Education.. English first additional language, (2011).

¹⁰ Nic Spaull, "Examining Oral Reading Fluency among Rural Grade 5 English Second Language (ESL) Learners in South Africa: An Analysis of NEEDU 2013," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5, no. 2 (2015): 44-77.

¹¹ Thenjiwe Gumede and Naomi Adjoa Yeboah Boakye, "Investigating the Reading Comprehension Ability of Grade 9 (Form 2) Learners at Bulawayo Central District High Schools in Zimbabwe," *Per Linguam: A Journal of Language Learning= Per Linguam: Tydskrif Vir Taalaanleer* 36, no. 1 (2020): 71-89.

¹² Grace Tatter, "English Learners and Reading Challenges," Harvard Graduate School of Education, October 12, 2018, <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/18/10/english-learners-and-reading-challenges>.

¹³ Richard Nordquist, "Definition and Examples of Text in Language Studies," ThoughtCo., July 3, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/text-language-studies-1692537#:~:text=A text is any stretch,can be considered a text.>

¹⁴ Lisbeth M. Brevik, "Explicit Reading Strategy Instruction or Daily Use of Strategies? Studying the Teaching of Reading Comprehension through Naturalistic Classroom Observation in English L2," *Reading and Writing* 32, no. 9 (2019): 2281-2310.

presented by the text or present it again in a different way.¹⁵ The success of a reading lesson depends on the text selection, as there is no "one size fits all" approach.¹⁶ The text should be readable within the learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD), with three primary levels of difficulty within the ZPD. Figure 1 below depicts the three main levels of difficulties within the zone of proximal development of the learner which teachers should consider when choosing a text for reading comprehension. These zones are (1) the zone in which the learner can do with guidance from a teacher or more knowledgeable others, (2) the zone in which the learner can read without the help of a teacher, and (3) the zone in which the learner cannot do even if assisted.

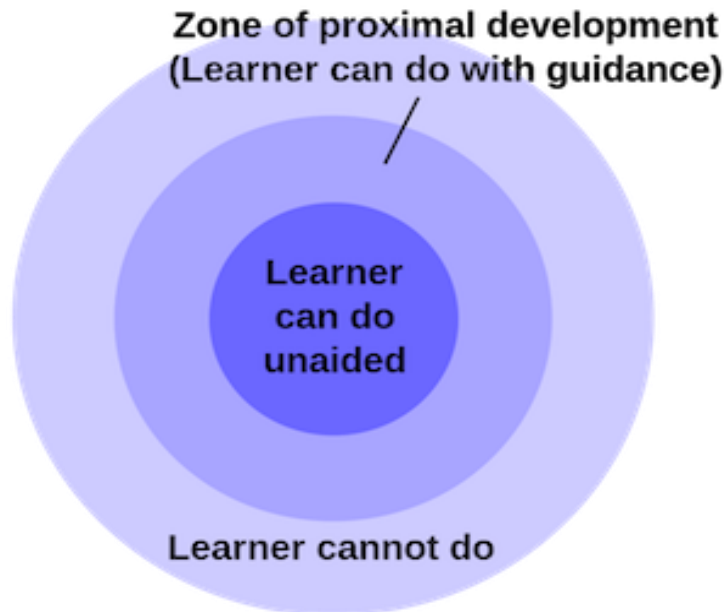


Figure 1: The zone of proximal development is the perfect area of difficulty.¹⁷

In addition to considering the text to fall within the zone of proximal development of the learners, it should also be culturally relevant to the learners' needs.¹⁷ Nevertheless, for teachers to encourage learners to enjoy reading and learn from various sources, they should expose students to diverse texts with rich ideas, appropriate difficulty levels, and relevance to lesson goals. In this regard for this study to also succeed there is the need for the researcher to select a text that is culturally relevant to the participating learners. Thus, the texts should be relevant to grade 8 students' cultures, setting them in familiar circumstances, with stories not too old for their understanding, and characters of similar ages.

Reading Comprehension and Academic Performance

Reading comprehension is a crucial process that requires children to recognize words quickly and accurately while constructing meaning.¹⁸ It requires the coordination of multiple linguistic and cognitive processes, including word-reading ability, working memory, inference generation, comprehension monitoring, vocabulary, and prior knowledge.¹⁹ Good readers are aware of how they are reading and why, can identify difficult texts,

¹⁵ F. Claudia, "Using literary texts to teach reading comprehension," 2021. Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/selectingtexts-for-reading-comprehension.htm>

¹⁶ Timothy Shanahan et al., "Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade: IES Practice Guide. NCEE 2010-4038.," *What Works Clearinghouse*, 2010.

¹⁷ A. Robb, "Selecting texts for reading comprehension" (2016). Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/selecting-texts-for-reading-comprehension.htm>

¹⁸ Margriet A Groen, Nathalie J Veenendaal, and Ludo Verhoeven, "The Role of Prosody in Reading Comprehension: Evidence from Poor Comprehenders," *Journal of Research in Reading* 42, no. 1 (2019): 37–57.

¹⁹ Amy M Elleman and Eric L Oslund, "Reading Comprehension Research: Implications for Practice and Policy," *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2019): 3–11.

make inferences, and monitor and use fix-up strategies when comprehension fails. High-functioning readers can understand a text at three levels: literal, inferential, and evaluative.²⁰ Functional readers use three main strategies: global, problem-solving, and support strategies. Global strategies prepare the reader for reading, problem-solving strategies solve problems when the text becomes challenging, and support strategies help the reader while reading.²¹

When learners acquire the necessary skills to comprehend what they read, it helps them in other areas of their academic work. Reading comprehension is crucial for academic success, and it is the single most important aspect of academic work. Research shows a strong correlation between reading proficiency and academic success at all ages. For example, research in applied linguistics and reading confirms this correlation.²² Other studies have shown that when a child becomes reading proficient by the end of grade 3, it becomes a key milestone in their educational development and an indicator of future success.²³

However, South African children are currently reading far below the expected age-appropriate level, which is a major concern in the field of reading comprehension.²⁴ To encourage learners to persist in understanding texts, teaching strategies should involve skills that enable them to become functional readers and achieve their academic goals. Researchers advocate for strategy instruction to effectively increase comprehension, even among learners with poor reading comprehension.

Factors Contributing to Poor Reading Comprehension

There are many factors that affect the ability of a child to comprehend a text. These factors include the problem of multilingualism, inadequate teaching and learning resources, cultural capital and teacher pedagogical knowledge. These factors are discussed below.

a. The Problem of Multilingualism

It is observed that multilingualism in South Africa negatively impacts reading literacy.²⁵ Learners are taught their indigenous language (L1) when they start school and then change from grade 4 to English as their language of learning and teaching (LOLT). Karim and Nassaji state, that when the children begin to move to English, they develop language anxiety which leads to pronunciation mistakes.²⁶ This subsequently leads to poor transfer of reading skills, as indigenous languages share lexical features with English but differ in phonetic terms. In grade 4, learners in South Africa lack relevant skills to scaffold reading in English.²⁷ Language anxiety and pronunciation mistakes in indigenous languages cause poor language acquisition, negatively impacting reading excellence.

b. Inadequate Teaching and Learning Resources

The insufficient resources in schools hinder children's reading comprehension. Instructional materials such as textbooks, novels, drama books, radio and television programmes, and digital learning resources are critical ingredients in learning, and the intended curriculum cannot be easily implemented without them. Most schools in the study area are not well-resourced with these materials.²⁸ Learners in well-resourced schools are inclined to attain higher literacy levels than learners from schools with high levels of poverty.²⁹

²⁰ Pretorius and Spaul, "Exploring Relationships between Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension amongst English Second Language Readers in South Africa."

²¹ Bailey Frid and Deanna C Friesen, "Reading Comprehension and Strategy Use in Fourth-and Fifth-Grade French Immersion Students," *Reading and Writing* 33, no. 5 (2020): 1213–33.

²² Bharuthram, "Making a Case for the Teaching of Reading across the Curriculum in Higher Education."

²³ Joy Lesnick et al., "Reading on Grade Level in Third Grade: How Is It Related to High School Performance and College Enrollment," *Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago* 1 (2010): 12.

²⁴ T. Olifant and M. P. Cekiso, "Teachers' perceptions Of Reading Habits And Attitudes Of Grades 8 To 10 First Additional Language Learners In South Africa," in *ICER12019 Proceedings* (IATED, 2019), 1142.

²⁵ Nokwindla Makiwane-Mazinyo, "Challenges Teachers Encounter in Teaching English Reading and Writing to the Intermediate Phase Learners in the Uthungulu District Schools" (University of Zululand, 2017).

²⁶ Khaled Karim and Hossein Nassaji, "The Revision and Transfer Effects of Direct and Indirect Comprehensive Corrective Feedback on ESL Students' Writing," *Language Teaching Research* 24, no. 4 (2020): 519–39.

²⁷ Kleopas Mule, "Types and Causes of Reading Difficulties Affecting the Reading of English Language: A Case of Grade 4 Learners in Selected Schools in Ogong Circuit of Namibia" (2014).

²⁸ Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). *National government directory*. National Government Departments (2011). Available at at: <https://www.statssa.gov.za>

²⁹ Abbas Pourhosein Gilakjani and Narjes Banou Sabouri, "A Study of Factors Affecting EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Skill and the Strategies for Improvement," *International Journal of English Linguistics* 6, no. 5 (2016): 180–87.

c. The Cultural Capital

Poor English first additional language (EFAL) reading comprehension among South African public school pupils can be attributable to cultural capital, which includes skills, education, norms, and behaviours, which affect literacy levels. Children from illiterate parents such as in the study area, may be disadvantaged and they will not be motivated, supported, engaged and exposed to reading tasks at home at an early stage, which would lead to problems in understanding what they read.

d. Teacher Pedagogical and Content Knowledge

Pedagogical knowledge includes the principle of instruction and skills related to teaching reading comprehension in EFAL.³⁰ It is particularly important for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, particularly when teaching reading comprehension to non-English speakers, that their understanding of what they read depends on the teacher's pedagogy and content knowledge. A lack of pedagogical content knowledge can result in ineffective teaching.³¹ However, many teachers in South Africa lack effective training in teaching reading, resulting in inadequate pedagogical knowledge. Poor language and literacy practices in black rural and township schools are often due to ineffective instructional practices. To improve performance, schools must adopt new knowledge and skills, with a focus on instructional practice.

Approaches to Teaching Reading Comprehension

There are two main approaches to teaching reading comprehension, as identified in this study. These approaches are the Direct Instructional Approach (DIA) and the Strategy Instruction Approach (SIA).

a. Direct Instruction Approach (DIA)

Direct instruction (DIA) is a structured approach led by teachers aimed at improving student performance and behaviour. Originating from traditional bottom-up reading and influenced by behaviourist psychology, DIA focuses on decoding text and rote learning.³² Critics argue it doesn't consider readers' prior knowledge, underestimates their reading abilities, and doesn't ensure rapid and accurate processing of unfamiliar words.³³ In South African classrooms, DIA which is predominantly being used, is not achieving desired outcomes,³⁴ highlighting the need for pedagogical and content knowledge.

b. The Strategy Instructions Approach (SIA)

The Strategy Instructions Approach (SIA) is a language learning strategy that focuses on teaching learners to become competent in reading fluently and comprehending what they read.³⁵ SIA is a step-by-step procedural process facilitated by the teacher to relate what is being taught to what the learners already know.³⁶ During lessons, both the teacher and the learners discuss the step-by-step procedures they will use to solve the problem, the teacher helps them and shows how the steps can be taken, and the learners start individual work. SIA encompasses teaching practices that involve teachers clearly explaining to learners why they are learning something, how it connects to what they already know, what they are expected to do, and what it looks like when they have succeeded.

Shea and Roberts identified three stages in teaching reading comprehension: pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading.³⁷ In a typical reading comprehension lesson, activities take place in pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading. The teacher is present and available, allowing the students to state their thoughts and exercise problem-solving aloud. The teacher also observes and formatively assesses the students.³⁷ The only limitation of SIA is that it demands a lot from the teacher, as they must assess children and tailor lessons to individual needs.³⁸

³⁰ Jacob Filgona, John Sakiyo, and D M Gwany, "Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Students' Academic Achievement: A Theoretical Overview," *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science* 14, no. 2 (2020): 14–44.

³¹ Nick Taylor, "Inequalities in Teacher Knowledge in South Africa," *South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality: A Study of the Present Situation and Future Possibilities*, 2019, 263–82.

³² Husam Helmi Alharahsheh and Abraham Pius, "A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism," *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2020): 39–43.

³³ Rahma Al-Mahrooqi and Adrian Roscoe, *Focusing on EFL Reading: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

³⁴ Mule, "Types and Causes of Reading Difficulties Affecting the Reading of English Language: A Case of Grade 4 Learners in Selected Schools in Ogong Circuit of Namibia."

³⁵ Rebecca J Baier, "Reading Comprehension and Reading Strategies," A research paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Education Degree in Education. The Graduate School, University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2005.

³⁶ Baier, "Reading Comprehension and Reading Strategies."

³⁷ Mary Shea and Nancy Roberts, *The FIVES Strategy for Reading Comprehension* (Learning Sciences International, 2016).

³⁸ J. Clements, . "Teaching comprehension. Pathways," 2022. Available at: <https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk>

Effective Instructional Strategies to Support SIA

Research shows that proficient and confident readers employ a few strategies to achieve comprehension of a text.³⁹ The strategies they employ to achieve better reading and comprehension need to be taught in class so that the learners can assimilate them and use them for their day-to-day reading. However, while some teachers do not know the particular strategy to use to teach reading comprehension,⁴⁰ others are exposed to the reading comprehension strategies, but they do not know which one will be suitable for their children.⁴¹ There is, therefore, the need to expose teachers to the right comprehension strategies, hence the use of SIA. There are four main approaches teachers employ when using SIA to teach reading comprehension. These approaches are discussed below.

a. *Predicting Approach for Teaching SIA*

Predicting is a teaching approach that involves guessing what will happen next in a text.⁴² It helps students anticipate what will happen next by using information from the text and their prior knowledge. Predicting helps readers set a purpose for reading, encourages interaction with the text, and increases interest and focus.⁴³ Predicting does not only occur at the pre-reading stage but continues throughout the reading process.

b. *Questioning Approach for Teaching SIA*

Questioning is a crucial strategy for improving reading comprehension. Skilled readers use metacognition to answer questions, giving them a purpose for reading. This helps them focus on what needs to be learned, develop active thinking, and monitor their comprehension.⁴⁴ Teachers should provide opportunities for students to ask questions and explore the text, focusing on Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How inquiries.

c. *Summarising Approach to Teaching SIA*

Summarising is a crucial strategy for teaching reading comprehension, as it helps students construct a concise understanding of text.¹⁴ Teacher modelling is essential, as summarising can be complex.⁴⁵ A summary wheel is an after-reading instructional strategy that supports tasks completed after listening or reading a story.⁴⁶ The wheel focuses on questions like 'Who, What, Where, When, Why, How, and So What?'⁴⁷ Students construct summary statements based on their reading on the wheel. However, teaching and acquiring this skill can be time-consuming and challenging for teachers.

d. *Visualisation approach to teaching SIA*

Visualisation is a strategy that involves mentally picturing images and ideas while reading, allowing students to translate their literal understanding of text into pictorial form.⁴² It requires students to combine their background knowledge, text evidence, and creativity to create a mental image that matches the story.⁴⁸ Visualisation enhances comprehension by helping readers understand, organize, and remember the text in a vivid mental picture. Teachers can employ all or only one or two strategies in their class, gradually removing support and releasing responsibility for using strategies to the learners.

Using SIA to Improve Performance in Reading Comprehension

SIA focuses on teaching learners to become competent in reading and communicate their ideas effectively. It involves making inferences, allowing learners to construct their own meanings. SIA also equips readers with metacognitive awareness, enabling them to monitor their understanding and respond to comprehension issues.⁴⁹ It motivates learners by linking new knowledge to their prior experiences, stimulating curiosity and improving

³⁹ N Duke and P Pearson, "Reading Comprehension: Strategies That Work," *Retrieved from Http://Www. Jstor. Org/Stable/42748663*, 2001.

⁴⁰ Abigail K Ballou, "Using Explicit Strategy Instruction to Improve Reading Comprehension," 2012.

⁴¹ Ballou, "Using Explicit Strategy Instruction to Improve Reading Comprehension."

⁴² Duke and Pearson, "Reading Comprehension: Strategies That Work."

⁴³ Edinburg Literacy Hub. "Teacher's guide to reading comprehension strategies." The City of Edinburg Council. *Reading Comprehension P5-S3*, 2014.

⁴⁴ B. Loveless. "A complete guide to schema theory and its role in education", 2022. Available at: Educationcornerhttp://C:/Users/user/Documents/A%20Complete %20Guide%20to%20Schema%20Theory%20and%20its%20Role%20in%20Education.htm

⁴⁵ WestEd. "DOINGWHATWORKS. *Strategies in teaching reading comprehension*" US Department of Education (2021). Available at: dww@wested.org

⁴⁶ Lottie Baker, "Using Story Retelling Wheels with Young Learners.," in *English Teaching Forum*, vol. 59 (ERIC, 2021), 14–24.

⁴⁷ Marollo, S. *Summary wheels*, 2022. Available at: <https://prezi.com/iobjxaov7ry>

⁴⁸ Jessica Will, "Visualization Techniques To Support Students' Reading Comprehension," 2018.

⁴⁹ Marsha L Roit, "Effective Teaching Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension in K-3 Students," *Open Court Reading*, 2016.

reading comprehension. Using context clues, such as definitions, examples, and illustrations, helps learners understand unfamiliar words.⁵⁰ SIA also encourages learners to verbalise their thinking, which has been shown to improve comprehension scores. However, most English teachers do not apply these teaching techniques, leading to poor reading comprehension performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research approach was used in the study as it allowed the researchers to use quantitative data sets to compare pre and post-test results before and after using SIA respectively. Two data sets were derived from the control group and the experimental group. The experimental design was therefore used in this study. This type of design consists of selecting a small group of subjects, doing something with them and observing the effect of what was done.⁵¹ Action research was used to investigate the impact of using SIA (Strategy Instructional Strategies) on reading comprehension in schools. The research was motivated by the poor performance of learners in reading comprehension, particularly in English and their native African languages. The study sampled 40 learners from three schools in the Elliotdale cluster of Amathole District, with half taught English comprehension using SIA before, during, and after reading, and the other half taught using DIA. The study aimed to assess the strategy's impact on performance, attitudes, and reading autonomy. Three components were involved in experimental research, namely: (1) Independent and dependent variables, (2) Pre-test and post-test and (3) Experimental and control groups. The study total sample consisted of 120 grade 8 learners from three schools in the area, as not all learners in the three schools (about 412 learners) could participate from all schools in the study area from these 120 learners were sampled to participate in the study. Since this study used an experimental design, it had to be conducted in close proximity to each other to limit internal and external factors that could affect the outcome of the study. In addition, it has become easier to engage research participants. This study used probability sampling to select 40 grade 8 learners from each of the three schools in the Elliotdale cluster giving a total sample size of 120 learners. The study aimed to assess English comprehension using SIA and direct methods. Standard comprehension passages from various books, were carefully selected to avoid bias. Three teachers were trained in using SIA to teach participants in experimental groups, while DIA was used for control groups. Six culturally appropriate passages were used over six weeks, with pre-tests and post-tests to track progress. The study aimed to determine SIA's impact on performance outcomes. Tools were designed to teach predicting, questioning, summarizing, visualizing and answering questions. The concept of instructional scaffolding was applied as support from the facilitators was gradually withdrawn as learners internalized the strategies. In the end, the tools were introduced without teacher assistance. SPSS was used to analyse participants' data, using descriptive statistics and visual aids like percentages, medians, and modes. Reading comprehension scores of both control and experimental groups were analysed.

FINDINGS

The tables below show the extent to which SIA could have influenced the performance of learners. To obtain this, a pre-test and a post-test were administered to both the control group and the experimental group after the interventions. Both results are analysed below.

Table 1: One-sample statistics for the control group test performance

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control before	60	8.48	3.606	.465
Control after	60	10.30	3.697	.477

Looking at Table 1 above, it can be observed from the mean scores that before the intervention, most of the learners in the control groups scored 8.48. However, after the intervention, the mean score increased to 10.38. This shows that there was an increase in the performance of the learner participants by 1.82, which is a 21% improvement. This analysis postulated that there was a significant increase in the performance of the learner participants after the intervention, even among the control group.

⁵⁰ R K Rynette and M S Kjesbo, "Context Clues-Can You Figure It Out" (Educational Handout for Teachers and Parents. Retrived from www ..., 2010).

⁵¹ Earl R Babbie, *Introduction to Social Research* (Wadsworth Cengage learning, 2011).

Table 2: One-sample statistics for the experimental group test performance

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental before	60	8.88	4.759	.614
Experimental after	60	16.73	4.787	.618

Looking at Table 2 above, it was seen from the mean scores that before the intervention, learners in the experimental groups scored a mean mark of 8.88 with a standard deviation of 4.759. However, after the intervention, the mean score increased to 16.73 with a standard deviation of 4.787. This showed that there was a significant increase in the performance of the learner participants by 7.85 to 88%. This analysis postulates that there was a statistically significant increase in the performance of the learner participants after the SIA intervention.

Table 3: One-sample test for the control group test performance

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Control before	18.225	59	.000	8.483	7.55	9.41
Control after	21.578	59	.000	10.300	9.34	11.26

Irrespective of the small mean differences noted in Table 1, Table 3 depicts that there was a significant change in t value from 18.225 to 21.578. The difference between the marks was statistically significant and showed improvement in the performance of the learners. What it means was that the use of DIA increased the performance of the learners. Even though there was an increase in performance, on average after the intervention, the majority of the learners could not obtain 50% (raw marks of 15) out of a total of 30. This supported the fact that if teachers did their teaching of reading comprehension well, the learners’ performance could increase. However, there was still room for improvement.

Table 4: One-sample test for the experimental group test performance

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Experimental before	14.459	59	.000	8.883	7.65	10.11
Experimental after	27.079	59	.000	16.733	15.50	17.97

Table 4 depicts that there was a significant change in t value from 14.459 to 27.079. In addition, at the 95% confidence interval of the difference, the lowest mark before the intervention increased from 7.65 to 15.50 and the highest from 10.11 to 17.97. The difference showed a statistically significant mean difference in the test performances of experimental learners before and after the experiment. This means that the use of SIA increased the performance of the learners tremendously. In addition, there was a remarkable improvement; on average, most of the learners obtained more than 50% of the total marks. This supported the fact that the use of SIA led to an improvement in the performance of the learners. All learners improved on their pre-test scores unlike in the control group where some learners had lower scores after the intervention.

DISCUSSIONS

The study used DIA and SIA interventions to teach reading comprehension and literacy respectively. The mean pre-test scores were nearly the same across the three schools, indicating poor performance in reading comprehension, a common issue in South Africa. The control and the experimental groups were subjected to different interventions (DIA and SIA, respectively). After the intervention, the mean score for the control group increased from 8.48 to 10.38, depicting an increase in the performance of the learner participants by 1.82 (21%). For the experimental group, the mean score increased from 8.88 to 16.73, giving a difference of 7.85 (88%). These results could further be interpreted to mean that the average percentage performance of the control group after the intervention was 34.6%, as compared to 55.7% of the experimental group. This revealed that there

was a higher increase in the performance of the learner participants in the experimental group after the intervention than those in the control group.

As said earlier, in the control group, the researchers used the direct instructions approach. In this approach, teachers direct the instructional process or instruction is being directed at learners. The teacher guides the learners to decode the text, teaches them the meaning of some unfamiliar words, allows learners to read aloud, corrects their pronunciation mistakes and then asks them to answer the questions asked about the passage. This methodology was inferred from the literature where Buckingham stated that in DIA, the instructional approaches are structured, sequenced and led by teachers.⁵² According to the literature, this approach does not achieve the desired results, hence the abysmal performance of the learners even after the intervention.⁵³

The intervention under the experimental group was the use of SIA to teach reading comprehension. According to the literature, the application of SIA requires the teacher to be present, support the learners (as they do activities such as predicting, questioning, summarising, visualising and answering questions set on the passage) and expand on their efforts without rejecting what they have accomplished.⁵⁴

This procedural explanation of SIA is a vivid description of what the constructivists' perspective entails. Here, learners are assisted (scaffolded) and the scaffolds are gradually released for the learner to proceed with the activities without any assistance.⁵⁵ This was implemented throughout the six-week teaching and learning section. It was observed at the end of the intervention that SIA indeed had a positive impact on the performance of learners doing reading comprehension (from 29.6% mean percentage to 55.7%). From the raw marks, it was also observed that all learners from the experimental group have improved on their pre-test scores, unlike in the control group where the performance of some learners has even declined. This performance supported what Friesen posits that when teachers use SIA, it will help second language readers to generate a mental representation of the text, construct meaning from the text and eventually increase their reading comprehension performance.⁵⁶

SUMMARY

From the discussions above, even though the mean differences between control and experimental groups before and after the intervention are all statistically significant, SIA yielded a more positive result than the control group. This suggests that, to a great extent, SIA had a positive impact on the performance of the learners doing reading comprehension. Therefore, SIA is effective for the improvement of learners' performance in reading comprehension.

RECOMMENDATION

This study recommends best practices for reading comprehension among four key stakeholders: the Department of Basic Education (DBE), higher education institutions, local government authorities, and schools, based on its significance and findings. The study suggests that the DBE curriculum development section should retrain teachers to use SIA for teaching reading comprehension, including workshops, in-service training, and on-site training. Additionally, the time allocated for teaching reading comprehension should be reviewed, as academic development relies on reading comprehension ability. The study suggests that most teachers lack adequate training in teaching reading comprehension from higher institutions. It recommends a curriculum shift, including SIA in the curriculum, and reinforcing the strategy through proper training. School management teams should monitor and supervise SIA implementation, ensure teacher development, allocate more time for reading comprehension, and provide more reading activities for learners at school, at home, and on holidays.

CONCLUSION

The majority of language teachers, especially those who teach English as a first or second language, were found to be lacking in the skills needed to impart reading comprehension effectively to their learners. This study's exploration of the effectiveness of using SIA as a comprehension reading teaching strategy used a quantitative

⁵² Jennifer Buckingham, "Direct Instruction in Very Remote Schools: A Rejoinder to Guenther and Osborne (2020)," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 49, no. 2 (2020): 171–72.

⁵³ Judith A Langer and Arthur N Applebee, *How Writing Shapes Thinking: A Study of Teaching and Learning*. NCTE Research Report No. 22. (ERIC, 1987).

⁵⁴ Langer and Applebee, *How Writing Shapes Thinking: A Study of Teaching and Learning*. NCTE Research Report No. 22.

⁵⁵ H Blik, E G Harskamp, and H M Naayer, "Strategy Instruction versus Direct Instruction in the Education of Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities," *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 2016, 20–35.

⁵⁶ Deanna Friesen and Corinne A Haigh, "How and Why Strategy Instruction Can Improve Second Language Reading Comprehension: A Review," *Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal* 18, no. 1 (2018).

experimental design to compare learner performance in reading comprehension when the DIA and SIA were used on a homogeneous group of 102 learners. Grade 8 learners were taught reading comprehension using SIA which was basically from the curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) materials. The study revealed at the end of the intervention that SIA indeed had a positive impact on the performance of learners doing reading comprehension (from 29.6% mean percentage to 55.7%). When raw scores were used, it also emerged that all learners from the experimental group had improved on their pre-test scores, unlike in the control group (using DIA) where the performance of some learners even declined. The study, therefore, concludes by emphasising the need for teachers to be capacitated through school-based staff development programmes on how to use SIA as a strategy for teaching reading comprehension. The higher education teacher training programmes should also incorporate the use of the diversity of approaches for reading comprehension. Lastly, more research needs to be done on how to teach reading comprehension not only using SIA. These research works could also use hybrid approaches.

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