

Teaching Reading Comprehension in Community Schools: Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract

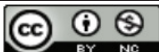
This article presents the views of secondary level English language teachers about their experiences of teaching reading comprehension in community schools. The main purpose of this study is to explore the difficulties in teaching reading comprehension and teaching strategies used by teachers to address these difficulties. I used the interpretive paradigm of research, in which the four teachers from four schools were asked to share their personal experiences in teaching reading comprehension. The main tool utilized in this study was a set of interview guidelines for teachers, under which they were asked to narrate their real-life experiences in order to expose their perception and experiences of teaching reading comprehension at secondary level in community schools. The findings show that the students had problems with vocabulary, lack of background knowledge of the text in the readers, problems with inference, and difficulty in understanding the technical texts. The teachers addressed these problems through teaching vocabulary, questioning, applying co-operating reading strategy and explaining the text in simple language. The results from this study can be applied to provide insights for the teachers and teacher educators to improve the existing problems in teaching reading comprehension.

Keywords: Technical text, questioning, teaching vocabulary, co-operative reading

Introduction

Reading is the process of learning through graphical representation. It is the most popular and simple way to get information that has been printed or written with the proper speed and understanding. Reading is viewed as the most crucial skill of language which fosters second or foreign language learning and academic success of a learner. Similarly, the development of other skills of language largely depends and imagined only after full-fledged development of reading skill (Tiwari, 2022). Reading comprehension is a fundamental academic skill for all learners (Clarke et al., 2013). It can be described as the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and engagement with written language. Adhikari and Shrestha (2024) stated that the role of reading is more important in formal education where students' academic achievement is determined by their skills in dealing with academic texts.

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To comprehend text effectively, students must be able to understand word meanings, interpret an author's perspectives, and expand their vocabulary (Ruiz, 2015). These skills are essential in helping students meet educational objectives within classroom settings. Reading comprehension also plays a critical role in everyday life. People rely on reading skills to understand directions, labels, job applications and newspapers (Chatman, 2015). Furthermore, literacy skills are essentials for securing and maintaining employment, handling daily responsibilities, and living independently (Hoeh, 2015). Inability to comprehend text may hinder their ability to learn, retain information, and graduate which in turn affects many aspects of their lives (Hoeh, 2015). Reading difficulties negatively influence academic progress, self-confidence, attitudes toward learning, motivation, career opportunities, socio-economic status, and expectation for future success.

Reading aids students in their academic lives by enhancing and broadening their knowledge. It is one of the most significant tools people use to stay up-to date on global events. Reading also provides our minds with a diversity of ideas. Reading requires the ability to comprehend the author's ideas, recognize words and their meanings, choose a feeling and mood, evaluate the ideas' accuracy, and use or apply them (Nuttal, 1982). The process of separating three levels is what is referred to as reading comprehension. These three levels are the lexical, structural or grammatical, and sociocultural level. In this regard, Varghese (1990) asserts that understanding the meaning of the graphic symbols and the sounds they stand for is necessary for reading to have meaning. A competent reader should be able to decipher the meaning of each word as they read any piece of information.

In the context of Nepal, the present syllabus of secondary (grade nine and ten) level of English curriculum gives more weightage (40%) to reading skill in comparison to other language skills. However, students seem to be less confident in the reading comprehension exercises. A study carried out by Subedi (2016) found out that students obtained less score in reading comprehension in the examination, and they were not able to understand the reading text. He concluded that students get less score in reading comprehension exercise but the reasons behind getting less scores need to be explored.

In response to why students feel difficulty in reading comprehension exercises, Gaire (2011) argued that the teaching methodology used by most of the teachers is still traditional. He goes on saying that teaching reading text is similar to a lesson of other subjects like social studies, moral studies, environmental education, etc. It is uncommon for teachers to use cognitive processes to support students develop their reading command. Even in English-medium schools, students are taught to read texts in order to acquire different material or facts about a certain topic linked to the book. Students are not urged to read texts independently any more (Gaire, 2011). This is what the students go through because there are not any effective reading skills taught in the classroom.

From the findings of these studies, it can be said that students should comprehend the meaning of the text they are reading for themselves as they read. They need to apply various language functions themselves through the practices of reading text in the classroom. They need to analyze, evaluate or create some more ideas from the reading text to get the actual meaning of it (Rosenblatt, 2005). Such reading comprehension development can be increased through proper teaching strategies. Although there are a number of studies in the field of teaching reading, this study mainly focuses on the challenges of teaching reading at secondary level community schools and teachers' strategies to overcome these challenges. The following are the research questions for this study:

1. How do English language teachers narrate the challenges in teaching reading comprehension?
2. What teaching strategies do the language teachers use to teach reading comprehension?

Literature Review

Early perspectives on reading were shaped by the traditional view, which emphasized reading as a mechanical process of decoding written symbols into spoken language. This view primarily focused on phonics, word recognition, and literal comprehension, assuming that meaning was transmitted directly from text to reader with minimal cognitive engagement (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Building on this, the cognitive view conceptualized reading as an active mental process involving multiple levels of information processing. This includes decoding, syntactic parsing, and inferential reasoning, where the reader constructs meaning through both bottom-up and top-down operations (Just & Carpenter, 1987). Reading is thus seen as a complex cognitive activity requiring attention, memory, and integration of textual information. Extending further, the metacognitive view introduces the role of self-awareness and strategic control in reading. It emphasizes the reader's ability to plan, monitor, and regulate comprehension through conscious strategy use (Flavell, 1979). Skilled readers not only process text but also assess their understanding and adjust their approaches accordingly (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). These three perspectives collectively update the current theoretical models of reading by accounting for both automatic cognitive processing and reflective strategy use in reading comprehension.

There are three main models of reading comprehension. These are essential for controlling and maintaining the comprehension process, helping pupils understand written texts more fully, and overcoming reading activities that present reading comprehension difficulties. The interactive model, the top-down model, and the bottom-up model are the three models (Grabe, 2004). In terms of how they instruct pupils to comprehend a written passage, these three methodologies are different from one another.

Bottom-Up Approach

According to the bottom-up approach, children should gradually start reading by deciphering each letter, terminology and other symbols and phrase so as to understand what is written down (Pressley, 2000). The entire reading process is considered in terms of letters and language, particularly under this paradigm. As a result, to interpret the text's meaning, students must comprehend and recognize language as they read.

Top-Down Approach

According to the top-down reading comprehension paradigm, which Goodman created in 1967, readers' past knowledge, experience, and expectations about a subject are used to help them understand the material that is presented. According to the top-down paradigm, understanding what is being read is a process that starts in the mind and ends with the text. As a result, using this technique, students should start the reading comprehension process by developing clear expectations for the subject matter (Eskey, 2005). These assumptions have to be based on the reader's prior knowledge of the topic. In contrast to the top-down paradigm, which considers itself to be meaningless, the reader creates meaning from the text by integrating it into their past knowledge.

Interactive Approach

The interactive model is predicated on the notion that neither the top-down nor the bottom-up models are able to adequately describe each step in isolation of the reading comprehension

process. Ahmadi (2012) argues that the interaction between these two models led to the creation of this model. The interactive reading comprehension approach encourages the use of both basic processing abilities, like word recognition, and more sophisticated inference and reasoning abilities, like text explanation (Grabe, 2004). Thus, the interactive model sees reading comprehension as a function of readers' actions rather than only as the result of the brain processing text and information and written passages cooperating to produce meaning.

Bhusal (2011) researched on the independent extensive reading development in EFL classroom. His objective was to investigate to what extent the English language teachers would understand the purpose of teaching intensive reading and to explore on what strategies they would adopt to motivate their learners towards extensive kinds of independent reading. He wanted to find the teachers' practice of teaching reading in the classroom in EFL context in Nepal. Bhusal (2011) found that the teachers were clear concerning the purpose of teaching reading skills. His participants made a common understanding that teaching of reading was an attempt to train the learners with all required sub-skills and techniques they needed to understand the complete message of the text. The participant had good understanding of purpose of teaching reading. Pokhrel (2013) researched teachers' beliefs and perspectives on teaching reading skills. His objective was to explore the teachers' belief in teaching reading strategies and found that teaching reading strategies to the students were of great importance for them to develop their reading skills. Moreover, effective classroom practices by applying appropriate teaching reading strategies enhanced and supported the development of learners' reading proficiency. He concluded that the teachers focused on the development of skills rather than making a particular text familiar to them.

Acosta and Ferri (2010) carried out an action research on reading methods to improve reading comprehension thinking abilities. Their action research project looked at how well eighth graders in a public school could read in a foreign language in Columbia. They intervened the action after exploring the problems of the students. The students lacked the strategies like prediction, prior knowledge, graphic organizer, questions, etc. They analyzed the students' perception and practicality of the strategies and students' work on graphic organizer and reading work sheet. The study revealed that when students employed reading strategies like activating background information, making predictions, and responding to questions using interactive materials, they were more motivated to read, learn more, and understand more. According to the study, students' reading comprehension was enhanced by strategies and engaging reading assignments. They concluded that the majority of the students had a positive attitude toward reading.

There are also some research studies on teachers' teaching strategies in teaching reading. For example, Gambrel (2013) asserted that cooperative strategic reading helps children read more effectively by encouraging their helpful habits. Moreover, an empirical study conducted by Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) discovered that students perform better academically when they worked in cooperative groups. Tiwari (2022) carried out research on the challenges faced by the bachelor's level students in reading English textbooks and found out that unfamiliar words in the text, lengthy passages, poor reading of the students, long and difficult sentence structures and lack of reading habit of the students have been the major challenges for the students. Likewise, Adhikari and Shrestha (2023) carried out a case study research on university teachers' practices in incorporating pre-reading activities and the finding highlighted the role of pre-reading activities such as contextualization of the topic, description of the title and the pre-teaching key vocabulary

items. The findings from this research can also be applied as a strategy in teaching reading comprehension in language teaching classroom at school level.

The research studies which I have reviewed mainly focused on the beliefs and perspectives on teaching reading, teaching reading methods, university level students' challenges in reading and university teachers' practices in teaching reading. All these studies are related to my study and helped me expand the research areas and research gap. However, this study is different in the sense that no other studies concentrated on challenges and strategies in teaching reading comprehension at secondary school level.

Methods and Procedures

This small scale research utilized narrative inquiry as a research method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I purposively selected four secondary level (Grade nine and ten) permanent English teachers: Chandra, Bhawana, Rewati, and Nirmal (all pseudonyms) from four government/community schools in Kathmandu Valley. The teachers were two males and two females and their teaching experiences ranged from seven to thirteen years. After selecting the research participants who were willing to participate in my research project eagerly, I conducted two rounds of face to face interviews. I used Nepali language for interview so that the research participants could express their experiences and teaching practices in a natural way. For this, I prepared open ended and probing questions in my interview guidelines (Yin, 2011). After completing first round of interview with the participants, I transcribed the data. While transcribing the data, there were some cases in which more details were required and so I interviewed the participants again with specific questions. I analyzed the data inductively, deriving themes from the interview data, and findings were drawn (Saldana, 2016). I used the pseudonyms of the participants to maintain anonymity of the participants (Kvale, 1996). The data were thematically analyzed and the findings were presented in different themes supported with available literature.

Results and Discussion

The findings are presented below under two broad themes related to the research questions. The sub-themes are also presented within each broader themes.

Challenges in Teaching Reading Comprehension

All the participants of this study shared some challenges that impede the students' reading comprehension skills. They shared their stories as they were experienced in teaching secondary level students for many years.

Limitation of Prior Knowledge

All the English teachers participated in this study had different views relating to the difficulties pupils have with understanding reading. One of my research participant, Chandra shared:

....prior knowledge has a crucial role in getting the meaning of reading text. If students have prior knowledge about any text they can make connections to the present reading which facilitates in getting the meaning. In the absence of background knowledge, students have to struggle a lot for understanding.

From Chandra's narrative, it can be understood that teaching any text by providing background knowledge about the author, type of the texts, the things or subject matters that are presented in the text need to be presented beforehand so that students relate it to the text while studying. It is more important to provide background knowledge while teaching poem because the poet has

his/her own style of writing and the subject matter is presented differently in the poem through the use of literary devices.

Chandra's narrative indicated that the lack of prior information regarding the topic in the students has been one of the problems in reading comprehension. He added that he provided background information about the text in the beginning of the lesson and then only he started teaching the lesson. It helped students understand the lesson properly. He also shared that providing prior/background knowledge while teaching poem is necessary because teaching poem is more complex in comparison to other informational text. Prior knowledge about the time of when the poem was written, in what context the poet has written the poem, its denotative and connotative meaning, poet's childhood and lifestyle, theme of the poem and so on, if given to the students in advance, it could be easier to grasp and understand the meaning of the poem.

Chandra's narrative seems similar with the views of McEwan (2007) who opines that one of the difficulties that prevents children from comprehending written material successfully is a lack of using prior information in the right way. Similarly, my next research participant, Rewati shared her experience regarding the problems that learners face in reading comprehension in her class:

Yes, sir, let me share my experience on the initial days' experience. There is a lesson on 'Memoirs of my Visit to France' in grade ten. It was my first time I have taken class in grade ten. In section A I taught the same lesson with explanation sometimes translating the difficult words. But in section 'B' I slightly changed my teaching method. First of all, I gave information about France, the museums which are worth visiting there, and so on. Next day, when I went in section 'A', I had to repeat the lesson because the students requested to repeat the lesson. But in section 'B', the students understood well.

Rewati's narrative indicates that prior knowledge is important for comprehending the text well. Nirmal also agreed with the narratives of previous participants and shared his experience on the problems of the students in reading comprehension in the following lines:

Students cannot understand well in the absence of context and background information. If I do not give background information of the lesson, the students remain dumb. To activate their background knowledge, I generally ask them questions related to the topic. I also simplify the difficult information in the text so that each student can understand easily. Not only this background information also helps students understand all the connotative meaning of the text.

Nirmal's narrative stresses that contextualization and background information helps students understand indirect meaning given in the text easily and students feel as if they are participating in the learning through questioning. Nirmal's narrative aligns with the view of Oakhill et al. (2015) who explained that past knowledge plays a significant part in assisting pupils in comprehending all implicit information and effortlessly recalling what has been read. He further says that although prior information is important factors in helping pupils understand, some students, struggle to fully understand a text because of their low background knowledge.

Difficulties with Technical/Expository Text

All the participants in this research study shared their experience and agreed that academic and expository texts have been one of the difficulties that impedes learners' understanding. Chandra, one of the research participants shared his story being based on his teaching experience on how these texts have helped create the problem in reading comprehension of the students'.

In my teaching experience, what I feel is that students have difficulty in understanding technical texts in comparison to stories which start with 'Once upon a time...'. They comprehend the stories well and narrate to you everything about what happened in the story, who were the characters, what were their role, how they were acting in the story, sketching the character and so on.

When I asked him what made academic text more difficult, he went in the following lines:

Well...ummm, I think the main reason of difficulty in those text is presentation of unfamiliar and difficult vocabulary in the expository writings. Sometimes there are such vocabularies in the texts which students never come up in their academic life nor have they heard in their daily life or conversations. Next thing is the grammatical structure used in those texts such as impersonal writings, use of passive voice, selection of highly formal and standard vocabulary and so on.

After reading Chandra's views, I reflected from my school days that technical texts are more difficult than the general texts. Expository texts have unfamiliar words which create difficulties to understand the meaning of the texts.

Limited Vocabulary

Knowledge of vocabulary is an important component that supports learners' reading comprehension. In this regard, Qian (2002) argues that an essential component of reading comprehension is vocabulary knowledge, which enables pupils to easily understand terms in written texts. The association between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension is thus strong and obvious. All four participants of this study shared their experiences on how lack of vocabulary knowledge hinders in reading comprehension. One of the participant, Chandra shared his experience in the following lines:

I do not need to tell you the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension. In our time our teacher used to give us a list of word meaning (English word and Nepali meaning) in each lesson before teaching. Our duty was to learn them by heart. If anybody missed a single word meaning, then he or she used to get one stick as a punishment. But now this method is totally regarded as grammar method and outdated method and no teachers like to apply in the classroom. Nowadays, GT method is seen as a sin these days. It is focused that vocabulary should be taught through contextualization and communicative ways. But one of the biggest problem in reading comprehension is the lack of knowledge of vocabulary in students. Students cannot comprehend the text because they do not know the word meaning. This is the simple answer for the question of why students cannot do better in reading comprehension exercises.

Here Chandra revealed that he was taught through GT method in his school level and teaching vocabulary was taught through rote learning. He also admitted that one of the biggest problem in reading comprehension that the learners face is lack of vocabulary knowledge. After reading Chandra's narratives, I remembered Chou (2011) who asserted that children with more vocabulary than children with fewer terminology may pick up on new words more rapidly and comprehend written texts more effectively. Adhikari and Shrestha (2024) also found that students' poor vocabulary knowledge has remained one of the key factors fundamentally affecting the efficacy of reading instruction.

Similarly, my another participant, Rewati shared her experience of how lack of vocabulary negatively affects the learners' understanding in the following ways:

Vocabulary plays important role in reading comprehension. One of the reasons why students cannot acquire reading comprehension is that they have controlled number of vocabulary that negatively affects the comprehension of the text. There are so many words in a passage that they are unfamiliar with. If they know the meaning of all foreign words, no doubt they can understand any written text fully. Each time they come across with a new and unfamiliar words, they stopped and their comprehension is also stopped. Not only this they feel discouraged whenever they encounter with unfamiliar words again and again.

Rewati claimed that controlled vocabulary has been the major problem in reading comprehension. One most remarkable thing she shared was that students are discouraged due to the frequent encounter with the unfamiliar words. I feel that this is true because when we do not know the meaning of the vocabulary in spoken or written language then communication is not smooth and it breaks down. Rewati's narrative resonates with Graham & Bellert (2005) who explains that using foreign vocabulary impairs a students' ability to comprehend what they are reading, which deflates their expectations and saps their desire to read. He went on saying that Inadequate utilization of previous information and a lack of vocabulary knowledge are two more problems that have a detrimental effect on learners' understanding of a text. Understanding passages with a lot of tough academic and vocabulary is quite difficult for students and as a result, they frequently make reading mistakes because they are unable to relate the passages to their prior knowledge.

Regarding the same question, 'what creates difficulty in reading comprehension?' another participant of this study, Bhawana also had a similar experience. She said:

Obviously, vocabulary is the major cause of difficulty in reading comprehension. Those students who are good at vocabulary can have better reading understanding capacity in comparison to the students those who acquired less vocabulary. But within vocabulary also there is another problem, that is the nature of the multiple meaning of the word. For example, the student who knows the meaning of 'bank' as the place where we get money gets confused and happens to make mistake when he finds the sentence like 'the cows are grazing in the bank of the river'. In this sense, students have to struggle a lot to understand and to get the differences between the multiple meaning of the same word.

Bhawana admitted that vocabulary has a major role in reading comprehension. Moreover, she emphasized the knowledge of multiple meaning of a same word that the students should possess and teachers should be wise enough to teach how a single word can have multiple meanings and in what contexts they are used. Her narrative is very convincing and aligns with the view of the scholar, Chou (2011), who concludes that learners' reading comprehension is influenced by their vocabulary size. Vocabulary size increases when students have good knowledge of multiple meanings of a single word. He further stated that Students with greater language knowledge are superior than those with less vocabulary knowledge and may understand the material better.

Apart from emphasizing the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension, Nirmal highlighted two pertinent things: knowledge of the derivational nature of the vocabulary and academic vocabulary. If students have good knowledge about these two nature of vocabulary, he believes that students, to some extent comprehend the reading text easily. I feel Nirmal's narrative is genuine for he revealed the practical problems with vocabulary with the examples. His narrative seems more similar with the view of Graham and Bellert (2005) who alleged that students find it most challenging to read passages that utilize much challenging language and terminologies as a

result they frequently make mistakes in comprehension because they are unable to relate the passages to their prior knowledge.

Teaching Strategies for Reading Comprehension

In response of the second research question, the research participants shared their teaching practices in the following sub-themes.

Teaching Vocabulary

All the participants in this study reported that without the knowledge of vocabulary, students cannot achieve reading comprehension. They claimed that to make reading comprehension easier, they introduced vocabulary items before teaching any reading comprehension text. Chandra, shared his experience of teaching reading in the following ways:

Yes. In our school time, when I was a student, we had to remember all the English words with Nepali meaning. The teacher used to write all the word meaning in the white board and our duty was to memorize them by heart. When we knew the word meaning we felt a kind of satisfaction in learning. An important component that helps in reading comprehension is children's knowledge of vocabulary. If students know the meaning of vocabulary, they can quickly interpret and understand the sentence in the text. There is a strong relationship between learning vocabulary and reading comprehension. Therefore, first of all, before teaching the lesson, I ask the students to underline the difficult words in the text with pencil. When they finish the task I write all the Nepali equivalents of English vocabularies on the whiteboard and make meaningful and contextual sentences by using those words.

Here, Chandra emphasized the importance of teaching vocabulary for reading comprehension. He said that he wrote the meaning of difficult vocabulary on the whiteboard to facilitate the reading comprehension process. His experience of prioritizing teaching vocabulary is aligned with Chou (2011) who argues youngsters with higher vocabulary knowledge may quickly grasp the meaning of new terms and have a better understanding of written texts in comparison to kids with lower vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, Rewati another participant of this study also said that she focused on vocabulary instruction and shared her story in the following way:

For me, reading comprehension means teaching meaning of the text or passage. And the text or passage is an extended form of the vocabulary. Without teaching vocabulary, how is it possible to teach the longer texts? If they don't know what vocabulary mean, how can they get the meaning of such longer texts? That's why I ask the meaning of vocabulary to the students.

Their narrative resembles with McEwan (2007) who claims that foreign vocabulary impairs a students' ability to comprehend what they are reading, which deflates their expectations and saps their interest in reading.

Explanation of the Text

Chandra and Nirmal, two participants of this study agreed that they explained the text for making students comprehend the passage. They shared their common story in the following lines:

First of all, we tell the students to read the passage themselves. At the same time while reading, we ask them to underline such words which they cannot pronounce correctly and which have difficult meaning. When they finish their task, we start explaining the lesson line-wise, reading word by word so that they hear the correct pronunciation of each word. At the same time, we explain the meaning of the difficult words by giving example, using

the word in sentences, by giving similar or opposite meaning of the word or translating the words into Nepali.

All the participants emphasized the suitability of the explanation strategy for large classes, teaching more content over a short span of time and uniformity of teaching and preparation of exam.

Regarding the explanation of the text as a technique of teaching reading, Rosenblatt (1994), in transactional theory of reading, opines that teachers should encourage students to engage with text in a smoother way and help them with teaching while they try to understand it. Through transactional theory, she suggested that although teachers are not directly involved in that interactional process, they can still provide students with a variety of interpretations of the passage to help them understand it better.

Questioning

The participants in this study agreed that they utilized questioning as a strategy. Chandra, the first research participant shared his experience in the following ways:

I tell them to read the whole passage themselves. But in the middle, I ask them questions to check if they comprehend or not. I believe, it helps them motivate towards reading and makes them as a compulsion for reading. They pay attention towards reading properly thinking that the teacher is going to ask them questions.

Another participant Rewati put her experience of using questioning strategy in the following words:

... through questioning strategy, I observed that it helps improving learners' skills of understanding the text, focusing on reading text, making mind about the most appropriate answers and they can go back to the passage and re-read it in case of missing pertinent fact.

The narratives of Chandra and Rewati seem to be similar with the observation of Taylor et al. (2002). Numerous research has looked into how questioning affects pupils' reading comprehension. For instance, Taylor et al. (2002) investigated how questioning affected high school students' comprehension of literary works. Participants were given a list of five pre-structured questions about various tale characteristics. The reading was supposed to stop three times, at which intervals the pupils were supposed to pause and ask and answer questions. The findings showed that after getting training through inquiry, students' understanding of narrative texts and retelling considerably improved.

Co-operative reading strategy

Regarding co-operating reading strategy, the participants of this study narrated their experiences in different ways. Chandra highlighted that he found co-operative reading strategy effective for summary writing and other question answer activities. He added that this technique needs teacher's presence for frequent instruction and observation for the students. His narrative seems to be parallel with Kim et al. (2006) who argue that cooperative strategic reading is an approach that offers students a cooperative learning environment in which they collaborate in disproportionate groups to help one another, assess one another's comprehension of the lesson, and talk about how their thoughts interact. Likewise, Rewati, another participant of this research narrated her story as:

Yes, cooperative teaching is also effective in teaching reading comprehension. I mainly apply this strategy in teaching poem and its related exercises. I found this strategy more

appropriate because poems can have several interpretations and each group has different views on the theme of the poem.

Rewati also shared her story emphasizing on the appropriateness of cooperative reading strategy. Her narrative is in line with Newman and Gambrel (2013) who assert that cooperative strategic reading helps children read more effectively by encouraging their helpful habits. Moreover, an empirical study conducted by Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) found that students perform better academically when they worked in cooperative groups.

Conclusion

This study highlights that teaching reading comprehension in Nepalese community schools is shaped by multiple challenges, particularly students' lack of background knowledge, limited vocabulary, difficulty with technical and scientific texts, and weak reading fluency. These factors collectively hinder learners' ability to grasp meaning and engage with texts effectively. Despite these difficulties, teachers reported adopting a range of strategies, including explicit teaching of difficult words, simplifying texts into accessible language, employing questioning techniques to check comprehension and sustain motivation, and encouraging cooperative reading practices. Such approaches were found to be practical and supportive in addressing students' needs. By documenting these experiences, the study contributes to the broader understanding of reading pedagogy in the EFL context of Nepal and provides a useful reference for improving classroom practices.

The findings of this research suggest several implications for teaching reading comprehension in community schools. Teachers should give greater emphasis to activating background knowledge and systematically addressing vocabulary gaps to reduce comprehension difficulties. Scaffolding strategies, such as rephrasing complex ideas and guiding students through structured reading tasks, can enhance learners' engagement with texts. Similarly, interactive methods—such as questioning, peer discussion, and cooperative reading—should be incorporated to encourage active participation and deeper understanding. The study also underscores the need for teacher education programs to focus on equipping teachers with effective reading strategies that are contextually relevant to Nepalese classrooms. Furthermore, novice teachers can draw on the strategies documented here as practical guidance in their early careers. At a broader level, teacher educators, researchers, and policymakers may use these insights to strengthen reading instruction and to design professional development initiatives that address the specific challenges of community school settings.

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