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Improving Reading Comprehension Achievements of Pupils in Public Primary Schools: Implications for Teacher Librarians

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Abstract

Teacher librarians are individuals with recognized teaching qualification as well as qualification in library science. Teacher librarians are often concerned about how much learners are able to grasp and retain meaning from the materials they read as well as their reading comprehension achievements. The term reading comprehension describes a complex process in which learners are involved in some mental processes like creating meanings and organizing texts. This study aimed to improve the reading comprehension achievements of pupils in public primary schools through the use of reflective instructional technique. Two teacher librarians served as research assistants in the study. The study employed the quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. Thirty-three pupils each were assigned to the experimental and control groups respectively. The sample comprised pupils in primary four and five classes. The instrument used for data collection was the reading comprehension achievement test. The data generated were subjected to analysis of covariance. Results of the analyses showed that the reflective instructional technique led to improvement in the reading comprehension achievements of pupils in public primary schools in that the experimental group had a significant increase in reading comprehension achievement scores at the posttest. There was no significant influence of pupils' gender on their reading comprehension achievement scores after benefitting from the intervention, $F(1, 65) = .259, p = .613$. Results further show that there was no significant interaction effect of the instructional technique and gender on the pupils' reading comprehension achievement scores, $F(1, 65) = .228, p = .634$. One of the study implications is that teacher librarians can collaboratively work with other teachers to improve pupils' reading comprehension achievement in primary schools. The teacher librarians can also influence pupils' learning outcomes by working directly with pupils and promoting reading.

Keywords: primary schools, pupils, reading comprehension achievements, teacher librarians

Introduction

Teacher librarians are individuals with recognized teaching qualification in addition to a qualification in library science (Australian School Library Association, ASLA, 2003). Teacher librarians are distinctively qualified and valuable individuals in the school given their curriculum knowledge and pedagogy fused with knowledge and skills in library and information management (ASLA, 2003). ASLA (2003) also noted that through advocacy and building of effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners, teacher librarians can support and implement their school's vision. Given their expertise as educators of information literacy in the library, classroom and virtual spaces (Herring, 2017), teacher librarians are often concerned about how much learners are able to grasp and retain meaning from the materials they read as well as their reading comprehension achievements. Reading comprehension is a complex process in which learners use several mental processes such as reading words, creating meanings and organizing text (Habók and Magyar, 2018; Käsper *et al.*, 2018; Rastegar *et al.*, 2017). Reading comprehension according to Lim *et al.*, (2018) refers to a cognitive process that takes place when an individual interacts with the text.

Suwanto (2014) identified three levels of reading comprehension as literal, interpretative and critical comprehension. Literal comprehension implies that a reader explicitly understands the key information in the text. Interpretative comprehension means that the reader can analyse and evaluate the text, and can personally react to ideas in the text. Critical comprehension requires that the reader can react critically to text information and form his/ her own opinion of it. These three levels are of great importance for pupils' reading comprehension and the evaluation of pupils' reading comprehension achievement. Snow (2003) also characterized reading comprehension as an interactive process of deducing and constructing meaning from the text. This process involves three components: first, the reader

who is reading and is involved in the comprehension process; second, the text that has to be processed and comprehended, and third, the activity in which the reader is engaged during the comprehension process. These three significant components of reading comprehension proceed within a social context.

Widdowson (2015) described factors that affect reading comprehension. These include the reader's background and prior knowledge, quality of reading materials, and type of teacher and text instructions. According to Yang (2016), the factors which affect strategies for developing reading comprehension can be divided into two dimensions: situational and individual. The situational dimension includes classroom settings, teaching methods, and reading texts. The individual dimension can be influenced by readers' age, motivation, learning strategies and style, personal circumstances, and certain other latent factors. Fitrialsia *et al.*, (2015) also listed person, task, and strategy as factors that influence reading comprehension achievement. They noted that 'person' means the reader whose general knowledge, age, aptitude, and learning strategies and styles are included in the learning process. Task indicates all kinds of activities in which the reader must engage during the teaching session. Strategy involves an awareness of strategy use to interpret the text, e.g. how to select key information and main ideas, and how to predict the message of the text. Staden (2010) stated that there are three main events affecting pupils' reading comprehension achievement and these are learner factors like learner motivation, needs, opinions, values, relationships to peers; home factors like parents' education, social relations, socioeconomic status; and school factors like teachers' characteristics, the structure of the education system, school facilities. Huang (2013) identified certain factors that motivate learners' reading comprehension achievement as cultural values, instructional methods, and structures in the school environment. Zhang (2016) also identified three variables which influences reading

comprehension achievement and these are text characteristics, reader characteristics, and social context.

Factors in the Reading Process

In the reading comprehension process, according to Cirocki and Farrelly, (2016); Garzon (2018); Pollard *et al.* (2014); and Ratminingsih *et al.* (2018), the first main idea is that reading comprehension is a process in which the reader interacts with the text. The second main idea is that five distinct main factors affect pupils' reading comprehension process; context, strategy, reader, task, and text. The third main idea is that the notion of context, where instruction occurs as a kind of instructional context, is interconnected with other factors, such as task, reader, text, and strategy. To reconfirm the role of this third concept, Walker (2008) also stated that context, which proceeds during the teaching event, plays a key role in influencing learning. The author further highlighted some important factors to be considered during the teaching context. These are the teaching strategy (teacher's methodology), organization work while completing the reading task (group work, pair work, individual work, and scheduling), text (source of information), and reader's characteristics (prior knowledge and previous experiences in learning situations). The structure of these three components is shown in Figure 2.

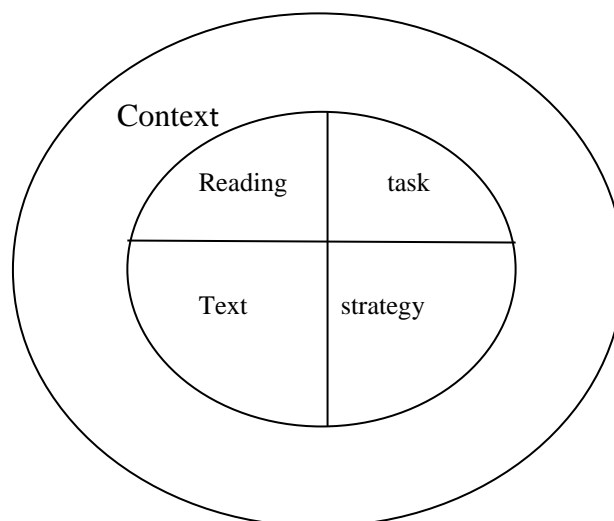


Figure 2: Factors in the reading comprehension process

The teaching-learning process is as old as humans on the earth. It has been carried out by human beings, to teach their young ones for successful adjustment to existing conditions in their environment (Owoeye, 2017). Teaching is the act of disseminating information to learners in the classroom as conventionally understood by the traditional teacher. Similarly, Boris (2019) defines teaching as a systematic process of imparting desirable knowledge, values and skills to learners. Conventional teaching is simply a chalk-talk approach in which pupils remain passive as learners. Mostly, pupils are not satisfactory due to the use of this approach. Boris (2016) affirms that teaching is aimed at achieving two goals; the first is the acquisition of the body of organized knowledge in a particular domain, and the second important goal in instruction is the ability to solve problems in that domain. The methodology is very vital in any teaching-learning situation. The methodology adopted by the teacher may promote or hinder learning. It may sharpen mental activities which are the basis of social power or may discourage initiatives and curiosity, thus making self-reliance and survival difficult (Ameh and Dantani, 2012). Teaching is not just standing in front of a class talking. The best teachers contemplate how they all present a topic and have a wide variety of instructional strategies at their disposal. Boris (2019) opines that a teacher may profess to hold fifteen years' experience, but the experience means nothing if he keeps on repeating the same thing without bringing innovation into his teaching. If the child is not properly and adequately trained and educated, the child might find it difficult to attain the set developmental goals, hence the need for a reflective teaching method that would make the learners develop and have a sound education.

The reflective teaching method is a kind of teaching approach that encourages teachers to improve their teaching skills by engaging in critical reflection on their teaching-learning process (Ashraf and Zolfaghari, 2018). According to York-Barr *et al.* (2006), the reflective teaching method (RTM) is an inquiry-based approach to teaching that involves

critical thinking and a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement. The reflective teaching method has to do with a deliberate examination of how teachers teach and learn. It is more towards critical thinking of how we teach and learn. It is a kind of teaching strategy which has to be viewed in terms of what the teacher can do and for the pupils to ascertain productivity in teaching and pupils' learning. Hence reflective teaching is a call to let the teacher combine theory and practice to maintain and sustain his teaching profession (Ige and Olayode, 2012). The reflective teaching method orientates teachers towards self-focus and self-evaluation. It involves the transformation of professional values and actions of the teachers and that of others who he/she interacts with. The reflective teaching method means looking at what you do in the classroom, thinking about why you do it and thinking about if it works or not. It is a process of self-observation and self-evaluation in which strengths and weaknesses are identified and then adjust to re-plan for better performance. It is a means of professional development which begins in the classroom. It is paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday action by examining practice relatively and reflexively (Bolton, 2010). The reflective teaching method enables the teacher to form the known to the unknown by making use of recalled experiences in a critical manner. The reflective teaching method is a deliberate move to allow the teacher to think critically of his/her teaching so that his/her students can maximise their learning (Ige and Olayode, 2012). The reflective teaching process is in four phases: planning, acting, reflection, and evaluation. The reflective teaching method is a cyclic process by which the teacher interprets his/her classroom practice (Cirocki and Farrelly, 2016; Garzon, 2018; Pollard *et al.*, 2014; Ratminingsih *et al.*, 2018) is that reflective teaching is a cyclical and conscious process.

Today, the reflective teaching method is essential for all teachers in different fields of education. Without regular use of reflective teaching method in instructional context, the

teacher cannot understand how effective his/her teaching is for encouraging, motivating and evaluating pupils reading comprehension or how the pupils' emotions, lives, and directions are shaped, or how their activities and reading text are related to their learning efforts (Çimer *et al.*, 2013).

In reflective teaching method and reading comprehension, the teacher's responsibility is to help pupils express their own thoughts by the use of their reading comprehension skills (Ahmada, 2019). To help pupils use these reading skills well, instructional strategies are very essential for the teachers' success as a professional. Regarding teaching strategies of reading comprehension, the teacher's reflection practices are necessary to fill in some gaps of method-centred teaching (Aliakbari and Adibpour, 2018). Therefore, applying a reflective teaching method enhances skills in the reading comprehension of pupils. Figure 1 shows the reflective teaching process.

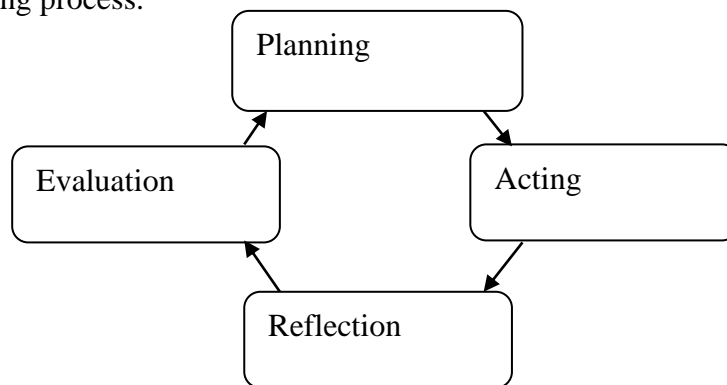


Figure 1: Graphic presentation of the reflective teaching process

. Connors-Tadros (2014) opined that reading is an active and complex process that involves: (a) understanding written text, (b) developing and interpreting meaning, and (c) using meaning as appropriate to the type of text, purpose, and situation. Kusumawati and Widiati (2017) stated that comprehension is a bridge between the known and the unknown. The authors emphasized that comprehension is something that humans do from the early years. To comprehend information, they stated that the reader must relate his/her new information to his/her prior knowledge. Additionally, Gilbert (2017) asserted that reading in

both first and second language contexts includes the reader, the text, and the interaction between the reader and the text. Zhang and Zhang (2013) indicated that reading is a constructive process in which the text, the reader, and the context interact. In this process of interaction, the reader can reconstruct the information in the text based on his/her ability to decode and working memory based on his/her schemata. Thus, both the reader and the text can be considered as the main parts of the teaching-learning context.

Developing effective teachers has become one of the basic underlying principles of all teacher education courses and reflective teaching method as an essential factor for the enhancement of the development of effective teachers. The skill of reflective teaching develops highly over time and this can be observed easily among experienced teachers. The reflective teaching method is used at both pre-service and in-service levels of teaching, although coaching and peer involvements are the two aspects of reflective teaching seen most often at the pre-service level. The reflective teaching method (RTM) facilitate the process of teaching and learning by engaging the learners in a thoughtful process of examining their own experiences in practical performance. It is the process of self-examination of the educators who want to be effective in their profession. These practices applied in teaching are intended for teachers to become lifelong, self-regulated and self-motivated learning professionals. RTM is a process in which teachers reflect on their instructional practices by analyzing their teaching styles, methods and pupil's learning and outcomes, constraints and mistakes so that they can find better and improved practices in the future. This is done by researching the activities in the classroom, critically observing and evaluating the acquired information of the pupils' and the teachers' themselves. This process includes analyzing and identifying what practices and underlying presumptions of the teachers in their instructional performance in the classroom need improvement (Mathew *et al.*, 2017). Ideally, all teachers should be lifelong learners engaged in this continuous learning process who become better at

teaching over time (Zeichner and Liston, 2013). As teachers devote more time and effort in critical analysis of their teaching and pupil's learning, it results in the self-realization of how they grow as teachers. Darling-Hammond *et al.*, (2017) opined that the essential components of the reflective teaching method focuses on content, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert supports, is of sustained duration. These skills are essential components of the reflective teaching method as it is focused on day-to-day instructional processes in the classroom.

The reflective teaching method is essential because it helps and enhances the reading comprehension of pupils. Teachers without reflective teaching method cannot guarantee the success of desirable aims of teaching and learning and for that reason, they became technicians, not professionals in teaching. This results from their inability of taking responsibility for their actions in the classroom as they are unreflective of the outcomes of their decisions. Yoon and Shapley (2007) explained how teacher development by reflective teaching method affects pupils reading comprehension achievement. They explain that the effectiveness of professional development largely depends on how teachers apply the knowledge and skills in the classrooms. This study indicates that it is the way the teachers utilize the content knowledge and pedagogical skills that they acquire from training programs results in enhancing pupils' reading comprehension achievement. Disu (2017) opined that the reflective teaching method enables the teachers to become effective teachers and teachers use the reflective teaching method to observe and evaluate pupils' learning improvement, reading comprehension, finding more effective teaching methods, and more innovative approaches for achieving new insights on classroom instruction. Therefore, it supports teaching effectiveness and improves pupils' reading comprehension and learning. The reflective teaching method helps teachers to become more effective teachers by engaging them in the critical evaluation of their teaching behaviours. It creates a space for teachers where their

actual teaching behaviours can be observed, measured, and the learning outcomes analyzed.

The reflective teaching method also enables the teacher to identify the effective teaching manners and what causes them with the pieces of evidence of what he or she did in teaching. With the careful examination of the scenarios in the real-life classroom, it provides a more precise decision of the effectiveness of teaching. In many cases, it also strengthens the retention of the teachers. From this, it can be deduced that the reflective teaching method builds a connection between personal and professional experiences, between theory and practice by linking concrete events with informed pedagogical decisions. Gradually applying the reflective teaching method, teachers gain control over their teaching. Noormohammadi (2014) also declared that the reflective teaching method improves teachers' skills for possessing autonomy and being independent.

Boris (2016) opined that a number of factors have been identified militating against pupils' attainment of the objective of instruction, and the most pronounced factor identified by researchers is the inappropriate and uninspiring teaching methods adopted by teachers. In public primary schools, it seems there is persistent poor reading comprehension achievement. This has been linked to the adoption of instructional strategies which did not give enough consideration to learners' previous knowledge and how they reasoned in order for learners to construct their knowledge based on these. Similarly, ignorance of teachers and neglect of activity-oriented methods by teachers grossly contributed to pupils' poor reading comprehension. This indicates that the teachers need practical teaching skills and only in that way can the pupils achieve the intended learning outcomes and good reading comprehension achievement.

Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the effect of the reflective teaching method on reading comprehension achievements among pupils in public primary schools
2. Ascertain the influence of gender on reading comprehension achievements among pupils in public primary schools when exposed to the reflective teaching method.
3. Find out the interaction effects of methods and gender on reading comprehension achievements among pupils in public primary schools.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the effect of reflective and traditional teaching methods on reading comprehension achievements among pupils in public primary schools.
2. There is no significant influence of gender on reading comprehension achievements among pupils in public primary schools when exposed to the reflective teaching method.
3. There is no significant interaction effect of methods and gender on reading comprehension achievements among pupils in public primary schools.

Methodology

This research was carried out among primary school children in Anambra State, Nigeria. This study, whose ethical clearance was obtained from Educational Foundations Department Research Ethics Committee at the University of Nigeria, employed the quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. So, pre-existing groups were used. The sample comprised 33 pupils (50%) assigned to the experimental group (reflective teaching method group) and another 33 pupils (50%) assigned to the control group (were exposed to the usual classroom teaching). Out of the 33 pupils assigned to the experimental group, 15

(45.5%) were males while 18 (54.5%) were females and for the control group, out of 33 pupils, 15 (45.5%) were males while 18 (54.5%) were females. Pupils mean was $8.91 \pm .74$ years old. The sample selected using a multistage sampling technique comprised pupils in primary four and five classes.

The instrument used for the study was the Reading Comprehension Achievement Test (RCAT) with 10 questions of 5 marks each. The reading comprehension achievement test constituted the pre-test and post-test. The RCAT items were drawn by selecting questions relating to the topics on reading comprehension. The research instrument was validated by experts. A trial test was carried out outside the study area. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method and the instrument was considered reliable (Pearson $r = 0.73$). The reflective teaching package was based on the scheme of work and lesson notes on selected topics in reading comprehension. The topics in the school's scheme of work prescribed by the Ministry of Education were used for this study. The package was prepared on weekly basis according to the scheme of work for pupils in primary schools. The outline for the lessons included a date, period, topic, instructional objectives (stated in behavioural terms), entry behaviour, instructional materials and the teacher's and pupils' activities. Two teacher librarians served as research assistants in the study.

To ascertain the baseline score of pupils in the experimental and control groups, the RCAT was administered to the pupils as a pretest in the first week. During the implementation period, pupils in the experimental group were exposed to the reflective teaching method. On the other hand, pupils in the control group were exposed to the usual classroom teaching. At the end of the four-week implementation, the RCAT was administered as a posttest. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and ANCOVA (analysis of covariance) to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of pretest and posttest mean reading comprehension achievements of the pupils according to their group and gender

Group	Gender		Pretest	Posttest
Experimental	<i>Male</i>	Mean	21.00	39.47
		N	15	15
		SD	1.46	2.92
	<i>Female</i>	Mean	21.00	38.83
		N	18	18
		SD	1.46	2.81
	Total	Mean	21.00	39.12
		N	33	33
		SD	1.44	2.84
Control	<i>Male</i>	Mean	21.00	20.6667
		N	15	15
		SD	2.42	2.16
	<i>Female</i>	Mean	20.33	20.4444
		N	18	18
		SD	2.93	2.62
	Total	Mean	20.64	20.55
		N	33	33
		SD	2.69	2.39

SD=Standard Deviation

Table 1 indicates the reading comprehension achievement scores of pupils by group and gender at pretest and posttest. The pretest reading comprehension achievement score of pupils in the experimental group was 21.00 ± 1.44 whereas their posttest reading comprehension achievement score was 39.12 ± 2.84 . The pretest reading comprehension achievement score of pupils in the control group was 20.64 ± 2.69 whereas their posttest reading comprehension achievement score was 20.55 ± 2.39 . This result implies a mean gain in the reading comprehension achievement of the pupils due to the reflective teaching method. Male pupils in the experimental group had a posttest reading comprehension achievement score of 39.47 ± 2.92 which appears comparable to the posttest reading comprehension achievement score of the female pupils in the same group (38.83 ± 2.81).

Table 2: Analysis of covariance of mean reading comprehension achievements of the pupils before and after the use of reflective teaching method

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared (<i>PES</i>)
Corrected Model	5724.300 ^a	4	1431.075	213.506	.000	.933
Intercept	370.958	1	370.958	55.344	.000	.476
Pretest	27.144	1	27.144	4.050	.049	.062
Group	5561.917	1	5561.917	829.798	.000	.932
Gender	1.734	1	1.734	.259	.613	.004
Group * Gender	1.531	1	1.531	.228	.634	.004
Error	408.867	61	6.703			
Total	64875.000	66				
Corrected Total	6133.167	65				

^a. R Squared = .933 (Adjusted R Squared = .929)

Table 2 revealed that a significant positive effect of the reflective teaching method on the mean reading comprehension achievement score of pupils in public primary schools, $F(1, 65) = 829.798, p = .000, PES = .932$. Also, there was no significant influence of pupils' gender on their reading comprehension achievement score after benefitting from the reflective teaching method, $F(1, 65) = .259, p = .613, PES = .004$. Results further show that there was no significant interaction effect of methods and gender on the pupils' reading comprehension achievement score, $F(1, 65) = .228, p = .634, PES = .004$.

Table 3: Sidak analysis for posthoc testing of mean differences in pupils' reading comprehension score according to group

(I) Group	(J) Group	<i>MD</i> (I-J)	<i>SE</i>	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
Experimental	Control	18.493*	.642	.000	17.209	19.777
Control	Experimental	-18.493*	.642	.000	-19.777	-17.209

MD=Mean difference; *SE*=Standard Error

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

^b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Sidak.

Table 3 revealed that the mean reading comprehension achievement scores of pupils in experimental and control groups were significantly different with a more substantial mean gain in favour of pupils in the experimental group ($MD = 18.493; SE = .642, 95\% CI = 17.209, 19.777$).

As have been demonstrated, the findings of this study revealed that pupils taught with the reflective teaching method performed better than pupils taught using the traditional method. The reflective teaching method enhanced reading comprehension achievements among pupils in the experimental group. The two groups involved in the study exhibited comparable characteristics. Thus, they both entered the instructional experiment on equal strength and ability which showed that the two groups were suitable for the study when comparing reflective teaching method with traditional method on reading comprehension achievement among pupils in public primary schools. The study also found no significant interaction effect of method and gender on reading comprehension achievements of pupils in public primary school. This simply implies that the reading comprehension achievements of pupils taught using the reflective teaching method is not in any manner affected by gender. The finding aligns with the findings of Maxwell *et al.*, (2018), Awodun *et al.*, (2020) and Oo, Magyar and Habók, (2021). All these researchers are of the view that the reflective teaching method enhances pupils reading comprehension achievement. This method stimulates pupils' interest in reading and sharpened their interest to find reading a pleasurable activity. It is possible that the pupils taught using the traditional method would find reading a chore, a burden and boring. However, the reflective teaching method is a good approach for teaching reading comprehension to pupils because it may not only help them to select their own reading materials, read them at their desired time and pace but also facilitate their reading skills and improve their attitude towards reading.

Implications for Teacher Librarians

Given that the roles of the teacher librarians are multi-faceted (Herring 2007), one way they can achieve one of their roles (teaching role) effectively is to acquaint themselves with and use evidence-informed pedagogical strategies. Our study results imply that teacher librarians in collaboration with other teachers can utilize this method to improve pupils'

reading comprehension achievement in primary schools. Also, teacher librarians should ensure that teaching-learning activity occurs in a stimulating and helpful learning atmosphere in order to promote pupils' reading comprehension achievements. Teacher librarians can influence pupils' learning outcomes by collaborating with teachers, working directly with pupils, championing reading, provide information-rich learning environments, and advocating for information literacy (San José State University School of Information, 2021). Furthermore, teacher librarians must continue to exercise their traditional role as literature leaders by making ensure that the right book enters the right hands and that students become engaged readers (Chrysanthos, 2020). The teacher librarians works with principals and senior staff in order to make sure that information literacy outcomes are a key focus of the school; advance the development of information literacy in the school; plan, teach and evaluate collaboratively with teachers in order to ensure the effective incorporation of information resources and technologies into student learning; and promote reading for students' understanding and enjoyment (ASLA, 2003).

Conclusion

The study has confirmed that the reflective teaching method is a major variable in pupils' reading comprehension achievement. There was no significant influence of pupils' gender on their reading comprehension achievement score after benefitting from the reflective teaching method. Also, there was no significant interaction effect of methods and gender on the pupils' reading comprehension achievement score. Therefore, the reflective teaching method is an appropriate method of instruction that can boost learning outcomes and the reading comprehension of pupils. Teacher librarians in collaboration with other teachers can utilize this method to improve pupils' reading comprehension achievement in primary schools. The teacher librarians can also influence pupils' learning outcomes by working directly with pupils and championing reading activities.

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