

ASSESSMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES AND STRATEGIES USED IN NIGERIAN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Kolawole Akinjide Aramide

Department of School Library and Media Technology

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

aramidekolawole1@gmail.com

+2347019115839

Chidaka Okachukwu Nyemezu

Department of Library and Information Science

Rivers State University

Nkpolu-Oroworukwo PortHarCourt, Nigeria

Chidaka.nyemezu@ust.edu.ng

+2347032154657

Abstract

This paper explores the reading comprehension problems of students attending schools in Nigeria and the role schools libraries play in overcoming the problems. Reading comprehension skill is an important ability to academic success yet most students in Nigeria are not able to master it. Such difficulties tend to be aggravated by the language barriers, lack of vocabulary, lack of awareness of sounds present in words, and social-economic problems. Also, most Nigerian school libraries are underfunded and do not have the resources needed, and it is more challenging to get the reading materials students require. This research concentrates on how school libraries can play their part in facilitating the reading of students against these odds. It puts into consideration the challenges that the Nigerian students continue to experience that are exacerbated by cognitive and environmental variables. Many schools do not have the right teaching tools and learners struggle to decode and read written information. The systematic review methodology allows the study to review the current research on the problem of reading comprehension and the role of libraries in alleviating the problem and enhancing reading abilities. The review considered the publications published between 2019 and 2025 and covered the problem of reading comprehension and the contribution of school libraries in Nigeria. The results indicate that the issue of reading comprehension in the Nigerian schools is mostly caused by

cognitive difficulties, i.e., by lack of phonological awareness and vocabulary, and by socio-economic determinants. School libraries with restricted funding have achieved a lot by providing a collection of reading material, running special classes to assist ineffective readers and encouraging learning to go together. There are also libraries that have implemented digital devices that facilitate the interactions with the students and enhance their reading abilities. The paper has emphasized the significance of school libraries in enhancing reading comprehension among Nigerian students and suggests that more resources be allocated to libraries, librarians train better and that reading strategies needs to be incorporated into the broader education system to enhance the literacy growth of Nigerian students.

Keywords: Reading comprehension difficulties, Nigerian school libraries, Reading strategies, Library programmes, Collaborative support

Background to the Study

Academic success and learning in general involves reading comprehension since it assists the students to perceive and interact with the materials in various subjects, which is critical in their growth and development. Nonetheless, reading comprehension poses a challenge to many students across the globe including in Nigeria. This problem is not only classroom related, but it has an impact on future performance and student success. The problem of reading comprehension is prevalent in Nigerian schools and a combination of socio-economic issues, language barriers, insufficiency of resources, and poorly trained teachers are the causes of the problem. Mahapatra (2015) notes that these problems have created a rising crisis in literacy education particularly among schools that lack access to high quality teaching resources and teachers with training. Studies indicate that the reading level of students is not properly developed and they face academic problems in the long term (Freihat et al., 2019).

School libraries are significant at this point of tackling such challenges yet are largely ignored. Access to a variety of reading materials is also offered by libraries to students and this is important in the development of reading skills. Nevertheless, in Nigeria, school libraries are mostly inadequately funded, equipped, and connected to the teaching activity (O'Connor et al., 2014). Nonetheless, libraries are still a resource and can be used to help students with their reading problems provided they were utilized better. Reading comprehension cannot be developed overnight with lack of mind power, language and the appropriate resources. Comprehension in reading is not only a word decoding process, but rather it involves learning the meaning of the text that is read which is not easy to many students and more so those who have difficulty in phonological awareness, memory, and attention (Snow, 1998).

Language is one of the biggest hindrances to reading comprehension in Nigeria. The official language spoken in schools is English though most students use their local languages at home. This causes a divergence between the language they speak at

home and the language they should know in school, and it becomes difficult to comprehend English-language texts. Numerous students are also less exposed to the English language outside the classroom, and it influences how they can read, comprehend, and utilize the language (Anuar et al., 2025). Inadequate resources in the schools of Nigeria are another challenge. In high number of schools, particularly rural schools, the reading materials are not available. Not all schools have libraries, and those that do have them have old or under-funded libraries, so the students do not receive the diversity of texts required to enhance reading comprehension. Lacking a wide selection of books, students are unable to acquire the competencies of reading fluently and interpreting various kinds of texts. Rather, they tend to use textbooks that have less to say, and it does not assist them in developing their reading abilities (Connor et al., 2014). The classroom is also overcrowded, thus, hindering the teachers to provide students with the personal attention they require. Because of this, students with poor reading comprehension get even further behind, increasing the gap in literacy.

Despite such issues, school libraries can change a lot. Libraries not only provide a reading environment to students, but also present important resources that can enhance student learning. It has been proven that the presence of a well-resourced library can create an interest in reading as well as introduce students to a variety of texts, which is critical in developing reading comprehension skills (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2021; Aramide and Adigun, 2024; Woodley, 2025). Research also reveals that in a situation where students are allowed various forms of reading materials, including fiction or academic material, their vocabulary and comprehensions levels improve (Bayraktar, 2018). Nevertheless, school libraries in Nigeria are not well set to offer full encouragement to students reading. They do not have up to date and varied materials and this restricts the reading of those texts that are appropriate to the level of reading among students. This has been particularly so in the rural areas where schools in most cases do not have the basic library infrastructure.

However, studies also point to the opportunities of libraries in promoting reading given that the libraries are well resourced and used in a strategic way. Libraries have the ability to assist struggling readers through one-on-one reading sessions, group reading sessions, and other literacy programs (Freihat et al., 2019). Also, the libraries can be useful with developing the information literacy of the students which is a significant portion of the reading comprehension. Information literacy does not only entail text reading and comprehension but also critical analysis and synthesis of information contained in different sources of information. This can be assisted by libraries in providing resources that prompt critical thinking and how to utilize these resources to the best (Connor et al., 2014).

There are various strategies that are necessary to enhance the reading comprehension. Early intervention programs that can detect struggling readers at an earlier stage and give them special attention is one of the effective measures. Screening instruments such as the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) can be

used to intervene within a group of students at risk and give them the assistance needed before their difficulties become embedded within them (Lora et al., 2025). The other important strategy is differentiated instruction, which entails the approach of individualising the instruction to accommodate the needs of different students. This is particularly critical in classrooms whereby students are exposed to varied degree of exposure to the English language or prior reading experience. With differentiated strategies, the teachers can offer particular assistance to the bad readers, at the same time not shirking the good ones (Freihat et al., 2019).

Another strategy that works is peer-assisted learning. In this method, the poor readers are grouped with those who are more successful in reading to collaborate. Such a learning community has been found to enhance the level of comprehension as well as fostering a feeling of community and motivating students to read (Connor, 2011). Peer-assisted learning can be the best achieved in libraries, which have the resources and the environment to make this strategy successful. Lastly, additional reading comprehension can be provided by utilizing technology within the classroom. Online learning platforms, e-books, online reading applications enable students to study at a pace and become better readers (Woolley, 2025). These online solutions are especially useful in those schools where the physical books are scarce.

The reading comprehension has remained a big problem in the Nigerian schools, yet it is not an unsolvable issue. Nigerian schools can achieve a lot in the area of reading by treating the root causes of reading problems, enhancing access to resources, and applying specific strategies to the reading results. When school libraries are appropriately supported and utilized, they may be a key part of this endeavor. Moreover, it is necessary to train teachers, provide early intervention, differentiate instruction, and implement various techniques, which are the key to assisting students in developing reading comprehension skills. The paper will illuminate on the type of reading comprehension issues faced by students in Nigeria and how school libraries can help enhance literacy achievement.

This paper is about the current problems that the Nigerian students are experiencing in the acquisition of good reading comprehension skills. One of the most important academic skills is reading which most of the students continue to master especially in reading and interpreting the written materials. This challenge normally results in low grades (Mahapatra, 2015). These reading difficulties have complicated causes that may include cognitive and insufficient language development as well as absence of proper teaching guidance in schools (Snow, 1998; Noble and McCandliss, 2005). The inadequacy of well-equipped libraries and resources contributes to the severity of these issues because they only contribute to the already existing problems faced by students in enhancing their reading comprehension (Fletcher et al., 2002). The second key problem is that not all teachers in Nigeria are adequately trained to solve reading problems in a manner that suits personal needs of students. There is no improvement in case students are not provided with personalized approaches or differentiated teaching strategies (Connor, 2011; Foorman et al., 1998). Nonetheless, studies have

indicated that reading skills can be enhanced by using such strategies as peer-assisted learning, fluency programs and vocabulary building, particularly in low-resource schools (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005).

This is further aggravated by the existing curriculum, in which in most cases, the emphasis is made on memorization and word recognition instead of building up deeper knowledge and critical thinking. This limitation does not allow the students to work with texts in full and affects not only their understanding but also their possibilities to apply reading to real-life contexts (Mahapatra, 2015). This research will, therefore, focus on the reasons behind difficulties in reading and how school libraries in Nigeria may contribute to the solution of the problem, which eventually results in improved reading among students.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this paper is to assess reading comprehension difficulties among students in Nigerian school libraries and evaluate the strategies employed to address them. Specifically, it aims to identify major challenges, examine library interventions, analyse the link between strategies and comprehension outcomes, and propose optimisations for enhanced literacy. In order to achieve this, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows:

Section 2 outlines the methodological approach (systematic review) used to synthesise the literature.

Section 3 examines reading comprehension challenges faced by students in Nigerian schools.

Section 4 details strategies used by school libraries to address these difficulties.

Section 5 analyses the relationship between reading strategies and students' comprehension abilities.

Section 6 proposes ways to optimise school libraries for improved reading outcomes.

Section 7 concludes the paper with a summary of findings and targeted recommendations for stakeholders.

Research Questions

The following research questions aligned directly with the objectives and guide the systematic review:

1. What are the major reading comprehension difficulties encountered by students in Nigerian school libraries?

2. What strategies are used by school libraries in Nigeria to address reading comprehension difficulties?
3. What is the relationship between the use of reading strategies and students' reading comprehension abilities in Nigerian school libraries?
4. How can school libraries in Nigeria be optimised to improve reading comprehension outcomes for students?

Methodological Approach

A systematic review method was applied in this study to examine the challenges encountered by students in the reading comprehension process in Nigerian schools and the measures which school libraries are taking in an attempt to overcome the challenges. The aim is to bring together and critically assess available body of research on the problems that Nigerian students face in reading, specifically how school libraries contribute to the reading growth of students. The study adopted PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items to Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) as a guide to the review. These are guidelines that assist in making the review process transparent, reproducible and exhaustive (Liberati et al., 2009). Six academic databases, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, African Journals Online, ERIC, and JSTOR, underwent comprehensive searches using keywords such as "reading comprehension difficulties," "Nigerian school libraries," "reading strategies," "literacy development in Nigeria," and "library interventions to reading comprehension," combined with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT). This yielded 613 records comprising journal articles, conference papers, and grey literature published between 2019 and 2025, prioritising recency and relevance.

Inclusion criteria targeted English-language studies addressing comprehension difficulties in Nigerian school contexts and library support strategies, spanning 2015–2025. Exclusions encompassed pre-2019 publications, non-Nigerian settings, and unrelated topics. Title and abstract screening eliminated 417 records, advancing 196 full-text articles for detailed evaluation. Subsequent full-text assessment excluded 147 due to methodological weaknesses, off-topic focus, or inadequate data on library strategies, resulting in 49 high-quality studies. Standardised extraction captured study details (authors, publication year, design), participant demographics, identified deficits, interventions, and outcomes. Quality appraisal employed CASP checklists for quantitative studies, COREQ for qualitative, and MMAT for mixed-methods designs; only moderate to high-quality works proceeded, ensuring robust, valid findings. Narrative synthesis integrated qualitative and quantitative data through thematic analysis, highlighting cognitive barriers (such as phonological awareness deficits), library contributions to skill development, and intervention efficacy. Descriptive statistics summarised quantitative results, while effect sizes quantified benefits of reading groups, literacy programs, and resource access on comprehension. No ethical approval was required for this secondary analysis of published literature, with all sources duly cited. Limitations include English-language restriction, potentially

overlooking local-language works, and reliance on small-scale or anecdotal evidence for certain library strategies.

PRISMA Flowchart of Reading Comprehension Problems and the Strategies applied in Nigerian School Libraries

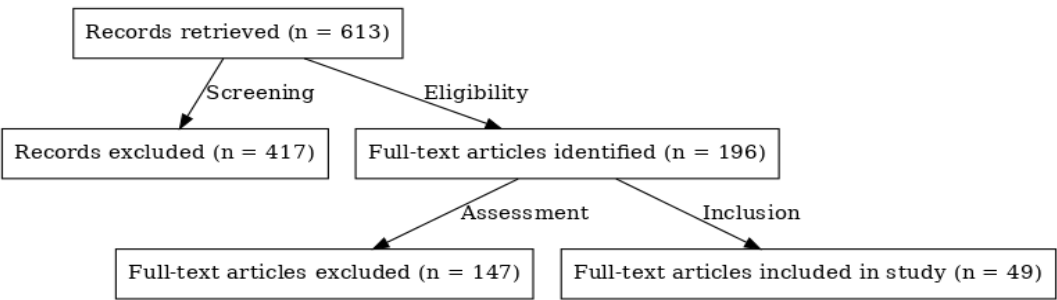


Table One: Characteristics of Representative Studies Included in the Review (2011-2025)

Authors	Year	Region	Methodology	Participants	Key Findings
Mahapatra	2015	Nigeria	Literature review	N/A	Factors contributing to reading difficulties in Nigeria include socio-economic factors, limited resources, and language barriers.
Freihat et al.	2019	Jordan	Survey, Diagnostic tool	Primary school students	Phonological awareness is a key predictor of reading comprehension. Students with weak phonological awareness struggle with reading fluency

Authors	Year	Region	Methodology	Participants	Key Findings
O'Connor et al.	2014	Various	Literature review	N/A	and comprehension. Libraries with diverse reading materials foster engagement and improve comprehension.
Anuar et al.	2025	Malaysia	Survey	Students	Language proficiency gap contributes significantly to reading difficulties.
Aramide Adigun &	2024	Nigeria	Case study	Public primary school pupils	Identified root causes of reading difficulties in Nigerian schools include language barriers and lack of phonological awareness.
Abu-Ubaida et al.	2017	Nigeria	Survey	Secondary school students	Challenges in teaching reading skills in Nigerian schools are compounded by insufficient resources and teacher training.
Woolley	2025	Australia	Literature review	N/A	Digital tools like e-books can enhance reading comprehension, especially in

Authors	Year	Region	Methodology	Participants	Key Findings
					resource-limited environments.
Bayraktar	2018	Turkey	Case study	Preschool children	Exposure to diverse reading materials improves vocabulary and comprehension.
Connor	2011	US	Literature review, Case study	Children, Teachers	Libraries, when integrated into teaching, significantly contribute to literacy development by providing diverse reading resources.
Guthrie & Wigfield	2021	US	Literature review	N/A	Reading engagement and motivation are key to improving reading comprehension.
Freihat et al.	2019	Jordan	Literature Survey	review, Teachers, Students	Peer-assisted learning is effective in improving reading comprehension by fostering collaboration and active learning.
Woolley & Hay	1999	Australia	Literature review	N/A	Vocabulary development is critical for

Authors	Year	Region	Methodology	Participants	Key Findings
					reading comprehension.
Aramide	2015	Nigeria	Literature review	N/A	Extracurricular reading programmes help develop vocabulary and reading comprehension skills.

This table provides a clear overview of the studies, methodologies, and their contributions to understanding reading comprehension difficulties and library interventions in Nigerian schools.

Reading Comprehension Challenges Faced by Students in Nigerian Schools

Among the most important results of this study is the fact that learners in Nigerian schools are exposed to a several challenges, which, in turn, prevents them from comprehending and interacting with texts. The biggest obstacle is language barrier. Even though Nigerian schools use English as the means of instruction, it is not the mother tongue of the majority of the students. Consequently, most of the students are not able to interpret written English, hence they usually do not have much exposure to English beyond the classroom. Research indicates that a different language of home language and the language of instruction deprives students of having full access to academic texts, which results in severe complications with reading comprehension (Anuar et al., 2025; Aramide and Adigun, 2024).

The other difficulty is the absence of phonological awareness which can be defined as the ability to identify and manipulate sounds in words. This is an essential ability in reading (Garcia-Gomez and Rueda, 2022). Nevertheless, this is a basic skill that is lacking in many Nigerian students and this affects their capacity to decode words and comprehend meaning of texts. This findings was supported by Abu-Ubaida et al. (2019) and Ying and Chen (2020) who reported that poorly developed phonological awareness can make students unable to read fluently and comprehend. Another important factor that causes reading difficulties is limited vocabulary. The exposure of many Nigerian students to a broad range of reading materials at an early age does not create a great deal of difference concerning their vocabulary and skill to decode words they have never heard or read (Aramide and Adigun, 2024). It has been found that

vocabulary acquisition is essential to comprehension as it enables the students to relate words and ideas in the text (Mahapatra, 2015; Bayraktar, 2018). Besides these cognitive factors, other factors that are influential are emotional and psychological issues. Students having low working memory or attention could find it hard to retain and process information as they read (Snow, 1998). Additionally, such emotional aspects as anxiety, low self-esteem, and the inability to feel motivated might leave students unable to be immersed in reading activities, and thus, they may find it more difficult to enhance their understanding (Freihat et al., 2019).

Strategies Used by School Libraries to Address Reading Comprehension Difficulties

In spite of these difficulties, school libraries in Nigeria have adopted some methods that can enable the students to enhance their reading comprehension. Provision of variety of reading materials is one of the commonest strategies. Well stocked libraries with different texts such as fiction, non-fiction and academic books are beneficial in ensuring that students increase their vocabulary and better their comprehension abilities. This observation is upheld by the research, which underlines that developing love of reading and enhancing comprehension depends on the availability of a wide range of reading materials (O'Connor et al., 2014). Most Nigerian school libraries however are not well-funded and thus they find it hard to access these basic resources. Students of the school with an improved library have access to more reading materials, which enhances vocabulary and comprehension abilities (Heilmann et al., 2018).

Besides availing reading materials, school libraries also offer intervention programmes like reading diagnosis, reading remediation, reading groups and one-on-one session. These initiatives target the struggling readers. The results of the synthesised literature reveal intervention programmes as strategies used by school libraries in helping struggling readers. Studies, such as, Capellini and Germano (2018) and Castillo, (2018) have shown that small-group interventions, where students receive personalised instruction based on their specific reading needs, are highly effective in improving reading comprehension. Such specific interventions give the students the necessary support in a more supportive setting (Freihat et al., 2019). Another intervention that has produced good outcomes in assisting reading comprehension is peer-assisted learning. This approach involves the matching of struggling readers with more proficient students, to help them with reading tasks. This collaborative approach not only benefits struggling readers but also encourages active learning and mutual support among students to help them with reading tasks. This collaborative approach not only benefits struggling readers but also encourages active learning and mutual support among students. This strategy can be of great assistance in the large classrooms where the teacher might not be able to attend to each student.

The other potential strategy is the use of technology in school libraries. The digital resources such as e-books and interactive reading applications offer learners with customised learning experiences as they can read at their own pace and receive

feedback immediately. Woolley (2025) notes that technology can be an excellent enhancement to reading comprehension particularly in those schools where conventional resources are limited. Even though technology is still in its infantile stages in most schools in Nigeria, it has displayed immense potential in assisting with reading comprehension especially among struggling readers.

Relationship Between Reading Strategies and Students' Reading Comprehension Abilities

Among the important questions that this study attempted to answer was how the interaction of the students with the reading strategies correlates with their reading comprehension skills. The literature reveals that there is a strong connection between students' engagement with effective reading strategies and their reading comprehension outcomes. Formal interventions, such as reading groups and individual sessions, play a major positive role in reading comprehension of students. Such interventions offer the specific support required by students and provide an opportunity to use an individual approach so that these students could receive instruction according to their requirements (Abu-Ubaida et al., 2017; Aramide and Adigun, 2024).

The peer-assisted learning is also effective to enhance the reading comprehension. The students engaged in this method have an advantage of not only getting assistance of the stronger readers but also having a chance to discuss the text, exchange insights, and question. This participatory method assists in enhancing their knowledge and increasing their cognition (Bayraktar, 2018; Ying and Cheng, 2020). Technology also helps in reading comprehension through interactive, engaging, and personalised learning. Online technology enables students to think differently about texts, provide instant feedback, and monitor their achievements. This observation is corroborated by Woolley (2025) who reported that the use of technology in Nigerian school libraries has been found to enhance students' engagement with reading, leading to improvements in their comprehension skills. T

Optimising School Libraries to Improve Reading Comprehension Outcomes

The last question that this research set out to address was the way in which school libraries in Nigeria can be maximised to achieve better results in reading comprehension. The use of technology in Nigerian school libraries has been found to enhance students' engagement with reading, leading to improvements in their comprehension skills. One of the most important recommendations is to allocate more funds for library resources acquisition since well-funded libraries that are stocked with diverse reading materials can provide students with the exposure they need to develop strong reading comprehension skills. School libraries also need to embrace the use of digital materials, particularly in schools that have scarce physical books since the digital systems can offer individualised learning (Woolley, 2025).

The other suggestion is that school librarians should be offered continuous professional growth. Proficient librarians will be in a better position to develop and adopt efficient reading programmes, offering support to the struggling readers, and integrating technology into library activities (Freihat et al., 2019). It is also important that there should be cooperation between school librarians and teachers. School librarians and teachers must collaborate to find struggling students and create specific interventions that integrate library resources into classroom instruction. This collaboration can help create a more holistic approach to reading instruction, ensuring that students receive consistent support across both their library and classroom learning experiences (Connor, 2011).

This research has revealed that school libraries have very important role in supporting learners reading comprehension development in Nigeria. Nevertheless, with the language barrier, the lack of vocabulary, and cognitive factors, school libraries provide valuable resources and strategies to address these difficulties. The integration of diverse reading materials, structured reading interventions, peer-assisted learning, and technology into library practices can enhance students' comprehension skills. Moreover, optimising school libraries through increased investment in resources, training for librarians, and stronger collaboration with teachers will create a more supportive environment for students, leading to improved reading outcomes across Nigerian schools.

Summary and Conclusion

The current study is significant because it provides relevant information about the reading comprehension problems that affect students in Nigerian schools and how these problems are addressed by school libraries. The findings reveal that students in Nigerian schools encounter a range of obstacles, including language barriers, limited vocabulary, phonological awareness issues, and cognitive and emotional factors. Such difficulties complicate the process of reading and comprehension of texts among students and eventually affect their performance in school. Meanwhile, school libraries in Nigeria are majorly involved in assisting to overcome these challenges. School libraries have implemented strategies aimed at enhancing reading comprehension which include the provision of a variety of reading resources, the provision of reading intervention programmes, peer-assisted learning, and the incorporation of technology which have been found to promisingly improve reading comprehension.

Although school libraries may have to contend with issues such as the lack of funding, shortage of resources, and poorly trained librarians, the implemented strategies are working. The strategies have aided in the engagement of students in reading and enhanced their understanding ability. The relationship between the use of these strategies and students' reading comprehension abilities highlights the importance of tailored interventions and personalised learning experiences. Treatment strategies such as structured reading programmes and peer-assisted learning are particularly useful in treatment with struggling readers. There is also the prospect of making

reading in libraries more interactive and engaging using digital tools which can significantly enhance comprehension especially where the resources are limited.

Optimising Nigerian school libraries to improve reading comprehension outcomes requires increased investment in library resources, professional development for librarians, and closer collaboration between teachers and school librarians. Such initiatives will contribute to making sure that the reading strategies are incorporated into the broader education system that will offer students the ongoing assistance they require to resolve their problems with reading. These changes enable school libraries to be a central contributor in the development of literacy and ensuring that students succeed in their studies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings from the study:

1. Funding of school libraries should be the priority of the Nigerian government, education ministries and school management bodies in order to provide more resources including a variety of reading resources such as fiction, non-fiction books and academic books.
2. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with educational institutions and library associations, should organise professional development programmes for librarians through ongoing training in effective reading instruction strategies, including how to implement reading interventions and use technology in libraries.
3. School administrators, in partnership with teachers and librarians, should foster a collaborative environment to design and implement integrated reading strategies that support students' literacy development.
4. School administrators, teachers, and librarians should set up programmes on peer-assisted learning initiatives in libraries where more proficient readers help struggling readers with comprehension.
5. The administrators, teachers, and librarians of schools should collaborate, to establish a collaborative environment that plans and executes reading strategies to help students develop literacy skills.
6. Technology providers together with the Ministry of Education should facilitate the incorporation of technology in schools libraries like using e-books, reading applications and interactive systems to aid reading comprehension.
7. Teachers and librarians, supported by educational authorities, should take responsibility for early identification and intervention to address reading comprehension difficulties at the earliest possible stage.

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