

**INTERROGATING NATIONAL INSTRUCTIONAL  
STRATEGIES AND TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARD  
READING COMPREHENSION IN SELECTED SCHOOLS  
IN GRENADA**

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Reading comprehension is the core element of the reading process. The aim of this study was to examine the use of nationally-endorsed instructional strategies in, and current teacher attitudes and beliefs towards, reading comprehension instruction in a Grade Four classroom in Grenada. Participants included five teachers and their respective classes, totalling 136 students. Multiple methods were used such as non-participant classroom observations, document review, and semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that little explicit reading comprehension instruction occurred as teachers mainly engaged students in activities that provided information on the content of text, activities that assessed this content, and drills. Instructional strategies utilised lacked components of the gradual release of responsibility model that literacy researchers have recommended which can favourably impact educational theory practice (Pearson & Galagher, 1983; Donaldson, 2011). Nevertheless, teachers held strong favourable attitudes towards reading comprehension instruction as they recognise its value and importance, and also believe they can effectively deliver related instruction. Yet, they seemingly lacked knowledge about current available instructional strategies and approaches. Recommendations include the urgent need for curriculum intervention, at various levels and for different stakeholders, and renewal in the form of quality, relevant and interesting reading comprehension instructional strategies, materials, practices and approaches.

**Introduction**

The primary aim of reading comprehension is to gain meaning from the text (Shanahan, 2020) thereby intertwining the processes of

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comprehension and reading. Indeed, literacy is a foundation skill that all persons should develop in order to function effectively and successfully in their respective societies. Teaching students to comprehend text is an important component of any reading programme or literacy classroom since understanding text in all its forms is the ultimate goal of reading. Yet, research indicates that little reading comprehension instruction takes place in classrooms beyond asking students to answer questions or complete worksheets after reading texts (Ness, 2011). Some teachers allocate minimal time for directly teaching reading comprehension (Spear-Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014). Others fail to promote a deeper understanding and active interpretation of texts read despite their belief in, and positive attitudes towards, the value of such processes (Ness, 2011). All of these factors negatively impact the primary school student's honing and cultivation of much-needed reading comprehension competencies for success at their current and future levels of schooling.

In Grenada, the Primary School Language Arts Curriculum used in Grade 4 includes a pivotal reading component which places emphasis on reading comprehension instruction. Inclusive among the particulars for teachers is the use of a range of approaches to monitor students' understanding of texts, as well as specific instructional strategies to be adopted before, during and after reading to aid students in constructing meaning (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Education Reform Unit, 2005). Teachers are provided with a teacher's manual for the *Keskidee Reader* textbook used at the Grade 4 level. But this manual simply provides a collection of reading passages and activities for reading comprehension without articulating practical and relevant teaching strategies. The cumulative effect of all of this is decreased reading comprehension abilities among students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although reading comprehension is a crucial aspect of reading, little direct, explicit attention has been devoted to helping students develop the skills they need to enhance their ability in reading comprehension (RAND, 2002). Questioning remains the most common practice of instruction that occurs in many classrooms (Almasi & Garas-York, 2009; Block & Duffy, 2008). The same was reported by Education Officers in Grenada during informal interviews on reading comprehension instruction at the primary level. As an Early Childhood Education Officer, the primary researcher of

this study observed that many teachers of the educational district in Grenada where this study is situated, do not explicitly teach reading comprehension but, rather, assess and provide drills in line with national approaches, despite their awareness of the value of teaching reading comprehension strategies. This is in keeping with earlier research done by The RAND Report (2002) as well as with Durkin's earlier 1980's study that indicated that explicit comprehension instruction was quite rare in the classroom (cited in Gill, 2008). Wijehumar et al. (2019) noted that teachers placed emphasis on using read aloud and discussion to teach reading comprehension rather than teaching specific strategies. Further, Gill (2008) stated that for many years, teachers *tested* comprehension rather than *taught* comprehension. Likewise, Durkin (1978-1979) criticised core programmes for engaging in too much assessment at the expense of comprehension instruction. Taylor et al. (2003) posit that the more teachers use the practice approach to teach reading comprehension, the lower the growth in reading comprehension skills. And in their study on comprehension instruction in core reading programmes, Dewitz et al. (2009) consistently found that important comprehension strategies were not taught with the explicitness recommended by researchers.

As a result, many elementary school students struggle to create meaning from text. The currency of the problem seems exacerbated in the results of Grenada's Minimum Competency Test at Grade 4 level, which shows the percentage of students in six selected schools passing the reading comprehension component of the examination in 2018, 2019 and 2021.<sup>1</sup> Refer to Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Percentage of Students Passing the Reading Comprehension Component of the Minimum Competency Test at Grade 4, in 2018, 2019 and 2021**

School	Percentage of students passing Reading Comprehension in 2018	Percentage of students passing Reading Comprehension in 2019	Percentage of students passing Reading Comprehension in 2021
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<sup>1</sup> There was no 2020 examination in Grenada due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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<b>A</b>	50%	71%	60%
<b>B</b>	68%	62%	43%
<b>C</b>	45%	38%	53%
<b>D</b>	50%	45%	69%
<b>E</b>	40%	73%	18%
<b>F</b>	51%	45%	56%

These statistics reveal that the present problem is certainly alarming and that Grenada's Reading Comprehension classrooms need urgent curriculum intervention, coupled with a professional reflective practice among teachers, in order to effect positive change.

### **Justification for the Study**

Despite the importance of reading comprehension in the primary school and the reality of existing literacy problems at Grades Four and Six in Grenada, no known study has been conducted to examine the joint foci of instructional practices and teacher attitudes vis-à-vis reading comprehension in this Caribbean country. The need for this study is tripartite. First, students' reading comprehension competencies, as reflected in the Grade 4 National Examination, are worrisome as seen in the statistics. Second, general prevailing sentiments among some Grenadian practitioners regarding the lack of quality, research-based reading comprehension instruction in schools can no longer be ignored. Third, the lack of currency of instructional strategies has been a concern since age-old approaches and dated pedagogical beliefs held about teaching reading comprehension still seem prominent in many primary schools across Grenada.

Against this backdrop, many students are ill-prepared for the academic requirements of the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (formerly the Common Entrance Exam) at Grade Six in primary schools in Grenada. Additionally, without the basic rudiments of reading comprehension, students are ill-prepared for the additional and current demands of functional literacy, visual literacy and new digital literacies. There is a need for immediate intervention in the Grade 4 classroom to adequately address the problem, better preparing students to succeed in the summative examination at Grade Six. This will also lay the solid foundation for success in other types of literacies at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

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Students seemingly lack the awareness of specific strategies that will enable them to comprehend text effectively. In addition to this, during observations of lesson delivery during the Literacy Block/Language Arts at different schools, the primary researcher recognised that little direct and explicit attention has been devoted to helping students develop the skills needed to enhance reading comprehension. In actuality, many teachers spend instructional time *assessing* reading comprehension rather than teaching *reading* comprehension as per curriculum goals of the related syllabus. These and other observations point to the need for a distinct, empirical investigation regarding how reading comprehension is treated in Grenada's primary classrooms; what the instructional strategies and time entail; and, how related teachers' attitudes and beliefs about reading comprehension instruction impact student learning.

### **The Purpose of Study**

The dual purpose of this study was to examine teacher practices during reading comprehension instruction, and teachers' attitudes towards and beliefs about teaching reading comprehension at the primary level. The study becomes significant as the focus on students' experiences will lead to an exploration of opportunities which will allow them to be better assisted in developing their reading comprehension skills and competencies. This will serve to generate higher degrees of success. Success at school will be felt at home through higher student motivation to engage in related homework and enrichment activities. As such, parents, in turn, will experience an appreciation for higher levels of motivation among their children concerning reading exercises, as the latter will be in a far better position to grapple with the tensions, contentions and collisions associated with reading comprehension. Likewise, teachers will be able to reflect on their practice and appreciate the need for the adoption of effective, research-based reading comprehension instructional strategies, as they prepare students for life-long learning. This study will provide teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their concept and beliefs about reading instruction, through an interrogation of how teachers engage in reading comprehension, and an exploration of their attitude towards the subject. This can lead them to embrace the design of instructional interventions that could potentially improve reading comprehension instruction at the Grade 4 level. Similarly, sharing this study's findings with other levels and among other educational districts can potentially help educators and school administrators to recognise what entails effective

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reading comprehension instruction. As such, there is the possibility for the promotion of continuous curriculum renewal practices across Grenada.

**Research Questions:**

1. What are the teaching practices used during reading comprehension instruction in the Grade 4 primary school classroom in Grenada?
2. What are teachers' attitudes towards and beliefs about teaching reading comprehension in Grenada?
3. What reading comprehension strategies are most prevalent during reading comprehension instruction in the Grade 4 classroom in Grenada?

**Review of Related Literature**

Reading comprehension can be defined as the understanding of what the text means and the idea the author is conveying (Montgomery, 2018). It is a complex process and teachers have a profound responsibility to assist students develop reading comprehension skills in order to enhance their reading ability through explicit reading comprehension instruction (Shanahan, 2020). According to Shanahan (2020), readers construct meaning from the written word by using background knowledge, experience, and abilities. When readers do not interact with text that relates to students' experiential background and lived realities, comprehension is limited. Many factors affect a student's ability to comprehend text including, but not limited to, the amount of text on the page, the difficulty level of the text, and the type of text (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). Weaver (2002) classified the main factors as reader, text, and environment situation, while Snow and Sweet (2003) labelled categories as reader, text and activity which exists within a particular socio-cultural context. When teachers have a clear understanding of the factors affecting comprehension, it can help in the type and quality of instructional strategies utilised in the classroom.

According to Paris et al. (1983), teachers' manuals generally fail to provide teachers with helpful instructional strategies or with instruction on directly teaching students how to comprehend text. They argue that many of the reading programmes used at the primary level focus on reading comprehension instruction but lack the explicit instruction that should be provided for use at this level. Wijehumar et al. (2019) support this assertion as they found that comprehension instruction in core reading

programmes included more direct explanation, but the instruction lacked explicitness. Instead, practice (32.6%) and preparation for reading (5.6%) predominated in the manuals that are seemingly predicated on teachers already knowing the instructional strategies that ought to be adopted. It was also noted that over 70% of instructional elements were basically questions, with very little modelling and guided practice of any other strategies. This is in keeping with Schmitt and Hopkins' (1993) study which examined comprehension skills and strategy instruction in basal reading programmes, and the emergent finding that these programmes encompassed important skills but failed to do so with any element of explicit instructional strategy.

Rognlie (2017) and Hanford (2019) note that when primary grade students receive adequate and explicit comprehension instruction, their performance on measures of literal, inferential and metacognitive comprehension increases. The National Institute for Literacy (2006) claims that simultaneously, there are proportionate increases in vocabulary development as well as in skills of decoding, problem solving, and cooperative learning; and improved self-esteem (Lee & Wong, 2017).

Smith and Rothkoph (1984) suggest that when a specific strategy is introduced it should be practised frequently and then such practice should diminish as the skills become more established. This dovetails with Jitendra et al.'s (2001) study that focused on observations in the primary grade classrooms in which new strategies were introduced but students did not receive explicit teacher-guided instruction regarding these strategies, leading to diminished comprehension skills. Independent practice or the opportunity to ensure maintenance of strategies was also limited, impacting sustained comprehension levels. Researchers have posited that the most effective ways teachers can help students improve comprehension is to directly teach comprehension strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000; Richards-Tutor et al., 2016). Although many strategies have been identified to aid reading comprehension, there are eight that have been deemed most effective (Dole et al., 2009; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Pearson & Gallagher, 1993):

- 1) *Activating background knowledge*. Readers must bring a set of schemas constructed over past experiences to every reading experience as individual meaning is hinged on this.
- 2) *Determining importance*. Since it is important to remember what is read, readers must develop the capacity to demarcate a text's main ideas from its details.

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- 3) *Drawing inferences*. Students are required to reason and draw conclusions using some given information. This strategy helps students to ‘read between the lines’ and determine what has not been explicitly stated, thereby cultivating higher order thinking skills.
- 4) *Monitoring*. Where problems of understanding occur, students try to determine what has gone wrong and do all in their power to correct thinking, thereby developing problem-solving skills.
- 5) *Questioning*. Posing questions before reading or during reading helps to integrate information and think as students read. This activity requires students to interface with the text well.
- 6) *Repairing*. When students realise that they are confused, or have lost their way in the text, they must reflect on the issue. This may involve re-reading or skipping and reading ahead.
- 7) *Summarising*. In order to synthesise texts, readers must understand the kernel and peripheral ideas and be able to paraphrase these in their own words.
- 8) *Visualising*. This strategy helps students to form mental pictures of what they are reading thereby honing abstract skills and competencies in reading comprehension.

Tompkins (2006) believes that teaching these eight strategies will equip students with a very powerful repertoire for effectively reading and gaining knowledge from a wide variety of texts and posited that these instructional strategies can be used before, during and after reading. Pyle et al. (2017) indicate that students’ reading comprehension improves when teachers place emphasis on teaching strategies throughout the reading process, as the direct and explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies helps students become active readers, who understand written text. Indeed, the main goal of explicit strategy instruction is to create self-regulated learners who can apply the comprehension strategies they have learnt to new contexts.

Direct strategy instruction in reading comprehensions that has been met with large measures of success generally follows the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (GRRM), as introduced by Pearson and Gallagher (1993). This paradigm involves an explanation and modelling of strategies, the scaffolding use of strategies, and students’ incremental use of the strategies during reading. The model encourages reader independence as, after instruction, students should be able to use strategies on their own when needed to be able to read more challenging texts without the teacher’s help (Saldana, 2016). Fielding and Pearson (as cited



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in Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) identified four components of comprehension strategy instruction attached to the GRRM. In the first component, Teacher Modelling, the teacher explains the strategy, demonstrates how to apply it successfully, and then thinks aloud to model the mental processes he uses when he reads. The second component, Guided Practice, sees the teacher gradually giving the student more responsibility for task completion. Here, the teacher and students practise the strategy together with the former scaffolding the students' attempts and supporting students' thinking. Feedback is then given to the student during conferring and classroom discussion. Students are also provided with opportunities to share their thinking processes with each other during paired reading, and small and large group discussions. Independent Practice is the third component. After working with the teacher and with other students, the student then tries to apply the strategy on his own, benefiting from regular feedback from the teacher and other students. Finally, Strategy Application is the component that sees students applying the strategy in other reading situations, and to new genres and formats of texts. It is here that students demonstrate the effective use of a strategy, attached to unseen and/or more difficult texts.

Whereas it is universally accepted that reading comprehension instructional strategies ought to be direct and explicit, there is an ongoing debate on whether it is more effective to teach them individually or using a multiple strategies framework. Cain and Oakhill (2006) recommended that it may be best to teach these strategies separately "all the while encouraging children to work toward an integrated and complete model of text as a whole" (p. 170). Another school of thought argues that good readers use multiple strategies when reading (Baker, 2008; Thompson, 2008), and Van Keer and Vertiaeghe (2005) believe that instruction in multiple strategies helps to improve comprehension and helps students become more strategic and motivated readers.

The choice of using a singular approach or one of multiplicity of instructional strategies becomes hinged, in part, on the individual teacher's own attitude and beliefs regarding reading comprehension. According to Santa (2006), teacher attitude can impact positively and negatively on students' academic success in the reading classroom. As well, Freedman and Carver (2007) are adamant that teachers' personal beliefs and values help to guide their teaching practices in the literacy classroom. Hall (2005) summed it up nicely by declaring that regardless of the amount of knowledge a teacher may possess, their beliefs which vary determine their attitudes and actions in the classroom.

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In a related study, Theurer and Onofrey (2006) examined elementary pre-service teachers' understanding, attitudes and beliefs regarding the teaching of reading comprehension. The majority of teachers indicated that they valued comprehension highly. However, most teachers did not have a recollection of specific comprehension instruction in school (Beerwinkle et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it was noted that they did have a "strong foundation between skills and strategies and the relationship each has with reading comprehension" (Theurer et al., 2006, p. 117). On the other hand, Ahmad (2006), in a study that focused on the attitude of teachers towards reading and how it affects their mode of instruction, found that some teachers possessed negative attitudes towards utilising direct instructional strategies in reading comprehension. Their rationale for this was that engaging some strategies was time-consuming and competed with time for the teachers to complete an already over packed primary school curriculum. Such attitudes directly impacted the reading proficiency of students in Ahmad's (2006) study.

Indeed, as Reutzel et al. (2016) surmise, there are many factors that can influence teachers' attitudes towards reading comprehension instruction. Inclusive are pedagogical knowledge of the sub-discipline; an awareness of the sociology and psychology of education; the stage of intellectual development of the student; an assimilation of curriculum and instructional goals; and professional and personal literacy beliefs. All of these become intertwined in the emergent teacher attitude and belief about reading comprehension in the primary school. These, in turn, have the ripple effect on students' development of related skills and competencies that lie along a continuum with success and proficiency at one end, and failure and frustration at the other.

## **Methodology**

### **(1) Research design, location, and participants**

The study adopted a multi-method design which included quantitative and qualitative approaches to arrive at a deeper understanding and appreciation of the phenomena (Creswell, 2016). Purposeful sampling was employed to select students and teachers. Five Grade 4 classes were chosen since students at this grade level typically have proficient decoding skills and have traditionally been described as reading to learn which is quite different from students in the earlier grades who are described as

learning to read.<sup>2</sup> This is of importance since reading comprehension focuses on making sense of text. The teachers at the various schools all function at the Grade 4 level and possess at least a Certificate in Primary Education or had other formal training in primary education.

The actual research occurred within an educational district in Grenada characterised by a combination of eight multi-grade, co-educational city and rural primary schools. The five schools where the research was done were Top Hill Methodist, Happy Hill Methodist, St. De Gale Roman Catholic, Coals Gap Government, and Frequente Anglican.<sup>3</sup> These schools use the Eastern Caribbean States Language Arts Curriculum for teaching Language Arts or Literacy, and all utilise a standardised Language Arts textbook. They lie in relatively close proximity to one another, and all have Grade 4 teachers with the educational criteria determined in this study, as indicated in Figure 2 below. Additionally, these schools are supervised by the researcher daily, thus making it convenient for the implementation of the research.

All five participating teachers were female whose teaching experience ranged from 9 to thirty-three years. They have all attended Language Arts, Literacy or/and reading workshops at various times during their teaching careers. Additionally, all teachers received formal training in primary education at a teachers' training college. Each teacher's class automatically became the student participants in the study with a total of 136, their age ranging from 9 to 10 years. Refer to Figure 2.

<b>School</b>	<b>Class Size</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Years in Teaching</b>	<b>Qualification</b>
<b>Top Hill Methodist</b>	25	Ms. Gibson	18	Certificate in Primary Education
<b>Happy Hill Methodist</b>	30	Ms. John	14	Certificate in Primary Education

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<sup>2</sup> A disclaimer for this terminology is offered here. Current literacy studies debunk this passé description as there is the belief that students are always reading to learn and learning to read, even after they have developed their decoding skills and fluency as per text, class, or age level.

<sup>3</sup> All schools, teachers and students were granted pseudonyms throughout the study

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<b>St. De Gale Roman Catholic</b>	26	Ms. Miller	23	Certificate in Primary Education, Associate Degree in Special Education
<b>Coals Gap Government</b>	24	Ms. Williams	6	Associate Degree in Primary Education
<b>Frequente Anglican</b>	31	Ms. Paul	33	Certificate in Primary Education

**Figure 2: Additional Information on Participants**

**(2) Data Collection – Instruments, Validity, Reliability**

Classroom observation, document review and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. Validity was addressed as all three instruments were piloted with another Grade 4 teacher and her class at the St. Thomas RC School<sup>4</sup> in another educational district, with subsequent adjustments made to ensure that the necessary data collected were valid and reliable. Validity was also established by using areas of Saldana (2016) coding system to analyse the instructional delivery for the teaching strategies. At the end of the interviews, the researcher allowed the respondents to review the interview notes for accuracy by making emendations accordingly. This ensured reliability of the content. Another procedure used to ensure reliability of the instruments was triangulation (Creswell, 2016; Silverman, 2016) incorporating data from the classroom observations, teacher interviews and document analysis of the lesson plans.

Pre-determined, non-participant direct classroom observation over a four-week period was then utilised to examine teachers’ practices during reading comprehension instruction (Best & Khan, 2006). Each teacher was observed three times yielding a total of 15 lesson observations. Field notes, inclusive of direct quotes, focused on the teachers’ and students’ behaviours, and instructional practices and materials during reading comprehension sessions. At the end of each lesson observation, the teacher’s lesson plan was collected for review. This was done to

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<sup>4</sup> This name is also a pseudonym

triangulate the data collected during the classroom observation. This practice is supported by Marshall & Rossman (2016), who indicated that data found in artifacts and documents can be cross checked with field observations. Finally, one-hour semi-structured interviews were arranged for a mutually acceptable time, reflecting open-ended questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016). A common set of seventeen questions along with further probing questions based on the participant's responses were posed.

### **(3) Data Collection – Coding and Counting**

Predicated on a qualitative approach paradigm, all classroom lesson observation notes were read then coded based on what the teacher did or asked the students to do before, during and after reading the text. This yielded eight different but prominent practices, as per Dewitz et al.'s (2009) research that supported the gradual release of responsibility. Refer to Figure 3.

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Prior knowledge</b>	Teacher activates students' knowledge about a particular topic before reading of the text.
<b>Discussing</b>	Teacher poses a preliminary question on the content of the text and allows students to discuss with their classmate or with the teacher.
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Teacher teaches students unfamiliar words from the text.
<b>Predicting</b>	Teacher allows the students to read a topic and/or look at a picture and say what they think the story will be about.
<b>Summarizing &amp; Paraphrasing</b>	Teacher asks students to summarize or paraphrase the text
<b>Sequencing</b>	Teacher asks students to sequence the text's events.
<b>Questioning</b>	Teacher questions students on the content of the text.
<b>Strategy Instruction</b>	Teacher provides one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mention of the strategy</li><li>• Description of the strategy</li><li>• Modelling the strategy</li><li>• Guided practice of the strategy</li><li>• Independent practice of the strategy</li></ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Application of the strategy to new reading situations</li></ul>
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**Figure 3: Codes and Descriptors for Teaching Practices**

Actual reading comprehension strategies were then coded, based on researchers' recommendations (Tompkins, 2006; National Reading Panel, 2000), leading to seven distinct categories. Inclusive are the activation of background knowledge, inferencing, visualising, monitoring comprehension, summarising, generating questions, and asking questions. A quantitative approach followed by attaching numeric values to the various codes identified. The frequency of related behaviours was then tallied for both teaching practices as well as for reading comprehension strategies.

Using document review as an information-gathering tool, all stated or implied comprehension strategies in each of the 15 lesson plans were elicited and coded using the same categories adopted in the classroom observations. Due diligence was applied to note if the documents reflected the GRRM. In particular, keen attention was paid to ascertain if the lesson plans reflected the teacher's explanation of the reading comprehension strategy, teacher modelling, guided practice, and independent practice in line with the literature (Shanahan et al., 2010; Duke & Pearson, 2002).

The semi-structured interview data was read, checked for inconsistencies against the classroom observation notes and the lesson plans, then examined closely for themes, organised into categories by question. According to Saldana (2016), discovering patterns helps the researcher to make general statements about the relationship among categories. During the initial coding process, many categories were identified. A summary was written on each category, noting the key ideas expressed using the respondents' own lexicon.

### **Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

#### **Major Finding #1: Teaching Practices used during Reading Comprehension Instruction**

Actual teaching practices, coded into eight categories, are reflected in Figure 4.

Teaching Practices	Ms. Gibson	Ms. John	Ms. Miller	Ms. Williams	Ms. Paul	No. of Lessons with each Practice	% of the No. of Lessons with each Practice
Prior knowledge	3	2	3	3	2	13	87
Discussing	1	3	2	1	2	9	67
Vocabulary	1	1	2	1	3	8	53
Predicting	2	2	1	2	1	8	53
Summarising & Paraphrasing	1	2	1	1	2	7	47
Sequencing	0	1	2	0	1	4	27
Questioning	3	3	3	3	3	15	100
Strategy Instruction	1	0	1	2	0	4	27

Figure 4: Teaching Practices Occurring Before, During and After Reading Text

Teacher questioning was the most common practice, occurring in all fifteen lessons. This is consistent with research by Ness (2011), Taylor et al. (2003), and Durkin (1978-1979) whose findings showed that teachers frequently asked questions during reading comprehension instruction and teacher generated questions dominated related instruction. Teacher questioning may have been the most frequently used practice in this research since questioning is a strategy that can be used to check understanding and assess students' knowledge about a topic.

Overall, teachers activating students' prior knowledge (87%) and creating opportunities for discussions (67%) were the second and third most common practices, respectively, in the three lessons. Three teachers used the former practice in each lesson while two used it in two lessons. Only one teacher created discussion opportunities in all three lessons. The other teachers used it at least in one of the three lessons observed. Providing vocabulary development instruction was another practice adopted 53% of the time, as was giving opportunities for student predictions. Of the 15 lessons, both of these practices were used in eight lessons. Only one teacher used the former practice in all three lessons, and none incorporated predicting in all three lessons.

Whereas teacher explanation of text occurred two-thirds of the time, vocabulary instruction and predicting competencies occurred less than 40% of the time. There were different activities during the vocabulary instruction that included giving word meaning, making sentences, using context clues, giving synonyms, and playing games. The use of this practice is consistent with research done by Baumann (2009), Pearson et al. (2007) and Connor et al. (2004) who indicated that vocabulary instruction was part of reading comprehension instruction. This study's finding indicates that teachers are clearly aware of the connection between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, and its role as a foundation skill for success in reading comprehension. However, the limited activities during instruction in teaching students unfamiliar words seemingly contributed to their inability to answer questions posed, as proffered by Ness (2011) and Almasi & Garas-York (2009). This may be due to teachers' lack of knowledge in teaching vocabulary, or it may be that most teachers recognise the lesson as reading comprehension lesson and not a vocabulary lesson per se.

Teachers allowed students to summarise or paraphrase text in seven lessons or 47% of the total lessons. All the teachers used the practice at least in one lesson, but no teacher used it in all. Sequencing a text's events was not a popular practice, occurring in only 27% of the number of



lessons. While no teacher used this practice in all lessons, two did not use it at all while two teachers used it once, and one teacher adopted it twice.

Likewise, providing reading comprehension strategy instruction occurred in only 4 out of the 15 lessons (27%). Like sequencing, this practice occurred in the least number of lessons. Overall, only three reading comprehension strategies were taught: predicting, summarising, and generating questions. This occurred in lessons done by three teachers. These relatively limited foci undoubtedly impact students' grasp of strategies which, in turn, impact skill development (Dewitz et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2003). The situation becomes acute as students were rarely provided with the instruction as to how to comprehend the text, and there were limited explanation, modelling, and guided practice. The findings of this study converge with those of Durkin (1978- 1979), Duffy (2009) and Pearson (2010) who found that teachers spend little time directly teaching students how to comprehend text. The findings of Durkin's research also indicated that teachers assessed comprehension rather than explicitly explaining and modelling how to comprehend text, which also transpired in this research. Whereas teachers were knowledgeable about some of the components that are critical for effective reading comprehension instruction, they lacked an understanding of current and meritorious approaches of actually teaching the skills.

**Major Finding #2: Strategy Instruction Delivery**

Strategy Instruction, with its six-pronged foci on Mentioning, Description, Modelling, Guided Practice, Independent Practice, and Application, was examined in detail as this is indicative of the components of the GRRM, championed in the literature. Only three of the 15 lessons reflected any aspect of strategy instruction, as depicted in Figure 5.

Components of Strategy Instruction	Teacher and Lesson Number			
	Ms. Miller Lesson #1 (Predicting)	Ms. Williams Lesson #3 (Predicting)	Ms. Gibson Lesson #1 (Summarizing)	Ms. Gibson Lesson #1 (Asking Questions)
<b>Mentioning Strategy</b>	√	√	√	√
<b>Describing Strategy</b>	√	x	√	x

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<b>Modelling Strategy</b>	x	√	x	√
<b>Guided Practice in Using Strategy</b>	√	√	√	√
<b>Independent Practice in Using Strategy</b>	√	√	√	√
<b>Applying Strategy</b>	x	x	x	x

**Figure 5: Components of Strategy Instruction Present in Three Lessons**

In teaching different reading comprehension skills across the three lessons, three teachers mentioned the strategies they were adopting, provided guided practice using the strategies and allowed for some independent practice afterwards. None of the teachers created opportunities to apply the strategies to new text. In teaching the skill of predicting, both Ms. Miller and Ms. Williams mentioned the strategy, but, unlike Ms. Miller, no strategy description was provided by Ms. Williams. Contrariwise, whereas Ms. Williams modelled the strategy, Ms. Miller did not. In teaching the skill of summarising, Ms. Gibson, the teacher, mentioned and described the strategy but did not model its use. On the flip side, while asking questions in the same lesson, Ms. Gibson mentioned the strategy and modelled it but did not describe it.

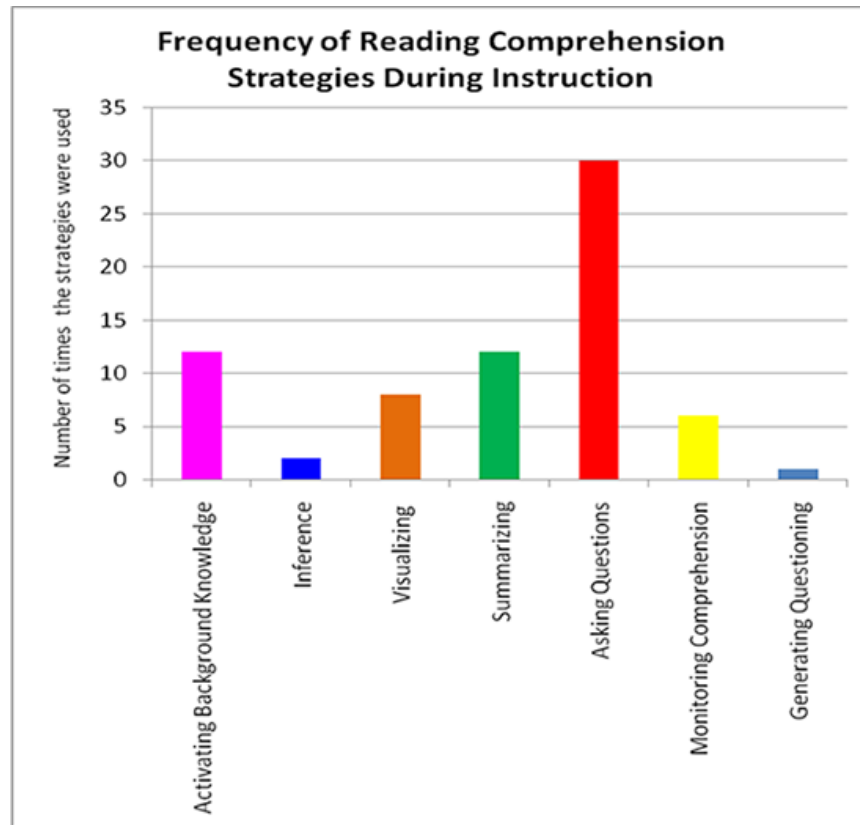
That minimal elements of strategy instruction occurred – and in only three of the 15 lessons – is telling about teacher practice vis-à-vis the approaches and requirements of effective reading comprehension delivery. The three different skills of predicting, summarising, and asking questions that featured in the lessons suggest that instruction is very limited to teaching a few strategies. Seemingly, teachers lack the knowledge and insight of current strategy instruction delivery, or perhaps have become somewhat complacent in effecting the various phases of gradually shifting responsibility for knowledge creation and application to students. The GRRM, endorsed as a crucial paradigm was not adhered to in totality by any of the teachers; rather, elements employed suggested a more resigned approach to classroom delivery. Apart from the sparing use of critically needed strategy explanation and modelling in some lessons, none reflected the application of skills as deemed significant for the development of

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effective reading comprehension competencies (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

**Major Finding #3: Reading Comprehension Strategies**

“Actual reading comprehension strategies and their frequency in lessons are reflected in Figure 6.”



**Figure 6: Type and Frequency of Reading Comprehension Strategies**

The most common strategy adopted, 30 times, was the teacher asking questions. This finding dovetails with the literature about teachers’ affinity for asking questions as the major strategy in reading comprehension classrooms (Ness, 2011; Taylor et al., 2003; Durkin, 1978-1979). It is indicative of questioning as a comfortable assessment tool that suggests

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traditionalism when used without incorporating other means of assessing understanding.

Activating background knowledge and summarising tied for the second highest number of times used, 12 times each. Visualising came in next, used eight times. Monitoring comprehension closely followed being used 6 times while making inference was used only twice. Generating student questions only materialised once. These findings are in keeping with Connor's (2004) research that stated less than one minute was spent on strategy instruction in the primary classrooms, while Taylor et al. (2003) reported that it features only 2-9% of the time in Grades 1-4. Evidently, teachers in this study are rarely teaching reading comprehension strategies. Perhaps they are not familiar with the strategies and current delivery practices. The impact is that students will not be equipped with skills to adequately comprehend text. This runs counter to the Rand Reading Study Group's (2002) recommendation of teaching children different strategies to foster comprehension skills.

**Major Finding #4: Teachers Attitudes Towards, and Beliefs About, Reading Comprehension Instruction**

The major points of all the semi-structured interviews are succinctly captured below, indicative of teachers' prevailing attitudes and ascribed beliefs regarding reading comprehension.

Literacy and reading comprehension play an important role as they involve teaching skills and strategies to help children make sense of a passage. Teaching reading comprehension must be undertaken by all teachers as it helps students to understand what they read. Ms. Gibson stated:

*"It is a foundation skill that is needed to learn anything. If you can't read, and understand what you read, it will be difficult to engage in lifelong learning."*

Ms. John supported the point highlighting that reading comprehension instruction plays a major role as students have to be taught how to interpret what they read:

*"In order to do any other subject area well, a student must be able to read and understand."*

Reasons for teaching reading comprehension, a major component of reading instruction, are two-fold: it is part of the curriculum, and it gets

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students to discuss topics, enabling them to speak about their experiences and, in the process, develop thinking skills. Ms. Williams believes:

*“It gives students the foundation skills for understanding all other subjects’ areas. When they are able to understand what they read they can learn anything.”* Ms. Miller claimed that, *“It is not just for Language Arts but for other subject areas; as a matter of fact, it is for lifelong learning. It also involves teaching students strategies for understanding and checking understanding.”*

For this reason, she teaches reading comprehension daily. Theurer (2006) is adamant that teachers value comprehension, an assertion supported in this study. It is clear that all five teachers have a highly positive attitude towards teaching reading comprehension and place high priority on it due to its significant role in all disciplines. Since attitudes and beliefs influence classroom practices (Freedman & Carver, 2007), the positivity displayed among teachers is very promising for the acceptance, integration, and execution of current paradigms of teaching reading comprehension.

Although teachers understand reading comprehension instruction and its importance, they did not possess a knowledge of current strategies and approaches that may be adopted. The heavy reliance on their teachers’ manual, limited in focus and range, possibly contributes to this. Despite their training and qualifications, the teacher’s manual becomes the standard for all delivery, thereby affecting teacher throughput and, ultimately, student competencies.

### **Recommendations**

Pertinent recommendations may be offered that address all stakeholders in reading comprehension instruction. These are directed specifically towards the schools within the educational district that formed part of this study, but can also be considered for applicability to other primary schools across Grenada,

First, teacher participants in this study should expand and improve their professional repertoire of skills, competencies and knowledge in reading comprehension and its instructional delivery. Adherence to all phases of the GRRM should become the epitome of instruction. This will positively impact their planning and preparation, classroom activities, and management of time while engaging in instruction that is current, interesting and of relevance. Students stand to benefit greatly from the wider gamut while making mundane and tedious lessons, experiences of

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the past. New or recalibrated instruction and strategies incorporated will also increase the probability of student attainment of behavioural objectives and higher order thinking skills in reading that may be transferred to other disciplines and other technologies.

Second, the current national Teachers' Manual should be replaced or amended immediately. Teachers are seemingly bound to this without realising how prohibitive it is for effective instructional delivery in the reading comprehension classroom. Efforts should be made to source an updated manual which would encompass content, delivery strategies, activities, and support measures for teachers in line with 21<sup>st</sup> Century reading comprehension approaches. Perhaps a recalibration with pivotal amendments, drawing on teacher experiences, can be applied to the existing manual, for infusion at a later stage.

Third, throughout the school terms, teachers ought to be encouraged to adopt a professional reflective practice. In so doing, they can be brutally honest in understanding what works, what needs debunking, what requires emphasis and what should be their new methodological stance. Not only does this give teachers a realistic, pragmatic approach to their work but it also builds problem-solving skills and efficiency.

Fourth, principals, school administrators and the Ministry of Education are charged with creating and providing opportunities for teachers to participate in ongoing professional development workshops. Model sessions on teaching reading comprehension strategies should be an element to guide and prepare teachers accordingly. Consideration should be given to adjusting workloads of staff so the language arts subject leader or literacy coordinator at the school can provide additional support that mirrors the GRRM for teachers. Likewise, clinical supervision that is developmental without being punitive should become a reality for teachers, in conjunction with school and education. Similarly, school management should seriously consider how timetabling can be amended to facilitate additional sessions in reading comprehension since this becomes the backbone for success across the primary school curriculum.

Fifth, schools should have periodic workshops with parents providing them with information that can be used to help their children develop related skills. Parents can assist their children through their own competencies or through the use of YouTube videos, et cetera, regarding desirable strategies. Partnering with parents is key for sustained application of the new paradigm, potentially yielding a community-based approach to effecting change.

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Finally, the related curricula of Grenada's Teacher Training College should undergo an overhaul of its dated content and approaches to reading comprehension and become more in line with current best practices that are implemented across the Caribbean crucible and beyond in other territories of the Global South that share historical, educational, and cultural legacies. Adoption of the proven GRRM should become a cornerstone in such curricula.

### **Conclusion**

Reading comprehension remains an important academic and functional skill characterising life-long learners and literate citizens (Ness, 2011; Shanahan et al., 2010). Teachers have the important responsibility of enabling students to reach this stage. This is predicated on the adoption of current, best-industry instructional strategies and practices in the reading comprehension classroom. Positive attitudes and solid professional beliefs complement this assertion.

This study interrogated instructional strategies and teacher attitudes towards reading comprehension in five selected schools in Grenada. Five Grade 4 teachers and one hundred and thirty-six Grade 4 students participated in this multi-methods enquiry. Non-participant classroom observation, document review and semi-structured interviews were the principal data-collecting techniques utilised over a four-week period. Each teacher delivered five reading comprehension lessons. Findings were presented and analysed under four major areas: teaching practices utilised; strategy instruction delivery; reading comprehension strategies; and teacher attitudes and belief.

Chief among the findings was that many teaching practices do not provide explicit and direct reading comprehension instruction. Teachers mainly engaged students in activities that provided information on the text's content, assessment activities that largely entailed teacher questioning, and drills. Likewise, very little strategy instruction is provided, and students were not taught a variety of strategies deemed necessary by the scholarship for successful navigation in the reading comprehension classroom. A major finding was that strategy instruction lacked significant components of the GRRM, the most current reading comprehension paradigm that generates success among students. Despite these, all five teachers displayed positive attitudes and articulated professional beliefs about the value, place, instruction, and need for reading comprehension instruction. However, teachers seemingly lacked deep-seated pedagogical knowledge of current approaches and

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instructional strategies that may be utilised today. Overall, they rarely provided the systematic, explicit instruction that is required during classroom instruction.

A gamut of recommendations predicated on this study's findings become applicable. These speak largely to the vocation of engaging in reading comprehension instruction as it involves teachers, language arts subject leaders and literacy coordinators, and teaching materials. Similarly, recommendations have also been proffered for school principals and other administrators, parents, and Grenada's Teachers' Training College, and, by extension, the country's Ministry of Education.

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