

Original Article

Barriers to Junior High School Learners Reading in Ghana: The Case of AKOASE Schools

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Abstract: The issue of barriers to reading among junior high school learners in AKOASE Schools, Ghana is a critical concern that warrants attention. The study investigated the underlying factors contributing to the inability of Junior High School Three learners in AKOASE to attain proficient reading skills. The study provided insights into the specific obstacles faced by these students, thereby contributing to the broader understanding of literacy challenges in Ghana. It employed a descriptive survey design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data from learners and teachers in AKOASE R/C Basic School, AKOASE Methodist Basic School, and AKOASE Presby Basic School. A total of 120 learners completed questionnaires, and in-depth interviews were conducted with six teachers. The findings revealed significant inadequacies in the school environment, including a severe lack of reading materials and insufficient library resources, which hinder students' ability to engage in regular reading activities. The study also highlighted that while teachers are making efforts to support reading development, they face significant challenges due to resource constraints and the need for enhanced training. Additionally, the study identified a general waning of interest and enjoyment in reading among learners, influenced by socio-economic factors and a preference for non-text-based media. Psychological barriers, such as anxiety and fear of failure, further exacerbated reading difficulties. The study concluded that addressing reading difficulties among Junior High School learners in AKOASE requires a comprehensive approach. Recommendations include enhancing school library resources and integrating digital and multimedia tools into reading programs.

Keywords: barriers, junior, high school, learners, reading, Ghana, non-text-based media

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of barriers to reading among junior high school learners in AKOASE Schools, Ghana is a critical concern that warrants attention. According to [1] reading ability is defined as the ability to understand and interpret written text. It requires a variety of skills, including decoding words, comprehending terminology, and drawing conclusions about the meaning of a document. Reading is a fundamental component of language proficiency that is acquired by pupils [2]. To be deemed a proficient reader, a person must be able to read fluently as well as engage with the material on a deeper level, analysing and synthesizing information to derive meaning. According to [3] pupils are considered proficient in reading when they can comprehend the meaning of words based on contextual cues, even if they are unable to phonetically sound out the letters of the corresponding item. Proficient reading and writing abilities enable individuals to accurately comprehend diverse forms of written materials [4]. Reading is a complex and purposeful activity that involves active participation, comprehension, and adaptability. It demands a substantial investment of time and resources to develop [5]. According to [6] reading is

essential for both student academic progress and national growth. Students who acquire an interest in reading are more likely to succeed in school, as many classes and assignments need reading comprehension [7]. An author [8] posits that, strong reading skills can help individuals think more critically and creatively, leading to better problem-solving abilities and a deeper understanding of the world around them. Furthermore, reading abilities are important for academic performance since they improve students' understanding and retention of information. When students can read and comprehend information quickly and accurately, they are better able to absorb and retain knowledge from textbooks, lectures, and other course materials. It can lead to greater grades, improved exam performance, and overall academic success. In fact, studies [9,10] have found that children with great reading skills have higher Grade Point Average (GPAs) and are more likely to graduate from college than their counterparts with lesser reading ability. Although language proficiency is crucial for educational success, achieving fluency in reading is a challenging process that can hinder students' reading ability, learning, and academic performance due to various interacting factors. Study has established that socioeconomic status plays a crucial role in determining reading proficiency. Children from lower socioeconomic status (SES) households may have restricted availability to reading materials, diminished exposure to language-rich events, and a scarcity of educational resources in their homes [11]. These conditions can result in challenges in orthographic processing, which is linked to the visual understanding of words and letters. On the other hand, pupils from higher socioeconomic status (SES) families who have difficulty with reading generally face difficulties in phonological processing, which refer to their ability to assemble sounds into words [12]. The home literacy environment is crucial in influencing a child's reading development. An environment that provides enough opportunities for literacy engagement, such as engaging in shared book reading, having access to a wide range of reading materials, and having parents who serve as role models for reading enjoyment, can enhance a child's early literacy skills and their desire to read. On the other hand, if students do not have these experiences, they may struggle with reading since they may not have a solid understanding of language, comprehension, and a passion for reading [13]. The efficacy of reading instruction and interventions in schools can also have a profound influence on students' reading proficiency. Utilizing effective reading strategies, such as actively evaluating comprehension, employing graphic organizers, and participating in metacognitive activities, can significantly improve text comprehension [14]. The reading performance of students might also be influenced by their attitudes towards reading. Student's reluctance to participate in reading activities and enhance their skills might be attributed to negative attitudes and a lack of desire, which are frequently caused by on-going difficulties with literacy [15]. The proficiency and instruction of educators are crucial in tackling reading challenges. Teachers who possess the expertise and abilities to recognize reading difficulties and apply instructional methods based on solid evidence can provide more effective assistance to children with various reading requirements [11]. Reading development can also be influenced by external variables, such as the social environment and parental engagement. Supportive family situations and favourable parental attitudes towards schooling can improve reading outcomes, but a lack of such support might result in difficulties [16]. As a professional teacher, reading abilities are important for pupils' learning outcomes. However, the reading abilities of learners are inadequate. It has become necessary to examine the factors accounting for inability of Junior High School three pupils to read at AKOASE Roman Catholic (R/C) Basic School, AKOASE Methodist Basic School and AKOASE Presbyterian Basic School. In contrast to the pressing concerns regarding the development of proficient readers among students, the teachers of AKOASE Circuit observe reading difficulties among pupils. There are numerous challenges associated with reading among students in AKOASE which includes poor vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, wrong spellings, slow reading pace, and flawed grammar. These challenges often stem from a lack of vocabulary and limited exposure to reading materials. Additionally, some students struggle with decoding words, making it difficult for them to fluently read and comprehend texts. As a result, the

teachers at AKOASE Circuit have implemented various strategies and interventions to support students in developing their reading skills and overcoming these challenges. However, pupils neglect to undertake reading tasks, and fail to use the library. The decline in English Language proficiency among pupils, particularly at the Junior High level, has garnered the interest of scholars, educational policymakers, the general public, and the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC). Although reading is widely recognised as a crucial factor for academic achievement and overall success, pupils face difficulties. Moreover, difficulties in reading can give rise to social and emotional concerns, including diminished self-confidence, heightened worry, and sadness, which can have an impact on learners, particularly students, who encounter difficulties with reading proficiency. With the exception of the study conducted by [15] in the Tamale Metropolis, limited studies have been done in Ghana on the study topic making it crucial to undertake the study to bridge the gap in the literature and provide practical suggestions for improving the reading abilities of pupils. The study investigated the underlying factors contributing to the inability of pupils attending Junior High Schools three (JHS) in AKOASE to attain proficient reading skills.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study which was undertaken in the AKOASE Circuit in the Birim North of the Eastern region was involved three schools (AKOASE R/C Basic School, AKOASE Methodist Basic School, and AKOASE Presby Basic School). The population, sample, sampling, study design, instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis are presented. The study investigated the underlying factors contributing to the inability of pupils attending junior high schools (JHS) in AKOASE to attain proficient reading skills. The study utilized a concurrent triangulation mixed-method design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the barriers to proficient reading among Junior High School pupils in AKOASE. The design enabled simultaneous data collection for both methods, allowing for comprehensive analysis and cross-validation of findings through integration at the interpretation stage. The quantitative strand involved a descriptive survey design, employing structured questionnaires to collect data from 120 pupils across three schools in AKOASE. The method facilitated the measurement of various factors contributing to reading challenges, such as availability of resources, teacher support, and environmental conditions conducive to reading. The qualitative aspect included in-depth interviews with six teachers from the involved schools. The approach provided deeper insights into the contextual and nuanced factors affecting reading proficiency, such as teaching methods, availability of reading materials, and the educational environment. The qualitative data were analysed thematically to extract significant patterns and themes relevant to the study questions. Data from both components were analysed separately according to their respective methodological frameworks. The integration occurred at the data interpretation stage, where findings from the quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews were juxtaposed and combined to form a holistic understanding of the barriers to reading proficiency. The integration helped in validating the quantitative data with qualitative insights and vice versa, enhancing the reliability and depth of the study conclusions. AKOASE is a settlement located in the Birim North District of the Eastern Region of Ghana. The Birim River, an important source of diamonds, flows through the district. The total land area of the Birim North District is approximately 566.5 square kilometers (218.7 square miles). AKOASE is situated at an elevation of 214 meters above sea level. In AKOASE, varieties of educational facilities cater to different levels of learning, from primary schools to senior high schools, and potentially access to tertiary education through affiliations with universities. The population of the study constitutes all Junior High School Three students of AKOASE R/C Basic School, AKOASE Methodist Basic School, and AKOASE Presby Basic School. The study population is presented below:

Table 01: Study Population.

School	Population of Learners
AKOASE R/C Basic School	90
AKOASE Methodist Basic School	180
AKOASE Presby Basic School	150
Total	420

Therefore, the targeted population for the study is 420 learners. In the study, both probability and non-probability sampling techniques was adopted for the study to get samples that can be generalizable to the populations under study [17]. Firstly, the study adopted the stratified random sampling technique. The JHS 3 students formed strata according to the three schools captured in the study. The main concept behind stratified sampling is to break down a diverse population into smaller, more uniform groups [18]. The division aims to guarantee that the units within the sample frame have similar characteristics related to the study's focus within each subgroup (referred to as "strata"), while being different in terms of these characteristics among the various strata. The proportional approach was then utilized to make sure that each stratum contributes an equal percentage of the overall population to the sample frame [19]. Secondly, the simple random technique was used to select respondents from each stratum to ensure that each member of the population has equal chance of participation [20]. The sample for the study was drawn from the population of Junior High School Three students which is presented in Table 1. The sample size was determined using the Yamane's (1967) formula which is given as:

$$n = N/1+Ne^2$$

Where:

- n = Sample Size
- N = Population Size
- e = Degree of Error (in proportion, not percentage)

Given population size (NN) = 420, degree of Error (ee) = 0.05

Plugging in the values: $n = 120.88$.

Thus, the sample size for the study is 120

Therefore, the accessible population is 120 learners. The instruments for data collection were a questionnaire and interview guide. The instrument was developed by the study. The study reviewed relevant literature, existing instruments, and consult with subject matter experts to inform the content. The development process involved several stages, including item generation, content validation by experts, and pilot testing. The study was considered various formats, such as Likert scales, closed-ended questions and open-ended. The questionnaire was administered to the pupils of the three schools while the interview was conducted for selected teachers at the schools. The questionnaires were divided into five sections. The first section was used to collect data on the demographic data of the respondents while the remaining sections covered the study objectives. In-depth interviews were conducted with 6 class teachers who usually engage the pupils in reading. The instruments went through a two-step validation process, involving both face and content validity assessments. To ensure face validity, the questionnaires was shared with colleagues within the same program, and their feedback and suggestions was solicited and carefully considered. The input from these colleagues was used to refine the questionnaires before they are officially administered. Additionally, the study supervisor reviewed

the instruments to assess content validity. The supervisor evaluated whether the individual items in the questionnaire accurately represent the variables of interest and ensured that the instruments effectively measure their intended concepts. In essence, the supervisor confirmed that the instruments aligned with their intended purpose. The questionnaire was administered by the study with the aid of two study assistants. The data was collected during break hours and the questions were asked clearly for the pupils to understand. Formal consent of the respondents was taken before data collection. The purpose of the study, risks, voluntary participation and issues of anonymity was explained to the respondents. To ensure credibility and reliability, the study acknowledged and mitigated potential biases during data collection. The study provided sufficient time for participants to respond to the questionnaire and interview questions. SPSS was used for data analysis of quantitative data. The use of graphs; pie charts, frequencies, tables, and percentages attracted the application of statistical packages such as Excel and the SPSS. Descriptive statistics was used for analysis. The descriptive analysis included the use of the means, frequencies, and percentages to present the results. Where applicable the results were presented in tables [21]. Furthermore, inferential statistics such as regression and correlation analysis were done to determine the relationship and impact of the independent variables on the dependent variables. As recommended by [22], all statistical tests were done at a 5% significance level. The interview questions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Examining qualitative data involves analysis of texts, visual or audio data. At the end of each session of interview, the study transferred the audio recordings to a personal laptop which was password protected. All the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim taking into consideration of the field notes. To ensure accuracy, the study compared the transcripts with the audio recordings. There was thematic content analysis which involves identifying themes and categories that emerges from the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 02: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Variable	Frequency (N=120)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	58	48.3
Female	62	51.7
Age Group		
10-12	15	12.5
13-14	48	40.0
14-16	45	37.5
17-18	12	10.0
Hours Spent Reading Outside School		
Source: Field Survey (2024)		
Less than an hour	72	60.0
1-2 hours	38	31.7
More than 2 hours	10	8.3

Table 03: School Factors Contributing to Junior High School Pupils' Inability to Read

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
The availability of reading materials in the school library is adequate.	120	1	5	2.3	1.1
Classrooms in my school have reading charts on the walls for us to read.	120	1	5	2.7	1.0
The school provides a conducive environment	120	1	5	2.5	1.2

For reading, including quiet spaces and comfortable seating.					
I am given time during school period to visit the library every week to read books.	120	1	5	2.1	1.3
The school organizes reading programs and events to encourage us to read more books.	120	1	5	2.4	1.1
Teachers regularly recommend books and reading materials to enhance our learning.	120	1	5	3.1	0.9
Our school library is equipped with a diverse range of books, including fiction, non-fiction and reference materials.	120	1	5	2.2	1.2
There are dedicated reading periods in our class schedule that allow us to read books of our choice	120	1	5	2.6	1.0

The availability of reading materials in school libraries is perceived as inadequate, with a low mean score of 2.3 (SD = 1.1). This aligns strongly with the qualitative responses from the teachers, where multiple participants highlighted the scarcity of reading materials as a primary factor hindering students' reading abilities. Participant 1 highlighted the issue, stating: The main factor is limited reading materials in the school. Storybooks, reading books we have limited reading materials for the students to use. The lack of resources limits students' opportunities to practice and improve their reading skills. Participant 2 reinforced the point by saying: Some of the challenges that are leading to students' inability to read is enough reading materials for the learners. The scarcity of books makes it difficult for students to engage in regular reading activities, thereby hampering their progress. Participant 3 also emphasized the non-availability of books as a critical issue: The only factor that is causing their inability to read is books. Non-availability of books. The participants consistently noted that the schools lack sufficient and up-to-date reading materials. The even lower mean score of 2.2 (SD = 1.2) for the diversity of books in school libraries further underscores the issue, suggesting that not only is the quantity of books insufficient, but the variety is also lacking. Participant 4 mentioned: I have one copy each for each class for reading textbooks. And so, I make photocopies for them. It indicates that teachers often have to resort to photocopying limited resources to ensure students have something to read, which is not an ideal solution. The school environment's conduciveness to reading is also suboptimal, with a mean score of 2.5 (SD = 1.2). It suggests that many schools in the district are not providing quiet spaces or comfortable seating for reading, which could discourage students from engaging in reading activities. Time allocation for reading activities is another significant issue. The statement "I am given time during school period to visit the library every week to read books" received the lowest mean score of 2.1 (SD = 1.3), indicating that dedicated reading time is often not provided. It is emphasized particularly when Participant 3 compared current practices to past policies, lamenting the abandonment of stricter reading practices: During my school days, we were forced to learn how to read. Conducting dictation and mental... but nowadays it's not admitted. It suggests that earlier policies, which enforced rigorous reading activities, might have been more effective in promoting literacy. Participant 2 also pointed out that the curriculum sometimes includes content that is too advanced for the students' age level, making it difficult for them to engage with the material. On a slightly more positive note, teachers' recommendations of books and reading materials received the highest mean score of 3.1 (SD = 0.9). While that is still only slightly above average, it suggests that teachers are making some effort to encourage reading. However, this contrasts with the lower score of 2.4 (SD = 1.1) for school-organized reading programs and events, indicating that while individual teachers may be promoting reading, there's a lack of systematic, school-wide initiatives to encourage reading. School policies and practices significantly influence students' reading abilities. Participant 1 discussed the potential benefits of implementing reading clubs, stating: Policies like having

reading clubs help students to read because when we have such clubs, students will be enthused to read and participate in such activities. Reading clubs can provide a structured and supportive environment for students to practice reading. Overall, while the qualitative responses from the teachers primarily focused on the lack of reading materials, the survey results from the students reveal a broader range of issues, including inadequate time allocation for reading, insufficient school-wide reading initiatives, and suboptimal reading environments. Together, these factors create a challenging landscape for developing strong reading skills among junior high school pupils in AKOASE schools. The quantitative data (Table 4) presents a concerning picture of the teacher environment's support for reading. With mean scores ranging from 2.8 to 3.5 on a 5-point scale, most factors are rated below average, indicating significant room for improvement in schools' efforts to promote reading

Table 04: Survey Responses of Teacher Factors Influencing Junior High School Pupils' Inability to Read

Statement	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S. D
My teacher provides enough individualized attention to students who struggle with reading.	120	1	5	3.2	1.0
My teacher has access to sufficient reading materials and resources to support effective reading instruction.	120	1	5	2.8	1.1
My teacher encourages us to read aloud in class.	120	1	5	3.5	0.9
My teacher encourages me to practice reading regularly both in and out of the classroom.	120	1	5	3.3	1.0
My teacher provides constructive feedback and guidance to help me improve my reading skills.	120	1	5	3.4	0.8
My teacher gives lessons to learners who have problems with reading properly.	120	1	5	3.0	1.1
My teacher incorporates various teaching methods to address different learning styles in reading.	120	1	5	3.1	0.9
My teacher creates a positive and supportive classroom environment that fosters a love for reading.	120	1	5	3.3	1.0

Table 05: Survey Responses of Individual Factors Contributing to Junior High School Pupils' Inability to Read

Statement	N	Min.	Max	Mean	S. D
I enjoy reading to my brother, sister, friend or relative.	120	1	5	2.8	1.2
I get bored when I tries to read a book.	120	1	5	3.4	1.1
I do not like answering questions that come below the passage	120	1	5	3.2	1.2
I lack interest in the topics or materials assigned for reading.	120	1	5	3.5	1.1
I prefer watching videos or listening to audio rather than reading.	120	1	5	3.7	0.9
I find it difficult to focus on a book for an extended period.	120	1	5	3.6	1.0
I feel excited when I start a new book.	120	1	5	2.9	1.2
I enjoy discussing what I've read with others.	120	1	5	2.7	1.1

Table 06: Survey Responses of Effects of Reading Difficulties among Junior High School Pupils

Statement	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S. D
I actively participate in classroom discussions and activities.	120	1	5	2.9	1.1
I effectively communicate my ideas and thoughts in social settings.	120	1	5	3.1	0.9
I feel confident in my ability to understand the subjects taught in school.	120	1	5	2.8	1.0
I regularly complete my homework assignments on time.	120	1	5	3.0	1.1
I feel stressed about my academic performance.	120	1	5	3.5	1.0
I am comfortable seeking help from my teachers when I don't understand something.	120	1	5	3.2	1.1
I participate in extracurricular activities or clubs at school.	120	1	5	2.7	1.2
I have a good balance between my schoolwork and personal life	120	1	5	2.9	1.0

The table reveals that students with reading difficulties struggle with classroom participation and academic confidence. The mean score for active participation in classroom discussions and activities is only 2.9 out of 5, indicating below-average engagement. It aligns with Participant 4's observation: Because they are not able to read, sometimes they feel belittled in the class. They feel whatever the teacher is doing, they don't care because they are not able to contribute or read. The lack of participation can create a cycle of disengagement and further hinder learning progress. Students' confidence in understanding taught subjects is also low, with a mean score of 2.8. The lack of confidence is directly linked to reading difficulties, as explained by Participant 1: Reading difficulties affect them in all the other subjects... if they are not able to read the question and understand the question, they can't give the correct answers. It highlights how reading difficulties permeate all aspects of academic performance, not just language-related subjects. The highest mean score in the table (3.5) corresponds to feeling stressed about academic performance. The stress likely stems from the challenges students face across all subjects due to their reading difficulties. As Participant 3 pointed out: Their inability to read will end up in getting bad results during examination. Because even if you are doing science or math, it involves reading and understanding. The stress can further impair students' ability to perform well, creating a negative feedback loop. Table 6 shows a moderate score (3.0) for regularly completing homework assignments on time. It suggests that while some students manage to keep up with homework, many struggle. The difficulty could be attributed to the extra time and effort required to complete assignments when struggling with reading. The balance between schoolwork and personal life also suffers, with a mean score of only 2.9, indicating that reading difficulties can impact students' overall quality of life. Students reported slightly above-average ability (mean score of 3.1) in effectively communicating ideas and thoughts in social settings. However, the contrasts with the teachers' observations about social withdrawal. Participant 1 noted: The future consequences are that it lowers their self-confidence because they can't read. The discrepancy might indicate that while students can communicate in casual social settings, they may struggle in academic or more formal contexts. The data shows that students are somewhat comfortable seeking help from teachers when they don't understand something (mean score of 3.2). However, the score isn't particularly high, suggesting there's room for improvement in creating an environment where students feel more at ease asking for assistance. It is crucial, as Participant 3 mentioned that reading difficulties can result in students feeling frustrated and lacking confidence, making them "not willing to engage in reading activities. The lowest mean score in the table (2.7) is for participation in extracurricular activities or clubs at school. That low engagement in extracurricular activities could be a result of the psychological impact of reading difficulties. As students struggle with academic tasks and feel less

confident, they may be less inclined to participate in additional school activities, further isolating themselves from potential learning and social opportunities. Overall, the data paints a picture of students grappling with the far-reaching effects of reading difficulties. These challenges impact not only their academic performance across all subjects but also their psychological well-being, social interactions, and overall school experience. Addressing these issues will require a holistic approach that not only focuses on improving reading skills but also on building confidence, encouraging participation, and providing comprehensive support to affected students.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study on factors contributing to junior high school pupils' inability to read in AKOASE schools reveal a complex interplay of school, teacher, and individual factors that align with and expand upon existing literature. The discussion will analyse the findings in relation to the conceptual framework and previous study, highlighting areas of agreement and divergence. The study's findings regarding school factors strongly align with existing literature on the importance of the school environment in promoting reading literacy. The low mean scores (ranging from 2.1 to 3.1) for various school-related factors indicate significant room for improvement in schools' efforts to promote reading, echoing the concerns raised in previous study [23]. One of the most striking findings is the inadequacy of reading materials in school libraries; with a low mean score of 2.3. This aligns closely with literature emphasizing the crucial role of access to diverse reading materials in developing reading skills [24]. As highlighted in the conceptual framework, the accessibility and quality of reading materials are key school factors that facilitate the development of reading skills. The scarcity of resources noted in the study corroborates the findings of [25], who suggested that students in poorer schools may lack the necessary resources to meet their reading achievement requirements. The low mean score (2.2) for the diversity of books in school libraries further underscores the issue, suggesting that not only is the quantity of books insufficient, but the variety is also lacking. The finding aligns with the literature's emphasis on the importance of a rich school literacy environment, as noted in the conceptual framework [26]. The lack of diverse reading materials can significantly hinder students' exposure to different text types and genres, which is crucial for developing comprehensive reading skills. The study also reveals that the school environment's conduciveness to reading is suboptimal, with a mean score of 2.5. The finding supports the literature's emphasis on the importance of a positive school atmosphere in promoting reading literacy. As noted by [27], a favorable social atmosphere in schools has the potential to mitigate the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement. The suboptimal reading environment found in the study suggests that schools in the AKOASE district may be missing opportunities to create supportive spaces that could help overcome socioeconomic barriers to reading achievement [28]. Time allocation for reading activities emerged as a significant issue in the study, with the lowest mean score of 2.1 for dedicated library time. The finding aligns with the literature's emphasis on the importance of structured reading time in schools. The conceptual framework highlights the role of supplementary reading programs and the general atmosphere of literacy within the school as crucial factors [29]. The lack of dedicated reading time revealed in the study suggests that schools may not be fully leveraging these important elements to promote reading literacy. The findings related to teacher factors reveal a mixed picture that both aligns with and diverges from existing literature. The mean scores for teacher-related factors (ranging from 2.8 to 3.5) indicate that while teachers are making efforts to support students' reading development, there is significant room for improvement. The highest mean score (3.5) for teachers encouraging students to read aloud in class aligns with the literature's emphasis on the importance of active reading practices. The practice, as noted in the conceptual framework, falls under effective teaching methods that are essential for enhancing students' reading abilities [30]. However, the overall moderate scores suggest that the implementation of such practices may not be as consistent or effective as the literature recommends.

The provision of constructive feedback and guidance by teachers (mean score 3.4) aligns with the literature's emphasis on the importance of targeted instruction and support. The finding supports the conceptual framework's inclusion of teachers' pedagogical skills and reinforcement techniques as crucial factors in reading instruction [31]. However, the moderate score suggests that there may be room for improvement in the consistency and effectiveness of feedback provision. Interestingly, the lowest mean score (2.8) was for teachers having access to sufficient reading materials and resources. The finding highlights a potential barrier to effective reading instruction that is not as prominently featured in the literature reviewed. While the conceptual framework and literature emphasize the importance of teacher knowledge and pedagogical skills, they may underestimate the impact of resource constraints on teachers' ability to implement effective reading instruction strategies. The qualitative data revealing teachers' efforts to employ diverse strategies, such as grouping students by ability and incorporating phonics instruction, aligns with the literature's recommendations for differentiated instruction [32]. However, the moderate quantitative scores suggest that the implementation of these strategies may not be as widespread or effective as the literature recommends. The findings related to individual factors contributing to reading difficulties reveal some interesting points of agreement and divergence with the existing literature. The general lack of interest and enjoyment in reading among students, as evidenced by low scores for enjoying reading (2.8) and high scores for getting bored when reading (3.4), aligns with the literature's emphasis on motivation as a crucial individual factor in reading development [33]. The strong preference for non-text-based media among students (mean score 3.7) is an interesting finding that may not be fully captured in the older literature reviewed. The preference could be reflecting changing media consumption habits among younger generations and may require updated strategies for promoting reading engagement. The reported difficulty in focusing on books for extended periods (mean score 3.6) aligns with the literature's discussion of cognitive factors affecting reading ability. The finding supports the inclusion of factors such as attention span and cognitive processing in the conceptual framework's individual factors [34]. The high lack of interest in assigned reading materials (mean score 3.5) raises questions about the relevance and appeal of current reading curricula. The finding suggests that there may be a disconnect between assigned materials and students' interests or backgrounds, an issue that may not be fully addressed in the existing literature. The qualitative data highlighting anxiety and fear as significant factors affecting students' reading abilities adds an important dimension that is not prominently featured in the quantitative survey or the literature review. The finding suggests that psychological factors may play a more significant role in reading difficulties than previously emphasized in the literature [35]. The findings on the effects of reading difficulties among junior high school pupils largely align with the existing literature but also provide some nuanced insights. The low scores for active participation in classroom discussions (2.9) and confidence in understanding taught subjects (2.8) corroborate the literature's emphasis on the wide-ranging impacts of reading difficulties on overall academic performance [36]. The high level of stress about academic performance (mean score 3.5) aligns with the literature's discussion of the psychological impacts of reading difficulties. The finding supports the conceptual framework's inclusion of emotional factors as key components affecting reading ability and academic performance [37]. The moderate score for completing homework assignments on time (3.0) and the low score for participation in extracurricular activities (2.7) highlight the pervasive effects of reading difficulties on various aspects of students' academic lives. These findings expand on the literature by illustrating how reading difficulties can impact time management and engagement in school life beyond just academic performance. The slightly above-average ability to communicate ideas in social settings (mean score 3.1) presents an interesting contrast to the literature's emphasis on the social withdrawal often associated with reading difficulties. The finding suggests that the relationship between reading difficulties and social communication may be more complex than previously thought and warrants further investigation. The findings of the study have

several implications for educational practice and policy in the AKOASE district and potentially beyond. The severe lack of reading materials and resources highlights an urgent need for increased investment in school libraries and reading programs. That aligns with the literature's emphasis on the importance of a rich literacy environment [38] but suggests that current resource allocation may be falling short of what is needed. The moderate scores for teacher factors suggest a need for enhanced teacher training and support in reading instruction. While that aligns with the literature's emphasis on teacher quality [39], the findings highlight specific areas where improvement is needed, such as access to resources and implementation of diverse teaching strategies. The individual factors revealed in the study, particularly the preference for non-text media and lack of interest in assigned materials, suggest a need for innovative approaches to reading instruction that can engage today's students. It may require updates to traditional reading curricula and teaching methods to better align with students' interests and media consumption habits. The psychological factors highlighted in the qualitative data, such as anxiety and fear associated with reading, suggest a need for more holistic approaches to reading instruction that address not only cognitive skills but also emotional and psychological barriers to reading [40]. Future study could delve deeper into the relationship between socioeconomic factors and reading difficulties, as hinted at in the qualitative data and supported by previous study [41]. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of innovative reading instruction methods that incorporate multimedia elements could provide valuable insights for addressing the preference for non-text media among students.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study have shed light on the critical barriers to reading proficiency among Junior High School Three pupils in AKOASE. One unexpected finding was the pronounced lack of reading materials and resources in the school libraries, which significantly hinders students' ability to engage in regular reading activities. The scarcity was more severe than anticipated and suggests a systemic issue within the educational infrastructure of the AKOASE schools. A possible explanation for the could be budgetary constraints or prioritization of resources towards other areas deemed more critical. The anomaly highlights the need for a reassessment of resource allocation within these schools to ensure that literacy development receives the attention it deserves. Another notable deviation from expected outcomes was the significant preference for non-text media among students. The preference could be attributed to the increasing influence of digital technology and multimedia content, which are more accessible and engaging for students. The finding suggests that traditional reading methods might need to be supplemented with digital and multimedia resources to cater to the evolving preferences of students. Integrating technology into reading programs could potentially enhance engagement and motivation. The study also revealed that while teachers are attempting to support students' reading development, they are significantly hampered by a lack of resources and training. It was somewhat anticipated but underscored by the data more sharply than expected. It suggests that improving teacher training programs and providing adequate resources could have a substantial impact on students' reading abilities. Moreover, professional development programs focusing on innovative teaching strategies and the use of technology in reading instruction could be particularly beneficial. One surprising insight was the profound psychological impact of reading difficulties on students, manifesting as anxiety, fear of failure, and reduced self-confidence. The psychological dimension is often overlooked in discussions about reading proficiency but emerged as a significant barrier in the study. Addressing the requires a holistic approach that includes not only academic interventions but also psychological support. Schools could benefit from implementing counselling programs and creating a more supportive and encouraging learning environment. Overall, the study has provided new insights into the multifaceted nature of reading difficulties in AKOASE schools. It has highlighted the critical need for improved resources, innovative teaching methods, and psychological support to

enhance reading proficiency. By identifying these key areas, the study contributes to a better understanding of the problem and offers practical solutions that can be implemented by educators and policymakers. In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of a comprehensive strategy to tackle reading difficulties, one that combines adequate resources, effective teaching practices, and psychological support. The integrated approach could significantly improve reading proficiency among Junior High School pupils in AKOASE, ultimately leading to better academic outcomes and overall personal development.

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