

TOWARDS THE ENHANCEMENT OF LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY GRADES: TEACHERS' EVALUATION OF A READING INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This study examined teachers' perspectives of a reading intervention program at the Grade I level in primary schools. Using a purposive sampling strategy, interviews were conducted with teachers who evaluated the implementation of the Spice Reader Programme. The themes generated from the study revealed perspectives on training, literacy improvement, supporting factors, challenges, and solutions. The findings revealed that the teachers rated the level of preparation needed to implement and sustain the program as effective. Students are experiencing success in the program regarding phonic awareness including fluency, decoding, and segmenting. However, parental involvement, student regularity, punctuality, and learning difficulties seem problematic in the program. The program can be enhanced through the use of teacher creativity, professional development, additional resources and effective parental engagement programs. The Spice Reader program can consider consolidating evidence-based practices, explicit strategy instruction, comprehensive teacher training, incorporation of family involvement, technology, and structured comprehension strategies to provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing the Programme. The Ministry of Education should consider developing similar programs appropriate to each grade level to sustain literacy within Grenadian schools.

Keywords: Reading intervention, literacy, phonic awareness, literacy challenges, Grenada.

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been debate among policymakers and educators in Grenada and the Eastern Caribbean about improving students' literacy performance, as data have shown lower-than-expected performance in crucial assessment areas. The Ministry of Education has encouraged and sought various literacy programs to approach the teaching and learning of language in primary schools over the last two decades. A few organizations, such as the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Hands Across the SEA, supported the MOE to improve primary school children's reading and writing competencies. Several programs to enhance the teaching and learning of reading and writing have been introduced in primary schools. One such program is the Spice Reader, implemented at the Grade One level in primary schools. The program includes a student handbook and teacher's guide deliverables, capacity-building workshops for ministry officials, principals, literacy coaches, and Grade One teachers, as well as on-site support for the implementation and sustenance of the program.

The Spice Reader Literacy Programme is a prominent initiative within Grenada's education system to enhance students' literacy skills. Using appropriate methods, parents and teachers can stimulate children to learn to read and write in a fun way through the media and game activities provided so that children do not feel bored in learning, children become active, and children's curiosity will appear naturally. Additionally, parents and teachers play a crucial role in developing children's potential, particularly in literacy development. They should also use

appropriate methods to engage children in fun and interactive activities related to reading and writing.

Stone et al. (2024) concluded that despite increases in attendance and enrollment worldwide, children are yet to acquire basic reading skills. Prior research has consistently highlighted the importance of early academic skills for subsequent student achievement and development (Weber & Heidenreich, 2018). Rabiner, Carrig, and Dodge (2016) assert that failing to master basic academic skills can lead to falling further behind over time and becoming less engaged in academic work, thus adversely affecting students' academic trajectory over an extended period.

1.1 Problem Statement

An examination of the World Bank reports on literacy rate reveals the most recent rate for Grenada was 98% in 1980. This outdated information does not paint a picture of the current state of affairs in Grenada. Data from examinations done internally and externally indicate that there is a cause for concern. Minimum Competency Testing, an internal assessment done at the Grade 3 level, indicates that the students are performing above the mid-point level in Language Arts. However, the results have gradually declined over the last five years. Other internal assessments, such as MCT at Grades 4 and 5, indicate that the students have been performing below acceptable standards over the last five years. An external assessment, the Caribbean Primary Exit Examination, revealed a similar trend, indicating that the performances in Language Arts are below the acceptable standards of the Ministry of Education. Poor performance in Language Arts in Grades 4, 5 and 6 suggests that early academic skills, particularly literacy, have been underdeveloped in primary schools.

Over the last two decades, Grenadian primary schools have implemented a few literacy programs as the Ministry of Education sought to address the literacy within these schools. These programs were made possible through grants from funding agencies, and it was expected that the schools would ensure continuity with the programs to improve the literacy skills of the early-grade learners in Grenada. One such program, the Spice Reader Phonics-Based Reading Programme, was first implemented in Grenada in 2015 by the Grenada Schools Incorporated (GSI) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education to develop and improve student literacy outcomes. Evidence from the Minimum Competency testing, Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), and Teacher-made tests suggest mixed results in students' literacy performance over the years.

While schools are given a variety of literacy programs to address literacy issues within schools, it is still being determined how these programs are implemented and whether they effectively and efficiently address literacy concerns, particularly those relating to equity between the sexes. In essence, it is still being determined whether implementing literacy programs in primary schools has impacted the students' literacy performance.

1.2 Rationale

The Ministry of Education has expressed concern about literacy based on the low performance in various assessment measures at the primary grade levels. Evaluating the Spice Reader Literacy Programme within Grenada's education system is necessary to assess its impact and effectiveness in improving students' literacy skills. While schools are supported using the Spice Reader literacy program, it needs to be clarified if it effectively and efficiently addresses the literacy concern, particularly regarding equity between the sexes. This examination can provide valuable feedback to the Ministry of Education on the issues surrounding implementing a literacy program and the benefits derived from its use. Moreover, much can be learned about

the program's effectiveness, efficiency, equity and sustainability. That knowledge can be transferred to successfully implementing other similar instructional programs within the Grenadian school system.

This research can add to the Literature and provide significant insights into the successes and challenges, best practices and the way forward relating to literacy learning, development and instruction. These understandings can be instructive in planning and further guidance or support the implemented literacy and other instructional-related school programs. The study's findings can guide future professional development to aid in the early childhood delivery of quality literacy instruction, and the planning unit can use this study to inform strategies and policies to improve literacy in schools.

The study can make contributions to knowledge base on the effectiveness and sustainability of reading intervention in the Grenadian primary school context. It is a significant evaluation of the Spice Reader as the central voice in the study is that of the participants implementing the Programme. The study identifies issues relating to the implementation of the Spice Reader, which can lead to recommendations for improvements.

1.3 Purpose

This research project evaluated the implementation of the Spice Reader in primary schools. The study examined the programs' effectiveness and sustainability based on the perspectives of teachers who are charged with the implementation. The evaluation seeks to answer the question, "How and to what extent does the implementation of the Spice Reader enhance the literacy of early-grade students?" The findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on the effectiveness and sustainability of literacy programs in the Grenadian primary school context.

1.4 Research Questions

The research will be guided by the central research question, which states:

How and to what extent does the implementation of Spice Reader enhance the literacy of early-grade students?

Several specific research questions supported this question:

- 1) To what extent are the teachers prepared to implement the Spice Reader Programme in their classrooms?
- 2) What aspects of students' literacy, if any, have been improved using the Spice Reader program?
- 3) What conditions have supported students, teachers, and parents participating in the Spice Reader programs?
- 4) What challenges are encountered in participating in the Spice Reader programs, and how are those challenges alleviated?

2. Literature Reviewed

The development of literacy in children has been a fascinating process with many dimensions as being supported several educational theories and theoretical foundations. There have been viewpoints expressed from a sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic perspectives each adding to the body of knowledge on literacy acquisition.

The sociocultural perspective on literacy emphasizes the role of social contexts and cultural practices in shaping literacy experiences. Esposito et al. (2015) argue that literacy practices are deeply embedded in sociocultural contexts, highlighting how power relations and politics influence the identification and valuation of these practices. This perspective is echoed by

Boakye (2015), who discusses how different communities may prioritize collective oral traditions over individual reading, thereby impacting students' reading habits and literacy development. The implications of these sociocultural factors are significant, as they shape not only the literacy practices of individuals but also the educational policies that govern literacy instruction.

Moreover, integrating linguistic and cognitive dimensions into literacy development is critical. Nurakhir et al. (2020) outline three essential dimensions of academic literacy: linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural, emphasizing that these dimensions interact to facilitate learning in various disciplines. This interaction is crucial for understanding how students engage with texts and develop their knowledge. The cognitive aspect is particularly highlighted in the work of Storch and Whitehurst (2002) who identify oral language and code-related precursors as foundational skills for later reading and writing abilities. This aligns with the notion that literacy is not merely a set of skills but a complex interplay of cognitive processes, social interactions, and cultural contexts.

In addition to sociocultural and cognitive frameworks, the role of dialogic teaching in literacy development must be considered. Brown (2016) discusses how dialogic pedagogy fosters literacy and language development through exploratory talk and argumentation, which is essential for critical thinking and comprehension. This approach aligns with the principles of social constructivism, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and dialogue among learners. Such pedagogical strategies are vital for creating inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse literacy needs.

The importance of early literacy experiences is underscored by Anderson and Anderson (2018), who emphasize that young children's understanding of print as a meaningful entity is foundational for later literacy achievement. This foundational knowledge is further supported by the transactional perspective on literacy, which posits that literacy development is a dynamic process involving interactions between children and their environments (Whitmore et al., 2004). This perspective highlights the necessity of engaging children in meaningful literacy experiences, as these experiences lay the groundwork for their future reading and writing skills. Furthermore, the concept of automaticity in reading is pivotal in understanding literacy development. Roembke et al. (2019) purported that a key predictor of reading fluency is automatic word recognition, indicating that as children raise the automatic word recognition, they will be able to distribute their cognitive alliances to more developed reading processes including comprehension. The view expressed by Roembke shows similarity to the theory of automaticity which major tenant rests on reading fluency as a determinant for acceptable comprehension and ultimately literacy development.

There is a contention in the literature that literacy development occurs in stages. Gove and Wetterberg (2011) attest that this development is volatile at times due to determinants such as the language features and contextual and individual factors influencing the child. Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework representing the development of written literacy in children which is underscored in three phases. According to Seng et al. (2018), the model misses key features of literacy, however, it is highly associated with the Early Grade Reading Assessment.

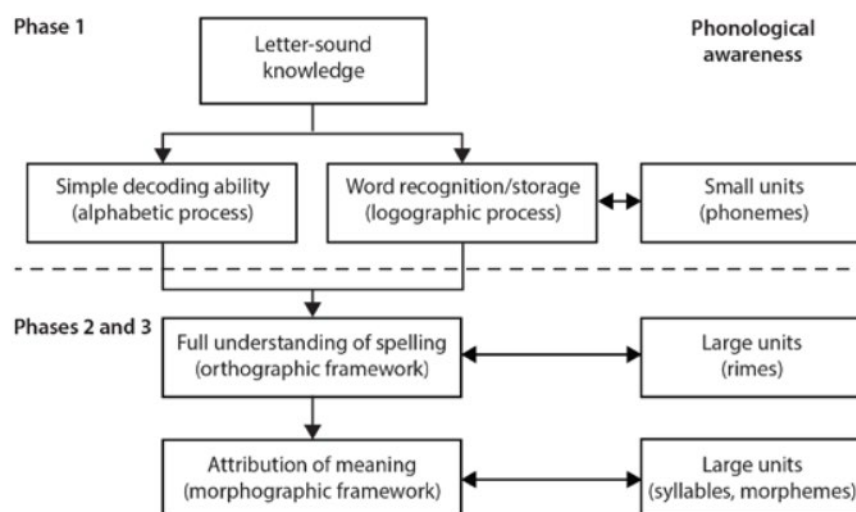


Figure 12. *A three-phase model of reading.* Source: Gove, A., & Wetterberg, A. (Eds.). (2011). There has been some consensus on what must be facilitated in a child's early years to develop literacy using written texts. Oral language, phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension are critical areas proposed by Knoza (2014) and supported by National Literacy Panel (NICHD, 2000). The facilitation of any reading program should consider these rudiments as key components to teaching reading. The pre-k-3rd Grade, for the last two decades, has focused on the five pillars of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Foorman et al., 2016). Previous research indicates that teachers are not highly prepared to teach the core concepts of the five pillars of reading and, therefore, may not be able to provide adequate instruction and support to all learners (Clark et al., 2018; Mather et al., 2001; Pittman et al., 2020).

3. Research Methodology and Design

The study will adopt a qualitative methodology to evaluate the literacy programs implemented in primary schools. Patton (2002) contends that qualitative research aims to understand the phenomenon in context-specific settings, such as a "real world setting, where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). The study used a phenomenological research design, which involves an analysis of teachers' experience of the phenomenon in schools and implementing the Spice Reader Programme.

3.1 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview was used to collect valuable data for evaluating the Spice Reader Literacy Programme. The self-developed interview protocols collected the participants' experiences and perspectives about the literacy program at their school. The interviews were digitally recorded with permission from the participants.

3.2 Population, Sample and Sampling

The study population consists of primary school teachers implementing the Spice Reader program within the Grenada education system and overseeing the primary school literacy component. The study purposively selected 30 schools as points of interest. These schools were selected based on the students' baseline performance on the Early Grade Reading Assessment 2023. The ERGA measures four components: Letter Naming Fluency, Letter Sound Fluency, Non-Word Reading and Reading Comprehension. Fifteen teachers of high-performing schools and fifteen low-performing schools on the ERGA formed the sample. This purposive selection

approach of thirty Grade One teachers is consistent with a qualitative research design that aims to construct an in-depth understanding and evaluation of implementing the Spice Reader Literacy Programme in Grenadian schools.

3.3 Data Analysis

A Thematic Approach, which involves preparing, organizing and coding data, theme development based on codes, and narrative presentation of findings, will be used to analyze and interpret the data collected from interviews. The thematic approach allows researchers to identify and analyze interview passages linked by a common theme and categorize them to establish a theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide to conducting thematic analysis was adopted to analyze the interviews in this research project. They describe this as a process of analysis that involves constant movement back and forth between the whole data set, the coded data being analyzed, and the analysis of the data being produced.

3.4 Trustworthiness

A team of literacy experts found the interview instrument valid, and piloting was undertaken to ensure that they could capture the necessary data and address the research questions posed by the study. The researcher also utilized member checking of the interview transcripts and the practice of reflexivity and bracketing of beliefs and assumptions during the data collection and analysis process to avoid any misrepresentation of the meaning of participants' perspectives.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study will use consent forms to ensure voluntary participation from the participants. It will also involve creating information letters explaining the nature and purpose of the research and matters relating to privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. The information letters and consent forms will be distributed to all school principals and teachers involved in the study, with a request to return the signed consent forms to the researchers to indicate willingness to participate. All participants will be fully aware that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw without negative consequences. All data to be collected and analyzed will be coded to protect the anonymity of the participants; for example, pseudonyms will be used to represent the schools. Confidentiality and anonymity were further maintained by using safeguards such as informing participants of the study and any possible risks, using pseudonyms for the teachers and schools participating in the interviews, informing them of their rights to refuse to participate in the study or withdraw at any time without any explanation to the researcher mainly since the researcher works for the Ministry of Education. Other actions involved protecting the confidentiality of the data during and after the research process.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented based on the research questions and associated themes developed from the data analysis process. The teachers' responses provided various commonalities of their experiences and perspectives on the Spice Reader Programme while highlighting the use of technology in instruction, other supporting factors, the challenges and the extent to which the implementation of Spice Reader enhances the literacy of early-grade students. While the teachers' perceived challenges are highlighted, the findings also offered realistic resolutions to address the issues surrounding the program.

4.1 Training

The theme Training was developed to address the research question, "To what extent are the teachers prepared to implement the Spice Reader Programme in their classrooms?". Initial training in the form of workshops introduced teachers to the program. Additionally, annual

training sessions are held at the end of every school year, including the initial workshops and refreshers for new and experienced teachers. The teachers explained that the training provided a well-informed structured approach to literacy instruction and was also engaging and interactive, with teachers practicing and refining their skills. The teachers rated the training highly and praised the facilitators and organizers for the comprehensive nature of the program. Ratings of 4.5 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5 were given to the training program.

Although the teachers expressed general satisfaction with the training received to prepare for implementing the Spice Reader program in the Grade One classroom, they noted a few points for consideration to improve the training. One teacher suggested that the initial training could be more beneficial with a longer format and that the refresher workshops would be more practical in nature. Another teacher surmised that the training could be improved by having tutors perform model lesson plans, making it easier for teachers to follow and implement. Likewise, another teacher mentioned the need for the lesson plans to be provided by tutors to restructure the training process and make it more effective.

Tummons et al. (2020) emphasize that many teachers feel unprepared to implement literacy strategies effectively, and this disconnection between teacher preparation and classroom practice suggests the need for comprehensive literacy training within teacher education programs. The importance of teacher training in literacy strategies is further reinforced by Tummons et al. (2020), who noted any gap in preparedness can hinder the effectiveness of literacy interventions, as teachers may need more confidence in their ability to teach reading effectively. As a consequence, it is important for the edification of teachers to include training that supports the facilitation of literacy learning. Additionally, Mishbah (2020) purported that literacy education should not merely replicate elementary school methods but should be tailored to the developmental stages of preschoolers.

4.2 Literacy Improvement

The theme, Literacy Improvement, was developed regarding the research question, "What aspects of students' literacy, if any, have been improved using the Spice Reader program?". There was no doubt in the teachers' minds that implementing the Spice Reader Programme provided literacy gains for the students. According to the teachers interviewed, the program has helped students with various aspects of reading, including letter sounds, decoding, phonics awareness, blending and segmenting, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, with variation in progress among the students. One teacher believes that the program has helped students with reading difficulties and other students to develop a love for reading, though improvements are minor and varied. Another teacher noted that the program included activities that make learning engaging and interactive, such as thumbs-up/thumbs-down games and vocabulary exercises. Likewise, another teacher commented on the program's comprehensive approach to helping children develop a strong reading and language skills foundation. Teachers expressed positive experiences, including improving children's reading skills and confidence. One teacher noted students' excitement about the program and the improved color in the required textbook.

Miciak et al. (2017) found that intensive reading interventions over one or two years can yield substantial improvements in word-level outcomes, although the effects on reading comprehension may vary. This highlights the importance of sustained intervention efforts to achieve meaningful literacy gains.

4.3 Supporting Factors

To answer the research question, "What conditions have supported students, teachers, and parents participating in the Spice Reader programs?" the theme of Supporting Factors was developed from the thematic analysis of the data. All teachers reported that the school deemed literacy development a challenge to resolve. Consequently, the schools resorted to techniques or strategies to alleviate the issue. At one of the schools, specific days are designed for reading, where students move through different levels to avoid "reading intimidation". Staff sessions are held to discuss materials and methods, focusing on getting new methods and materials to assist reading. A teacher commented on the usefulness of the principal's support and supervision in the Programme to enable students to succeed in literacy. Another teacher lamented the importance of teacher creativity in using the materials to encourage literacy development. Continuous assessment and feedback were also highlighted as supporting factors to monitor children's progress and adjust teaching strategies accordingly.

The teachers reported that parental involvement was considered the critical strategy the school developed. Parenting sessions are organized to help parents assist with literacy at home, though one teacher reported low attendance. Teachers commended principal leadership for organizing parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings and inviting experts to educate parents on literacy and related matters.

It has been established that reading intervention and programs provide excellent support for student literacy development, particularly for students with learning difficulties. Many of these interventions are grounded in research, theory and practice. Wanzek et al. (2020) emphasize that such interventions can significantly improve foundational reading skills, although they note that students often need to improve reading fluency and comprehension even after intervention. The finding of this study accentuates the need for the provision of support to the Spice Reader Programme and the use of strategic approaches or procedures to mitigate against circumstances that hinder the children's foundational reading skills and cognitive reading processes.

Susanto and Rifai (2018) argue that teachers' institutional support and authorization are critical for successfully executing literacy initiatives. Their study illustrates that when teachers perceive literacy programs positively, they are more likely to engage actively in their implementation, thereby enhancing the overall literacy outcomes for students. This aligns with findings from Wanzek et al. (2017), who assert that supplemental reading interventions in small groups can effectively address reading difficulties among elementary students.

4.4 Challenges and Solutions

In response to the research question "What challenges are encountered in participating in the Spice Reader programs, and how are those challenges alleviated?" the Challenges and Solution theme was developed. The teachers highlighted several challenges within the Programme, of which the lack of parental involvement stemmed as a fundamental challenge. One teacher stressed the lack of reinforcement at home as a significant contributing factor to students' poor reading skills and noted that parental support is minimal, with only a few parents actively helping their children within the program. It was further mentioned that many parents need to review homework and engage with their children's learning despite teachers sending reminders and resources to the home. Another teacher explained that children who receive more significant support from home support tend to perform better in literacy. Many teachers acknowledge that many parents are hesitant to acknowledge their children's learning difficulties, which can hinder the use of external support.

The teachers described challenges associated with the learners. Some teachers explained that students' readiness varies, with many being unprepared to learn and others needing more reinforcement. Students' regularity and punctuality were presented as challenged. They reported that the issue is compounded when the students are distracted by environmental factors and use technological gadgets for non-educational purposes. One teacher believes that using these gadgets hinders the children's language development.

Teachers acknowledged the challenges children with disabilities face when using the Programme but emphasized the need for individualized support and adaptations. In addition, the teachers accentuated the importance of gradual practice and teacher support in helping all children to progress in their literacy skills. One teacher noted that although the program helps build fluency and vocabulary, there are limitations in developing comprehension skills.

Teachers reported on some specific issues associated with the program. A teacher referred to experiencing some students getting bored with the program's routine and others having challenges with the closeness of words and lines in the passages used in the Programme. The teachers discussed the challenges of the program's structure as being too rigid and the need for more time, available material, and flexibility in its implementation. The teachers shared that instruction does not target creative writing and grammar, limiting the Programme. Teacher preparation and teacher competence were highlighted as aspects that created challenges for the teachers using the program.

The teachers surmised that the following can be adopted to curb issues relating to parental involvement:

- Organizing parenting workshops and extending the Programme to adults, with training sessions and a reward system for parents to motivate, understand and support their children's learning.
- Literacy programs should be implemented in different communities to address the issue broadly.
- Explore ways to increase parental involvement and support in literacy development.
- Provide guidance to parents on how to support their children's literacy development at home.
- Encouraging and developing ongoing communication and collaboration between parents and teachers on a consistent basis.

The teachers recommended various strategies to deal with the issues associated with the program's administration. These strategies included:

- Provide additional practical or hands-on training for teachers distributed throughout the academic year.
- Incorporate other materials and activities to complement the program, making it flexible and effective.
- Expanding the program's time allocation and integrating it with other literacy materials.
- Develop continuous professional development for teachers to improve the program's effectiveness.
- Encourage teacher creativity in adapting the program to individual children's needs.
- Provide guidance on using technology in literacy instruction and development to enhance the Programme and make it more engaging.

- Provide recordings of the songs and letters used in the SPICE reading program, and use more local pictures to make the materials relevant and relatable to the children.
- Incorporate more reading comprehension strategies in the SPICE reading program.
- Investigate opportunities to incorporate more open-ended questions and activities in the Spice Reader program to address areas not currently covered.
- Separating the program from the language block for better focus.

The teachers suggested that external support can be provided by:

- Advocate for the Ministry of Education to offer more targeted literacy-focused programs and resources.
- Continuous assessment and feedback to monitor children's progress and adjust teaching strategies accordingly.
- Explore ways to allocate more dedicated time for the Spice Reader program within the classroom schedule.

The role of the family must be underscored in studying the factors critical to literacy improvement through structured reading programs. Engaging families in the literacy process supports children's learning and strengthens the home-school connection. Al-Maadadi et al. (2017) concluded that involving families in literacy programs can foster cooperative partnerships between parents and educators, significantly impacting children's literacy skills. Many reading intervention programs rely heavily on family involvement in children's literacy development. Moreover, the role of parents and families in supporting literacy development is critical, particularly in multicultural contexts. Denessen (2023) emphasizes the need for culturally responsive literacy programs, as parents' contributions to early literacy development can vary across cultural contexts. This suggests that the Spice Reader Programme recognizes and values diverse literacy practices within families and communities.

Furthermore, structured reading interventions that emphasize comprehension strategies have been shown to be effective for struggling readers. Wanzek et al. (2017) found that interventions focusing on reading comprehension can assist students across various levels of reading proficiency, demonstrating the importance of tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. This approach aligns with the principles of differentiated instruction, which advocate for adapting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learners. The emphasis on comprehension is particularly crucial, as it enables students to engage with texts meaningfully and develop critical thinking skills.

Soto (2023) deemed that teachers' perceptions of reading programs can influence their willingness to adopt them, thereby affecting students' literacy outcomes. According to Soto (2023), the need for targeted professional development that addresses the specific challenges faced by teachers is evident, as it can empower them to implement effective literacy interventions.

Technology integration in literacy education also presents new dimensions for understanding literacy development. Lund et al. (2019) explored how digital literacies can transform educational practices, emphasizing the need for educators to adapt to technology-rich environments. This transformation necessitates rethinking traditional literacy instruction and incorporating digital tools that facilitate engagement and learning in contemporary classrooms. Hassenfeld et al. (2020) explored how programming can serve as a tool for enhancing literacy skills across various levels, suggesting that the skills learned in programming can translate into improved writing and reading abilities. This innovative approach engages students in

meaningful literacy activities and equips them with valuable skills for the digital age. The intersection of technology and literacy development represents a promising future research and practice avenue.

The amalgamation of evidence-based practices, explicit strategy instruction, comprehensive teacher training, family involvement, technology, and structured comprehension strategies provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing the Spice Reader Programme. Should the Programme explore and implement these strategies, it is essential to adopt a multifaceted approach that considers the diverse needs of learners and the contexts in which they are situated.

5. Conclusion

The study outlined that teachers perceived the Spice Reader Programme to be an effective reading intervention that can be sustained through continuous professional development, targeted merger with a parental literacy program, revised training and more significant support from internal and external stakeholders. The program's efficiency enabled students to improve literacy in fluency, phonic awareness and strategies such as blending and segmenting. The evaluation suggests that implementing similar programs at higher grade levels, targeting various components of the language arts program, can encapsulate similar results acquired from the Spice Reader Programme. Hence, the Ministry of Education can partner with external bodies to develop and implement literacy programs similar to the Spice Reader Programme's plan.

This study concludes that teachers are well prepared to implement the Spice Reader Programme despite opportunities for developing a more rigorous and targeted training design. The value of the school leadership should be considered in the survival and success of the program. School leaders are critical to solving the problems that may impede the implementation of the Programme. In addition, the teachers' competence to develop proper assessment techniques and procedures to collect data on students' literacy improvement or shortcomings is vital for incorporating strategic decisions in the classroom that may assist in alleviating the shortcomings of the Programme or the challenges faced in the Programme.

One component of the Programme that should be considered is the edification of the parents to ensure that they can become involved in their children's literacy development. Developing a strategy to get parents more involved in the Spice Reader Programme may be helpful.

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