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Teachers' and Markers' Perceptions on Vocabulary Assessment: Bridging Instruction and Evaluation in the LGCSE Context

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary proficiency is documented as requisite for reading comprehension and overall language proficiency; nevertheless, learners in Lesotho insistently flounder in the comprehension segment of the LGCSE English Paper II examinations. This study explores the perceptions of teachers and markers about vocabulary assessment as a nexus between teaching and assessment within the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education English syllabus. Employing a qualitative research approach embedded in the interpretivist paradigm, data was collected using semi-structured interviews with nine English Language teachers and LGCSE markers purposively selected from secondary schools and examination panel. Thematic analysis showed that learners' meagre comprehension performance typically comes from a dearth of vocabulary breadth and depth, an inadequate reading culture, and the dearth of unambiguous vocabulary teaching allied with examination necessities. Participants constantly acknowledged "own-word," "inference," and "effect-of-words" questions as the utmost problematic for learners, signifying insufficient contact to inferential reading and contextual vocabulary use. The data exposes a pedagogical-assessment discrepancy, wherein classroom teaching highlights literal comprehension, while assessments gauge inferential and evaluative skills. The study signposts that language proficiency is the vital link between teaching and assessment, and its disregard bears learners' poor performance. It advocates for a well elucidated and contextualized vocabulary teaching, alignment of syllabus and assessment techniques, efficient feedback interchange between markers and teachers, and programmes to indorse a reading culture within schools. Improving these capacities could meaningfully develop learners' vocabulary aptitude and comprehension skills, safeguarding that teaching and assessment practices in English education function cohesively.

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition and literacy development are fundamentally connected to vocabulary growth. Vocabulary knowledge (VK) establishes the groundwork of language skill, impelling learners' aptitude to grasp, construe, and communicate meaning in both oral and written forms (Chung *et al.*, 2025). In English language education, exclusively in locales where English is a second or foreign language, vocabulary aptitude has unswervingly been documented as a fundamental prognosticator of reading comprehension skill (Nation, 2022; Zwier & Boers, 2023). In Lesotho, learners' ability in decoding, inferring, and questioning written English texts, as directed by the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) examinations, is pointedly influenced by their vocabulary depth- understanding of connotation, nuance, and usage- and breadth (extent of known words) (Moea, 2025). Evidence from classroom annotations, examiner reports, and teacher comments recurrently designates that the many secondary school learners struggle to display satisfactory vocabulary control (Newton, 2022), ensuing in low reading comprehension marks.

The LGCSE English Language Paper II reading comprehension (RC) assessments gauge a learner's capacity to understand connotation and denotation, deduce concepts, interpret the author's diction, and address many question types, inclusive of paraphrasing,

word effect analysis (writer's craft), factual questions, phrasal questions, circumstantial meaning, summary, and inferential items. These types of reading comprehension questions necessitate both linguistic proficiency and the ability to adapt to meaning within context. Yearly, the Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL) reports obstinately below-par performance by learners in the reading for understanding part. This unending underachievement goads substantial didactic and assessment questions: Do vocabulary instructional methods in schools kowtow to the standards of the national examination? Do teachers and examination markers have an amalgamated comprehension of the assessment and augmentation of vocabulary? How can discrepancies between teaching and examination contribute to learners' persistent challenges?

This study centres on teachers' and markers' insights vis-à-vis vocabulary assessment and its connection with reading comprehension performance (RCP) in the LGCSE setting. This study intends to explicate the instructive and systemic interruptions that obstruct learners' achievement in reading comprehension tests by groping the practices of vocabulary teaching and the assessment of vocabulary-related skills. This study is vital as it links two central features of language education: teaching and assessment, whose alignment decreases the effectiveness of the general instructional course.

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Vocabulary is unanimously accepted as the keystone of reading comprehension and overall linguistic skill. Perfetti (2007) avows that efficacious comprehension counts on the eminence of a learner's lexical exemplifications, namely: the exactitude and richness with which a learner stores and reclaims word meanings, forms, and contextual relationships. Gough and Tunmer (1986) assert that reading comprehension results from decoding and linguistic appreciation, both of which are expressively reliant on VK. In environs like Lesotho, where English is the medium of instruction (MoI) from upper primary to secondary education, vocabulary acquisition presents philological and mental obstacles (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). Learners must attain both daily communication vocabulary and the academic and literary lexes indispensable to comprehend assessment texts composed in Standard English.

Even though vocabulary is acknowledged as critical, it has commonly been downgraded to the backrow of classroom teaching. Many teachers principally focus on grammatical constructions, comprehension tactics, and memorisation of reading tasks, presuming that vocabulary will grow parenthetically through exposure (Liao *et al.*, 2018; Newton, 2020). Empirical studies (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2010) accentuate that vocabulary acquisition is neither involuntary nor subsidiary; it demands deliberate, methodical, and contextually grounded instruction (Wallace & Ng, 2022). In the LGCSE context, the disproportion between incidental acquaintance and explicit instruction is strengthened by the misalignment of curriculum and assessment (Makoa & Moea, 2025; Matee, 2019). The present LGCSE English Language syllabus highlights reading comprehension and writing expression (National Curriculum Development Centre [NCDC] & Examinations Council of Lesotho [ECOL], 2019) though lacks inclusive strategies on organized vocabulary instruction. Subsequently, teachers employ miscellaneous and often unreliable strategies for vocabulary instruction - some encouraging extensive reading, others providing word lists, and a selected few integrating vocabulary into comprehension undertakings (Moea, 2021).

The practices of markers in assessing the LGCSE English Paper II expose an extra aspect of the issue. Assessment exposes that many learners do not understand the importance of needed expressions in texts and questions, resulting in flawed or disparate responses (Chung *et al.*, 2024; Moea, 2025). Questions like "explain fully," "in your own words," or "describe the effect of the word" divulge how learners' language paucities hamper understanding. Candidates often substitute dictionary synonyms for contextual meanings, misinterpret figurative language, or directly extract interpretations from the text without paraphrasing (Chung, 2023). These patterns show a weightier issue: learners lack the inferential and semantic abilities requisite for contextual vocabulary dispensation (Newton, 2020).

The corollaries of this challenge are widespread. Imprecise construal of examination questions by learners

unfavourably sways their reading comprehension, therefore diminishing their whole English proficiency and academic success (Liao *et al.*, 2018). Contrariwise, teachers meet hitches in merging curriculum content, examination groundwork, and vocabulary augmentation within inhibited instructional times (Chung *et al.*, 2024). Markers, who assess learners' work, identify the results of these instructional deficits however own limited avenues to add to pedagogical transformation (Moea, 2025). The interruption between teaching and evaluation outcomes into a pedagogical-assessment cavity, wherein learners' insufficiencies in vocabulary and comprehension are sustained due to the isolated functioning of teaching and assessment rather than their amalgamation (Black & William, 2018).

Besides, the socio-educational context in Lesotho aggravates these problems. Most learners, predominantly in rural and semi-urban educational institutions, experience English commonly within the classroom, with inadequate exposure to genuine English practice outside school (Gardner, 2006). Limited access to libraries, reading resources, and language-enriched milieus weaken learners' aptitude to boost their vocabulary by autonomous reading (Chung & Fung, 2023; Chung *et al.*, 2025). Teachers constantly show that the "absence of a reading culture" among learners ominously hampers vocabulary and comprehension development (Mustafa *et al.*, 2021). In this context, vocabulary acquisition is restricted by contextual, instructional, and systemic variables, rendering it a tenacious distress for teachers and policymakers.

Therefore, comprehending teachers' and markers' discernments on vocabulary testing produces major understandings into the interaction between instructional methods, learner performance, and assessment standards. This study evaluates whether teachers' classroom tactics adequately prepare learners for the vocabulary and inferential requirements of the LGCSE reading comprehension tasks, and whether examiners' assessments of learners' responses line up with rational prospects based on existing teaching circumstances. This study places vocabulary as dominant to the teaching-assessment continuum and pursues to offer methods to overcome this continuing division.

Notwithstanding the reputation of vocabulary in language proficiency and reading comprehension, learners in Lesotho constantly underachieve in the LGCSE English Language Paper II, exclusively in the comprehension part. Yearly examiner reports underline lasting deficits in word comprehension, incapacity to paraphrase, misreading of question aides-mémoires, and struggle to derive meaning (Moea, 2025). Teachers and markers, while conscious of the prominence of language mastery, habitually function within schemes that do not underscore overt vocabulary teaching or assessment. The result is a systemic incongruity between pedagogical methods and evaluation criteria. The issue presents itself at numerous levels. Learners exhibit shallow VK, pigeonholed by

superficial acknowledgement rather than contextual comprehension. They meet difficulties with “own-word,” “meaning-in-context,” and “effect-of-words” question types, often providing dictionary definitions or replicating phrases from the text rather than articulating the meaning in a sound manner (Moea, 2025). Teachers receive inadequate advice on integrating vocabulary education into comprehension pedagogy. Many people depend on sporadic practices, such as labelling reading excerpts or encouraging learners to gather new vocabulary; even so, these approaches flop to improve the inferential and analytical skills obligatory at the LGCSE level.

During assessments, examiners and markers frequently learn that learners struggle not due to incapability to read, but rather because they cannot comprehend the vocabulary contained within the questions. The lack of systematized collaboration between teachers and markers on the teaching and assessment of language impairs this issue. Teachers highlight syllabus coverage and the augmentation of overall reading abilities, but examiners formulate and evaluate questions that require thoughtful word and semantic understanding. The lack of communication between these two groups bears incongruities between instruction and assessment. Moreover, the LGCSE curriculum miscarries to define vocabulary learning outcomes or recommend practices for vocabulary testing, hence obliging that teachers autonomously interpret the skill. The result is a rambling method of vocabulary growth that yields suboptimal learner results.

This study surfaces from a pressing inevitability to square vocabulary education and examination within the LGCSE English structure. The study aims to identify misalignments by examining the belvederes of teachers and markers, questioning the influence of vocabulary proficiency on RCP, and reconnoitering solutions to expand consistency between instruction and assessment. The findings pursue to boost a unified model of vocabulary instruction and evaluation, guaranteeing that learners are not only presented to new words but are systematically taught on their usage, analysis, and use in applicable contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The correspondence between VK and RC has been extensively established across years of educational research. Researchers agree that VK is the principal language prognosticator of RCP (Nation, 2001; Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Qian, 2002). To read written writings, learners must identify words and understand their meanings, associations, morphological structures, and contextual nuances. Fundamentally, VK aids as the channel between word acknowledgement and comprehension (Perfetti & Hart, 2001). In settings like Lesotho, this link is often unwarranted due to inadequate contact to English in daily life, inadequate obtainability of reading resources, and an intermittent highlighting on explicit vocabulary teaching.

Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

RC is a multidimensional process that involves the interaction of numerous cognitive and linguistic elements. Gough and Tunmer (1986) affirm that comprehension rises from the amalgamation of decoding and language comprehension. VK unswervingly influences comprehension by countenancing learners to construe decoded words. In addition, Perfetti (2007) conjectures that comprehension relies on the correctness, eloquence, and interrelation of lexical representations. Learners who possess extensive, interconnected lexical knowledge are more inclined to infer meaning, analyze figurative language, and engage with texts at a deeper semantic level (Nation, 2022). In contrast, a delimited vocabulary leads to shallow processing, wherein learners read words without creating unified meanings.

Empirical data endorses that mutually vocabulary breadth and depth are conjecturers of RP success crosswise many age groups and linguistic backgrounds. Qian (2002) recognized that both breadth and depth are necessary for reading for understanding. Schmitt (2010) and Moea (2025) revealed that learners who hold wide-ranging and erudite vocabularies have heightened reading comprehension, expressly in events dictating inference and rewording. Research conducted by Pretorius (2002) and Mokgwathi and Webb (2013) in African milieus validates that derisory English vocabulary among secondary school learners deters their comprehension and academic performance, principally in assessments that stress inferential thinking and textual scrutiny.

Vocabulary Teaching and Learning Practices

Notwithstanding its worth, vocabulary teaching is far less prioritized in language teaching. Orthodox educational frameworks, specifically within African contexts, put more stress on grammar, comprehension question responses, and repeated reading than on explicit vocabulary enhancement (Mokibelo, 2016; Webb & Nation, 2017). Numerous teachers assume that vocabulary increases parenthetically from exposure; however, research recurrently shows that learners – chiefly second-language learners – require specific and repetitive teaching to embrace new lexicon (Graves, 2006). Nation (2001) categorizes vocabulary acquisition into three dimensions: meaning-focused input (reading and listening), meaning-focused output (speaking and writing), and language-focused learning (intentional study of vocabulary). Thus, operative vocabulary teaching integrates all three elements within communicative and content-based methodologies. In Lesotho, language instruction is fickle and incompetently developed. Teachers often urge learners to engross with consigned readings and classify unacquainted vocabulary; however, these approaches infrequently encourage deep lexical comprehension. Research in Southern Africa indicates that English Language teachers repeatedly lack training in vocabulary teaching, and as a substitute hinge on textbook-based exercises that stress memorization over contextual application (Manyike, 2017; Motlhaka,

2020). This results in learners who can classify words in seclusion but are incapable to construe their meanings within context - a restraint that unfavorably impacts understanding. Resource limitations among teachers and the encumbrance of extensive syllabi deepen the issue (Matee, 2019; Moea, 2022), resulting in inadequate time for concentrated vocabulary training. As a result, learners approach LGCSE tests missing the lexical proficiency requisite to interpret convoluted texts and suitably address inferential questions.

Vocabulary Assessment and Examination Demands

Vocabulary assessment has developed from simple word recollection testing to multifaceted models that assess breadth, depth, and contextual applicability (Read, 2000; Webb, 2008). National examinations, like the LGCSE, evaluate vocabulary circuitously through reading comprehension passages and assignments that measure inferential reasoning, paraphrase, and diction awareness. Questions like “explain in your own words,” “provide a comprehensive explanation,” or “analyse the effect of words” covertly assess vocabulary proficiency by demanding that learners understand and deploy meaning within context (Moea, 2025). These assessments presume that learners have been systematically taught to interrelate with words at this diagnostic level.

Research on comparable examination-centric systems in Africa submits that this supposition is often unsubstantiated. Studies conducted in Zimbabwe (Dube & Chikara, 2025) and Botswana (Mahoro *et al.*, 2024) show that learners’ subpar performance in English comprehension largely results from deficient vocabulary teaching and a divergence between classroom practices and examination necessities. Examiners show that learners often “lift” phrases straight from texts or use literal dictionary meanings instead of contextual understandings, illuminating a dearth in inferential skills. The issue surpasses classroom performance, addressing the all-embracing apprehensions of language policy, curriculum design, and educational quality in Lesotho. If vocabulary remains to be defectively taught, paradoxically assessed, and ineffectually prioritized, the nation’s educational objectives of nurturing effective English speakers and critical thinkers would remain unachieved, thus downgrading these all-important 21st-century skills of effective communication and critical thinking to secondary urgencies. Subsequently, remedying this deficit is not merely a pedagogical amendment but a question of didactic equity, assuring that learners have the linguistic capabilities needed for knowledge acquisition, outshining in assessments, and engaging competently in an increasingly globalized academic and professional landscape.

Teachers’ and Markers’ Roles in Vocabulary Development
Teachers and markers accomplish distinct but synergistic purposes in developing language expertise and RCP. Teachers concoct and implement instructional practices, while markers scale the efficiency with which learners

display lexical and interpretative skills. When these two roles are cock-eyed, learners meet a pedagogical-assessment disjointedness that weakens learning. Studies by Alderson (2000) and Urquhart & Weir (1998) show that teachers’ classroom practices often do not prepare learners for the language necessities of standardized RC assessments. On the contrary, assessors and examiners, functioning under stiff assessment criteria, may abandon to contemplate the linguistic constrictions characteristic in learners’ sociolinguistic environments.

Empirical research from Lesotho and contiguous nations highlights the obligation for improved configuration between education and assessment. Brookhart (2017) notes that whereas teachers highlight syllabus content coverage, examiners evaluate higher-order comprehension capabilities that entail mastery of forward-thinking lexicon. This disproportion results in constantly insufficient outcomes in the understanding parts of national assessments. Furthermore, markers’ remarks on learners’ responses, regularly underscoring shortages in vocabulary, rarely reach teachers in a controlled manner that could improve instructional practices (Moea, 2024). The lack of this feedback loop bears a cycle of underachievement: teachers persist in teaching vocabulary subtly, learners continue to have problems, and markers constantly punish language deficiencies.

The Lesotho Context and the Need for Bridging Instruction and Evaluation

Lesotho’s English Language education operates within an idiosyncratic sociolinguistic context, in which English functions as the authorized medium of instruction, yet is not the principal language used at home or within the community for the majority of learners. As a result, their experience with English language is confined to the schoolroom, and leisure reading is infrequent owing to deficient means and an underprovided reading culture (Moea, 2024). This environment underlines the implication of both effectual education and adaptive assessment. Teachers recurrently attribute vocabulary insufficiencies to a “lack of reading culture” and “limited exposure,” but examiners steadily recognize “inability to comprehend question vocabulary” as a chief factor underwriting derisory comprehension outcomes.

Current research in Lesotho (Moea, 2022; Moea, 2024) shows that the LGCSE English Language syllabus assumes rather than nurtures VK. Learners are expected to display inferential reading aptitudes notwithstanding insufficient curricular emphasis on the part of vocabulary in simplifying such understanding. This operational gap requires a reexamination of the link between language instruction and assessment. Integrating the belvederes of teachers and markers into this discourse offers indispensable understanding of how pedagogic practices and assessment principles might be aligned. This study enriches the body of literature aimed at coordinating instruction, assessment, and learner progression within African educational systems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study engaged a qualitative research approach drenched in an interpretivist paradigm to scrutinize the viewpoints of teachers and markers apropos vocabulary assessment within the LGCSE framework. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with nine participants, comprising English Language teachers

and LGCSE markers, purposefully conscripted from secondary schools and examinations marking panels. The interviews concerted on participants' experiences regarding learners' vocabulary proficiency, comprehension performance, and assessment methodologies. Below are the participants' demographics tables.

Table 1: LGCSE Grade 11 Teachers

Teacher	Experience	Gender	School location & proprietorship
T1	15 years	F	Leribe Rural – Church
T2	6 years	M	Leribe Urban – Private
T3	5 years	F	Maseru Rural – Govt
T4	10 years	M	Maseru Urban – Church

Table 2: LGCSE English Language Paper 2 Markers

Marking Teacher	Marking experience	Teaching experience	Gender	Position in marking	School location & proprietorship
MT1	20 years	25 years	F	Team Leader	Maseru urban - Church
MT2	15 years	20 years	F	Team Leader	Maseru rural - Govt
MT3	4 years	10 years	F	Marker	Maseru urban - Private
MT4	6 years	13 years	M	Marker	Leribe rural - Church
MT5	6 years	13 years	M	Marker	Leribe urban- Church

Data was recorded verbatim and thematically examined, simplifying the appearance of patterns and themes inductively from participants' narratives. Trustworthiness was established through the triangulation of teacher and marker replies, member checking, and the safeguarding of an audit trail during the analysis. The qualitative method generated deep, contextual visions into the node of instructional and evaluative practices in impelling learners' vocabulary and comprehension outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

The University of South Africa College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee inspected and permitted this study (Approval Number: 2024/05/08/64085694/01/AM). Before data collection, all participants were told of the study's purpose, methodology, and voluntary nature. Informed written consent was attained from each participant, and their prerogative to withdraw from the study at any time without ramifications was overtly conveyed. To uphold confidentiality and anonymity, participants were labelled using pseudonyms (e.g., T1–T4 for teachers and MT1–MT5 for markers), and no personal or institutional identification were exposed in transcripts or reports. Audio recordings and transcriptions were securely protected in a password-protected digital folder available exclusively to the researcher. All data will be well-preserved for five years post-publication and afterwards permanently deleted in acquiescence with the University of South Africa's ethical research requirements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study's findings show that mutually teachers and

markers prompt momentous unease about learners' poor performance in English RP, which they principally attribute to deficient VK. All nine participants established that VK is fundamental to comprehension and overall language competence in the LGCSE English examination. The teachers and markers noted that vocabulary teaching and assessment are incompetently aligned, resulting in a divergence between classroom practices and examination outlooks. This section outlines three intersected findings: (1) teachers' views on vocabulary assessment, (2) markers' insights on learner performance and word proficiency, and (3) the common necessity to connect teaching and assessment.

1. Teachers' Perspectives on Vocabulary Assessment

Teachers specified that most learners display poor or only moderate performance in reading comprehension tests, chiefly due to deficient vocabulary knowledge. T1 stated that there is a straight relationship between vocabulary level and performance, signifying that an inadequate vocabulary results in subpar performance. T3 pigeon-holed learners' performance as "average to below average," while T2 noted that "a lack of understanding of certain words and expressions leads to failure to comprehend the passage, thereby increasing the likelihood of incorrect answers."

Teachers noted that learners habitually engross with texts in a mechanical fashion, engaging apparent approaches like skimming and scanning, which encumbers their comprehension of the underlying meaning of the material. T2 noted learners' propensity to hinge on skimming and scanning skills, regularly deserting to read between the lines, which thwarts their capability to wholly comprehend the text and make workable, commonsensical inferences when necessary. From the teachers, learners' vocabulary

insufficiencies emanate from the early educational stages, where policies of promotion from one class to another and instructional approaches do not underscore mastery of the English language. T4 stressed this systemic flaw by noting: “the criteria for promotion to external classes exclude English, despite it being a passing subject in LGCSE examinations.”

Teachers acknowledged certain question formats that expose learners’ vocabulary inadequacies. These include own-word, inference, meaning-in-context, and effect-of-words questions - tasks compelling learners to reword, interpret, or evaluate language. Teacher 1 stated that “questions requiring extensive vocabulary, the use of one’s own words, those necessitating inference, and those specifically addressing the reasons behind the writer’s choice of words (diction)” are constantly challenging. Marking Teacher 5 (MT5) acknowledged “implicit questions” as needful of extensive thinking and inference, which learners often lack. These include in-your-own-words questions, attitude questions, explain-fully questions, effects-of-words questions, evidence questions, and contrasting questions. The patterns indicate that comprehension complications at the LGCSE level outspread further than reading challenges to incorporate learners’ inability to engage meaningfully with language. Teachers expressed concern that learners’ constrained reading practices expressively underwrite their vocabulary insufficiencies. MT4 noted that a privation of extensive reading and insufficient assertiveness damagingly influence learners’ aptitude to answer open-ended and effect questions. MT2 noted that lack of skills in basic tasks like writing names and spelling words, coupled with a sense of indolence and the belief that “English is not our native language” – inhibits progress. The responses signpost that sociolinguistic attitudes and an absence in reading culture aggravate linguistic barricades. Teachers professed vocabulary as not simply a linguistic distress but a widespread educational and motivational challenge demanding systemic intercession.

Markers’ Perspectives on Vocabulary and Learner Performance

The experiences of markers during the examination marking practice backs the observations made by teachers. Their analysis underscored that a circumscribed vocabulary among learners is a constant and obvious inclination in LGCSE scripts. Markers noted that many learners struggle to correctly construe question stimuli, misinterpret contextual meaning, or offer literal dictionary definitions that are not pertinent to the passage. MT5, who works as both a teacher and a marker, indicated that “students encounter difficulties with implicit questions due to the requirement for extensive cognitive processing and inference-making, which students often lack.” Another marker noted that “even those who appear to know certain words only understand them superficially and lack familiarity with their roots or derivatives.” Markers showed that learners habitually extract

answers verbatim from the passage instead of engaging paraphrasing, which reflects a deficiency in lexical liteness. Marking Teacher (MT) 1 noted that learners often do not make intelligent conjectures as projected, perchance attributable to their difficulty in following the narrative. Many learners misinterpret figurative expressions and idiomatic phrases, indicating limited lexical depth. Markers indicated that efficacious candidates, although limited in number, largely reveal a wide-ranging understanding of both vocabulary breadth and depth. MT4 stated that learners with a comprehensive vocabulary can understand a variety of texts and, importantly, can deduce the meanings of mystifying or abstruse sections. Markers observed that limitations in vocabulary obstruct both comprehension and writing aptitudes. In comprehension summaries, learners regularly employ repetitive, abstruse, or incorrect word choices, thereby misrepresenting meaning. MT2 noted:

The answers indicate that students are unable to reformulate the text in their own words; they replicate what they see without comprehending its meaning. The observations show that vocabulary insufficiency epitomizes both a linguistic and cognitive drawback. This submits that without access to apposite lexical resources, learners are rigorously handicapped to create meaning. Markers agreed that the LGCSE assessment structure takes for granted a level of vocabulary proficiency that the existing teaching system miscarries to dependably deliver. This disconnect results in learners being inadequately fortified for comprehension tasks that compel cutting-edge lexical dispensation. The markers noted that even though teachers aim to improve learners’ language skills, their instructional methods recurrently flop to tally with the diagnostic and inferential necessities of the examination.

Bridging Instruction and Evaluation

Teachers and markers agreed that a gap between pedagogy and assessment exists in the teaching and evaluation of vocabulary. Teachers signposted that though they endeavor to integrate vocabulary into reading lessons, their approaches incline to be incidental and unmethodical. Vocabulary is often viewed as an addition to comprehension instead of its major basis. T2 and MT1 projected approaches comprising the setting up of varied passages for learners to read and present to the class, whereas T3 and MT2 encouraged for extensive reading for pleasure to nurture and develop reading culture. While these activities succor learners to obtain innovative vocabulary, they infrequently address inferential vocabulary use, apposition, or morphological understanding, all of which are indispensable skills for LGCSE RC questions.

Markers contended that assessment apparatuses defectively symbolize the linguistic authenticities existing in the classroom. The level of vocabulary used in various LGCSE comprehension passages is

cutting-edge compared to learners' proficiency levels, resulting in cognitively challenging tasks. MT3 noted that "examinations presume learners have had consistent exposure to English reading, yet many have not." Both groups supported heightened placement between instructional content and assessment criteria.

Participants recommended various approaches to address this gap. Firstly, they recommended that teachers should device explicit and contextual vocabulary teaching that assimilates meaning, use, and form within true reading and writing settings. Secondly, ECOL should offer post-examination comments to schools, particularizing common vocabulary-related insufficiencies to inform instructional practices. The overall feeling is that the customary examiners' reports that are published after examinations are not sumptuous enough vis-à-vis the systemic vocabulary-related flaws. Thirdly, the English syllabus must integrate explicit vocabulary learning outcomes to warrant that teachers underscore methodical lexical expansion. In addition, schools should nurture a reading culture by employing initiatives like reading clubs, library programmes, and learner competitions to augment exposure to a variability of vocabulary sources.

The findings designate that vocabulary proficiency obliges not only as a component of English education but also as the primary linkage between teaching and assessment. Teachers regard vocabulary as necessary for comprehension, while markers identify its dearth as a major cause of underachievement. Both groups support concerted charters that yoke classroom practices to assessment outcomes. This collaboration may perhaps avert learners from facing drawbacks due to systemic irregularities between teaching and assessment.

The enactment of these commendations would result in a more comprehensible language education framework, in which teachers teach vocabulary with an understanding of assessment prospects, markers evaluate with contemplation of instructional backgrounds, and learners engage with vocabulary as an important and practical aspect of meaning-making. Spanning teaching and evaluation embroils not just bringing into line measures but also transmuting vocabulary teaching into a focused, assessed, and maintainable and defensible process that nurtures literacy development within the LGCSE context. The findings designate that teachers and markers enjoy harmonizing understandings that, when combined, can transmute vocabulary teaching and assessment in Lesotho. Both groups diagnose vocabulary as a dire feature in comprehension performance and advocate for an interconnected approach that places vocabulary instruction at the epicenter of pedagogy and assessment. The findings specify that the future of English education in Lesotho relies on this configuration, where teaching schools learners for the lexical requirements of LGCSE, and assessment truthfully echoes the linguistic circumstances present in the classroom.

Discussion

This study's findings indorse that VK is central to RCP,

an inference that is generally validated by universal research (Nation, 2022; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Perfetti, 2007). In the LGCSE context, together teachers and markers observed learners' insufficient comprehension outcomes as symptomatic of inadequate vocabulary breadth and depth. This remark supports the Lexical Quality Hypothesis, which avers that comprehension is dependent upon the productivity and accuracy of lexical representations (Perfetti & Hart, 2001). The participants' recurrent reference to challenges with own-word, inference, and effect-of-words questions backs prior research demonstrating that vocabulary insufficiencies obstruct inferential and evaluative comprehension (Qian, 2002; Pretorius, 2002). The incapability of learners to read between the lines these question types designates that vocabulary teaching in Lesotho is predominantly incidental and deficient. This is congruent with the observations of Mokibelo (2016) and Newton (2020) who noted that several African classrooms prioritize routine comprehension drills over calculated lexical enrichment. Such practices seem to target short-term attainment in examinations however fail to amalgamate learners' understanding of lexical items (ECOL, 2020, 2022). The irony is that, based on the participating markers in the current study, these examination drills do not seem to produce positive results bearing in mind the ubiquitous deficiencies in vocabulary-related examination questions. The study specifies that RC failure in LGCSE examinations stems not only from insufficient reading strategies but also from unfledged lexical competence, which expressly confines learners' cognitive engagement with texts.

Equally noteworthy is the finding where both teachers and markers pinpoint an operational disconnect between vocabulary instruction and assessment. Teachers articulated uneasiness that vocabulary instruction is ineffectually prioritized in the English Language curriculum, while markers observed that assessment items undertake a level of lexical proficiency that learners have not accomplished. This finding supports the avowal by Black and Wiliam (2018) that operative assessment should be based on pedagogical realities. The LGCSE context exemplifies the occurrence of assessment misalignment, as characterized by Wallace and Ng (2023), in which assessment tasks measure competencies that have not been overtly taught. Teachers' observations regarding learners' reliance on memorisation and the practice of 'lifting' responses from texts support findings from studies conducted in Zimbabwe and Botswana (Dube & Chikara, 2025; Mahoro *et al.*, 2024), which show that inadequate vocabulary teaching leads to apparent understanding and rote answers. These studies point out that learners face trials with appropriate meaning, underlining the requisite for overt vocabulary instruction that incorporates linguistic form, function, and meaning. These findings support Nation's (2001) three-dimensional model: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, and language-focused learning, as an indispensable framework for vocabulary teaching in second-language

contexts such as Lesotho. Effecting this three-pronged approach could help synergize the aforementioned binaries where teachers feel the teaching of vocabulary is given less primacy while markers recurrently observe that examinations assume learners have greater lexical skills however assessment scores continue to substantiate otherwise.

This study stretches the discourse to comprise the systemic and sociolinguistic factors impelling vocabulary acquisition in Lesotho. Teachers' focus on the "lack of reading culture" and "minimal exposure to English outside school" highlights the socio-educational challenges acknowledged by Gardner (2006) and Mustafa *et al.* (2021) who contend that limited exposure to authentic English backgrounds confines vocabulary development and reading proficiency. The alignment of teacher and marker viewpoints directs the likelihood of a collective framework where assessment appraises instructional practices, and instruction arms learners for assessment tasks. Vocabulary functions as a serious link between teaching and assessment, a standpoint validated by Alderson (2000) and Brookhart (2017) who accentuate the importance of integrating examiner feedback into educational practices. Aligning teaching practices, curriculum goals, and examination expectations within the Lesotho education system can transmute vocabulary instruction into a thoughtful and continuous process, rather than an incidental result of comprehension exercises. This approach would improve the goal of inaugurating a well-adjusted and equitable English education system that authorizes learners both linguistically and intellectually within the LGCSE framework.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that VK is the main aspect influencing learners' RCP in the LGCSE English Language examination. Teachers and markers admitted that a limited vocabulary breadth and depth inhibit learners' capability to interpret, infer, and gauge meaning in examination texts. The continuing difficulties with own-word, inference, and effect-of-words questions indicate that comprehension failure branches from lexical ineffectuality rather than solely insufficient reading strategies. The findings indicated a systemic misalignment between classroom teaching and assessment outlooks, with teachers accentuating literal understanding while examiners evaluate interpretive and analytical language use. The pedagogical-assessment slit supports the contention by Black and Wiliam (2018) that meaningful learning is accomplished only when teaching, curriculum, and evaluation are commendably aligned. The study highpoints the prominence of improving vocabulary instruction and aligning assessments to improve English literacy outcomes in Lesotho secondary schools. In light of these insights, some recommendations are put forth. Teachers should implement explicit and contextualized vocabulary teaching that integrates meaning, collocation,

morphology, and usage within reading comprehension lessons. Additionally, the Examinations Council of Lesotho, in tandem with curriculum developers, should outline explicit vocabulary learning outcomes and confirm that examiners deliver formative feedback to teachers following each examination cycle. Teacher training programmes must integrate modules focused on vocabulary pedagogy and assessment literacy to afford teachers with effective policies for teaching and evaluating word knowledge. Schools should nurture a continued reading culture by augmenting library resources, launching reading clubs, and implementing autonomous reading projects to upsurge learners' exposure to diverse vocabulary. Assessment design must be assessed to warranty impartiality and progress by aligning linguistic necessities with learners' instructional experiences. Implementing these recommendations would link instruction and evaluation, confirming that vocabulary development is a thoughtful, assessed, and sustained aspect of English language education in Lesotho. In the final analysis and in view of the expedition to hone learners' communicative skills and boost their capacity to think critically – the study recognizes the value of close synchronization of teaching and evaluation. This will guarantee that classroom content attainment is not simply geared towards short-lived examination difficulties but fortifies learners' hold of indispensable language skills which permit them to function optimally as self-assured language users.

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