



Investigating adult learners' experiences from using slow reading as a pedagogical approach

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the utilization of slow reading as a pedagogical tool aimed at enriching the learning experience in higher education, with a particular emphasis on fostering meaningful engagement with academic texts. Drawing upon insights from a qualitative case study conducted within a Norwegian vocational teacher training program, this research challenges the conventional belief that effective learning is synonymous only with speed and efficiency. By adopting a qualitative approach inspired by critical pedagogy, this study investigates the multifaceted dimensions of slow reading as an in-depth learning strategy. The inquiry includes a diverse range of data sources derived from a research and development project, encompassing the perspectives and reflections of both students and educators. The study's findings shed light on how individuals perceive and engage with slow reading as a pedagogical approach and its impact on their learning experiences. Notably, the study reveals that slow reading serves as a catalyst for fostering interaction, contemplation, and the exchange of experiences and novel ideas, ultimately contributing to the creation of an inclusive and dynamic learning environment. In conclusion, this research underscores the potential benefits of integrating slow reading as one among several study techniques within higher education.

1. Introduction

We do need time to think. We do need time to digest. We do need time to misunderstand each other, especially when fostering lost dialogue between humanities and natural sciences. We cannot continuously tell you what our science means; what it will be good for, because we simply don't know yet. Science needs time. (The Slow Science Manifesto, 2023)

As articulated in 'The slow science manifesto,' both science and education demand time for fostering contemplation and ensuring long-term development. In an era marked by globalisation, traditional boundaries of time and space have been redefined (Giddens, 1990). Numerous scholars have called for a departure from the frenetic pace that often characterises modern society and the academic world, emphasising the drawbacks of haste and intense competitiveness (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Conell, 2019; Treanor, 2006; Stengers, 2018). This contemporary era has even been termed 'The age of rage' by the slow movement, encapsulating the rapid pace and restlessness of our times (Honoré, 2004). In the pursuit of quick solutions and instant gratification, we often overlook the depth and richness that arise from deliberate, unhurried pedagogical processes. In his critique of superficial speed reading, Thomas Newkirk (2010) underscored the importance of rediscovering the auditory qualities inherent in written language and finding inspiration in specific text passages. He proposed various techniques that educators can employ to facilitate a slower, more profound reading

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experience. These methods encompass memorisation, reading aloud, paying closer attention (Newkirk, 2010).

Within academia the notion of time-effectiveness exerts a profound influence, shaping perceptions of learning and education. Efficiency reigns supreme, with the definition of a 'good teacher' now intertwined with that of an 'effective teacher.' The quest for improved reading efficiency (Wallace, 2004) and the unravelling of the intricate dynamics of teaching and learning have come to the forefront, leaving students grappling with an overwhelming deluge of information. Students find themselves frustrated, unable to immerse in specific perspectives, question the literature, and savour their learning journey, given the sheer volume of knowledge expected for adeptness. Moreover, a common presumption among educators is that students inherently possess effective learning strategies and reading skills, often disregarding the nuances distinguishing academic reading from casual consumption.

While there is limited literature on slow reading as a pedagogical tool, research shows that taking a reading skills course can significantly improve students' chances of succeeding in the academic world (Cox et al., 2003). Rather than offering a defined reading strategy, slow reading could here be regarded as a pedagogical intention—a conscious effort to decelerate individual or group reading processes. This endeavour creates room for contemplation, questioning, assessment, and discussion, facilitating a sense of ownership over one's time and learning journey. In this project, slow reading was introduced as an academic exercise within smaller groups, composed of four to five participants. At designated points in the text, participants collectively paused to reflect, bridging the gap between new knowledge and prior experiences and ideas. Involving students in the development of this approach aimed to investigate its impact on their academic development and learning processes, drawing upon their reflections and insights (Marton & Säljö, 2005).

Inspired by the prevailing assumptions about effective reading strategies, the study departs from the notion of time-efficiency as the ultimate solution in academia. The project was driven by the aspiration to enrich students' learning experiences through an exploration of an unconventional approach, one that challenges the prevailing culture of information overload and rapid assimilation. The research question was: How can the practice of slow reading, when embraced collectively, contribute to learning within higher education?

The study explores the possibilities and limitations of slow reading as a pedagogical approach, undertaking an analysis of various data sources, including feedback from both students and teachers. The subsequent sections provide the study's contextual background, incorporate relevant theoretical concepts, and offer an overview of relevant research. Then the methodological approach and acknowledgement of its limitations is presented. Subsequently insights drawn from students' experiences are presented, complemented by reflections from two teachers. Finally, the discussion encompasses a series of considerations, grounded in the findings and their implications for higher education.

1.1. The vocational teacher master's programme

The project took place within a master's programme designed for Norwegian students specialising in Vocational Education and Training (VET) didactics. Vocational teaching is a profession based on a type of dual professionalism that is embedded in their professional identity (Andersson & Köpsen, 2015). This programme's primary aim is to equip teachers from practical professions with the ability to bridge their prior experiences with new didactical and pedagogical competencies (see, for example, Colley et al., 2003; Eraut, 2004). The two-year full-time programme provides students with diverse training experiences to further develop their teaching practices in learning environments as VET teachers (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2023a). It fosters the development of academic reading, research comprehension, and writing skills, empowering students to conceptualise and execute didactic projects. At the culmination of their studies, students communicate their findings to the academic community through their master's theses. The programme also serves as a platform for the continuous professional development of VET teachers who choose to advance their academic journey, often after many years of practical experience in a vocation before becoming certified VET teachers. This programme is intentionally designed to accommodate professionals from a diverse array of vocational backgrounds, including healthcare, industry, telecommunications, and more. Participants converge in interdisciplinary groups, enhancing their vocational competence and pedagogical expertise, creating an environment that acknowledges practical knowledge. At its core, this programme aims to facilitate continuous competency development and professional advancement throughout students' academic journey and beyond (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2023b). Participants actively engaged in reflection on vocational practice, enabling them to begin initiatives that enhance competencies contributing to the development of vocational teaching within their specific sectors. Equipped with a versatile skill set, participants systematically analyse vocational practices, plan, and execute research projects, facilitate learning processes, and contribute to enhancing the vocational and didactic dimensions of their organisations. The context for this study is vital for interpreting the findings, as the student group possesses a wealth of life experience, practical knowledge, yet often struggle with academic reading and writing.

1.2. Theories and concepts

In the case of this study, the group consists of adult learners with backgrounds in vocational teaching. The curriculum encompasses perspectives on democracy, knowledge production, and societal power dynamics within the educational system. By equipping students with tools to decode and translate their experiences into the academic knowledge system, we empower them to continue learning independently, fostering their ongoing development. Slow reading as a group-learning strategy not only aids individual comprehension but also serves as a method for creating and sharing experiences on a broader scale.

In the Nordic countries, education has historically been considered a public good closely linked to democratic ideals (Telhaug et al., 2006). Here, students are viewed as equal members of the academic community, not components in a production process but individuals with a voice and mastery over their destinies. These perspectives foster a horizontal structure that promotes problem-solving,

reflection, negotiation, and dialogue, emphasising group collaboration over individual study and project-based learning (Sørbo, 2002). These perspectives on education as emancipation are pivotal for contextualising this study, as both professors and students in this specific setting hold expectations about the organisation of education and believe that learning outcomes extend beyond examination results and individual class performance.

The theoretical framework deploys from the assumption that both pedagogy in a general sense and university pedagogy in particular, are influenced by cultural and normative assumptions regarding the purpose of educational activities, human relationships, and the ideal teaching practices relevant to the subject matter (Biesta, 2015). For the cultivation of a truly reflexive pedagogy in higher education it is necessary to go beyond the conventional paradigms of teaching. Such a pedagogical approach would be characterized by an unwavering commitment to questioning the fundamental assumptions entrenched within educational practices. A more reflexive pedagogy should be sensitive to the multifaceted world of human interests and reasoning that invariably manifests within diverse educational settings (Kincheloe et al., 2011) and could enable teachers and learners to move beyond dominant discourses of efficiency and instrumentality (see for example Agger, 1992). Moreover, such a pedagogical approach could operate as an ever-evolving framework, continually integrating novel insights derived from the dynamic contexts of learning, valuing the process of teachers and students interacting and learning from each other. A reflexive pedagogy entails to break away from the rigidity of traditional educational structures and adapt organically to the unique learning environments encountered in specific academic journeys. In essence, it represents an educational philosophy that not only welcomes change but actively seeks to harness it, thus fostering a more inclusive and adaptive educational landscape.

Instead of solely focusing on the concept of "effective education," educators should grapple with more profound questions about what constitutes "good education." This shift in perspective underscores the theoretical dimension of how we conceptualise learning and reading within higher educational settings. While cognitive learning theories prominently emphasise memory, social constructivists highlight the critical role of social environments and interactions in knowledge and skill acquisition (Schunk, 2012). Historically, literacy and literature education have been revered for their potential to promote individual prosperity and societal advancement (Sundström Sjödin, 2020). However, adopting a social view of reading and writing allows us to transcend the notion of literacy as a universal set of transferable skills, recognising instead the emergence of diverse literacies within social contexts (Mannion et al., 2009).

Critical literacy perspectives shed light on how curricula and pedagogical practices can disempower and alienate students (Janks, 2010; Morrell, 2015). Within this context, a student reader is not merely a passive recipient of knowledge but rather an active participant situated within a particular social and material context, shaped by various expectations, material conditions, and pedagogical approaches (Sundström Sjödin, 2020). In the field of critical pedagogy, a pertinent perspective for understanding the pedagogical aspects of reading in higher education is the concept of group learning. Group-learning processes encompass various interpretations, and as facilitators, it is crucial to grasp the multifaceted nature of group learning (Lakey, 2010).

1.3. Cultivating learning environments for adult students in higher education

As suggested by Karge et al. (2011), educators have a variety of options for employing creative teaching methods to cultivate engagement and inquiry among adult learners. Creating supportive learning environments involves promoting reflective strategies that empower students to continue learning beyond their studies (Allan & Clarke, 2007). Additionally, raising students' awareness of their learning-style preferences can encourage more effective and productive learning (Rogers, 2009). Atkins and Brown, (2002) emphasize that effective learning is not solely the teacher's responsibility but also a matter related to students' responsiveness. Teaching should be viewed as an interactive process that provides opportunities for students to learn intentionally. It's essential for students to comprehend the experience of learning before discovering their own learning-style preferences and developing useful study skills (McKeachie, 1986; Weinstein et al., 1988). To improve student comprehension, teachers can instruct reading strategies (Küçükoglu 2013). Strategies such as predicting, making connections, visualizing, inferring, questioning, and summarizing have been shown to enhance reading comprehension (Block & Israel, 2005). Duke and Pearson (2009) emphasize the importance of explicitly teaching these strategies by naming and demonstrating them, followed by modelling through group and partner practice, think-aloud processes, and independent strategy use. Adult students, who have already achieved foundational reading proficiency, require a different approach to further enhance their reading comprehension compared to younger learners (Landi, 2010; Pearson & Galagher, 1983). Given their existing reading skills and life experiences, adult learners often benefit from strategies and interventions that foster deeper critical thinking, context-based comprehension, and the ability to extract nuanced meaning from complex texts. Tailoring instructional methods to address these specific needs is essential for optimizing the reading comprehension development of adult students within educational settings. As expounded by Fenwick and Tennant (2004), learning comprises various facets, including the acquisition of new skills, the construction of novel perspectives, engagement in collaborative processes within social contexts, and active participation within communities.

The notable increase in students aged 25 and older enrolling in higher education over the past five decades is a testament to the evolving educational landscape (Caruth, 2014). National statistics further emphasise the prominence of older students in Norwegian higher education, ranking among the oldest in Europe (Statistics Norway, 2018). Within the field of teacher education, the specific focus of this study, many students embark on continuing education in response to policies aimed at elevating the quality of schools (Smeplass, 2018; Smeplass et al., 2023). For instance, within vocational didactics, some students pursue university education after accumulating up to 20 years of work experience. Given their rich life experiences, older students possess distinct prerequisites for engaging with academic texts compared to their younger counterparts, who typically follow a more linear and uninterrupted educational path. In accommodating these adult learners, innovative teaching strategies that leverage their prior experiences become

essential to promote effective learning. Adult learners seek group support in their quest for knowledge and understanding (Dirkx, 1997). Concepts such as 'agentic engagement' (Reeve, 2013) and 'student-centered learning environments' (Doyle, 2023) provide valuable frameworks for designing pedagogical approaches that acknowledge and incorporate the wealth of knowledge and experience that adult learners bring to the classroom.

To address the challenges faced by adult learners in higher education, it is imperative to assist them in developing a diverse repertoire of study techniques. One such technique that holds promise is namely *slow reading*. Slow reading is not merely a reaction to the prevailing culture of speed in academia. Rather than being a pre-defined method, slow reading represents a pedagogical approach rooted in holistic perspectives on learning and reading in higher educational settings. In line with cognitive learning theories that emphasize memory and social constructivist perspectives highlighting the role of social environments in knowledge acquisition, slow reading offers a unique lens through which students can engage with complex academic texts. It also resonates with a view that literacy and literature education should be seen as emergent practices found in social settings (Mannion et al., 2009) and addresses the potential disempowerment and alienation of students caused by curricula and pedagogical practices (Janks, 2010; Morrell, 2015). However, slow reading goes beyond individual reading experiences. It finds its true potential when employed as part of a group-learning process. In higher education, many students struggle with reading academic texts at a level appropriate to their study programs and reflecting critically on those texts (Clarence & Bharuthram, 2015). Slow reading, as a group-learning strategy, provides a powerful response to this challenge. By engaging in slow reading as a collective endeavour, students can broaden their repertoires concerning how to decode the academic world and renew strategies for learning to learn (Wright, 1982). It encourages them not only to understand the 'what' of a writer's text but also the 'how' and 'why' of the author's argumentation. Slow reading as a group activity promotes dialogue, critical engagement, and the sharing of diverse perspectives, aligning with the Nordic ideals of education as emancipation and democratic participation (Telhaug et al., 2006). It positions students as active participants in the academic community, fostering problem-solving, reflection, negotiation, and dialogue. Therefore, slow reading, when approached as a pedagogical strategy within a group-learning context, represents a promising pedagogical method for equipping adult learners in higher education with the skills and strategies needed to navigate the complexities of academic reading and develop a deep understanding of disciplinary texts. Hence, it can be seen as a response to the challenges posed by the rapid-reading culture in academia and an opportunity to empower students to become critical, engaged, and self-directed learners. The integration of principles from slow reading into higher education can create enriched learning experiences that promote reflection and participation.

2. Methods

The primary objective of this research design was to refine teaching practices and develop more sensitive teaching methods that would foster group learning and encourage students to reflectively enhance their study techniques (Baeten et al., 2010; Beatty, 1998; Wilson, 2018) as part of their journey within the master's program. The research employed a multi-method case study design (Merriam, 2015) with a qualitative approach inspired by critical pedagogy (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Kincheloe et al., 2011; Serrano et al., 2018). The research method contains elements from experiential narratives to address the complexities and subtleties of the human experience of teaching and learning (Webster & Mertova, 2007) in order to reconstruct how slow reading was given meaning by the study's participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1987). Further, the analysis is based on a systematic review of the course material thorough a comparison of the students' feedback from the course and the teachers' written reflections.

The academic content of the course for the study was centred around an in-depth exploration of the teaching profession within the context of professional competence and the profession's responsibility for interpreting educational guidelines. A core focus was on the development and application of documentation as a foundation for professional discourse, which encompassed the evaluation of the quality of vocational work and vocational competences within the realm of didactics (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2023c). The course also entailed the creation, analysis, and discussion of various forms of documentation derived from students' didactic work, bridging their roles as vocational professionals and future teachers. Throughout the four non-consecutive weeks of the course, several distinctive thematic topics guided the sessions, including: a) The individual's role within the group, b) Defining quality in education, c) Embracing a community of practice, reflection, and critical thinking, and d) Democracy and democratic learning processes within education. The study included two lecturers and eight master's-level students. While some students were acquainted prior to the course, most were strangers to one another. Therefore, the initial gathering was dedicated to mutual introductions. Subsequently, students organised themselves into two collaborative groups that would collaboratively engage throughout the semester.

The semester was structured around extended and intensive sessions spanning full days, with traditional lectures being limited in number and duration. This format facilitated prolonged, intensive group work during the sessions and played a significant role in the implementation of the slow reading method. Additionally, ample time was allotted for participants to interact on the university campus. Notably, the concept of slow reading was introduced on the very first day of the semester. Over the course of the semester, five slow reading sessions took place within the collaboration groups on campus, supplemented by eight individual reading assignments distributed between these gatherings. The curriculum for the class encompassed three distinct types of texts: those related to group processes and collaboration (Ehn & Lövgren, 2006; Røkenes & Hanssen, 2012; Wenger, 2004), pedagogical theoretical literature (Dale, 2003; Dewey, 2005; Biesta, 2014), and literature pertaining to quality and processes within the academic landscape (Elbow, 1998; Rolf et al., 1993). These readings were in both Scandinavian languages and English.

The data collection occurred during a single semester and spanned four non-consecutive, intensive weeks throughout the semester. Students were expected to actively participate in all four weeks, including engaging in reading and writing tasks between sessions. This approach aimed to maintain a consistent and conducive learning environment while promoting group learning within the class. The

course instructors actively participated in the slow reading groups for the entire duration of the course. They observed and interacted with students during these sessions. The process of establishing the reading groups and conducting the slow reading sessions unfolded as follows:

1. Selection of texts: the choice of texts for slow reading was predetermined by the instructor.
2. Formation of stable reading groups: students and teachers created reading groups comprising four to five members, and these groups remained somewhat consistent throughout the course.
3. Initial discussion on slow reading: the groups initiated their journey into slow reading by collectively discussing how to read slowly together. Methods included taking turns reading aloud or designating a reader for a specific session.
4. Reading sessions: each reading session typically lasted between 1 to 1.5 hours. The groups paused to engage in discussions whenever deemed suitable. These discussions occasionally extended beyond the reading itself.
5. Summarisation and reflection: at the conclusion of each reading session, the group summarised their newfound insights collectively. Subsequently, each group member individually reflected on their learning outcomes and the methodology.

Throughout the course, the participants also experimented with other group-learning methods, such as reflective teams (Oertel & Antoni, 2014) and mind mapping (Edwards & Cooper, 2010). While these methods are not the focus of this analysis, they may have indirectly influenced the group-learning process during the semester. However, the data collected mainly focused on the slow reading sessions, making it difficult to include these other sessions in the analysis. Nevertheless, they most likely had an impact on the learning environment and could be considered an important contextual factor for the study. The researchers' observations and queries were continuously documented as notes during and after each session, including those with other pedagogical methods. In the course, the role of the professor was more that of a facilitator or guide than a traditional lecturer. Consequently, the teachers were active, as members of the slow reading groups. Additionally, students provided various forms of feedback, which contributed to the observations through the span of the course. Students were required to write reflections after each gathering and upon the course's conclusion individually and jointly. These reflections were integral to the course. A colleague of the author participated in several slow reading groups and served as a teaching partner during the semester, also contributed her reflections on the slow reading approach, which are included in this study. Table 1 provides an overview of the various data sources utilised in this research, each offering insights into the learning process and the impact of slow reading for the participants.

This combined methodological approach encompasses various data types, offering a comprehensive perspective on the slow reading process and its interpretation by both students and instructors. The analysis is also informed by review of course materials, comparisons between student feedback from the course, and the teachers' written reflections. This can be regarded as an analytical reflexive pedagogical method.

The analytical approach adopted for this study adhered to the qualitative methodology, focusing on interpreting the intricate relationship between context and personal experiences, in line with the theoretical framework. Course materials and assigned readings, which were familiar to the author, served as valuable resources during the course and after the completion of the study, providing contextual information and acting as reference points for the insights shared by the project participants. The reflective notes, contributed by both students and teachers, underwent a rigorous process of close reading. During this critical phase, the content of these notes was meticulously examined to discern recurrent themes, identifiable patterns, individual experiences, and insightful observations pertinent to the slow reading experience. This analytical process aligned with principles of qualitative interpretation (Willig, 2017) and employed an abductive analysis approach (Tavory & Timmerman, 2014). Given the theoretical underpinnings of the study of critical and reflexive pedagogy, an abductive strategy was considered imperative to facilitate a productive dialogue between the study's objectives and the data collected. Notably, particular emphasis was placed on identifying findings that differed from the initial research intentions, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of the data. This dialectical coding process, coupled with a sensitive awareness of unexpected discoveries, enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's findings (Saldaña, 2014). Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that the study was registered with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, and participants willingly volunteered and provided informed consent. The author meticulously adhered to ethical protocols throughout the research process and held full responsibility for the well-being of the participants during the study's duration. No ethical modifications were necessary during or after the project's conclusion and the completion of the course. All participants are fully anonymised in the analysis.

Table 1
Data sources and description.

Data Source	Material	Description
Course materials	7 textbooks, 5 compendium articles/chapters, 1 white paper, 1 course description and 1 students' evaluation report	Textbooks, readings, and course resources
Teacher's reflections	2 elaborated notes (one per teacher)	Two instructors' overall reflections on slow reading
Student's course reflections	8 reflections	Students' final reflections on slow reading
Student's session reflections	16 individual notes	Students wrote and discussed their reflection notes twice during the course
Teacher's session notes	5 session notes	Notes after each group session with observations and reflections

3. Findings

The analysis undertakes a comprehensive examination of the participants' reflection notes, aimed at meticulously assessing their evaluation of the slow reading experience and its integration throughout the course. The data is translated from Norwegian to English.

3.1. Multifaceted learning experiences for students

To emphasize the importance of students' awareness of learning-style preferences, Rogers (2009) suggests that understanding one's preferred learning style can be instrumental in adapting to slow reading as a valuable learning method. This highlights the need for students to comprehend their own learning processes and preferences. The following is an example of a student who grapples with the intricacies of slow reading, essentially seeking a blueprint for its correct execution:

'At first, I felt it was poorly spent time. This was probably because I have a full-time job while studying and have a strong need to work effectively through things. I felt this in particular when we were slow reading texts that I already had read by myself. But I also realised that it was a great way to approach difficult texts. Some of the literature has been a bit heavy reading, and it was very useful to discuss a small section more in depth (but it could have been strictly discussed without us reading it aloud first). I certainly think slow reading has a justification in a subject like this, but I think texts that are important and difficult can be selected and that we should spend some in-depth time on. The first time we tried [slow reading], it was not a particularly difficult text on the subject of recognition.'

Their initial scepticism hints at the rapid pace that characterises our contemporary reading habits (Berg & Seeber, 2016). The swift and efficient absorption of information has become almost reflexive, making a deliberate slowing down of the reading process appear counterintuitive. However, it is noteworthy that, despite this skepticism, the student recognises the value of slow reading, especially when confronting challenging texts. This intriguing observation underscores the tension between our modern reading habits and the benefits that a slower, more deliberate approach can offer in deciphering complex literature.

In the next reflection, a student presents an insightful perspective on the purpose of slow reading.:

'Slow reading seems to me to have worked very well as an introduction to [group] discussion. If the intention was that we should read a lot slowly to understand better, it was not quite successful. But, on the other hand, I have understood much more of what we discussed as a result of the slow read, if it makes sense. I definitely think slow reading should be continued [in the class]'

While the act of reading slowly may not necessarily enhance individual comprehension, it becomes a catalyst for more profound group discussions. The student's experience underscores that the true utility of slow reading may not lie in the act of reading itself but rather in its role as a catalyst of substantive and in-depth group conversations.

Another student provides a nuanced perspective, describing the challenges of engaging in slow reading within a group context. They find this approach tedious and cumbersome, advocating that slow reading is better suited for solitary exploration. This viewpoint aligns with literature that portrays the potential of slow reading as an individual practice:

'The first session we did slow reading with a teacher. Then we read brief parts of the text differently each time, reflecting on what we had read before we read on. This form, which is probably the correct form for slow reading, I thought was tedious and difficult. Slow because it was very slow to read text aloud and then to reflect around it; difficult because I need real time to think about what I have read before I can reflect on a high level with others. Slow reading at home, on the other hand, is something that, after introducing it now in this course, is of great benefit.'

In contrast, another student expresses positivity towards slow reading but raises questions about its practicality within the confines of brief class gatherings. Their focus leans towards the outcomes of slow reading, especially its efficacy in comprehending complex texts. This student's pragmatic approach treats study techniques as valuable tools to be deployed when tackling intricate academic literature, illustrating the need for being exposed to different study strategies as a student:

'I think slow reading has a good effect, especially on difficult texts. I would have liked to have used the method more in the class, but since it is time consuming and the class gatherings are short, it becomes difficult to carry out. What I thought was best about slow reading was when we had read the texts beforehand and then went deeper [together in groups].'

They seem to be more preoccupied with the effects of the method rather than the experience itself. In their narrative, it is possible to see an outline of the expectations she has internalised as an adult learner. Study techniques are understood as tools they can retrieve when she needs to delve into the literature.

One student's narrative shines a light on the collaborative nature of the course and how slow reading contributes to collective understanding. Their use of inclusive terms like 'we' and 'us' underscores a strong group-oriented orientation in the learning process. This dynamic suggests that reading groups foster a sense of shared development, particularly in a class that places significant emphasis on group dynamics:

'[We have had] interesting discussions that fit well with the curriculum. A lot of reflections have been added both individually and in groups, which has resulted in good use of the syllabus. The way lecturers have participated in the discussions has worked well. [...] Slow reading contributes to increased development and better understanding of difficult theory and helps us to translate other languages. The course has helped to strengthen us as students towards writing a master's thesis and has made us aware of the use of primary sources.'

Mannion et al. (2009) and Janks (2010) advocate for the perspective that literacy is an emergent practice intricately woven into social contexts, which is instrumental in addressing potential issues of disempowerment stemming from curriculum and pedagogical practices. It is noteworthy that, in the analysis of students' experiences, none of the participants expressed frustration with the curriculum, lack of motivation, feelings of being uninspired or perceived irrelevance of readings to their academic development. Evidently, slow reading emerged as a potent catalyst for educational engagement, critical thinking, reflection, and meaningful dialogue within a supportive group-learning environment. The analysis of students' narratives portrays a diverse spectrum of learning experiences stemming from their engagement with slow reading. This raises fundamental questions regarding the classification of slow reading—as an independent learning method or as a conduit for fostering profound reflections. Within group settings, slow reading assumes the role of a transformative agent, facilitating profound learning experiences, especially when discussions align with participants' educational journeys and objectives. This multifaceted approach underscores that slow reading can encompass both a method and a vehicle for nurturing more profound reflections, ultimately contributing to enriched comprehension and diverse learning outcomes.

The analysis of students' learning experiences demonstrates that slow reading within a learning group has the potential to foster in-depth learning for participants, provided the discussions resonate with their interests and needs. Moreover, it reveals that when students feel included and accommodated in the learning setting, slow reading acts as a preventive measure against alienation and reinforces a sense of mastery in the academic environment.

3.2. Experiences from fostering inclusive learning environments using slow read

In the aftermath of the students' reflections, the pedagogical question of how teachers can facilitate learning through slow reading as a pedagogical approach is essential. This part of the analysis is built on the observations and documentations of the course, the teacher's self-reflection, feedback from the students and data from both teachers. Facilitating learning through slow reading is firmly grounded in theoretical considerations drawn from pedagogy and educational philosophy. Within this framework, the role of the teacher extends beyond conventional authority, aligning with pedagogical paradigms that underscore inclusivity, dialogue, and recognition (Biesta, 2015). This theoretical foundation underscores the significance of creating a positive learning environment and acknowledging the individual identities and expectations of each student, both of which are essential components of meaningful student engagement (Kincheloe et al., 2011).

In the role of a university teacher, the researcher's focus has been on guiding and assisting students in establishing a conducive atmosphere for collaborative work and knowledge exchange during group sessions. Despite occupying a position of authority, the class was structured to cast the teacher as an organizer and an active conversational partner. The reflection notes over time shows that the initial meeting with students held paramount importance, as it laid the foundation for a secure, open, and inclusive learning community where students could comfortably share their experiences, reflections, and learning frustrations. Recognition emerged as a central theme during the first slow reading session, reinforcing the idea that every student must be acknowledged to foster a sense of security within the learning environment. Deliberate efforts were made to learn and use each student's name from the very outset and take notes of their interests and frustrations. Students were given the opportunity to introduce themselves, sharing their backgrounds and expectations as they embarked on their university journey. Detailed notes were maintained throughout these sessions, capturing both student contributions and insights shared by the teacher. The lecturer was forthright about personal experiences as a teacher and researcher, acknowledging a tendency to employ reading shortcuts to increase reading speed. It was also emphasized that the pace of academia can be overwhelming, dispelling the expectation of a single "true meaning" in the literature they would explore together.

While adhering to the university-approved curriculum, the researcher found that practice of facilitating slow reading groups necessitates openness to students' tangents, divergences, and moments of frustration. The slow read sessions were preceded by careful preparation. Surprisingly, the teacher's own well-considered perspectives were often challenged during the reading sessions, revealing the multitude of ways in which students perceive the same passages and words. By being open to other interpretations, the teacher further developed her own understanding of the curriculum. The approach to slow reading ranged from analysing sentences to reading longer passages, a dynamic that was subject to continuous negotiation within the group. Despite occasional glances from students seeking guidance on whether to continue or pause, the teacher consciously allowed the group to determine its own approach to each text. In effect, most of the time was spent engaging in discussions rather than reading. Reading aloud alternated with designated readers on various occasions, adding distinct qualities to the reading sessions. Of note was the serenity of collaborative reflection, allowing for extended moments, even minutes, of repeated passage rereading before probing into discussions of meaning and content.

A significant observation arose from the colleague's perspective, as she encountered slow reading for the first time as a teaching method, having not been introduced to it during her student years. She remarked that '*Quality is often associated with efficiency and effective learning*'. Her written accounts illustrate that she believes slow reading was a counterbalance to this. She reportedly found the method to be useful and interesting regarding both the content of what we had read and the group-learning process. She wrote in her reflections:

'We have read several types of texts with this method. The first text was about recognition and communication. It did not have a difficult content to understand purely linguistically. Here I felt that the purpose of slow reading was to build relationships, raise awareness of how important recognition is in collaborative relationships, and work forward and towards creating good group dynamics. We got to speak and discuss what it would mean to recognise each other in a group collaboration. [...] Other texts were more demanding texts from primary sources. Here, I found that the method was appropriate for understanding content.'

Once the group had discussed how to develop a common understanding of what the content might mean, some would like to reflect further on the importance of this in a larger context.'

She found the method valuable and engaging, both in terms of comprehending the text's content and enhancing the group-learning experience. The slow reading sessions, in essence, became rich sources of content and meaning, shaped by the active contributions of the participants themselves. It was evident that students progressively developed their own objectives for these exercises as the course unfolded. Over time, the practice of slow reading established shared references that students could draw upon when engaging with new texts throughout the semester. Consequently, the teachers found that the experience of slow reading fostered a positive group dynamic and contributed to the creation of an inclusive learning environment. It remains challenging to ascertain whether this was primarily a result of the slow reading sessions, other factors that contributed to students experiencing to be acknowledged by the teachers, or whether the students already possessed strong relationship-building skills. Notably, some participants occasionally displayed impatience when progress appeared slow regarding the text. The teacher colleague expressed that, "as the professor, she would typically have been concerned about not covering as many pages as originally planned". Consequently, after a comprehensive discussion of the course's outcomes, it can be concluded that slow reading demands an elevated level of concentration and teacher presence beyond the norm in conventional teaching situations.

In critical analysis, the course's intentions and outcomes are compelling. The deliberate focus on recognition, open dialogue, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives aligns closely with the theoretical underpinnings of inclusive pedagogy and the philosophical commitment to student engagement. The teachers' roles as organisers and active conversational partners are pivotal in fostering a positive learning climate that values individuality and student experiences. However, the challenge of navigating students' detours and the unanticipated complexity of students' interpretations serve as a critical reminder of the dynamic and unpredictable nature of group learning. The introduction of slow reading as a novel pedagogical approach, particularly for a colleague unfamiliar with the method, highlights the potential for diversifying teaching strategies and challenging conventional views of effective learning. The method's success in both facilitating comprehension of straightforward content and promoting reflective discussions about more complex texts underscores its adaptability and effect on in-depth learning.

The observed development of shared references among students and the creation of a positive group dynamic further reinforce the benefits of slow reading as a pedagogical tool. It empowered students to actively engage with course materials, fostered a sense of community, and encouraged collaborative meaning-making. However, the lingering question regarding whether the observed positive outcomes were a result of the method itself or the students' preexisting skills and attitudes merits further exploration. The course's ability to transcend concerns about page coverage and instead prioritize depth of engagement demonstrates a departure from traditional expectations and highlights the capacity of slow reading to cultivate a more profound and reflective approach to learning.

3.5. Discussion – Potentials and limitations of the approach

This study examined the concept of slow reading as a pedagogical approach within higher education, challenging the prevailing culture of speed and efficiency that often characterizes academia. The study's research question was: "How can the practice of slow reading, when embraced collectively, contribute to learning within higher education?" The investigation emphasized the significance of time and thoughtful engagement with academic texts, values often overshadowed in today's rapid information consumption era.

Contemporary higher education often prioritises efficiency and speed, at times neglecting the pursuit of genuine understanding and critical engagement with course materials. This pressure for quick assimilation of information can overwhelm students, hindering their ability to explore diverse perspectives and question literature fundamentally. The study's theoretical foundation draws from critical and reflexive pedagogy, challenging traditional educational norms and practices, while advocating for a commitment to questioning fundamental assumptions about teaching and learning.

Slow reading, when adopted as a group-learning strategy, addresses several challenges faced by adult learners in higher education. Many students struggle to read academic texts at a level suitable for their study programs and to critically reflect on them. Slow reading, within a group context, offers a viable solution to this challenge. It empowers students to expand their abilities to decode the academic world and refresh their learning strategies collaboratively.

The participants in this study were enrolled in a master's program in vocational didactics. They brought with them extensive professional experience from diverse vocational backgrounds. However, it's important to note that many of them had relatively less experience as university students. This unique group of participants could be described as adult learners who possessed a wealth of practical experiences but were in the process of developing their study techniques as an integral part of their training in higher education. Interestingly, this shared vulnerability among the participants, particularly in terms of meeting the academic demands of processing and producing academic texts, could be viewed as a strength. It served as a common ground upon which to build a foundation for in-depth learning through discussion and reflection. This shared experience of grappling with academic challenges created a sense of camaraderie and provided a strong incentive for participants to engage deeply in discussions and reflective practices during the slow reading sessions.

The analysis demonstrates that slow reading can yield various effects on different individuals, depending on the situation. This underscores the complexity of this pedagogical reading approach, which inspires some while frustrating others. The feedback from students revealed that some found slow reading beneficial when practiced individually, while others did not perceive it as having concrete learning outcomes. Therefore, it's essential to weigh both the potential advantages and limitations before engaging in slow reading as a group-learning activity. It might be a better suited approach for specific learning contexts than others.

Slow reading, as we present it in this study, is not a pre-defined reading strategy. Instead, it represents an intention—an intentional

effort to slow down the reading process and foster deeper engagement with texts. We've introduced it as an academic exercise within smaller groups, where participants collectively pause at designated points in the text to reflect, discuss, and bridge the gap between new knowledge and their prior experiences and ideas. This way, slow reading serves as a method for creating and sharing experiences on a broader scale, emphasizing the value of communal reflection.

Five critical aspects emerge when considering the application of slow reading in higher education:

1. **Text Selection:** Careful consideration must be given to the type of text suitable for slow reading, as the ensuing discussions are as crucial as the reading itself. Themes and topics should be provided, and different texts' potential to stimulate discussions should be assessed.
2. **Group Engagement:** Group discussions should occur before, during, and after the slow reading process, allowing the group's feedback to inform the method's effectiveness and guide the selection of texts for future sessions.
3. **Facilitative Role of Instructors:** Instructors should act as facilitators rather than controllers, allowing the group to collectively decide when to pause, what to discuss, and when to proceed. Collaboration is key, encouraging members to share experiences, ask questions, and reflect on differing opinions.
4. **Openness to Unpredictable Outcomes:** Planning specific learning outcomes for each session can be challenging due to the open nature of the process, which encourages diverging discussions within the group. Consequently, it is challenging to universally recommend the method, as it aligns more with non-instrumental learning as a study technique.
5. **Complementary Learning Tools:** Slow reading should complement other learning activities. While it is highly effective for certain types of open discussion, it may not suit all topics. Therefore, instructors should view it as one of several tools in their pedagogical toolkit.

Critical pedagogy, finds resonance in Nordic higher education, challenging the conventional equation of speed with quality in teaching and learning. This approach can unlock access to information that would remain hidden through dominant speed-reading methods. Establishing slow reading groups, as detailed in this project, demonstrates that individuals can learn as much from each other as from the literature itself. However, it's vital that both students and instructors perceive the method as one of several collective learning approaches to achieve successful outcomes. Whether slow reading surpasses other in-depth reading methods in terms of effectiveness remains a subject for further examination.

Amidst diverse reflections from course participants, it is clear that slow reading has various individual effects when applied to different academic texts. While the analysis suggests the potential for in-depth learning through slow reading, it is crucial to acknowledge several limitations. In today's higher education landscape, dominated by quantitative quality indicators and instrumental tools for assessing learning outcomes, it becomes essential to weigh these considerations carefully. Nevertheless, the use of slow reading techniques might offer students fresh insights and stimulate in-depth discussions among adult learners willing to explore this method collectively. Learning and developing knowledge and skills hold extensive value for both individuals and society. Therefore, the time and effort invested in specific learning settings should empower students to secure further development and continued learning.

In conclusion, slow reading represents an alternative approach that provides students with various tools by acknowledging their prior experiences, valuing their reflective communication skills, and fostering new ways of listening to others in an inclusive learning setting. Rather than dictating the 'correct' way to think and interpret information, such an approach to improving learning and reading skills in higher education promises a broader and more meaningful educational experience. Achieving this necessitates educators to reflect on their assumptions regarding what quality in education is and expand their techniques for empowering students on their academic journeys. Slow reading, when thoughtfully integrated and combined with other strategies, represents a promising avenue for transforming learning experiences in higher education, fostering critical thinking, dialogue, and profound engagement with academic texts. However, further research and exploration are needed to fully understand the potential impact of slow reading across various educational settings.

Declaration of Competing Interest

No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability

Research data can be shared upon request.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized the GPT-3.5 language model developed by OpenAI to enhance linguistic clarity. Subsequently, the author thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as necessary, assuming full responsibility for the final publication.

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