FORMATION OF READING CLUBS IN RURAL SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE LITERACY LEVELS AMONG GRADE TEN (10) EFAL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects of extensive reading strategies on Grade 10 EFAL learners' academic performance at a selected Secondary School. The study was qualitative in nature and it employed a case study research design. The study adopted the constructive paradigm because knowledge is studied and altered to suit certain conditions. It focused on obtaining data from Four (4) English teachers including the Languages Departmental Head (LDH) and they were purposefully sampled. In gathering data, the researcher conducted interviews, focus group discussion, observations, and documentary survey. Data analysis unfolded as a three steps approach, which included data presentation, discussion, and conclusion drawing. The results of this study found that learners become shy when asked to read aloud in front of their fellow learners because they have fear of being laughed at in case they read poorly. Consequently, such learners do not improve their reading skills. The study revealed that teachers sometimes neglect the pre-reading stage when teaching reading. Teachers rush to complete the syllabus, and at the same time they do not expose learners to variety of reading material to make reading appealing on their side. The other challenging factor is the school's inadequate technological infrastructure and its rural background which deprive learners to access different reading material online. Furthermore, the study revealed that non-English major teachers teach EFAL. The study recommends that EFAL must be taught by teachers who majored in English if learners are to improve.

Keywords: Extensive reading, English First Additional Language, Academic performance, Language of teaching and learning, Reading club.

INTRODUCTION

There is a high failure rate experienced in public schools, mostly those that are based in rural areas (Mohammed & Molepo, 2017). This is because learners in rural areas are disadvantaged in terms of exposure to English First Additional Language (EFAL) as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL). In English, there are four language skills which are: listening and speaking, reading and viewing, writing and presenting as well as language structures and convention (Department of Basic Education, 2011. These language skills should be taught to learners and they should master them. Since Reading is at the core of all other skills, one will argue that literacy begins with reading, hence the rhyming of consonance and letters of alphabet in the Foundation Phase (Department of Basic Education.2011). The researcher believes that learners' participation in reading clubs serve as the platform whereby they practice reading with comprehension which in turn pave the way for learners' academic success. Various attempts have been made in addressing the challenge learners face with regards to reading skills (Minahan, 2012; Molotja, 2016; Cekiso, 2022). One of the reading strategies is to create a learner-centred, low-anxiety reading experience (Minahan, 2012).

Learners are viewed as kids who need a low anxiety and stress-free setup to enjoy learning (Bernal-Morales, Rodríguez-Landa & Pulido-Criollo, 2015). In view of this, the researcher assumed that a reading club can make reading fun to grade 10 EFAL learners (Walburg, 2014). Learners were exposed to five (5) reading steps which were intended to influence their reading habits. DBE (2012) asserts that learners need opportunities to read and view the Additional Language for information, pleasure and literary appreciation. For instance, this can be achieved when learners read explanation with an accompanying diagram for information, read a magazine for pleasure and finally reading a poem for literary appreciation (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014; Walburg, 2014; Mohammed & Molepo (2017). DBE (2012) further states that the best way to develop a wide vocabulary is through extensive reading.

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REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading defined, is a complex process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation. According Butterfuss et. al. (2020), reading involves three interrelated elements which are the reader, the text, and the activity, all situated into a broader sociocultural context. It is important to understand how readers, in this context grade 10 EFAL learners, integrate these facets to make meaning from the text. This ability to see and understand written or printed language is called reading. People who cannot read and write are said to be illiterate, or unlettered. In addition, Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) argue that reading as an activity should unfold in three levels vis; pre-reading, during reading, and post reading to enhance comprehension (Ghuma, 2011) has identified the reading monitoring strategy as also necessary. The reading monitoring strategy assists learners in reading clubs to pace their reading according to the text's difficulty (Kesler, 2010). One can read a text selectively or repeatedly to maximise the appropriate comprehension level and to infer the meaning of words according to their structure by using contextual clues. However, reading strategies are categorised as general comprehension and local linguistic strategies. General comprehension emphasises the textual elements that concern the interpretation and the reader's reaction. Conversely, local linguistic strategies are concerned with linguistic factors where the reader questions the meaning of words, and they help with vocabulary and paraphrasing (Ghuma, 2011; Mohammed and Molepo, 2017; Mohammed & Ofori, 2018).

The researcher observed that of all the EFAL skills, reading is not prioritised by many teachers. This study contends that reading skills help the EFAL learners to understand texts written in English. Progress in International Reading Study (PIRIS) (2016) corroborated the above by stating that a lot needs to be done to develop a reading culture among learners. In 2014, the DBE initiated reading clubs throughout the country. There are many factors that contribute to the development of reading culture among learners. Some of them are, inter alia, having a caring mentor (teachers), parental involvement, and the provision of quality reading materials.

Extensive reading involves reading a lot of materials which exposes learners to different writing genres such as poetry, plays, novels, short stories, and newspaper articles. Exposing learners to different genres enables them to respond to literature assessment in the EFAL's Paper 2. Learners are thus developed into critical thinkers, and hence creative writing comes naturally thereafter due to learners reading different persuasive writings. Considering EFAL Paper 3's assessments in creative writing, learners would not find it hard to work along the criteria set on the writing rubric (see Annexure B). Similarly, language in context (Paper 1) and oral tasks are easier for learners to respond to due to their rich and broad vocabulary gain through reading. Learners are also able to read instructions with understanding. From reading aloud activities, learners gain speaking skills when they properly pronounce words, purpose, and register (DBE, 2012). Another assessment component in EFAL is visual literacy, which encompasses cartoons, advertisement, and essays. In this regard, learners who are members of a reading club would not struggle, and hence predict the meaning of their reading by viewing cover pages that display pictures (Kesler, 2010). In reality, learners who read a lot can solve problems they encounter by reflecting on similar or related cases tackled in books they read. The above is in line with one of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement's (CAPS) cross-field aims to produce critical and divergent learners.

According to the DBE (2011), reading clubs are vehicles to nurture young children's reading habits through fun and entertainment. The DBE (2011) defined a reading club as the avenue where people who love stories and books gather on regular basis to read and share stories about what they read. Members of the reading club might do fun activities related to stories they read. Reading clubs are explored in to demonstrate how they can be used to unearth weaknesses in classroom reading practice. This researcher's reflection on the use of reading strategies applied in reading clubs to help learners improve their reading skills. The nature of reading clubs help instill positive reading habits among learners through reading for pleasure, which develops learners into literate individuals proficient in EFAL skills. The other benefit enjoyed by learners participating in reading clubs is to be able to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words by taking into consideration the context with which the word is used. Learners are able to learn many new words using contextual clues (McKenzie, David, Ravindran, & Jeevan, 2021). Types of contextual clues include restatement, comparison, contrast, and synonyms. Mapping is

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another vocabulary building strategy that encourages learners to actively interact. When learners encounter new words, they first guess their meaning before checking the definitions in the dictionary (Kizlik, 2015). McKenzie et al. (2021) concurred by stating that the mapping strategy helps older learners predict the meaning of words they are unacquainted with. To achieve this, learners learn to isolate parts of words such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots to predict the meaning of the word. Word mapping is also a key strategy that empowers learners to learn and predict new vocabulary without rigorous prompting or pre-teaching (McKenzie et al., 2021). This is in line with what Goodman (1988) referred to reading's guessing game. The DBE (2011) asserted that it becomes a challenge if learners have not yet developed reading habits in their teens. Reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game in which readers (learners) pick up graphic cues to words, form a perceptual image, and consequently read by a selection process (Ball, 2014; Ranney, 2015; Payette et al., 2016). The reading process constantly uses long and short-term memories (Stanlick et al., 2015).

METHOD OF RESEARCH
A qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study. The idea was to explore, describe, and understand the participants' experiences, ideas, beliefs, and values (Morrow, 2005). Using this methodology helped to explore the effects of extensive reading strategies on the Grade 10 EFAL learners' academic performance at the selected secondary school (Jongbo, 2014). The qualitative research methodology was preferred over other research methodologies because it helped this researcher to understand the learners' behaviour towards reading (Franklin, 2013). Getting the participants' opinion was vital because they experience issues studied.

Setting-up reading clubs at the case secondary school enabled this researcher to effectively conduct this study (Jongbo, 2014). The study explored the reading clubs' extensive reading strategies to ascertain how they influence the Grade 10 EFAL learners' academic performance. To achieve the above, questions about how or why extensive reading influences learners' academic performance were answered. In addition, the qualitative research methodology involves deductive reasoning to make sense of the issues raised during data collection.

Research Paradigm
A research paradigm is a set of common views and agreements shared among scientists about how problems should be comprehended and resolved (Kuhn, 1970; Uyangoda, 2015). Research paradigms can be measured by the way scientists respond to ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions (Guba, 1990; Scotland, 2012). This study falls within the constructive paradigm because knowledge is studied and altered. The constructivist learning theories helped the researcher to understand how learners learn in social contexts. Vygotsky (1962) stated that learners learn through their interactions and communications with others. Vygotsky (1962) examined how the learners' social environments influence the learning process. He claimed that learning takes place through the learner's interaction with peers, teachers, and other experts. Consequently, teachers can create a learning environment that maximises the learners' ability to interact with each other through discussion, collaboration (in reading clubs), and feedback. Vygotsky (1962) argued that culture is the primary determining factor for knowledge construction. This theory is in line with the DBE (2012)'s observations that reading involves making meaning of the text and paying close attention to its language features, actively making sense of the text, working out the meaning of unfamiliar words and images by using word attack skills and contextual clues. Furthermore, the DBE (2012) called for the use of, among other strategies, comprehension strategies, making connections, monitoring comprehension, adjusting reading speed to text difficulty, and re-reading where necessary. The DoE (2012) stated that at Grade10, learners should be confident and independent readers in their First Additional Language, selecting texts for their interests and tastes.

However, this may not be the case for all learners. At the beginning of the year, it is necessary to assess the learners' reading for comprehension in order to teach them accordingly. Acheawn and Larson (2014) pointed out that reading involves a close study of the text where learners answer questions about the text's meaning. In this case, learners are expected to use comprehension strategies such as inference. Scaffolding becomes conspicuous to enable learners to break their reading process into smaller manageable segments. This means that instructional scaffolds are important in language learning, especially in learning reading for comprehension (Huggins &

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Edwards, 2011). Reading is viewed as a problem-solving behaviour that gets readers involved in processes of meaning derivation from connected written material discourses (Poorahmadi, 2009; Huggins & Edwards, 2011). Constructivism views each learner as a unique individual with unique needs and complex backgrounds. Teachers must, therefore, help learners to attain their goals. The learner's uniqueness and complexity encourage teachers to utilise them as integral parts of the learning process. The researcher believes that professional development should consider the importance of using the learners' experience in the teaching and learning process. Learners are challenged within proximity to their current level of development. By experiencing the successful completion of challenging tasks, learners gain confidence and motivation to embark on more complex challenges, which Vygotsky (1978) called the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Teachers should encourage and accept learner autonomy and initiative by using raw data and primary sources in addition to manipulative, interactive, and physical materials. In this way, learners are put in situations that might challenge their previous conceptions that create contradictions to encourage discussion among themselves. In their teaching, therefore, teachers should use activities that originate from the learners' environment to make learning meaningful to learners. For instance, teachers should bring materials that follow the Currency Authentic and Relevant (CAR) principle to class. The constructivist approach insists that facilitators must help learners to understand content. Teachers should encourage the learners' critical thinking and inquiry by asking them thoughtful and open-ended questions. Learners should be encouraged to ask questions to each other in order to construct their meaning when reading (Hawkins, 1994).

Social learning is not merely a classroom event, it is a process that occurs all day and every day. Social learning involves learning from what we see around us. Bandura (1975) propounded the social learning theory, which has become one of the most prominent theories of learning and development. Although based on traditional learning theories, Bandura (1975) considered the possibility that direct reinforcement alone could not account for all types of learning. Bandura (1975) stated that learning would be difficult and risky if people had to rely solely on the effects of their actions to inform them of what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling, that is, from observing others one forms an idea of how new forms of behaviour are performed. On later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action. Bandura (1975) added a social element, arguing that by watching other people, it is possible to learn new information and behaviours.

Research Design
A research design ensures that the study obtains relevant evidence and specifying the type of evidence needed to answer the research questions or to accurately describe the phenomenon under study (Jongbo, 2014). Creswell (2014) defined a research design as a specific plan that outlines the process to be followed in the selection of participants, data collection and analysis. Trochim et al (2015) asserted that qualitative research designs are used to advance understandings and, to explore the intensity, richness, and complexity inherent in a phenomenon. In conducting this study, the action research design was used with the case study design (Creswell & Clark, 2013). Reading challenges are a global phenomenon that demands that teachers continue looking for answers for the challenges they face on daily basis. Action research allows teachers to adjust their approaches in line with what they currently face. It is for this reason that this study is justified in employing an action research model. To this end, Creswell (2009) sees the phenomenology research as interested on the teachers' experiences in order to get the full picture of what occurs in intensive reading at Grade 10 EFAL level.

Phenomenological case study
A phenomenological case study was selected as the appropriate research design to be used for this study since knowledge is contextual. The case study design is a strategy where the researcher identifies the essence of human experience about the phenomenon as described by the study participants (Creswell, 2014). A case study is a research approach and a practical inquiry that scrutinises a phenomenon within its real-life context. Case studies are based on a comprehensive scrutiny of a single individual, group, or event to explore the causes of underlying

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principles. Meriam (2009) outlined the case study knowledge as more concrete, more contextual, and more developed by the reader interpretation than other techniques.

A narrative description was used to describe the case study design's content. The Grade 10 EFAL learners were interviewed about reading before and after joining the reading clubs. A narrative description is a term that subsumes a group of approaches that rely on written and spoken words, or individual visual representation. This design was chosen because it helped the researcher to understand how the participants construct stories and narratives from their personal experiences. Training learners on extensive reading strategies in a low-anxiety, stress-free environment, and in a fun way, develops their love for reading. Learners are subsequently empowered to read the EFAL texts with understanding. This study created a platform to build a community of readers among learners (Burns, 2010). It is through the case study design that the researcher managed to unearth weaknesses in the classroom reading practice. Using reading strategies learned from reading clubs helped the researcher to reflect on what happens in normal reading classes as compared to the reading clubs' reading exercises (Mohammed & Molepo, 2017). The design enlightened the researcher about situations learners find themselves in when they do reading activities both in class and for pleasure.

Research setting

The sampled school is situated in Sekgopo village. The area is known for its poverty due to high unemployment levels. Literacy levels are very low and this result in poor parental involvement in their children's education. Consequently, when these parents are invited to parents' meeting, they do not come in numbers. Only a few attend and they are reluctant to participate in decision making processes. In addition, the educated have relocated to towns and cities. The researcher observed that the learners' inability to read EFAL texts is due to the lack of exposure to English. Learners interact with people in Sepedi or "Sephukubjeni".

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

a. Population

The research population is a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of the study. Polit and Hungler (1999) defined population as an aggregate or totality of all objects, subjects, or members that conform to a set of specifications. This study's population were the case school's teachers and Grade 10 learners. The researcher opted for the case school because it is located in rural areas and she works at that school. This rural area set a trend, which could be applicable to other areas such as the semi-urban and urban areas. That is, living conditions in rural areas are generally similar. The Rakwadu 2 Circuit has seven secondary schools, one of which is the case school. The study's population were 170 Grade 10 EFAL learners, LDH and three Grade 10 EFAL teachers.

b. Sampling

Sampling is a process where a predetermined number of observations are taken from a larger population (Creswell, 2014). Sampling is concerned with the selection of a group of individuals from within a population to estimate the populations' characteristics (Majid, 2018). Sampling is an indispensable technique of research. Research cannot be undertaken without sampling as it is a minimised representation of the population (Majid & Vanstone, 2018).

The researcher used a non-probability and purposive sampling technique to obtain the study's sample. This technique is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. The technique focuses on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest. The characteristics enabled the researcher to answer her research questions. Purposive sampling was chosen because it saves time. The technique made it easier to target those who faced reading challenges. For this study, ten Grade 10 EFAL learners, the LDH, and three EFAL teachers were purposefully chosen for this study. The idea was for them to provide necessary information that helped to answer the research questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The researcher, with other teachers' help, made sure that all learners were represented in terms of age and sex for the four Grade 10 classes (that is, 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, & 10.4) at the case school. The learners were selected according to their performance levels. That is, the

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best, the average, the slow learners. The ten sampled learners represented two different groups, those that are affiliated to the reading club and the non-affiliates. This was to establish their differences in terms of reading for fluency and the writing quality between the two groups. Doing so helped to pick out themes that form shared patterns in the learners' reading and writing skills.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data collection methods adopted for this study were the face-to-face semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions, and observations. These technics helped to gather multiple pieces of data for data triangulation to enhance the study's credibility.

a. Interviews

Interviews are convenient to explore experiences, views, opinions, or beliefs on definite matters. Interpretations can be explored and compared to others to develop an understanding of the core organisation of opinions (Green & Thorogood, 2010). Interviews are important because they reveal the participants' true experiences and give in-depth data (Philips, 2016). The face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture the participants' views on the effects of extensive reading strategies on the Grade 10 EFAL learners' academic performance in one selected secondary school. I opted for this data collection method because it guarantees certainty about who answered questions and allows for further clarity (Green & Thorogood, 2010). The semi-structured interviews were used because the researcher sought for the participants' opinions on specific reading issues. Such information was compared and contrasted with information from literature. Using the semi-structured interviews meant that the process was flexible to accommodate probing when interesting issues were raised (Allwoo, 2012; Asiamah et al., 2017). The interviews were done under strict COVID-19 regulations such as wearing of masks, sanitising, and the use of elbows when coughing/sneezing, and maintaining physical distances of up to two metres (Greef, 2020; Knights et al., 2021).

The interview schedule was developed guided by the academic literacy competencies developed by Nizonkiza and Dyk (2015) and Bakatara (2014). The EFAL teachers were interviewed to identify and understand the challenges they face when teaching reading to the Grade 10 EFAL learners. Teachers interacting with learners daily (Bakatara, 2014). The researcher developed a list of open-ended interview questions (see Annexure D). The interview is a product of interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. Its setting and the researcher's interviewing skills were important here. The interviews were recorded for backup in case of something happened to the transcribed notes (Nwankwo et al., 2013; Pernecky, 2016).

Interviews allowed the researcher to probe research participants for clarity (Struwig & Steads, 2001). Interviews allow the participants to broadly elaborate on what is discussed about. Through interviews, the researcher gets different response from the participants. The other advantage of this data collection method is that questions are prepared ahead of time to help the interviewer prepare for the task ahead and (Ranney, 2015).

b. Focus-Group Discussion

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a data collection mode used to bring together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest (Green & Thorogood, 2010). The group of participants should be guided by a moderator (this researcher) who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a dynamic and natural discussion amongst themselves. This method was used to gather the learners' views and experiences. The FGD is useful to examine how social knowledge is produced (Green & Thorogood, 2010). This researcher guided the two separate discussion sessions where learners were asked about their understanding of the term reading and how often teachers teach them reading and writing.

The researcher stimulated discussion to examine how knowledge and ideas develop and operate in a given group. In most cases, the facilitator guides a discussion about a particular topic in a group of usually six to twelve people (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). FGDs are interview driven, and learners discussed as they responded to questions asked by the researcher (see Annexure E). The classroom was the venue for the FGD given the COVID-19 protocols (www.who.int). Sensitive issues might be

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easily discussed within a group, while personal information might be withdrawn. For instance, when persons are conversant with each other or because of classified relations within the group. The researcher facilitated the discussions by creating an open atmosphere and involving participants in the discussion, and managing the discussion (Middelweerd, 2015).

The FGD were carefully organised and attention paid to finer details. This included the sampling and recruitment of participants, the composition of the issues discussed, and how the data were collected. To satisfy the latter, each group consisted of individuals who were exposed to the same scenario. That is, each focus group consisted of either learners affiliated to reading club or learners who were non-affiliates. The researcher conducted two discussions from the sampled school. Each group had five EFAL leaners.

c. Observation
Observational methods are used to understand phenomena by studying people's accounts and actions in an ordinary context (Ukessay, 2018). There are different types of observations with various degrees of participation like non-participating observation, which might be done in the form of video recordings, and participant observation or ethnography. For this study, the observer was the participating observer and observed learners reading in a reading club scenario and in the classroom situation.

This method was used to gather data on the learners' reading patterns in their different reading contexts (classroom and reading club). An observation checklist (see Annexure F) was designed and used to record all observed reading events and common reading errors picked in the process. The observation checklist used was designed such that the strategies teachers use in the classroom when teaching reading and how learners interact with the teacher throughout the lesson were apparent. This was done to enlighten the researcher about the contextual factors that influence the participants' behaviour during reading. The research also took notes on what she observed. Observation enabled the researcher to take note of both verbal and non-verbal cues (facial and body gestures and emotional reactions) that transpired during reading. In addition, a read-aloud rubric was used to gauge the level of the learners' reading proficiency.

d. Document Analysis
Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis was used to interpret and examine data to understand and develop knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The documents gathered were the read aloud rubric and the learners' summary tasks given as class activity together with their responses. Learners were given texts to read and summarise as directed. The researcher collected and marked them using rubric for summary writing. The idea was to establish differences in terms of the quality of writing that learners who are members of the reading club and the non-members would display. Themes that formed shared patterns in their writing were picked.

One question the study was answering is "How does the use of these extensive reading strategies affect the learners' attitude towards reading in general, as reflected through the learners' performance in other learning areas?" To answer this study question, the researcher when designing data collection tools, two questions relating to reading clubs posed to teachers were as follows:

I. Do you see reading improvement by learners affiliated to a reading club?
Nothing is as fulfilling as helping learners improve their academic performance, particularly the improvement of reading skills (Macedo, 2019). Difficulties in reading and writing contribute to the learners' failure at school (Macedo, 2019). Learners become frustrated each time they perform poorly in class given their difficulties with reading skills (August & Shanahan, 2017). Learners are unable to construct sentences in EFAL because of vocabulary limitations as they cannot read texts with comprehension (Lumadi, 2016). The second question sought to find out whether learners affiliated to a reading club improved their reading abilities or not. The participants answered this question as presented below.

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Teacher B agreed thus:

"Yes. Learners who were slow readers now read better and coherently. They can now identify main ideas in a text."

Teacher C also agreed, pointing out that:

"Yes. There is a great improvement even though there are few learners who are affiliated to the reading club. The ones affiliated have become the best of friends. The shy ones are now comfortable to read in front of their peers in class."

Teacher D agreed as well, adding that:

"Yes. They are now interested in reading as they sometimes ask relevant questions based on their reading. They also can now pronounce words correctly."

Three out of four teachers agreed that learners in reading clubs exhibit notable improvement in reading. The results imply that reading clubs are critical if learners are to master reading skills in class. Learners who are reading club members develop reading confidence due to the help they provide to each other as they read in groups. The results are in line with Liziwe and Moodly's (2018) observation that reading clubs help learners acquire useful strategies to improve their reading for comprehension skills.

II. How does reading with comprehension improve the learners' performance?

Learners should have basic reading skills if they are to do well academically. Reading is a fundamental aspect of learning at school in all subjects (Akbari, 2015). Reading cuts across all forms of personal learning, and hence impacts intellectual growth (Widodo & Dewi, 2018). If learners do not comprehend what they read, learning is constrained, and the learners' hope to improve their academic performance is dashed (Schmidt, Benzing, Wallman-Jones, Mavilidi, Lubans, & Paas, 2019). The third question addressed issues related to reading for comprehension's impact on the learners' performance. In response to this question, the participant teachers provided the following views.

Teacher A asserted that:

"Learners develop self-confidence and ultimately enjoy reading for both pleasure and academic purposes. In this way, their performance improves".

Teacher B pointed out that:

"Learners make informed predictions based on what they read about and then make connections to prior knowledge, thus improving their performance in class."

Teacher C revealed that:

"Reading to understand improves the learners' performance because learners who read independently comprehend texts. They become better readers, score higher marks on tests in most subjects and understand issues better than others."

Teacher D said:

Learners are able to recall important facts gathered from the story.

The results indicate that reading for comprehension positively impacts the learners' performance. That is, this skill helps build the learners' self-confidence that is necessary for learners' ultimate aim of understanding examination questions and instructions. Leaners are able to make informed scholarly decisions based on their readings. The critical aspect here is their ability to connect new information to their prior knowledge, thus improving their school performance. Learners who read independently easily comprehend texts, and hence correctly answer questions posed to them concerning those texts. Learners who understand comprehension

passages are better readers compared to those who do not. The former generally score higher test marks than the latter given that it easier for them to answer comprehension questions than their peers. The results are consistent with Korthof and Guda's (2016) findings that reading for comprehension helps improve the learners' performance in class. There is a relationship between reading for comprehension and the learners' performance. Learners who are able to read with comprehension have the potential to pass assessment activities than those who are unable to (Muijselaar et al., 2017).

EMERGING THEMES FROM THE STUDY ARE DISCUSSED BELOW:

Teaching of reading the CAPS way to impart learners with basic reading skills

CAPS for EFAL from grade R to grade 12 provide guidance on how language skills should be taught at different levels and phases. For instance, the teaching of reading should unfold in three stages which and the pre-reading, during reading and post reading. Teacher because of the gale to complete the curriculum they omit some stages, say the pre-reading. The omission causes more problems on the side of learners since they become confused and lose interest. The pre-reading activities prepare learners even psychologically to embark on a reading activity. This is likened to athletes warming up before the race. Getting into a race without preparations and warmups is just a setup for failure. That is the reason scholars in EFAL advice that the subject has many areas with complications to learners, so teachers should start their lesson from simple to complex (Meier, 2011). After a reading lesson where CAPS was overlooked, learners did not gain any skill instead they become more frustrated. In contrary the reading activities in the reading club follow the stages outlined by CAPS and as such learners acquire basic reading skills and develop confidence when reading. Teaching of reading as stipulated in CAPS depends on the way teachers conduct the teaching of reading (Kizlik, 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that all teachers in a school should engage or enforce learners' participation when teaching reading skills as it is an important skill that will make learners easily pass their assessment activities. It is recommended that enough time should be extended in the form of extra classes to learners who need special attention in reading. DBE should monitor the programme and compensate teachers who will do this work, and advise supervisors, such as principals and departmental heads, in terms of teacher work output. For example, they must know that reading activities forms part of the work output of the teacher. This means that such supervisors will understand that reading in the intermediate has more hours than all other literacy skills. Therefore, reading time approved by CAPS was observed in the classrooms.

KEY STUDY FINDINGS

This section summarises the study's findings regarding the effects of extensive reading strategies on Grade 10 EFAL learners' academic performance. The findings are presented according to the four components derived from the analysed data and integrated literature. The researcher established that certain components were interrelated. The summary of the key findings based on the key themes established during data presentation and analysis are outlined below:

The following is the summary of the identified study findings.

- Selection of reading materials by teachers.

- Difficulties in reading by learners.

- Printed versus digital reading material.

Difficulties in reading among learners

It was found that leaners distance themselves from reading aloud in the presence of their peers because they have fear of being laughed at. Consequently, they do not improve their reading skills. Learners who show poor pronunciation of words during reading also show inappropriate spelling throughout their writing activities. Another finding is that challenging reading and writing activities are ignored in class, especially those activities

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that teachers are not familiar with (Hood & Tobutt, 2009). This was observed during the learners' activity books as teachers dwell in reading tasks they understand and tend to ignore those they do not understand. For example, learners read poems the whole term.

Printed versus digital reading materials

Learners do not have options such as digital materials due to the poor technological infrastructure at the school as they live in rural areas. Teachers in the FET Phase use EFAL textbooks, story books, and workbooks supplied by the DBE to teach reading. The observation in this regard revealed that teachers depend on teaching and learning materials supplied by the DBE. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, social platforms were the reliable platforms to continue with teaching and learning (McKenzie et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on research that has been done by the researchers, there are some factors founded on the basis of learners' lack self-confidence, anxiety on the side of the learners, fear of making mistakes, shyness, and lack of vocabulary. Meanwhile, the strategies to remove the barriers learners encounter when they read are embedded in the reading club hence it provides a free-anxiety environment where learners read for pleasure without fear of being judged.

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