

INVESTIGATING CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERMEDIATE PHASE EDUCATORS IN THE TEACHING OF READING IN ENGLISH FAL. A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NYLSTROOM CIRCUIT

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Abstract

Reading challenges by learners has been a widely researched topic by a lot of researchers. Poor teaching of reading by educators result in learners not being able to read. English is mostly used as a language of teaching and learning and that has influenced the rationale for this research project. The purpose of this study was to investigate challenges faced by the English Intermediate Phase educators. Learning cannot be successful without mastering reading as it is a basic tool for learning, it is not only in South Africa whereby English educators are not English speakers, yet learners are expected to master to English. Educators seem not to have good instructional practices as learners struggle to understand in English on its own. The study used a qualitative research approach with case study research design. The researcher used purposive samples, and selected 5 primary schools in which the population comprised of English Departmental Heads, and 3 English educators from each of the selected primary schools. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, documentations and note-taking. The theory of Rosenblatt, who believes in a relationship between the text and the reader, has been followed on the premise that, what the reader already knows will determine how much he interprets or understands in the text. Thematic approach was used to analyse data. The study found that teachers who are not thoroughly trained are unable to produce good performing learners and that has influenced the whole system of education. Overcrowded classes to practice good reading strategies, no proper reading assessment strategies, and no monitoring and moderation of reading by SMT. The study recommended extensive training of and teachers through in-service-training for lengthier periods, clear guidelines of teaching reading, monitoring and moderation. Mostly, educators indicated their desire to be trained in technology as learners prefer it rather than books and chalkboard.

Keywords: *Teaching strategies, educators reading, learners, schools.*

1. Introduction

Reading is central to learning, in order to learn one must be able to read. Educators have to teach reading so that learning can take place even in other subjects. Reading has to be taught from an early age in order for learners to be able to learn successfully at school (Worthington, 2013:23-24). It was previously stated that obtaining basic language skills in the early grades is not only significant for a child, but for the benefit of the country as a whole because when these learners have completed their education, they will contribute to the economic development of the country (Motsepe, 2018: 2). In view of the above statement, Motsepe (2018:2-3) states that learners who are unable to read are not beneficial to the country and do not gain much from the democracy. More researchers agree that the effect of the inability to read confidently with comprehension can result in learners dropping out (Dietz and D'Angelo, 2014:98). Powerful instruction comprises the following: teaching skills, strategies, models; providing differentiated instruction for all learners; providing explicit instruction, systematic instruction, and giving opportunities for application; and measuring the learners' progress (Denton, 2016:121). Teaching reading is then the most important task of educators (Moats, 2020:4).

Reading approaches need to be updated because they are also changing. Educators lack the expertise to teach reading, and their lack of teaching reading strategies causes learners to lose interest in reading (DBE, 2014, p. 26). The Annual National Assessment (ANA) as conducted by DBE (2014) results indicated that learner's reading ability is very low. To produce effective readers, educators should be

capable of employing some reading strategies, such as predicting, text-mapping, and summarising (Mistar et al., 2016, pp. 67-70). Educators, as revealed by Phindane, (2020) feel guilty of teaching English in Sesotho, yet they also feel that it cannot be taught like a native language. Educators that are teaching English First Additional Language are mostly not English Home Language Speakers. Other reading strategies that are applicable in order to be effective readers have been listed (Fitrisia et al., 2015, p. 89). They include slowing down the reading text by adjusting the reading speed, pausing and thinking about the text, and visualising and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words. These learning conditions may also hamper learning reading comprehension skills. If they follow their teacher's steps, they may get lost.

Educators also have to use technology so that their learners are up to the fourth Industrial Revolution era. Other studies have examined the effect of using technology on reading comprehension, observing that using technology enhance students' reading comprehension (e.g., Lenhard, et al. 2013; Delacruz, 2014). For instance, Redcay and Preston (2016) examined the impact of using teacher-guided iPad app instruction on the reading fluency and comprehension skills of second graders. The outcomes of that quasiexperimental study showed that students who were taught through the use of teacher-guided iPad app instructions demonstrated higher score on reading comprehension and reading fluency when compare to students who did not receive teacher-guided iPad app.

The study by Kuyatt et al. (2015) investigated whether there is a difference in student performance on state-wide achievement measures following high-level technology integration. The teachers in the study incorporated varying degrees of technology in their classrooms prior to end of the year state-wide testing. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results of achievement data were significant, and it was determined that higher test score proficiency was positively correlated with educators who implemented high levels of technology in their classrooms. Learners who scored in the non-proficient range did have technology integrated within their classrooms, however the levels of implementation were not high or implemented with advanced levels of fidelity (Kuyatt et al., 2015).

1.1. Cognitive challenge

Instruction must take into account cognitive challenges. Educators need to match the texts with the ability of the learners they teach. There needs to be a healthy distance between frustrations, and it must be easy for struggling readers. Educators must find texts that are age appropriate and thought provoking (Robertson, 2014). Educators must also use extended texts. This can build the stamina of the learners. Finally, the educators should find ways to mediate challenging texts. This might include offering read aloud, assisted readings, choral readings, and even reader's theatre (Robertson, 2014).

2. Research objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges that are experienced by IP educators in the teaching of English First Additional Language (FAL) reading.

2.1. The objectives of this study were to

- 2.1 Identify the challenges that are experienced by IP educators in the teaching of English reading.
- 2.2 Indicate the predominant effects that are brought-up by lack of good strategies of teaching reading in the IP.
- 2.3 Devise relevant strategies that will improve the teaching of reading by the IP educators.
- 2.4 Explore age and grade appropriate models and strategies for teaching reading in the IP.

3. Research methodology

For this study, the researcher made use of a case study design. A case study scientifically investigates a real-life phenomenon in-depth in its natural environment (Yin, 2015, p. 67). A case can be an individual, a group, an organisation, or even an event, a problem, or an anomaly. The benefit of using a case study is highlighted by Rider (2016, p. 88) who mentions that case study research seeks to identify "gaps and holes". The purpose of this study is to identify the gap in the teaching of reading by IP educators. It has been argued that in recent times researchers have become particularly focused on testing theories – mature theories as well as intermediate theories (Delbrige & Fiss, 2013, pp. 104-106).

Interviews are the main method of data collection in case studies (Yin, 2014:79) so the researcher planned to discuss the idea with the participants first, and this was achieved by visiting the schools in person. The desired information was therefore collected through interviews and documentation. For interviews, questionnaires were both closed and open-ended.

4. Research design

The researchers advocated for the use of a case study methodology as opposed to other methods Lucas, (2019:56-60). They add that the benefit of using a case study methodology is that it is a flexible approach suitable for developing research, as the topic of reading difficulty is a well-researched. The researcher investigated the role that educators play in teaching reading, and the kinds of reading strategies they use to teach reading. It was discovered that learners who are considered to be struggling readers typically read one or more years below their current grade level, but do not have an identified disability or challenge of any kind, which means they are struggling because they lack basic teachings (Hall, 2014:45). The use of a case study research design also allowed for triangulation to enrich the findings (Rider, 2016:78). The use of triangulation will narrow problems of construct validity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, reflective note taking, and documentation were part of the tools for collecting data. A number of data analyses strategies as indicated by Yin (2014:78) were also employed, for instance, case description, examining rival explanation, and going through documents.

5. Sampling

The researcher used a purposive sample, which is also called judgemental sampling, to gather and obtain the correct information, because Creswell (2014, p. 134) and Crossman (2018, p. 345) declare that sample members are chosen on the basis of the researcher's knowledge and judgement. Maree (2016, p. 85) echoes the same words as Creswell and Crossman in that qualitative sampling generally uses purposive sampling. From the population of the Waterberg District, with 56 primary schools, the researcher sampled five (5) primary schools and 16 educators. The total sample comprised 16 IP educators. To guarantee that the selection was the best and that respondents would answer the research questions and meet the objectives of the study, the sample was composed of Grade 4, 5 and 6 English educators. Departmental Heads were also sampled as part of the respondents in a view to establish their effectiveness in managing the subject, as Milondzo and Seema (2015, p. 234) argue that the quality of teaching and learning depends on the competency of the school management teams. However, the sample of schools was motivated by convenience.

The research sample consisted of 16 IP English teachers from the five (5) selected primary schools in the Nylstroom Circuit. There was one Grade 4, one Grade 5, and one Grade 6 educator, and a subject head from each of the five schools. The specific sample of participants in the five schools that were utilised within the district were selected based on familiarity and practice with the district's focus on improving the reading levels of the IP learners. Every respondent was sampled based on experience, those that had at least taught for 10 years, including a subject head from each school. In three of the identified schools, four of the educators did not meet the 10-year criterion as advised by the researcher, but were not excluded and participated in the study. Each of these participants were interviewed, and one of the educators was requested to conduct a reading lesson to be observed.

6. Results and discussion of findings

The results and discussions of findings as revealed by data analysis were obtained through the use of themes. Documents were viewed and semi structured interviews were conducted by the researcher. The researcher used exactly the same words from the participants, used her own interpretation and also probed them when they were not clear. The general outcomes of the discussions reflected a number of constraints for not to master the teaching of reading English FAL reading to the Intermediate Phase (IP) learners. The findings are indicated below. Younger educators revealed the need for the use of computer sciences, which were infact available but not used in the schools. They were saying the IP learners are more interested in Information Technology (IT) than in books, chalk and chalkboard.

7. The findings reflected by discussions

Educators exposed the department as not affording learners the opportunity to enjoy their learning because learners are more interested in technology than the use of 'books and chalkboard'. This backwardness was also frustrating some of the young educators. Learners who are in the IP enjoy cartoons, pictures and graphs than books. Referring to resources, there were resources as provided by both DBE and NECT, but none of them were relevant especially the texts that were not related to learners' environment. Learners had smartphones, but schools did not allow them to utilise them for learning, for example googling information instead learners use them for unimportant stuff. Parents and community were less interested in the education of their children and that alone led to learners not doing homework as there is no monitoring at home.

The impact of Covid 19 also brought problems regarding the teaching of English FAL reading as well as other languages. As the days of teaching were reduced, the content was also skimmed. Reading was one of the skills that was removed because the process of rotation could not accommodate all the topics. Learners forgot even the basic information of reading. This brought much struggle especially to the struggling readers.

8. Conclusion

There were no specific reading approaches that were mentioned as the best. Managing reading by the School Management Teams was also not clear. When they were responding to questions regarding “appropriate strategies for teaching reading, they were found wanting”. The importance of the teaching of reading cannot be over-emphasised, however not all English FAL educators have the expertise to instruct reading. Books are still valuable asserts and most of all the main source of information, but the arrival of the 4th Industrial revolution should be infused in our education system. Learners who are not advanced in technology are no longer relevant in the present day living. The Department of Basic Education has introduced many Teacher colleges, so there is hope that Educator-learner ratio will be improved in the near future

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