

Challenges Experienced By Grade Eight Learners In Reading English First Additional Language Classroom At Secondary School In Vhembe District Dzindi Circuit

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate challenges experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language classroom at Secondary School in Vhembe District, Dzindi Circuit. Qualitative approach was used to collect data from eight learners and one teacher using demi-structured interviews. The participants were purposefully sampled from a secondary school in Limpopo Vhembe East District, Dzindi circuit. Inductive thematic data analysis method was used to analyse data. The findings show that lack of vocabulary, reading strategies, lack of parental attention, background knowledge, and confidence impact learners reading of comprehension negatively. The study recommends that the Department of Education, teachers, parents and learners, should be involved in improving the academic performance of learners in schools.

Keywords: Reading difficulties, English Language, reading comprehension

Introduction

Reading plays a very important role in learners' educational success. Olifant, Cekiso and Rautenbach (2019) state that poor reading ability is a great challenge worldwide. For example, 40% of children in the United

States have a challenge with reading. Britain also has a challenge with among children which compelled Britain to declare the year 2008 as a National Year of Reading to address poor reading (Chaka, 2015). Furthermore, a study conducted in Francophone Guinea by Abadzi (2008) who states that most learners do not know the entire alphabet by the time they complete grade two (Olifant, Cekiso & Rautenbach, 2019). In South Africa, learners in primary, secondary and tertiary have poor reading skills which negatively impacts on their academic performance (Mukhuba and Marutla, 2019; Thaba and Motlhaka, 2022). This was evident when the analysis of average performance per sub-question in paper one in EFAL shows that learners achieved 59% in comprehension passage (NCS Diagnostic Report, 2019). This suggests that learners lack vocabulary skill to express themselves in English First Additional Language. In addition, Mukhuba and Marutla (2019) found that word recognition is needed to support vocabulary attainment and reading comprehension. This suggests that learners are unable to comprehend the meaning within whole text. Thus, this study is relevant as it investigated challenges faced by grade eight learners in reading comprehension at a secondary school in Vhembe District, Dzindi Circuit, Limpopo province, South Africa.

Research Problem

The researchers observed that learners in grade eight at a secondary school in Vhembe District, Dzindi Circuit, Limpopo province, South Africa struggle with reading due to lack of vocabulary, lack of phonological awareness, mispronunciation of words, lack of background knowledge in language comprehension, lack of self-confidence to read, poor or struggling of word decoding which affect their understanding of the text. The researchers' observation suggests that poor reading comprehension affects learners' academic achievements in schools. South African learners remain at the lowest levels in reading as compared with other nations despite efforts to improve learner's reading skills (Mukhuba & Marutla, 2019). Furthermore, learners who are unable to fully understand and interpret the text struggle to complete tasks which can lead to increased dropout rates (Mckenna, 2004; Ngwenya, 2010 as cited in Bharuthram & Clarence, 2015). Secondary learners are also not immune to this reading challenge hence, this study aims to investigate the reading challenges experienced by grade eight learners.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by bottom-up theory because it is concerned with perceptual accuracy, sound, and the ability to discover a series of texts, words, spelling patterns, and other language units (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2018:35). In other words, learners are able to comprehend the written text from the letters of words in small portions (Bintang, Jumariati, & Nasrullah, 2021). In this study, this theory helped learners to comprehend the text by constructing meaning. In other words, bottom-up processing involves building meaning from the linguistic content of a text. The bottom-up model for teaching reading begins with the sound of letters and progresses upwards from the single letters to the combination of letters that form words. Bintang et al. (2021) argue that bottom-up adjusts the reading pace depending on the text difficulty wherein the reader tries to understand the text. In this case, when learners are reading, they start by decoding letters, words, and syntactic features of a text, so that they can build textual meaning from what they read.

Aim of the study

This study aims to investigate difficulties experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language text at secondary school in Vhembe District, Dzindi Circuit, Limpopo province, South Africa.

Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are difficulties experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language classroom at a secondary school in Dzindi Circuit?
- What are reading strategies used by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language classroom at a secondary school in Dzindi Circuit?
- How do English First Additional Language teachers teach reading in grade eight at a secondary school in Dzindi Circuit?

Research methodology

Researchers used qualitative approach to investigate difficulties experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language text at a secondary school in Vhembe District, Dzindi Circuit, Limpopo province, South Africa. In this study, qualitative approach

helped researchers to understand the difficulties experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language classroom at secondary school in Dzindi Circuit and how English First Additional Language teachers teach reading in grade eight at a secondary school in Dzindi Circuit.

Sampling

This study used purposive sampling because it enabled researchers to recruit participants who can provide in-depth information about the difficulties experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language classroom at a Secondary School in Dzindi Circuit and how English First Additional Language teachers teach reading in grade eight at Secondary School in Dzindi Circuit. The researchers used number cards in a box to select two learners from each class to give equal opportunity for all participants to participate in the study. This means that eight learners were selected and one teacher who teach English First Additional Language.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews helped researchers to collect data to investigate difficulties experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language text at a secondary school in Vhembe District, Dzindi Circuit. The researchers prepared interview schedule for learners and the teacher and asked permission to tape-record the interviews. The interview session lasted for ± 15 minutes with each participant.

Data Analysis

The researchers used inductive thematic analysis to analyse data. The researchers transcribed recordings as well as the analysis of the observation data several times until they reached a saturation point. The analysis of data was guided by the following research questions:

- What are difficulties experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language classroom at a secondary school in Dzindi Circuit?
- What are reading strategies used by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language classroom at a secondary school in Dzindi Circuit?
- How do English First Additional Language teachers teach reading in grade eight at a secondary school in Dzindi Circuit?

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study aims to investigate difficulties experienced by grade eight learners in reading English First Additional Language classroom at a secondary school in Vhembe District, Dzindi Circuit. The data is analyzed through thematic data analysis method and presented through research questions as follows:

What are the challenges that you face during reading comprehension task in English First Additional Language?

This question seeks to determine the challenges that learners come across when they are reading comprehension passage. The participants indicated the following regarding challenges they encounter when reading a comprehension passage:

Excerpt 1

Bombastic/long words are very much challenging because I struggle to pronounce them. I even find some words hard to pronounce in a comprehension passage.

Excerpt 2

I have less/low understanding of some bombastic words and I lack reading skill. I become afraid of other learners (shy) while reading, especially when I come across with a difficult word.

Excerpt 3

I become confused by the meaning of words which results in ability to connect ideas in a comprehension passage. I can find it difficult to understand and remember what I have read throughout the whole comprehension passage. When I'm reading, I become nervous, afraid because I think other learners will laugh at me.

The responses above indicate that learners have a challenge in reading comprehension due to long words and pronunciation deficiency. The findings also indicate that learners struggle with reading skills, because they are shy to read in class because they don't know how to pronounce certain words because other learners may laugh at them. The findings are supported by Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2018) who found that the mispronunciation of words shows that the reader is less knowledgeable of words.

What do you think are the possible causes of these reading comprehension challenges? Please explain your response in more detail.

This question helped researchers to identify causes that make learners to have challenges when reading a comprehension text and participants indicated the following:

Excerpt 1

The possible cause it is not having a dictionary and not knowing the different reading skills. I hardly make time for myself to read books at home. Become afraid of reading in front of my classmate.

Excerpt 2

It is because of poor reading comprehension skill from a young age due to parents lacking money to buy me books.

Excerpt 3

Being nervous and shy of others, and also not understanding some spelling. Reading faster can cause you to not read correctly.

Excerpt 4

It is because of limited experience of reading books and poor phonemic awareness.

The above responses indicate the reasons why learners have challenges in reading comprehension texts due to not having dictionaries, not knowing proper or effective reading skill, and not giving themselves chance to frequently read different books. The findings also indicate that learners are having challenges when reading comprehension text because they are shy and become nervous when reading in front of their classmates. Lastly, learners tend to read faster which causes them to not read correctly. The findings are supported by Muhammaad (2020) who found that learners fail to understand the text because they are not familiar with reading strategies such as skimming and scanning.

How can you improve your English First Additional Language reading comprehension skills?

This questions seeks to determine reading strategies that could help learners to address their reading challenges during reading comprehension. Respondents indicated the following in addressing their reading challenges:

Excerpt 1

I need to practice reading English regularly. I need to have a dictionary to help with big word. I must re-read a comprehension to understand. well also read aloud.

Excerpt 2

I can improve my comprehension reading skills by attending English extra class after school, read English books and also watch comprehension reading on education channels at home for better experience.

Excerpt 3

I should write it down difficult words in order to improve my low understanding of bombastic words and read not fast.

Excerpt 4

I think I must adjust reading often. Nowadays I even volunteer to read comprehension in my classroom. I've even joined a group of learners who read after schools.

The responses above indicate how the learners can improve the challenges they face in reading comprehension text by frequently reading different books, have dictionary with themselves while reading and re-reading the comprehension text aloud. The findings also indicate that learners can improve their reading comprehension challenges by attending extra classes and watching education channels on reading. The findings also indicate that learners can write down the bombastic words that they come across to increase their vocabulary and by volunteering to read comprehension text in the classroom. The findings are supported by National Academy of Sciences (2018) who found that learners' perception of their ability or self-confidence is the central mediating construct of their achievement.

What methods and strategies do teacher use to teach reading comprehension skills? Please explain your response in more detail.

This question helped researchers to have an idea of how the teachers teach reading comprehension in the classroom and participants indicated the following:

Excerpt 1

Our educators during reading comprehension they gave us the best methods and strategies to use. Some of the methods we learned them in grade 8 is FUNDA method:

F-Fly with your eyes through the story

U- Underline every word you don't know

N-Note every word that is new to you

D-Discuss with you friends

A-Ask you teacher

Excerpt 2

Pre Reading-They read a comprehension two-three times to make us understand. Reading aloud-teachers read aloud for us to hear and also pronounce words. They explain to us the words we don't understand

Excerpt 3

They make different groups of learners for a spelling bee, so we can spell all the words we can't read.

Excerpt 4

We should read more comprehension more than three times too understand those words which the teacher was correcting us.

The responses above indicate that the teacher uses different methods and strategies to teach learners reading comprehension such as FUNDA method: whereby learners F-Fly with your eyes through the story, U- Underline every word you don't know, N-Note every word that is new to you, D-Discuss with you friends, and A-Ask you teacher when reading. The findings also indicate that the three reading steps were followed, pre-reading, reading, and post reading, and the learners were grouped for spelling bee so that they can practice the words that are new to them. The findings are supported by Rohani and Rahmadsyah (2019) who found that learners must have a good strategy for understanding the text because meaning is central to successful academic achievement.

Explain where the learners experience reading comprehension challenges in English First Additional Language

When learners are reading comprehension, the teacher can observe where the learners are struggling. This will help the researchers to know and find out more about where learners encounter challenges and the participant indicated the following:

Excerpt 1

Longer comprehension, learners do not want to read long texts and while reading they may lose focus and not get the message of the comprehension

The response above indicates that learners experience reading comprehension challenges when reading long texts because they tend to lose focus and meaning of the comprehension text. The findings are supported by Muhammad (2020) who found that determining a main idea of a text is one of the most difficult tasks in reading comprehension.

What are possible causes of reading comprehension difficulties in English First Additional Language?

As the teacher observes learners while reading, he/she can find out why those learners are having challenges.

Excerpt 1

Difficult words that learners do not understand makes difficult for learners to comprehend the comprehension passage.

The response above indicates that the possible causes of reading comprehension difficulties are caused by difficult words that learners come across and makes reading comprehension hard. The findings are supported by Usman and Siti (2017) who found that unfamiliar vocabulary interferes with learners' reading comprehension.

How do you address the challenges encountered by learners when reading comprehension text?

This question seeks to determine how the teacher addresses the challenges that learners come across during reading comprehension text.

Excerpt 1

Giving learners activities that include reading and analyzing text and also encouraging learners to read dictionaries and look to always search for difficult words they come across while reading casually. I also let them write spelling activities.

The response above indicates that the challenges encountered by learners when reading comprehension text are addressed through giving learners activities that include reading and analyzing text. The findings also indicate that learners are advised to have dictionary to help them with difficult words and they are given

dictation activities. The findings are supported by Mahmoud Al and Abeer Al (2021) who found that learners struggle to read due to insufficient vocabulary.

What methods and strategies do you use teach reading comprehension skills in a classroom? Please explain your response in more detail.

The teacher will explain the strategy which he/she used to teach learners reading comprehension text.

Excerpt 1

Before answering a comprehension passage learners have to read the comprehension three times, there is pre-reading, reading and post reading.

Pre-reading- I encourage learners to visualize and create images within their mind. First learners have to read the comprehension tittle and think about what the tittle is all about then read the comprehension passage in order to get the slightest idea what the comprehension is all about.

Reading- After pre-reading learners have to now read the comprehension once again slowly and try by all means to understand the message of the comprehension

Post reading - now learners have to read the question then scan through the comprehension answering questions.

Give learners more comprehension passage activities as informal assessment.

The response above indicates that the methods and strategies the teacher uses to teach reading comprehension skills in a classroom are through three stages of reading which are: pre-reading, reading, and post reading. The findings are supported by Rohani and Rahmadsyah (2019) who found that meaning is central to reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to investigate challenges that grade 08 learners face when reading comprehension in English First Additional Language classroom at secondary school in Vhembe district Dzindi circuit. The study found that lack of vocabulary, reading strategies, lack of parental attention, lack of background knowledge, and lack of confidence negatively impact learners' reading comprehension. The findings showed that

learners' inadequate exposure to English contribute to their lack of English First Additional Language proficiency. The findings also revealed that lack of teaching and learning materials, as well as physical resources such as libraries, study halls, dictionaries, laboratories impacted negatively on the academic performance of learners at school across the school curriculum. Future studies should increase the number schools in the township or towns, private schools, other districts at Limpopo province, FET colleges and universities in order to provide a detailed report about the challenges experienced by learners in reading comprehension text of English First Additional Language. The researchers used qualitative method to gain in-depth knowledge regarding the challenges experienced by learners in reading comprehension text of English First Additional language. Therefore, further studies can be conducted using mixed method approach.

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