

## Coping with Learners Experiencing Reading Problems in Tshivenda in Grade Two in the Foundation Phase

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**ABSTRACT** Reading is a skill which pervades many aspects of modern life and invariably, in our society, it is simply assumed that individuals can read. For children who experience difficulty with reading, the effects can be debilitating in terms of their interaction with their environment. The objective of this study was to investigate how educators cope with learners experiencing reading problems in Grade 2 Tshivenda in the Foundation Phase. The study was quantitative collecting data through a questionnaire. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select only Foundation Phase educators teaching Grade 2. Results show that at some point in their development, children's reading problems are likely to have a negative impact on their academic achievement. The consequences of this negativity affect their schoolwork and their self-esteem. The study concludes that educators teaching at Foundation Phase are faced with numerous problems which may affect children in their adult lives and impact on the types of positions and roles which they are able to take up as adults. The study recommends that Foundation Phase children should be assisted to improve their reading skills. The study also recommends that further studies be conducted in other provinces in South Africa.

### INTRODUCTION

Reading is an everyday, ordinary task for most people living in today's world. According to Inglis et al. (2000), reading is one of the most powerful ways of receiving ideas, information and stories. Reading helps people to understand the world by enabling them to learn about the past and plan for our future. It is critical that learners learn to read (Mudzielwana 2014b). When learners learn to read, they must read with understanding because without understanding, reading serves no purpose. A person, who can read well, can function more effectively in everyday activities and can satisfy his emotional and intellectual needs more effectively (Grove and Hauptfleisch 1982).

According to Mottram et al. (2011), reading is a process of active engagement with a text in the pursuit of meaning. When we live every day, we require reading in our daily tasks, including the simple tasks of banking, following directions, reading road signs and even shopping. Without reading, life becomes more complicated. In order to be able to process and understand information from computers, books, newspapers, magazines, emails, text messages on cell phones and the internet, one needs to have reading skills. In all these activities, reading as a form of entertainment requires more effort, more imagination

and requires longer periods of time (Mottram et al. 2011). However, if reading problems exist in our schools today, and no remedies for these problems are taken into consideration, the question that arises is: what academic performances of these children would look like?

Oberholzer (2005) indicates that reading is a prerequisite skill for effective and efficient functioning in today's modern world. It is taught to children from the earliest stages in their formal schooling and is a fundamental building block for further learning. Oberholzer (2005) adds that it is important to understand and acknowledge the main reading problems in the class so that the educator knows how to help those learners. Karel (2009) points out that there are many types of learning problems, of which reading is one, but these fall into two broad categories: developmental and academic learning problems. Karel (2009) explains that developmental learning problems affect the prerequisite skills that a child needs to learn, and academic learning problems, usually not obvious until a child enters school, affect the ability to perform specific skills, for example, reading, spelling, handwriting, arithmetic calculation and arithmetic reasoning.

Gardener (2007) states that reading problems can be caused by various factors, including birth defects that affect the brain, genetic problems and drug or alcohol use by the mother dur-

ing pregnancy. Gardener (2007) explains further that reading problems are not caused by factors such as cultural or language differences or poor schooling conditions. Derbyshire (1991) distinguishes the following factors in this regard: factors which can result in some injury to the central nervous system before, during or after birth, certain biochemical and metabolic factors and environmental factors which may entail an inherent tendency towards slow development and functioning of the central nervous system. Furthermore, Lerner (1993) states the fact that someone struggling to read, to express ideas in writing, or to remember new facts does not mean that person has reading problems. Some studies indicate that learners who do not learn to read fall substantially behind their classmates in reading skills during the first four years of school. Such early reading failure is one of the causes most often cited for referral to special education, later grade retention, academic failure, dropping out and even lack of adult employability. While teachers in the Foundation Phase are responsible for laying a strong academic base which is very critical for future educational developments, they do not seem to be coping with learners who have reading disabilities in Tshivenda. This study was aimed at investigating how educators cope with learners experiencing reading problems in Grade 2 Tshivenda in the Foundation Phase.

### METHODOLOGY

The study research design was quantitative survey. The population of this study consisted of educators teaching Tshivenda in Foundation Phase classes in schools in the Dzondo Circuit of the Limpopo Province. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select only Foundation Phase teachers for this study. Foundation Phase teachers were selected as they were the ones who are teaching those phases. Permission to conduct the study was sought from the District Senior Manager, school managers and educators. The respondents were requested not to identify themselves in any manner when completing the questionnaire. They were also informed about their rights to withdraw if they did not wish to continue participating in the study.

The study used questionnaire to collect data on how Foundation Phase educators cope with Grade 2 learners experiencing reading problems

in Tshivenda. Knowledge gained from the review of literature and teaching experience of teachers served as guiding framework for the development of the measurement instrument. The instrument consisted of two sections. The first section was biographical information regarding gender, age, highest academic qualification, teaching experience and teaching phase or band. The second section consisted of 24 items using a five point Likert type scale. The questionnaire was pre-tested with five educators in Foundation Phase classes from the schools where the researcher work. The educators were requested to give their comment on the clarity of the items before being applied to sampled respondents. Questionnaires were administered to one hundred and fifty six respondents and collected a week later depending on the agreements with the principals and educators. Data was analysed through the computer loaded with the Statistical Package for Social Science version 21 programme.

### RESULTS

Learners with visual problems experience reading problems. The findings in Table 1 presenting results show that respondents agreed that learners have difficulty with reading problems show that 130 (83.4%) respondents in this study agreed that learners with visual problems have difficulty with learning the alphabet.

**Table 1: Difficulty with reading problems**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	55	35.3
Agree	75	48.1
Not sure	5	3.2
Disagree	14	9.0
Strongly disagree	7	4.5
Total	156	100.0

The researchers wanted to establish if auditory perceptual problems affect hearing and impact on learners' reading problems. More than three quarters 139 (89.1%) of respondents (Table 2) agreed that learners with auditory perceptual problems have difficulties in taking information through the sense of hearing, and this may negatively affect their reading abilities. Very few (5.1%) disagreed.

**Table 2: Auditory perceptual problems**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	45	28.8
Agree	95	60.3
Not sure	9	5.8
Disagree	8	5.1
Total	156	100.0

Learners may be expected to copy information from books or other learning materials. The majority 112 (71.7%) of respondents (Table 3) agreed or strongly agreed that copying disability affects learners academic performance in the foundation phase.

**Table 3: Copying disabilities**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	28	17.9
Agree	84	53.8
Not sure	28	17.9
Disagree	14	9.0
Strongly disagree	2	1.3
Total	156	100.0

In establishing the importance of memory in reading abilities, the results on the Table 4 shows that 110 (70.5%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Visual and Auditory memory affect learners in remembering the different objects they have seen while only 20.5 percent of respondents disagreed in this regard. Only 9 percent were neutral. These results are consistent with literature by Grove and Hauptfleish (1982) which indicates that the eyes and ears are the primary means of delivering information to the brain, a process sometimes called input. These results indicate that learners' with Visual and Auditory problems are not able to remember what they have read. They will also not be able to make connections or associations between sounds in written words.

**Table 4: Visual and auditory memory**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	35	22.4
Agree	75	48.1
Not sure	14	9.0
Disagree	24	15.4
Strongly disagree	8	5.1
Total	156	100.0

The majority 117 (75%) of respondents (Table 5) strongly agreed that visual and auditory discrimination is the key to young learner's academic performance. Only 7.7 percent of respondents were neutral. A further 17.3 percent in this regard disagreed with this statement.

**Table 5: Visual and auditory discrimination**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	45	28.8
Agree	72	46.2
Not sure	12	7.7
Disagree	21	13.5
Strongly disagree	6	3.8
Total	156	100.0

The researchers wanted to establish the possibility that some learners are still able to read despite the fact they have reading problems. A large number 106 (67.9%) of respondents who completed the questionnaire disagreed that learners with reading problems can still read well (Table 6).

**Table 6: Learners with reading problems**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Strongly agree	9	5.8
Agree	33	21.2
Not sure	8	5.14
Disagree	76	8.7
Strongly disagree	30	19.2
Total	156	100.0

## DISCUSSION

The results showing that learners with visual problems have reading problems (Table 1) are consistent with literature by Spache and Spache (1977). They may jump over words, read the same line twice, or skip line. This result indicates that learners with visual and auditory discrimination cannot discriminate between colour, size, shape, letters, sounds and words. It can also create difficulties in learning new words.

The results in Table 2 are in agreement with Wallace and McLaughlin (1979) who found that difficulties with auditory perception can make it difficult to screen out completing sounds in order to focus on one of them, such as the sound of the educator's voice. This also results in difficulty when processing and understanding what is said. These results indicate that learners

with auditory perceptual problems are not able to remember what they have heard or seen. They also struggle to pronounce words correctly or say phrases in the correct orders. Learners with auditory perceptual problems must take notes in class and discuss what was taught with other students and the educator. The learner must try to listen to important facts and write them down.

Like all learning problems, difficulties in copying can be devastating to a child's education and self-esteem. As children progress through school, they are increasingly expected to express what they know about many different subjects through writing. They should be able to copy in some instances and see what they write (Ramaano 2014). If a child fails to see what they write, they are unable to write with the speed and fluency required to excel as these demands increase in speed. Learners who have copying problems are not able to analyse, synthesize, remember and use closure to copy accurately like write down something displayed on the writing board (Table 3). For a child struggling with a visual problems, the writing process becomes difficult and interferes with learning. Once children have mastered the ability to read, they are able to have access to a wider breadth of languages that they can use in their oral and written communication (Mudzielwana 2014a). Students faced with such difficult odds have trouble staying motivated.

The results in Table 4 are consistent with literature (Willows et al. 1986) which show that working memory refers to the ability to hold on to piece of information until the pieces blend into a full thought or concept. These results indicated that learners with short term memory cannot store or retain information for a long time. While for the academic success of the learner; learners need to have long term memory where they should store information over a long period of time.

Some learners have difficulty in recognizing the position and shape of what they see. Consistent with Landsberg (2005), learners might see reverse letters example, d as b or p as q. These results suggest that learners with sight problems should sit close to the front of class and should be referred for an eye test. Instead of the child struggling to look at the chalkboard, educators must write the learners work on flash cards so that it is easier for that learner to write the exercise.

Reading is an interactive process where there is dynamic relationship with a text, as the reader struggles to make sense of (Ramaano 2014; Mudzielwana 2014b). Basic reading problems occur when there is difficulty in understanding the relationship between sound, letters and words. These results (Table 6) indicate that learners with reading problems cannot read well (Mudzielwana 2014a). Learners who have reading problems identified when they reverse letters or words, omitting letters when reading, remembering little and also poor comprehension.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that educators teaching at Foundation Phase are faced with numerous problems while dealing with learners who have auditory difficulty. However, educators try to place those learners on the front seats of the class or near the educators and must write the learners work on flash cards so that it will be easier for that learner to write the exercise. Learners need to have long term memory where they should store information over a long period of time for the academic success of the learner. Foundation phase educators also had to look directly at the learner when giving instructions. Participants varied in their views regarding the use of remedial educators, versus trying out different strategies on their own. Participants expected that more support given to them in the schools where trained and qualified remedial educators were teaching, and that these 'experts' could work closer with them and share their knowledge and assist with the problems experienced. In addition, some schools have trained remedial educators available, but they are not primarily and effectively used in the school remedial programmes. At schools where a remedial educator was available, participants made use of their expertise by negotiating and requesting their assistance, but they are busy in their own classrooms. Participants add that when they are free they discuss the reading and learning problems of the learners with them and then they try to implement what they said they must do.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ♦ The individual Foundation Phase educators should plan for a variation of teaching techniques in reading, spelling, and/or mathematics.

ics. These skills could be learnt from support groups, workshops or self-study. Before deciding on techniques for teaching all learning programmes, the educator must understand the learner's abilities and disabilities to attainment levels and the operations that the learner can perform.

- ♦ The individual educator should read widely, attend workshops or enrol for specific qualification, such as the Advance Certificate in Education in Special Needs Education. The knowledge and skills thus acquired, would improve the educators' competence to teach all learners, including those experiencing reading problems. Learners who have auditory difficulties should be arranged for a hearing or speech therapist to assess the learner. All educators should establish a 'reading corner' in their classrooms. Reading material could be photo copies of interesting text, a block loan from the municipal library, or old magazines or other books donated by church groups or donors.
- ♦ Educators from each grade should get together and form their own internal support teams that could cooperate and collaborate in developing simple reading tasks that could be swapped between classes. This would save educators time in preparing these reading tasks and provide them with more time to spend on the task of helping learners experiencing problems.
- ♦ Educators (individuals or a support group) should organise activities that would promote reading, for example, 'Tell your favourite story' or organise a reading marathon. In this way, learners' reading would improve and educators could spend more time on other educational tasks. Educators should give learners constant support for activities. For example, when counting in multiples let them use real counters that they group and count. Educators as a support group should consider team-teaching activities.
- ♦ Educators should try to make learners feel safe and comfortable in their environment at school. Learners should be encouraged to assist their classmates for example by reading aloud what is written on the board for a classmate who does not see well, and, by repeating things for a classmate who does not hear well. Educators should explain new concepts when teaching specify purposeful,

direct and clear. Give the learner time to think before answering questions. Educators should use simple language when giving instructions so that every learner should understand what is needed.

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