

A Conceptual Study on the Reading Habits of Grade Three Foundation Learners

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ABSTRACT Reading is an indispensable activity in as far as learning of a child is concerned. Reading enables learners to progress academically. There are different means in which reading as a notion and behaviour can be examined. It is as a result of utmost importance that each and every learner develops the reading habits so that they would be able to succeed in their studies. This paper explored the reading habits of grade three learners. The methodology used in this paper was investigated by employing consistent literature review using a combination of both the background and theoretical review methods. The results of the study indicate that numerous learners are still incapable to read or write, which also brings about the over-all matric achievement being dragged down in South Africa. The National Systemic Evaluation (NSE) concerning the performance of learners, the education departments own Annual National Assessment (ANA), the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ II) of 2004, and the Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), they were found to be appalling in all these studies. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the books used for teaching reading to foundation phase learners be reviewed to change the content they are being taught. The strategies that are used to teach reading to learners should be changed to include better strategies that will be able to yield good results by the end of the day.

INTRODUCTION

In 2001 and 2004 the Department of Education (DoE) undertook two national systemic evaluations to determine reading and maths levels in primary schools. The above surveys revealed a disgracefully low level of literacy skills throughout the country. Most children simply could not read. Inability to read results in poor reading habits among learners in South Africa (Olifant et al. 2019). The Department of Education carries on examining literacy and to identify approaches to deal with the difficulty (South Africa Department of Education (DoE) 2008). Perhaps one of the reasons that explain the prevalence of this situation is the lack of exposure to school library facilities, especially in the rural areas of developing countries such as South Africa. The availability and usage of school libraries might help children to acquire reading habits, which will help them to become habitual and fluent readers. In other words, the existence and use of school libraries will perform a positive responsibility in addressing the reading habits of children (Mahwasane 2017c). A study on the role of school libraries on the reading habits of learners and the development of a suitable model for school libraries that would

motivate learners to become habitual readers in rural schools might make a difference. Libraries are the backbones of the mother body in this case is the school library that serves to provide the learners with many benefits such as, safe environment, relevant resources, as well as services that add value to learners' academic attainment. (Malekani and Mubofu 2019).

However, the South African education system is said to be "in crisis" and that the President pledged to put education first in his government's programme as well as improving the reading levels at schools (South Africa DBE 2010). This situation is also consolidated by the comments used to describe the reading levels in South African schools that is "shockingly low, disastrously poor, crisis in education, shocked the nation" (South Africa DBE 2010).

It is a well-known fact that reading habits need to be developed at the early ages of the child's life, but this is challenging and demanding for children growing and schooling in rural areas and in schools where there are no opportunities and support structures to develop literacy and reading habits. Oraekwe and Emenari (2021), Mahwasane (2017a) and Machet and Tiemensma (2009: 58) concede that lack of "a supportive literacy

environment contributes to alarming school drop-out rates, poor matriculation results and low scores in reading performance tests in South African schools.” Despite efforts designed to improve reading among children, the problem of disappearing or poor reading habits among Foundation Phase learners in rural areas due to absence of school libraries seem to be overlooked. Moreover, studies also exposed those South African children had the bottom achievement in “reading comprehension” throughout the fifty (50) contributing countries (Howie et al. 2017). Therefore, there is a need for research “on the role of school libraries” in developing the reading habits of Foundation Phase learners in rural areas (Mahwasane 2017b). The current study seeks to investigate school libraries and their role in promoting a culture of reading amongst “rural Foundation Phase (Grade three) learners in Vhembe District”, with specific reference to Thohoyandou.

The proposed study seeks to address the gap that exists in the “South African education” system in as far as the reading habits of grade three learners is concerned. Thus, the study is important for the reasons that the national drive to restore “reading and writing” in the elementary schools as promulgated by the “Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)” needs to be informed by empirical evidence. More importantly, it appears that studies of this type have not been conducted in South Africa, particularly in Limpopo Province.

Objectives

The researcher set out to realise the following objectives:

1. To understand grade three learners.
2. To examine the reading habits of three grade three learners.
3. To find out how it plays an important role in the academic success.
4. To explore the factors that cultivate deep-seated reading habits in grade three learners.

Understanding Grade Three Learners

Sinclair (1987) defines a learner as a person undergoing the rout of learning about a particular issue or to perform something. Piaget (1968)

indicates that a grade 3 learner, in terms of years, falls under the “stage of concrete operations”. This stage is characterised by reasoning tasks, which are essential for comprehending knowledge. For the purpose of this study, grade three learners are children whose ages range from seven to eleven years old. This study is intent in the reading habits of grade three learners, mainly because they are in the exit class from the “Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase”. The words ‘learners’ and ‘children’ will sometimes be used interchangeably in this study.

Reading Habits

Sykes (1991) indicates that reading is the ability to convert written, printed or other symbols or things, which are expressed and represented by such symbols into intended words or meaning. Sangkaeo (1999) points out that reading habits indicate the likeness and tastes of reading. Reading has much to do with how learners arrange their reading. In the same way, Shen (2006) sees “reading habits as how often, how much, and what, the learners read”. Mahwasane (2009: 9) states, “Reading habits refer to the extent to which users are motivated to read on their own. In other words, it pertains to voluntary reading at home, at school, and in the library. The reading habit is indicated by the number of school or class periods per week set aside for silent reading, the number of library lessons per week, the number of hours of voluntary reading at home, and the number of books read at the library”.

Reading habits in this study, therefore, refer to the repeated activity of reading, involving oneself on a regular basis in reading books, magazines and posters, among others, for the sake of enjoyment that is both wonderful and worth doing again and again. Reading materials are made available in both print and electronic format. It is a type of reading that is done voluntarily and eagerly and not for the purpose of academic performance. A reading habit is measured by the “number of materials being read, the frequency of reading and the time spent” doing it.

The Reading Habits of Grade Three Learners

The reading habits of learners are dependent upon their reading abilities. It is, therefore, difficult

to discuss reading habits without touching on the literacy skills and behaviour of children. The learner is a person who is still young who is not yet fully grown. The learner yet needs to be taught and to master from grown-ups or teachers in prescribed circumstances, that is a school. Sometimes learners can be adults in schools in which they learn being taught by adults too (National Curriculum Statement 2006). Grade three learners are learners who are in the “Foundation Phase”, which is the first phase of the “General Education and Training (GET)” band. Children in the “Foundation Phase” include those from “Grade R” to Grade three. Grade three is the fourth class of the “Foundation Phase in South Africa”, and most of the children in this grade are “seven to eight” ages. According to Piaget (1967), these grade three learners are at the phase, which is referred to as the concrete operational stage. This is the stage during which the child starts to “apply logic to concrete experiences, with the result that they begin to move beyond one-dimensional thinking”. Mwamwenda (2006) confirms this by stating that the “concrete operational stage” ushers in the beginning of logical thinking grounded on capabilities and tangible proof. Moreover, the child starts to be able to form ideas about what something is like, which is important when the child is learning to read. Grade three learners are learners in the final class, from the “Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase”, that is, from grade four to grade seven.

According to the “assessment standard guidelines for learning outcome”, reading and viewing (South Africa, Department of Education 2002) curriculums in the Foundation Phase (Grade R to three) require that the Grade R learner should be able to:

- Employ visible clues to make meaning
- Is able to make significance of written texts
- Consolidates phonic awareness
- Reads information for enjoyment
- Employs different approaches to understand text (Department of Education (DoE) 2008).

The amount of classroom time, which should be distributed for literacy learning programmes for the grade three learners is 10 hours per week. The time is dedicated to the instruction of reading. The Foundation Phase is the first four grades, that is, grade R, one, two and three of the “General Education and Training (GET) band”. The Phase

concentrates on elementary expertise, awareness and standards. It places the basics, the foundation for extra education. “There are three Learning Programmes in this Phase namely, literacy, numeracy and life skills”. It is in this Level that school learners should be trained on elementary skills such as the application of linguistic knowledge, which is about paying attention, talking, reading and all numeracy (National Curriculum Statement 2006). The strategy to encourage learners in the lower grade to read is for the librarian to read an interesting book and tell stories, and in turn, let the learners read and tell the stories.

Hanson (2005) indicates that she involves the first graders by letting them place the character in the story and then give them homework to go and retell the story at home. Moreover, she uses “trickster tales” for the second grade learners and lets them make a puppet show of the story where one kid would tell the story and the others perform it. She may also read the story and the second grade learners would act it. For the third grade learners, she uses books already read in grade two to usher them into something a little difficult to them. In this grade, learners now read the lines of a specific character in the story while they are performing with puppets. According to Hanson (2005), relating stories strengthens self-reliance, gratification, reading articulacy and respect admiration for others. Various authors on this topic agree that different strategies can be used in the school library to motivate learners in the lower grades to read, as long as they are provided with appropriate programmes, activities and applicable tasks to participate in.

While in South Africa there is no retention for learners from grade R-three, Johnson et al. (2013) indicate that most of the states take into account legal codes to authorise all grade three learners who are unable to read in their reading levels according to the standardised test scores to be retained. According to the “primary school curricula” concerning that grade three children should have the ability to “read and write” assuredly at a compound cognitive skill phase at the end of grade three (Cilliers and Bloch 2018). Hernandez (2012) reveals that children who still strive in reading in grade three have a great possibility of discontinuing schooling without having acquired the least qualification. This implies that when learners are unable to read in their reading levels, they have

to be retained, which gives them an opportunity to be able to master and know how to read before they proceed to the next grade.

Factors in Cultivating Deep-seated Habitual Readers

Access and availability of books are identified as the most important factors in fostering strong habitual readers. Learners are able to develop reading habits where libraries are able to provide enough reading books to learners (Krashen 2004). This was further summarised by Francis et al. (2010) and Rudkin and Wood (2019), that the more learners visit the library the better they can perform in reading. Moreover, primary schools learners (grades three to five) who visit the library on a weekly basis tend to read proficiently. It is evident that learners who attend schools where there is a library will read better. Pribesh et al. (2011) indicate that school libraries are indispensable in bridging the poverty attainment gap by offering admission to books and other materials. Furthermore, those who utilise “school libraries” turn up to attain higher reading levels (Clark 2010; Teravainen and Clark 2017; Clark and Teravainen-Goff 2018).

According to the South Africa, Department of Education (2008), the South African “National Strategy” is a means through which the “Minister of Education”, Mrs. Motshekga, and the “Department of Education” promote reading in South African schools. The “Department of Education” carried out two “national systemic evaluations” to find out the “literacy and numeracy” levels of learners in elementary schools in 2001 and 2004. The results of the survey reflected “shockingly low levels of reading” competence in the whole of “South Africa”. Most of the South African learners cannot read. As a result, the “Department of Education” introduced the National Reading Strategy as a means to combat the reading problem. On the other hand, “South Africa” is faced with many problems in as far as promoting literacy in South Africa is concerned. For example, there are few schools that have functional libraries, and in many homes there are no reading collection such as books in the mother tongue. Therefore, children are unable to read in their vernacular. Therefore, the National Reading Strategy aims to promote a “nation of lifelong readers and lifelong learners”.

The Systemic Evaluation undertaken by the “Department of Education”, “Provincial Department of Education” as well as “international organisations” indicated that “South African learners” that achieved badly, their reading levels at age-appropriate levels were found to be low (South Africa DoE 2008a). The National Reading Strategy also concentrates on enhancing learners to read smoothly with understanding, while supervising learners’ reading development. Supervising will be done by making use of the National Systemic Evaluation that will be conducted for the grade three and six phases. Systemic Evaluations to monitor the reading progress of learners is also conducted at provincial levels by Provincial Education Departments. Teachers in the Foundation Phase are provided with “Early Grade Reading Assessment” tools by the “Department of Education”.

METHODOLOGY

The paper followed the methodology that was investigated through a consistent “literature review” using the background as well as theoretical review approaches. A considerate and well-informed review of appropriate literature places the researcher in a structure of complementary study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current mass media report extensively about reading challenges in South Africa concerning the extreme degree of failure among the matriculates, which reflects that many learners are yet unable to read or write, which also result in the general matric achievement being pulled down (South Africa DBE 2010a). It is logical that according to Barone et al. (2005), there has been a report of instances where children in higher grades classes are struggling to read and write. It is also not surprising that Mngadi (2021) and Johnson (2006) asserted that most of the Senior Phase teachers are discouraged due to the poor state of reading of their children, as they have to take over and continue teaching them when they have not mastered what they were supposed to have mastered in the Foundation Phase, that is, reading and writing. This was pinpointed as being one of the main reasons of deprived educational accomplishment among children in

South Africa. This outcome is a suggestion that crucial concentration is necessary in as far as reading among especial learners in the foundation phase is concerned.

The most distressing issue was the outcomes of the education department's own Annual National Assessment (ANA), which was first undertaken in 2009 and then also in 2011 (South Africa DBE 2011a; South Africa DBE 2015; South Africa DBE 2017b; South Africa DBE 2017c). The tests involved grade one up to grade six classes nationwide. "The Human Sciences Research Council" confirmed the outcomes and managed an analysis of the answers of learners. The ANA's report provided records and strengthened the wide difference in test scores among schools situated in various socio-economic backgrounds. The reading problem among the grade one to six children is rising at a shocking pace (Schaefer and Kotzé 2019; South Africa DBE 2011b). This is a clear indication of the problems encountered by educators as well as the entire country.

Currently, ANA 2010 indicated that grade three learners performed with low scores in literacy at thirty-six percent. It is not surprising that in the ANA study, Mpumalanga and Limpopo are also some of the most disadvantaged provinces in as far as libraries are concerned with only 6.2 percent and 2.4 percent libraries, respectively (Equal Education 2010) and were found to be at the bottom of the list (The Times 2011). Grounded in the above results, "the Minister of Basic Education" indicated that the results are a sign that there had been an under emphasis in as far as the development of fundamental skills of reading are concerned, and that the "Department of Basic Education" needs to pay more attention to its main tasks of excellent "learning and teaching in schools". This means that up until the present moment despite the employment of the "National Reading Strategies", "South African learners" are still unable to read and comprehend what they are reading (Hugo and Masalesa 2021). This is a clear indication that more than just reading, strategies should be used to develop the reading habits of learners. As a result, reading for amusement and meaning should be the principal purpose throughout the "foundation phase" (Van der Berg et al. 2016). However, the only drawback is that with the exception of school libraries, a number of endeavours have been tried to improve reading

levels of learners but in vain. It is, therefore, evident that if in other countries that have school libraries the reading habits of learners are good, school libraries are the only options left to be used to promote reading habits among "Foundation Phase learners" in "South Africa".

As far as the National Systemic Evaluation (NSE) of (2010) concerning the performance of learners is concerned, they were found to be appalling. That is why according to South Africa DBE (2010a), the general outcome of the grade three learners was found to be fifty-four percent in literacy assessment. With the exception of KwaZulu Natal, investigation indicated that all other provinces achieved below fifty percent. Moreover, NSE of 2010 indicated that learners achieved better in "multiple-choice" questions in contrast to "free response" questions. The study revealed that learners battled to provide their own written answers (Mudzielwane 2012). In 2007 the situation deteriorated even worse when Western Cape and Limpopo achieved the lowest of all the provinces (South Africa DBE 2010a). The graph of achievement still dropped further in the results, which were shown in the 2011 "assessment tests" of "the Annual National Assessment (ANA)". It was found that grade three and six learners achieved poorly in literacy and numeracy. The scores ranged between forty-three percent for the Western Cape learners and nineteen percent for Mpumalanga (Mtshali and Smillie 2011). This is consistent with the studies by South Africa, DBE (2011c), South Africa, DBE (2015), South Africa, DBE (2017b) and South Africa, DBE (2017c) that stressed that the results were regarded to be hopeless and a reflection of the poor foundation of literacy, which the education of "primary school learners" in "South Africa" is based on. It is, therefore, a clear indication that children in South Africa are unable to read according to their reading levels stipulated by the Annual National Assessment. As a result, the researcher is of the view that a study about understanding, and development of reading habits of Foundation Phase learners is of paramount importance to address this reading problem in South Africa.

As far as the reading levels of "South African learners" are concerned, studies worldwide have indicated that they are lower than the universal standard in numeracy and reading. As far as literacy

is concerned, SACMEQ II of 2004 revealed that generally the reading levels of grade three children in “South Africa” is at level three, which is referred to as fundamental reading. This idea was supported by Keating (2007) who revealed that in the Western Cape Province, the “Western Cape Government” conducted a study of grade three learners’ achievement in which their writing, literacy and mathematical skills were tested, and it was reflected that more than fifty-three percent of the learners had difficulties in reading. As a result of the conclusions of the comparative investigation on reading and mathematics levels of “primary school learners” that were taken in twelve African states, “South African learners” were described as the “dunes of Africa” (The Sunday Times 2000:11). South Africa has also performed poorly in other international rankings such as “the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)”, where “grade four and grade eight” children are tested on their skill in “maths and science”. While nearly all other countries test their grade four learners, on the contrary South Africa tests its grade five learners, which aggravated the country’s miserable performance in the ranking even more worrying (Marius 2018). These results are an indication that “South African learners” achieved lower than learners from other countries in Africa in both literacy and numeracy.

The tests referred to as the “Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)”, disclose that “South African learners” are behind their global complements in terms of reading too. Of the 50 countries that participated in the tests, “South African learners” were found to achieve the poorest on their reading ability (Marius 2018).

“The Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)” commenced in 2001 with three countries only. In 2006 the number of the countries participating on PRLS increased to forty (Mullis et al. (2007). Literature by Mullis et al. (2003) and Mullis et al. (2004) asserted that PIRLS concentrated on three features of reading literacy that is the process of comparison, purposes of reading and reading behaviours and attitudes. According to “PIRLS study, South Africa” being better off economically as compared to other countries performed the poorest out of forty countries that participated in the study. Nearly eight percent of “South African” primary school children could not

accomplish at least the least possible benchmark. In as far as the reading achievement is concerned, the general scores position “South Africa” at the lowermost of the list.

Moreover, the audit to assess the reading level in the nine provinces of South Africa under taken by the “South African National Department of Education” in 2001 indicated that thirty-eight percent of grade three learners were found to be capable of reading at a grade level in their home language (Mtshali and Smillie 2011). This is a distinct suggestion that literacy is indeed a challenge to South African learners. Therefore, this study on school libraries and the reading habits of learners is appropriate.

The Western Cape Education Department authorised investigation on learners’ attainment in reading. The regulated literacy and numeracy tests were conducted for grade three learners. The results of the report were announced in 2002 and indicated poor levels of reading performance among the learners (South Africa, DOE 2008b). According to South Africa DoE (2008b), the “Department of Education” conducted an investigation on the assessment of the grade three learners and reflected that most of the children in lower grades are unable to read. Only thirty-six percent of grade three learners were able to read and count. In as far as literacy is concerned, Limpopo Province was placed the lowest of all the 9 provinces with merely twenty-nine percent. As a result of the above performance, the Minister of Education, Mrs. Motshekga, indicated that South Africa is falling short of its target of “fifty percent mean performance” in the country. In the researcher’s opinion, this is not appropriate enough. The learners deserve more and are able to attain even higher (South Africa DoE 2008b).

It is clear that South African learners’ level of reading is very poor and requires crucial attention. It seems brilliant to have research, investigation and annual evaluations conducted by the country in order to establish the learners’ reading achievement so as to know how they can be helped to improve their performance. “South African primary school” children have taken part in numerous “national and international literacy” that is (literacy and numeracy) studies that are used to measure learners’ attainment in various grades and at various intervals, and the results of these assessments were analysed by several

scholars (Govender and Hugo 2020). Therefore, there is need to focus on providing learner with relevant print that is at their level. Reading literacy is defined by PIRLS as “the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment” (Mullis et al. 2009).

Wray et al. (2002) reiterate that a literate person is a person who is capable of reading and writing with ease and comprehension, enjoy reading books as well as be able to differentiate among different categories of reading materials.

The first reading campaign in the democratic “South Africa” was the “Ithuteng” “Ready to Learn” carried out by “National Multi-year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training” in 1996, followed by COLT in 1997, SANLI in 1999 and the Masifunde Sonke in 2001 and was supported to continue until 2004 but lasted for only a year (Baatjes 2003). Baatjes (2003: 1) explained the two final campaigns as “failing project, poorly conceptualised and poorly funded.”

UNESCO has indicated, “Children from the wealthiest households in South Africa are ten times as likely as children from the poorest households to score well on reading” (UNESCO 2011: 87). The era starting from 2003 to 2013 was declared as the United Nations Literacy Decade. One of the main worries that led to the “Millennium African Renaissance Plan” was the challenge of illiteracy in South Africa and the whole African region (UNESCO 2005).

In South Africa there is a high level of adult illiteracy and a poor level of functional literacy. Concerning the 1996 general population census and the 1995 October Household Survey, Atchison and Harly (2006) indicated that in South Africa out of the 26 million people from age 15 and above, 12 to 13 million, that is, fifty percent of learners have not completed grade 9. Only 7.4 to 8.5 million were found to have not completed grade seven, which is regarded as a minimum education. On the other hand, 2.9 to 4.2 million people had not attended school, and as a result, are illiterate, which makes it difficult for them to assist their children with reading.

The main answer, which was provided by those who are illiterate in rural areas, is scarcity

of chance to read when they become adults (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture; Print Industries Cluster Council 2007). Illiteracy in the community is not encouraged as it affects the children in that their opportunity to be in contact with books that can instil the love for reading in learners (Hugo and Masalesa 2021; Mchet 2000). It is logical that the “South African Department of Arts and Culture and Print Industries Cluster Council (2007), South Africa DBE” (2015), South African, DBE (2017b) and South Africa DBE (2017c) indicate that there is no reading behaviour in South Africa. As a result, the majority of the population can be grouped as irregular readers. The majority of learners are from basically oral culture. They are not subjected to storybook reading before they start schooling and they have slight emergent reading experience. Furthermore, Opeola (2016) observed that lack of school library use by both teachers and learners in nearly all schools in underdeveloped countries caused poor performance of teachers and learners, which also led to lack of encouragement of creativity, learning, innovation and originality. However, for learners to develop the reading culture, they need to be immersed in books. Learners begin reading in their mother tongue, and when they have comprehended some words, an attempt is directed into assisting them to make the transition from deciphering to reading with understanding (Pretorius 2000). Tiemensma (2009) is of the opinion that a reading culture is an essential environmental aspect that inspires pupils to be intentional readers. Moreover, what makes matters worse is the fact that learners are not always taught in their mother tongue. The researcher disagrees with the opinion and is backed by Vega (2006), Busayo (2011), Oji and Habibu (2011) and IFLA (2015) that a reading culture is an essential environmental feature that motivates reading. This is indicated by low the reading levels of learners even after the National Reading Strategy was implemented. Moreover, the Department of Education “has played a role in trying to improve literacy by developing a culture of reading through several initiatives, which do not include providing a school library, but it never worked”.

The “Minister of Basic Education”, Mrs. Motshekga, “has signed a delivery agreement to improve the quality of education. Her success will

be measured by the achievement of national targets set for literacy and numeracy in grade three, six and nine, and for mathematics and science in matric". It is anticipated that in 2014, sixty percent of learners in the initial grade classes will be able to achieve at the requirement level. Pursues have been drawn for every province contrary to their "ANA 2011" outcomes, and provinces have geared up pursues and planned interferences for both regions and schools (South Africa DBE 2012).

According to South Africa, DBE (2012), the department is quite conscious of the problems in education such as international and regional studies as well as the Annual National Assessments. The systemic evaluation "(SE) model for 2018 and beyond is a tri-annual SE" that will be performed on a mock-up of Grade 3, 6 and 9 learners, and the assessment instruments will permit for international benchmarking and tendency analysis throughout the years (South Africa DBE 2017a). All indicate that "South African learners" are achieving way below the expected standard, aptitudes and abilities. Potential is not being realised, talents are not being developed and abilities are not being stretched. The reasons and causes are constantly researched and probed, and the results inform specific strategies developed (South Africa DBE 2012). This implies that reading is certainly a challenge in "South Africa". As a result of the importance of the proposal made by the Department of Education, it is therefore appropriate to provide a synopsis of the proposal made by the Department, most of which are at present being implemented. The Department of Education has on the entirety accepted a number of proposals and is at present employing most of them.

The Department of Education proposed that feeding schemes in schools be implemented so that learners will be able to learn, as they cannot do so in empty stomachs. The procedures of employing new school managers were also changed and well-qualified school managers were employed as a way to improve reading in the country. Moreover, the Department also embarked on developing competent and dependable teachers, as it thought it would enable them to develop learners' reading habits. The Funza Lushaka bursaries was also introduced with the aim of enhancing the standard of education in South Africa in order to do away with unions and

political intervention when employing teachers and instead, concentrates on acknowledging experts. The ANA tests and matric results are by now indicating the usual flaws and false impressions that had to be taken into consideration and be used together with further international evaluations. There are university-founded undertakings that assist educators in recognising their weak points in their field of study so as to enhance them in that manner (South Africa DBE 2012). In May 2015, the Department of Education implemented the "Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)" from grades one (1) to three (3) in 1000 schools in all official languages and in all the provinces (South Africa DBE 2019). Of concern is the fact that school libraries are not considered as major answers to the reading problem. Despite efforts by the "Department of Education" to improve the reading habits of learners, these proposals were implemented as a means to address reading problems but still there is no improvement in the reading habits of learners.

Learning from these proposals, it seems as if there is nothing concerning the role of school libraries as a factor that can help in addressing the inability of learners to read at a required standard in a particular grade. Deducing from this discussion might signal that the problem faced by "South Africa" is a reading problem and not specifically problems concerning issues such as learner nutrition, quality of teacher management system, etc. as the problem is still persisting even though these proposals are being implemented, and there is no noticeable improvement (South African DBE 2012).

CONCLUSION

The findings stated in this paper have shed some insights into the reading habits of grade three learners. The reading habits of grade three learners are very poor. The Department of Education has tried more efforts to uplift the reading levels of the learners but in vain. Moreover, despite initiatives to improve reading among learners by the "South African Department of Education" including the use of different reading strategies such as The National Reading Strategy (NRS), Drop All and Read (DAAR), "Integrated National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy", together with proposals initiated by the "South Africa

Department of Education”, learners’ reading levels are not improving.

Literature reveals that lifelong reading habits throughout the country are a challenge. It also revealed that there is a reading problem in “South Africa”. Proposals to address the problems are not yielding positive results in as far as improving the reading habits of learners are concerned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the education authority should see to it that the readers (reading books) that are prescribed for reading be reviewed and be replaced by books that will be able to make learners be able to read effectively. Teachers teaching in foundation phase should be trained in new strategies on how to teach reading to foundation phase learners. Foundation phase is the foundation of each child’s education. If a learner is unable to read when they are still in the foundation phase that particular child will end up dropping out of school.

LIMITATION

The paper concentrated on the reading habits of grade three learners in “South Africa” as a result of the reading challenge that the “South African” learners have. Nevertheless the studies by other authors about the reading habits of grade three learners in other countries were consulted too to justify the findings of the study.

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