

## Teachers' Perception on Foundation Phase Learners Low Reading Performance: A Case Study of Four Rural Schools in South Africa

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**ABSTRACT** Discourse in the foundation phase often revolves around that learners cannot read and understand the text. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perception and understanding of learners' low reading performance. Teachers often feel they are able to teach and that learners are unable to read with comprehension. The design of this study was qualitative approach. A sample of eight teachers was randomly selected from four schools in Limpopo Province was used in this study. The instrument for data collection was focus group discussion with the teachers. It was affirmed that there is low level of reading amongst learners. The results also indicated that the major factors for low reading level amongst others include factors such as the introduction of new curriculum without proper orientation of those who will implement it on the ground. Various recommendations were made for interventions.

### INTRODUCTION

The South African Department of Education NCS (DoE 2002) paints a gloomy picture of the state of reading competency among South African learners from foundation phase to university level. The report suggests that the reading competence level is in crisis. The DoE findings show that in the nine South African provinces only 38% of grade three learners could read in 2002. In addition, a study by the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Standards (SAC-MEQ 2004) reveals that children in grades one to six were reading two grade levels below their own, both in English and their LC1. Since there are causal factors of low reading standards in the foundation phase in South Africa, especially in the Limpopo Province, four schools with two Grade 3 classes each were chosen in this area to conduct the study, where student teachers were conducting their teaching practice sessions, in order to explore the possible reasons for low reading standards among learners at the foundation phase.

### Profile of the Schools

The four schools utilized for the study are situated in the rural setting in one of the district in Limpopo Province. In South Africa, schools have been categorized into quintile 1, 2, 3 and 4.

For example, school A and B are referred to as quintile 1, while school C and D are referred to as quintile 2. Schools that are classified as quintile 1 and 2 are no fee-paying schools. These schools cannot ask parents for any payment at all. In terms of funding from the South African DoE, quintile 1 schools get more funding than quintile 2 schools. These quintiles 1 are the schools that are referred to in this study. The teachers that served as the study's respondents were all qualified to teach in the foundation phase.

There thus is abundant evidence from research and reports from the DoE that South African learners' reading standards are below the expected standards. It is somewhat disturbing to know that South Africa, despite its vast resources, fares badly in reading. Conceivably, this situation can be addressed if the causal problems are identified.

The objectives of this study were to identify the causal factors leading to low reading standards, using the lenses of the teachers and suggest possible interventions that may facilitate reading competence among learners.

### Definitions of 'Reading'

Reading is a skill which serves as a pillar of almost all learning processes. In essence it is critical that every child should learn to read. For

the past few years, a great number of foundation phase learners have low performance in the national examinations in the Limpopo Province (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006; DoE 2007; Annual National Assessment tests (ANA) Department of Education, 2011). All major stakeholders, learners, educators, parents, employers and the national Ministry of Education are concerned about the problem of poor learner performance in the Grade 3 examinations in South Africa. This low internal efficiency of the education system simply implies more wastage and increases in the cost of education. By the fact that foundation phase learners are performing poorly is an indication that there is a need for better trained teachers and the use of research-based strategies of teaching reading. There is a need to gain a better picture on the causes and solutions to the problem and from the researcher's point of view; we cannot underestimate the people who are directly facing these problems on a daily basis, namely the teachers.

However, before such a discussion can be raised, the controversy surrounding the definition of reading by scholars must be addressed. It seems that 'reading' is an elusive concept. Scholars tend to define 'reading' according to the purpose of their particular research studies.

Hellekjaer (2009:23) states:

*Reading comprises decoding of the written text on the one hand, and efficiently processing the information gained.*

This implies that in order to process information gathered this implies that teachers must encourage learners to become actively involved in their own learning.

In addition to the above Curriculum Council of Western Australia (CCWA) (2008:54) states:

*Reading is the act of understanding from printed material that draws on a repertoire of social, cultural and cognitive resources. It is completed in different ways, for different purposes, in a variety of public and domestic settings. Reading is therefore a cultural, economic, ideological, political and psychological act...the issue of whether readers find a message, or engage in interpretation to generate a new meaning is subject to debate in literacy circles. This perspective suggests that meaning is a result of information acquired from the text and the reader's background knowledge.*

The researcher accepts the conceptualization of Inglis, Thompson and Macdonald (2000) that reading is an interactive process where there is dynamic relationship with a text, as the reader struggles to make sense of it. It is referred to as a 'kind of dialogue between the reader and the author that makes the reader develop further the general world knowledge and socio-cultural ethics, norms and values' (Inglis et al. 2000:73). Thus, the more learners are exposed to printed language, the more they are able to work with collected information and create new knowledge. Reading is therefore the construction of meaning.

The purpose of this study was to identify the causal factors for low reading standards amongst foundation phase learners from the teachers' point of view and to suggest possible intervention strategies. These strategies can be used to help teachers to create a more conducive environment in which learners and teachers can feel more comfortable as they progress toward the goal of reading.

### Research Context

Tollefson and Tsui (2008:233) state:

*In South Africa the DoE's language- in-education encourages the use of additive multilingualism but allows the governing body of each public school's medium of instruction. The policy does not recommend any specific model, but does suggest the two such models are considered practical: the use of a first language as medium of instruction (with requirement that an additional language also be studied) and a "structured bilingual approach" (presumably, initial instruction through the L1, with a gradual transition to English).*

South Africa has 11 official languages and the Constitution of the country allows learners to be educated in any of these languages as a first language/mother tongue. Schools have been categorized into quintile 1, 2, 3 and 4. The case study schools are referred to as Quintile 1-high-poverty schools. Parents in these communities cannot pay school fees or any payment at all. In terms of funding from the South African Department of education, quintile 1 schools get more funding because they are in a rural environment and parents cannot pay the school fees or to buy books for the children. Quintile 1 is the schools that are referred to in this study.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was deemed suitable for the study. The data presented is derived from four case study schools in the foundation phase in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. These schools catered for children six to nine years. The schools were selected based on the reason that learners had low reading performance (PIRLS 2006; SAQMEC 2004). Focus group interviews with the eight teachers were used to produce data. The researcher used focus group discussions to obtain rich data in my attempt to answer the research question (May 1997). A focus group discussion is useful when insights, perceptions and explanations are more important than actual numbers (Mertens 1998). The researcher used this instrument because people are social creatures who interact with others. They are influenced by comments of others and often make decisions after listening to the advice and opinions of others. The researcher was interested in finding out teachers' perception and understanding of foundation phase learners' low reading level focus group discussions assisted me to underline important facts while at the same time enhance the authenticity of the information received.

The ethical clearance for this study was obtained via university procedures before the study commenced. Consent for the study was obtained from the teachers. The letters outlined the nature and aims of the study, confidentiality and voluntary participation, data collection and dissemination of information. Teachers were given opportunities to clarify their understanding, ask questions related to procedures and research activities.

The two research questions of the study were: What are the causal factors of low reading standards amongst foundation phase learners in South Africa; what are the intervention strategies which can address the situation from the teachers' perspective?

## RESULTS

### Focus Group Discussions

The focus group discussions were guided by the above questions. The following were the factors highlighted by the participated teachers during the focus group discussions.

### The National Curriculum Statement (NCS)

Educators attributed poor reading competence among South African learners to the poorly-introduced Outcomes Based Education (OBE). The OBE curriculum that was announced on 24 March 1997 introduced some radical changes in the education system of the country, including the way reading was to be taught. Chief among the criticisms of the new paradigm is that it is a borrowed economic package that is difficult to implement in education, including reading. Teachers complained that they did not understand the principles of OBE, and yet they are expected to be the implementers. They also complained of a lack of specificity and examples in the NCS. Teachers were instructed to develop a learning program based on the NCS. There was an urgent need to make teachers literate about OBE for its effective implementation. A survey of 93 foundation phase teachers showed that half of the participants were not satisfied with their initial training to teach reading to beginners, and indicated a need for further training (Lessing and De Witt 2005). The foundation phase is critical in the sense that it acts as the bedrock that provides basic reading skills which are important in the acquisition of reading skills in subsequent grades. The DoE (2008) largely attributes poor reading standards to a poor training of foundation phase teachers.

However, the question can be asked whether teachers are not simply resisting change. It is common knowledge that some teachers always try to resist change when a new curriculum is introduced, despite the benefits, because change may result in more work in terms of training, reading and the preparation of learning materials. From the researcher's view point it may be possible that people prefer the familiar route to the new. Fear of the unknown seems to affect human responses. It would be foolhardy, however, to introduce a new curriculum package without giving due consideration to the ability of the implementers to handle such a new approach.

Even so, it appears that, one way or another, the introduction of the OBE curriculum had a negative impact on reading, accounting for the alarming low level of reading competence among the learners. At the same time it is acknowledged that conformity to pre-ordained outcomes stifles creativity. Dick (2001), therefore, further ar-

gues that the OBE was too prescriptive, to the extent that it does not encourage the love of reading for the sake of reading. The learner should have an intrinsic interest in reading, and that promotes reading competence.

This was highlighted in the following way by five respondents when they say:

*'There are so many workshops that we attend in particular now that there is NCS, but all of them focus mainly on planning and the three levels of planning and none on the development of reading and how to teach reading, I mean reading strategies, eh'.*

The question can also be asked if it should not be the teachers who extrinsically motivate the learners to read. Teachers are expected to excite learners and broaden their zone of proximal development. Yet only a competent teacher conversant with the curriculum would have the capacity and ability to do that.

It also seems, from the various reports by teachers, that the OBE was not timeously introduced, thus further contributing to the low performance level in reading. There are well-founded complaints that books that were in use were declared unsuitable and outdated. At the same time, there were no new curriculum reading materials when the new curriculum was introduced. This was tantamount to producing a major problem to teachers in the classroom.

This was highlighted in the following manner by five respondents:

*It is because of changes of curriculum and while doing this you change to that; and it confuses learners with their teachers. In the previous curriculum, learners were able to know the poems and rhymes chosen for that grade in different schools.*

### **Foundations for Learning Campaign (FFLC)**

Teachers complained that the FFLC came as an overload. They say that they are unable to plan instructions due to the many documents required by the FFLC and the introduction of new terms. Every new change comes with new terminology, and this is confusing to teachers.

### **Inappropriate Methodology Used in the Teaching of Reading**

Teachers did not seem to have been introduced to the major communicative and interac-

tive approaches to reading in the pre-service teacher programmes. Experience through interacting with practicing teachers shows that when learners read aloud individually, they are not given pause time to use other strategies. Learners often read parrot-like, while the meaning of what they read is not established by them. They are also over-corrected for trivial and insignificant pronunciation errors. From this it may be concluded that teacher incompetence in implementing the new curriculum is an impediment to effective and efficient reading.

The impact of these gaps in training was evident in the class observation, in which teachers used predominantly teacher-controlled approaches and focused on asking questions. This was confirmed by the NRS (DoE 2008: 10) which state the following:

*Many teachers in South Africa have an under-developed understanding of teaching literacy, reading and writing. Many teachers simply do not know how to teach reading. Too often, teachers know only one method of teaching reading which may not suit the learning style of all learners.*

In the context of literature, Joubert, Bester, Meyer and Evans (2012) suggest that teachers should know a variety of reading methods, for example, phonics approach or a language-experienced approach, and that they should not resort to one method of teaching. The NRS (DoE 2008:13) further emphasizes the following:

*South African teachers do not know how to stimulate reading inside, and outside the classroom. It further states that too many foundation phase teachers have not been explicitly trained to teach reading. That is why they find it difficult to help learners with reading difficulties. Consequently many teachers have resorted to rote teaching as the only option, and tend to be satisfied with the rote learning by their learners.*

### **Multi-Grade Teaching Approach**

During the teaching practice visits, the researcher noted that there were schools that had very low enrolment numbers. As a result, several grades were collapsed into one class despite grade differences. It was very difficult for the teacher to divide his/her teaching equitably. Those learners who were not involved were just lying down awaiting their turn. To occupy them,

teachers simply instructed learners to read. There was little evidence of what the teachers did to find out the root causes of struggling learners, and thus the teachers' means of arriving at ways to support learners in overcoming their problems. The reading activity was not properly organized, and so learners found such activities repulsive. Such an approach does not stimulate a learner's desire to read nor improve their reading standards. In a multi-grade class, teachers should plan lessons and activities in such a way that learners are able to share ideas and work together (Sargent 2002).

This was highlighted in the following manner by the three respondents:

*Because of rest and relaxation, there is nothing I can do, because some teachers have been deployed to other schools and now I have to teach all the grades, I do not know how and it is bad.*

#### **Lack of Parental Involvement**

Teachers complained that parents were not involved in their children's education. According to the teachers, parents remained uninvolved even if they were called by the teachers to come and see them.

This was confirmed by three respondents:

*Reading is a challenge. The learners' context is affected by a high level of poverty. The majority of the population lives in rural areas where there are high levels of unemployment. Reading becomes one of the activities that are not always prioritized by the community members, because the most prioritized activities are those that would bring food home. This can serve as one possible reason why parents remain uninvolved in their children's education.*

#### **Lack of Variety of Reading Materials and Books**

The unavailability of reading material was regarded as a major challenge by the teachers. There were no books for learners to read at the schools and in some schools there was no one to read to the learners, that is, no readers. Teachers can therefore not assist nor motivate learners to read.

This was highlighted in the following way by the six respondents:

*I believe that if reading could be made part of the learners' lives, things could turn around.*

*If children could be provided with reading material even before they go to school that would mean that they grow up having a positive attitude towards books and other related material. By the time they go to school, they will be used to books. They will be able to cut and paste pictures to make their own stories.*

This implies that it is important for children during their early years to be exposed to books so that they could develop the love for books and eventually will become readers.

One respondent also add on the above:

*The availability of reading material is the main challenge. There are no books for learners to read for pleasure other than the text books but it is much better because we are able to provide them with text books to read. Yes, there is a problem when it comes to assisting learners to read a variety of readings while they are out of classrooms.*

This implies that a culture of reading should be instilled before children start school. However in order to accommodate all the learners teachers must encourage learners to have the love for books. This can be achieved if teachers create a print-rich environment in the classroom by providing reading and writing materials for the learners and reading to the learners' every day.

Reading comprehension is what allows the reader to interact with the text in a meaningful way. It is true that reading comprehension cannot develop in a haphazard way. Hence, the importance of activities before, during and after reading to enhance reading comprehension (Chia 2001; Dole 2000; Allen 2003; Adler 2004; Wessels 2010). Therefore, the teacher should plan strategically before the reading comprehension lesson so that effective teaching and learning can take place.

Teachers must be conversant with theories and comprehension strategies related to reading comprehension in order to equip learners to develop and apply reading strategies during reading appropriately (National Reading Panel (NRP 2000; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) 2002). This enhances learners' understanding of the text because the purpose of reading is to read with understanding, so that one can be able to use the information in various ways. Finding the deeper meaning of the text requires a strategic reader who is able to use comprehension strategies when reading in order to gain the informa-

tion. Strategies might help learners to monitor the process of comprehension. As a result, the learner develops interest in reading because he/she can make meaning from the written words.

### Lack of Motivation

The motivation to read is essential for actively engaging learners in the reading process. It is the fuel that lights the fire and keeps it burning. Bruner (1986) values the role of motivation as important in learning and this can be applied to the teaching of reading comprehension. Strategic teachers are teachers who motivate learners to have an interest in reading any text with the aim to understand the meaning thereof. The teachers have to motivate learners before reading and make them want to read for information and for pleasure. Learners are motivated to engage in reading comprehension when they are given opportunities that improve their comprehension ability Texas Education Agency 2002; DoE 2002).

One respondent stated the following:

*'I motivate them before reading comprehension starts'.*

'Motivation is the internal force that drives an individual [learner] to move towards the goal after perceiving a plan, for example the need for accomplishment (Martin and Pear 2003: 57)' and this can influence the interest, purpose, emotion or persistence with which a reader engages with text (Butcher and Kintsch 2003; Schallert and Marting 2003).

The response about motivation indicates that the teacher understood that reading comprehension had an emotional value and needed to be developed. Motivation is critical because it can influence and create the interest, purpose, emotion, or persistence with which a reader engages with text and so improve reading ability and comprehension of texts (Guthrie and Winfield 2000).

This implies that motivation encourages arouses an organism to act towards a desired goal. It is important that teachers must motivate learners in such a way that they develop a love for reading. This behaviour can encourage learners to develop positive attitudes towards reading comprehension by motivating them at all times. During the classroom observations, the teachers started the comprehension lesson by reading and asking learners to read. The motiva-

tion of learners before the lesson did not come out clearly. It might be because the teachers interviewed said they were discouraged.

Some teachers indicated that they did not know how to motivate their learners. They were confused because learners could not read and understand the story.

Elaborating on the above, one teacher said:

*'Yes motivation is good, but these kids, you cannot motivate them, well I do not know how'.*

The above response indicates that this teacher seemed to be confused and did not know how to motivate her learners. This lack of knowledge may seem to be contributing towards negative attitudes with both the teachers and the learners. When teachers do not know what to do, it will certainly affect the learners.

The teachers in the study showed a lack of knowledge with regard to comprehension strategies in various ways and across all the data. In the next category, some teachers clearly indicated that they did not know about reading comprehension strategies.

It is important that teachers must teach learners to use comprehension strategies. Strategies are important since they assist learners when the comprehension process breaks down and restores meaning as they read (Dole 2000; NRP 2000; Myers 2005). It is important that teachers must have the practical and theoretical knowledge about the various strategies and how to apply them practically in the classroom.

However, participating teachers in the study seemed to lack a theoretical grasp of comprehension strategies.

Remarks by five teachers were representative in this regard:

*I do not know what to say, what to name it [reading comprehension strategies]; I do not know because I do not use strategies, I just teach them how to read a text and answer question. Nothing is realistic; I do not have anything to say because today you start this way tomorrow you start this way.*

These statements reveal a general feeling of despondency amongst teachers and as far as reading comprehension is concerned. The responses showed that teachers seemed to be uncertain of how to teach reading comprehension and that there was no uniform approach amongst teachers on how to teach reading comprehension.

Teachers were unsure of what to do during teaching reading comprehension. They did not feel that they had acquired the knowledge base and competencies needed for the proper teaching of reading.

Teachers did not discuss strategies or teach learners strategies for comprehending the text. Several authors (Kragler, Walker and Martin 2005; Pearson and Duke 2002; Sweet and Snow 2003; Reutzel, Smith and Fawson 2005) confirm that many primary-grade teachers have not always emphasised comprehension instruction in their curriculum.

### **Inability to Create Opportunities to Teach Vocabulary**

Teachers must provide many opportunities for learners to learn words, related concepts and their meanings. They need strong instructional opportunities to build their personal warehouse of words to develop deep levels of word knowledge and acquire a toolbox of learning strategies that aids their independent acquisition (Butler et al. 2010). However, there continues to be little research that conclusively identifies the best methods or combinations of methods of vocabulary instruction (NRP 2000). Bromley (2007: 529) suggest that teachers must use a combination of direct (explicit) and indirect (implicit) techniques in order to facilitate vocabulary. Direct techniques means teaching specific words, such as pre teaching vocabulary prior to reading a selection. The researcher believes that teachers must assist learners to develop an appreciation for words and having them read a lot (Dole 2000).

Teachers should incorporate vocabulary as an essential component of communication and comprehension competence. Teachers should pay attention to learners' individual needs and be able to employ developmentally appropriate methods to help the learners to do well. They should attach importance to current research-based strategies to teach language. There should be emphasis is on meaningful communication when teaching language to the learners. Without adequate vocabulary skills, the learner's ability to communicate are severely limited (Westwood 2004).

This implies that effective use of vocabulary learning strategies enhances vocabulary knowledge in learners. In this study, the researcher agree with Bromley (2007: 528) that vocabulary

is the is a principle contributor to comprehension, fluency, and achievement in reading and that both teachers and learners need support.

### **Lack of Learners Self-regulatory Skills**

The teacher must teach learners to acquire self-regulatory competence in order to become independent readers and learn to read and use the appropriate strategies needed for the text. These processes are planned and adapted to support the pursuit of personal goals in changing learning environments. Zimmerman (1998) proposed the idea of learners themselves being the source of plans, intentions, strategies and the emotions that are necessary to create meaning from the written text. According to Zimmerman (1998), teaching multiple strategies is important, since the self-regulatory strategy will not work for all learners and using a few strategies will not work on all tasks. Zimmerman (1998) suggests multiple self-regulatory strategies rather than single strategies and states that learners can be taught to become more self-regulated. This view is linked to the constructivist theory. By learning to self-regulate a skill from peers, parents or teachers, each new generation of learners can build on the achievement of prior generations and avoid the mistakes of the past (Zimmerman 1998).

### **Lack of Resources and Readers**

While the South African government is emphasizing reading in classes, there are no books in schools. All participants indicated the problem of a lack of readers for learners. Many learners do not have readers at school or at home. The DoE supply of readers in school leave much to be desired, and as a result reading cannot take place in schools.

### **Teaching Approaches**

In this study, teachers were not aware of the importance of the types of questions that should be asked to the learners.

Only one teacher remarked:

*'Different questions, not yes or no questions, questions that will provoke the minds of the learners to think'.*

Teachers must ask learners various questions at different levels. They should avoid rote questions to which learners become accustomed in

order to stimulate critical thinking to shape their understanding of the text and recall. They also need to show learners how to find answers and this requires interactive settings in order to achieve a high level of reading comprehension (Agee 2005; Alvermann 2005; Wolf 2008). As indicated by the NCS (DoE 2002), learners should be able to demonstrate understanding by answering questions pertaining to main ideas and main characters in the text.

In addition questions should be asked at various phases of the reading exercise, namely before, during and after reading the text (Birkets 2010; Pressley 2002; D'Ambrosio 2004) in order to check learners understanding of the subject.

### **Insufficient Time Allocation**

Concerns were raised regarding the allocated time for teaching reading comprehension to the learners' mother tongue. To justify the one hour suggested specifically for reading comprehension daily, one respondent stated:

*Reading has many things, we need more time for reading but one hour is needed specifically for reading comprehension because reading comprehension has many aspects. They must read and understand so that they can answer the questions you see it takes time.*

The respondent's remark indicates that teachers needed more time for teaching reading because it was difficult. The National Reading Strategy (NRS) stipulates 30 minutes for teacher-guided reading and independent reading, 15 minutes for shared reading and writing by the whole class and 15 minutes at word and sentence level (DoE 2008).

To support the above statement, Wessels (2010:93) says the following:

*Classroom time, however, is limited and teachers have to find ways and means to encourage learners to become readers. These include reading exciting passages to learners, talking about a story briefly and displaying illustrations, having book displays to awaken curiosity, and making room for a library corner.*

Wessels (2010) illustrates that time allocation for reading is important to enhance reading comprehension. It is clear that even if teachers have ample time, teaching reading comprehension cannot take place without books. Learners should therefore be exposed to the written word. Unfortunately, the teachers in my case study did not have readers or a library corner to motivate learners to read.

### **Multilingualism**

The new South African Constitution (Act No. 58 of 1995) was developed in such a way that it prioritizes, among other principles, the principle of human rights and equality of human status. It recognizes all 11 languages of the country as official and gives them the same status at national level.

In their view four teachers remarked:

*We are required to teach two languages and to teach reading and writing, eh. Some learners comes from a poor background, and when we introduce two languages it becomes more difficult and also to the teachers*

According to policy, schools use their own discretion in choosing two or more learning languages, including the one spoken in the area. These languages are introduced as early as Grade One.

This approach, however, does not promote effective language learning, including reading. The argument presented here is that the learner is still grappling to understand his/her own language at the same time as being burdened with learning alien languages. This language overload inevitably overwhelms the learner. Teachers view this as one of the factors impacting negatively on reading competency. The same teachers agree, however, that the teaching of the mother tongue language from Grade R to Grade three is in keeping with the South African Language policy (Table 1).

### **Possible intervention**

The interventions that follow were suggested by practising teachers during the discussions about how schools could improve learners' proficiency in reading:

Teachers need additional tailor-made training programs to enable them to understand OBE principles and the reading framework. Long-term reading courses could be offered by universities to produce highly competent reading specialists that could be used extensively to workshop other teachers. In addition, university education programs should enable prospective teachers with the skills and knowledge to teach reading effectively. Only well-qualified teachers should teach reading at the foundation phase.

A multi-method approach should be considered in the teaching of reading. This would al-



**Table 1: Summary from the focus group discussions with the teachers on the causal factors of low reading standards in the foundation phase in South Africa**

CF	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
NCS	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	x
FFLC	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	x
Inappropriate methodology	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	x
Multi-grade teaching	x		X	x	x		x	x
Multilingualism	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	x
Lack of parental involvement	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	x
Lack of readers	x	x	X	x	x	X	x	x
Lack of training and workshops	x	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
Rest and relaxation	x	X		x	x	x	x	

CFs= Causal factors

Ts= Teachers

low teachers to use methods they are conversant with.

Meaningful reading requires abundant reading literature to cater to the diverse interests of learners.

Teachers should encourage learners to construct meaning from texts, rather than merely decoding print.

Education is a basic right to all children in South Africa. It has to be provided equitably so that all children can learn. It is necessary that even the most disadvantaged populations should be given access to education in order to help reduce social, cultural and economic disparities, even if this involves putting learners of different levels and abilities in the same class. Teachers should, accordingly, be equipped with the requisite pedagogical skills to teach reading effectively in multi-grade classes.

Emphasis should be placed on the need for learners to understand what they read, rather than on quantitative outcomes.

Universities should conduct research on the teaching of reading, and distribute their findings to schools.

The DoE must create scholarships to send teachers to other countries that can demonstrate success in the teaching of reading, for the purposes of bench-marking.

Teachers should be able to apply remedial teaching strategies to assist learners who have reading problems (Table 2)

**Table 2: Summary from the focus group discussions with the teachers on what the intervention strategies should entail that should be put in place**

Intervention strategies	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Training/University	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Scholarships	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Remedial strategies	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Multi-method approach	x	x						
Literature on reading								
Training/Pedagogical skills								
Readers								
Conduct research on reading								

INTs= Intervention strategies

Ts= Teachers

## DISCUSSION

A child's success at school and throughout life depends largely on the ability to read and understand the texts. Teachers, especially those teaching in the foundation phase, have the profound challenge of making reading a reality for all learners.

Professional development is essential for teachers to develop knowledge of teaching reading. Research has to be done on how to support teachers on the teaching of reading and indicate which strategies to use when teaching reading. Teachers should know how theories should link with practice during teaching reading in the classrooms and why strategies can assist learners to construct meaning independently from the text.

More research on the impact of reading material, time, language and workshops is critical. Teachers need in-depth, hands-on training and also guided practice for developing lessons and activities using their content material to teach strategies to learners. They also need to know the basis or precursors of comprehension and how reading comprehension develops.

More research is needed in schools that are doing well in reading and document their use of strategies and insights to be copied to other schools.

### CONCLUSION

Reading is a skill that many foundation phase learners regrettably seem to lack. This inability can leave them feeling frustrated, even fearful of the act of reading. From the teachers' focus group discussion about their views on causal factors attributable to low level reading standards, intervention strategies emerged that could be applied to ameliorate the appalling reading standards in South Africa.

It largely remains the responsibility of the DoE to take bold steps to raise reading standards among learners by ensuring that teachers are conversant with the new curriculum, especially its framework for reading. Teachers need to be trained to impart appropriate pedagogical reading skills.

What teachers know about professional development affects their practice in the classrooms. Learners' ability to read the text with understanding depends on many factors. Since these conclusions arise from teachers' views and perceptions, there is a clear need to carry out properly empirical research to validate these views. With these intervention strategies, teachers may create a more conducive learning environment in which learners can both enjoy learning to read and make substantial gains in their attempts to become competent readers.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers should have ongoing professional development. Teacher development should become an integral part of the teaching of reading comprehension. Teacher training institutions should develop and offer a module on the teaching of reading as part of a literacy programme. This module should include practical experience for students to teach reading to learners in the foundation phase. Such a module could assist graduate students to complete their training with the knowledge and expertise for competently teaching reading.

Regular workshops overtime should be organized so that teachers can become strategic in their planning. This implies that the DoE

should organise more workshops to help teachers to become strategic in their teaching. The workshop series should focus on the components of reading, scientific reading research strategies that will increase learner achievement and some theories and models for improving comprehension. Each aspect of reading should be dealt with explicitly and with caution in order to improve the situation.

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