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Investigating teaching strategies for reading in the Motheo Education District

Abstract

This study investigated the English FAL teachers' knowledge and their use of reading methods. A mixed method approach was followed, where both qualitative and quantitative research methods were combined. Qualitative methods preceded quantitative methods. During the first phase of the study 8 teachers who teach English FAL in the intermediate phase were interviewed. For the second phase of the study, a questionnaire was distributed to 80 teachers in the different towns in the Motheo education district. Most of the participants teach in the township schools where the learners learn in English and

also do English as FAL. Qualitative data was analysed thematically, while quantitative analysis involved the use of descriptive analysis. The research findings imply the following: teachers have a superficial knowledge of reading methods and the main components of reading, there are other factors that affect the teaching of reading, and many teachers still shy away from infusing technology in their reading lessons.

Keywords: Reading, Strategies, Methods, Constructivism, Interactive, Environment

1. Introduction

The aim of this study was to determine how the language teachers in the Motheo education district teach reading, with particular emphasis on the intermediate phase.

Firstly we address the problem of poor reading performance in our South African schools, cascading from national to district level. An overview of the relevant theories of learning and reading that guided the study is also given. This is followed by a brief discussion of reading strategies, reading methods, and components of reading, as suggested by literature.

The article further gives a summary of the research design. The article concludes by looking into the findings as well as relevant pedagogical implications

2. The South African reading problem

Over the years, a number of reports painted a bleak picture about South African intermediate learners poor reading levels (Howie, Venter & Van Staden, 2008:555; Pretorius 2002:172; Van den Berg 2011:30; the systemic evaluation report 2005:41; the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) launch report of the Free State 2010:9; Bloch 2009:58; Macfarlane 2011:2).

The statistics also prove that the problem of reading is actually worse in the intermediate phase, especially in those schools where learners are studying in English as a first additional language. All the above raises the question, why? Various writers over the years have advanced possible reasons.

Chatry-Komarek (2003:26) points to the language of instruction as a possible cause. Cambourne (2001) (in Le Cordeur, 2010:80), cites the inability to effectively demonstrate reading strategies as a cause. Machado (2007:547) points to the following as the factors that may impede effective teaching of reading: teachers' level of training, knowledge of various reading methods, and the ability to plan interesting and appropriate activities. It is the aspect of knowledge of various methods that the study centred upon.

3. The constructivist and interactive theories

The constructivist and the interactive theories shaped the basis for this study. The constructivist theory forms part of this study as a theory of learning, while the interactive theory forms part of this study as one of the theories of reading.

The constructivist theory is based on the principles of cognitive development, popularized by Jean Piaget, who believed that active participation leads to cognitive development

(Child 1997:193). This aspect of active involvement is supported by a number of writers such as Brown (2000:11), Eggen and Kauchak (2010:45), and Center (2005:64).

Another critical aspect advocated by constructivists is social interaction. Eggen and Kauchak (1999:49) refer to the views of Lev Vygotsky, who argued that it is important for language to occur in an activity-orientated, social situation. A social situation enables the child to reach a higher level of cognition and ultimately function on that level (Gunning, 2003:5).

Barchers (1998:18) point out that the interactive theory combines the bottom-up and the top-down theories in a sense that the learners use their background knowledge and their decoding skills simultaneously to understand text. We also note that in the bottom-up theory the learners learn reading in the following sequence: letters; words; sentences; paragraphs; full texts. The top-down theory emphasises the experiences and knowledge that the learner brings to class. When arguing for the interactive theory, Scheckle (2009:136) points out that for learners to read successfully, they need a combination of decoding and understanding where they are using their knowledge of letters and words to make sense of what they read.

4. Reading, reading strategies, components of reading, reading methods and corrective reading.

4.1 Reading

Reading involves the identification of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for recall of meanings built up through past experiences and further construction of new meaning through the reader's manipulation of relevant concepts already in his/her possession (Petty, Petty, Salzer & Becking, 1989:323). They point out that the resulting meanings are organised into thought processes according to the purposes that are operating in the reader. This tells us that reading is a skill that has to be taught and learnt.

4.2 Reading strategies

According to Li (2010:185-186) reading strategies are deliberate, conscious techniques that readers employ to enhance their comprehension or retention of the textual information. The writer further advises that reading strategies can be divided into the following three sub-categories: global reading strategies; problem-solving reading strategies; and support-reading strategies. Global reading strategies are explained as generalised, intentional reading strategies aimed at setting the stage for the reading act. Li (2010) gives the following examples of global reading strategies: evaluating what to read or ignore; noting text characteristics; and guessing what the material entails.

Problem-solving strategies are explained as localised, focused, problem solving or repair strategies used when problems develop in understanding textual information, such as re-reading, going back when losing concentration, pausing and thinking about reading. Support-reading strategies are mechanisms aimed at sustaining responses to reading, such as, the usage of outside reference material, taking notes, underlining or circling information and other practical strategies that might be described as functional or support strategies.

Teachers need to familiarise themselves with these strategies. It can also be argued that they need to discuss these strategies with the learners. The learners need to know how to act under the different reading situations, and this has to start at an early age.

4.3 Components of reading

The Department of Education (DoE) (2007:11) encourages intermediate phase teachers to focus their attention on the development of the following components: phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight words, phonics), comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. Phonemic awareness raises the awareness that spoken words are composed of individual sounds or phonemes (Yopp and Yopp 2000) (in Christie, Enz & Vukelich, 2003:171). Word recognition is an essential first step in the process of deriving meaning from written text (Ives, Bursuk & Ives, 1979:12). Comprehension is a process of relating relevant aspects of the world around us to the knowledge and expectations we already have in our heads (Barchers 1998:191). In Wharton-McDonald and Swiger (2009:513) we see that a student's knowledge of vocabulary strongly relates to his or her ability to comprehend text. Kuhn (in Palumbo and Sanacore 2009:277) states that reading fluency is a major goal of literacy instruction.

4.4 Reading methods

The DoE (2007:3) prescribes the following methods for intermediate teachers: independent reading, shared reading, as well as guided reading for the intermediate phase. Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) refer to these activities as methods (Department of Basic Education, 2011:10). This document emphasises methods such as shared reading, reading aloud to the whole class, guided group reading, independent reading, and paired reading. These methods are summarised in the upcoming paragraphs.

In shared reading the teacher actively involves the students in small groups and whole class reading, in which the teacher engages students in discussion, modelling and demonstration of more complex reading strategies that promote understanding of literacy devices, vocabulary development, connections to the text, and graphic aids in fiction and non-fiction (Johnson 2008:14). This means that the teacher and the learners share the text.

The DoE (2007:26) explains that during read aloud, the teacher reads to the whole class or to a small group, using material that is at the listening comprehension level of the learners. Peterson (1995:48) suggests three, effective read aloud strategies for older, independent readers. The teacher must choose an appealing, captivating, flowing and enjoyable book. The teacher must ensure variety in terms of genres and publications. The teacher must change the book if he/she suspects that it does not serve the desired purpose. Guidance by the teacher in this regard is key.

In Barchers (1998:287-294) the following approaches interconnected with group reading are suggested: teacher-prepared book guides, literary discussion groups, student-implemented book guides, and literature circles. The author explains teacher-prepared book guides as the use of short-answer questions to determine comprehension. Literary discussion groups are formed when students are reading the same book, reading books on a similar level or reading books without thematic connectors. Student implemented book guides are used when a group of five to ten learners read a book and write a set of responses for each chapter. In the end, the students discuss the chapter and the responses with the teacher. Literature circles are small groups of learners reading and discussing the same book. After this, they need to evaluate the group's progress and follow up with a programme to extend reading. Literature circles can improve co-operation, accountability and self-evaluation. Cunningham and Allington (2003:151) encourage the use of play school groups. This strategy involves arranging the learners into groups of three to five. One of the learners acts as the teacher and directs the proceedings.

According to Cunningham and Allington (2003:139) during guided reading the teacher guides students within a group, small group or individuals, through an activity designed to help them apply their word identification and comprehension strategies. Chatry-Komarek (2003:122) points out that guided reading can have the following three phases: pre-reading phase, during-reading phase and the after-reading phase.

Independent reading methods come in different formations. The DoE (2007:27) explains independent reading as a purposeful, planned activity where learners have the opportunity to choose what to read according to their interest and ability. During independent reading sessions, the teacher should always be observing, listening and gathering information about learners' reading behaviour. One of these methods is the individual reading conference, which affords the learner a chance to choose what to read and to report to the other learners (Barchers 1998:27). There is also self-directed reading, which is a multilevel approach where the learners get to choose what they want to read (Cunningham and Allington 2003:136). The common thing about independent methods is the freedom afforded to the learners to choose what to read.

Paired reading is a procedure where a parent or another more advanced reader helps a novice reader to practice reading, which includes modelling of fluent reading, helping with difficult words, talking about ideas in the passage and giving praise (Kozey 1995:72). There is a format of paired reading where two students plan a reading schedule together

(Barchers 1998:283). One of the learners has to read while the other one listens. Discussion and questions follow this process. There is also partner reading, where children work together on a given task (Cunningham and Allington 2003:148).

Focus was put on these methods because they are what one can call “a matter of policy”, meaning that teachers in the intermediate phase in South Africa are expected to implement them. All the suggested methods seem to be constructive in a sense that they give the learners the opportunity to be actively involved.

4.5 How to implement corrective reading

Reading teachers should be in a position to identify and assist struggling readers. The following suggestions provide guidance in terms of how this can be achieved. Barchers (1998:57) argues that teachers should consider the whole language approach because of the following: it focuses on language processes rather than on isolated skills, it targets areas in need of development, it provides more personalised instruction, it values individual differences and progress, and provides multi-sensory experiences using a variety of materials. Scheckle (2009:135) advises that this approach could involve the use of flash cards or sight words that the child learns to read by recognising the formation or arrangement of the word.

Conley (2009, 563-564) refers to the Compensatory-Encoding Theory (C-ET) reviewed by Walczyk and Griffith-Ross. This theory encourages the following: slowing down the reading rate, pausing, looking back, reading aloud, sounding out, analogizing to a known word, or contextual guessing, skipping over a word, as well as re-reading text. Cunningham and Allington (2003:197-204) suggest the following as ways of assisting struggling older learners: find and train a tutor for your needy child, assign older struggling learners to tutor younger struggling readers, and classroom and special teachers are advised to have a co-ordinated reading programme. The DoE (2007:34) suggests the following: sensitivity towards the learner, one-on-one with the learner, listening to the learner and providing corrective and positive feedback, using the learner’s own words and stories during one-on-one, revising the learner’s phonics if they are under 11 years, teaching the learners meaningful words if they are older than 11 years, allowing the learners to practice sight words and using words that the learners use regularly in other learning areas.

5. Research design and methodology

The study was embedded in a pragmatic paradigm. Tashakkori and Teddlie (in Mertens, 2010:35) refer to the pragmatic paradigm as one of the paradigms that provides an underlying framework for mixed method research. Researchers can use multiple paradigms in their mixed method research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007:27). For this study both the interpretivist paradigm, which is qualitative, and the positivist paradigm, which is quantitative, were employed. This was done to reduce the limitations of

each paradigm, and to make the normative and meta-theoretical assumptions explicit (Clarke, 2009:35). According to Dzurec and Abram (in Onwuegbuzie, 2005:525) we link qualitative and quantitative research because we are in pursuit of the following: mastery over self and the world, complexity reduction to enhance understanding, understanding through re-composition, innovation, meaningfulness and truthfulness.

According to Babbie and Mouton (1998:28) the interpretive paradigm is in operation when human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their lives. Positivist researchers believe that the truth is objective and extrinsic, and attach importance to explaining matters by means of clear data, specific facts, and observable actions (Xinping 2002:39).

The basis of the study was an exploratory mixed method design. This allowed the researcher to start with qualitative data, to explore the phenomenon, and then build to a second, quantitative phase (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007:77). The quantitative data results were used to refine and extend the qualitative findings (Creswell 2008:561).

This study focused on the intermediate phase classrooms, in the Motheo education district, which comprises of the following towns: Bloemfontein, Clocolan, Thaba-Nchu, Botshabelo, Hobhouse, Wepener, Ladybrand, Vanstadensrus, Dewetsdorp, Excelsior and Verkeerdevlei.

The study commenced with the individual interviewing of participants, with the objective of finding out how they teach reading (Best and Kahn, 2003:255). For the interviews, 8 teachers were interviewed. An interview schedule was used to guide the interviews. The teachers had to explain their classroom practice in relation to the following: the reading methods, components of reading, inhibiting factors, the classroom environment, and the use of technology in the reading classrooms.

The quantitative process involved using a questionnaire, which is a survey tool where the respondents read questions themselves and mark the answers (Neuman, 2007:168). The questionnaires were hand delivered to the participants, and they had the opportunity to complete them on their own. The researcher opted for self-completion questionnaires because they are appealing for gathering large numbers of responses at relatively low costs (Leman, 2010:161). The questionnaire made it possible to quantify the responses. A total of 80 questionnaires were collected in a number of towns in the Motheo district.

Section A of the questionnaire focused on nominal measurements so that the researcher could assign numbers to individuals and be able to quantify demographic factors such as gender, age, race, and teaching experience. Section B of the questionnaire focused on ordinal measurements. The items in this section were informed by the themes that were identified during the qualitative phase of the study. This section was sub-divided into the following sub-sections: Reading methods, components of reading, factors influencing the teaching of reading, creation of an environment conducive to reading, and the use of technology.

Since this was a mixed methods research, data analysis consisted of analysing the quantitative data using quantitative methods and qualitative data using qualitative methods and procedures (Delpont and Fouché, 2011:447).

For qualitative analysis the approach encouraged by Yin (2011:176), was followed. It involves compilation, disassembling and re-assembling of data. Ultimately this resulted in a number of themes. The qualitative analysis ended with the interpretation of the data.

The second phase of data analysis, which was quantitative, consisted of using descriptive statistics. This made it possible to clarify proportions, percentages, ratios, measures of dispersion, and measures of central tendencies (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001:206). Graphic data such as graphs, pies, and charts were used to clarify distribution patterns. In conjunction with these, measures of central tendencies were also used.

6. Findings

The qualitative data analysis process yielded a rich, in-depth data that was divided into the following five themes: reading methods, components of reading, a suitable reading environment, factors affecting the teaching of reading, and the use of technology in the reading classroom. Having developed the themes they were subsequently divided into sub-themes. Qualitative findings are compared with quantitative findings.

6.1 Reading methods

Firstly, it emerged from the findings that grade 4 English teachers implement most of the reading methods recommended by literature, even though most of the time they could not provide details.

Paired reading was not mentioned by any of the interviewees, although 47.5% of those who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they have a good understanding of this reading method. 20% of the respondents claimed to have a very good understanding of this method.

Only 2 of the interviewees indicated that they use independent reading as a method. According to quantitative data 45% of the respondents claimed to have good understanding of what independent reading is all about. Another 27.5% claimed to have a very good understanding. The quantitative data contradicts with qualitative data in this regard. The following response by one of the interviewees indicates that there might be some teachers who cannot make a distinction between independent and individual reading.

P5: *“Eh, sometimes I do independent reading. That is where sometimes I am able to see those that need help, when they read individually”.*

Read aloud seems to be one of the unpopular methods because only 1 of the interviewees alluded to using this method. Qualitative data indicates that only 18.8% of the respondents perceive their knowledge of this method to be good, while only 2.5% think they have a very good understanding of this method.

When responding about group reading the teachers could only relate it to seating arrangement, division of the learners and the choosing of a group leader. The interviewee quoted below was the only one who could provide a detailed account of how she implements this method:

P5: *“Let me say, when I do group reading, I take about only six pupils, and then I make them read. All the groups read the same story, but they read different parts of that story”.*

These qualitative data contradicts with quantitative data which indicates that 48.8% of the respondents to the questionnaire think they have a good knowledge of group reading. Another 20% feel that their knowledge of this method is very good.

Half of those interviewed indicated that they use shared reading but the response below shows that some of the teachers do have an understanding of what shared reading entails:

P2: *“Sometimes I do shared reading with them. That’s most of the time ... Sometimes I read, they will read after me. They will follow me ... I like to read to them, then after that they will read after me, then I can go to another methodology”.*

Quantitative data shows that 33.8% of the respondents think they have a good understanding of shared reading, while another 17.5% feel their knowledge is very good. This data correlates with the qualitative data.

About half of the interviewed teachers indicated that they do implement guided reading. Of those who responded to the questionnaire, 52.5% indicated that they have a good knowledge of this method, 25.5% of them said they have a very good knowledge of this method. The responses of some of the interviewed teachers, however, indicate that some teachers confuse guided reading with shared reading:

P3: *“Then guided reading. This is where I read with them. Actually guided reading we need a big book, whereby we take a pointer, read with them. Like this word is ‘wall’, then they come after me”.*

P6: *“Firstly, I think the first one which is more vital for me; it is this one of guided reading. The teacher will read first, and then they will read after the teacher”.*

Lastly, all the interviewed teachers indicated that they do attempt to assist struggling readers. Just more than half (52%) of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they implement corrective reading.

6.2 Components of reading

The participants also had to indicate their knowledge in relation to components of reading. Once more, during the quantitative stage the respondents gave an indication that they teach the different components of reading, and understand what they entail, but the interviews proved that their understanding of most of these components is not adequate.

In relation to comprehension, the popular belief among the interviewees is that it can be achieved by using assessment. The majority of those interviewed indicated that they ask questions during or after the lesson to determine comprehension. Sixty one percent of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they always make an attempt to develop comprehension, while another 36.5% said they sometimes try to develop the learner's comprehension. The remaining 2.5% represents those who seldom focus on comprehension.

Quantitative data gives an impression that teachers take comprehension seriously, whereas qualitative data shows that the teachers do not have an in-depth knowledge in terms of how comprehension should be developed.

In relation to phonemic awareness there is parity between qualitative and quantitative data. More than half of those interviewed indicated that they develop phonemic awareness, even though they could not go into detail in terms of outlining how they do it. There were arguments that the learning and teaching support material (LTSM) used nowadays impedes on the teacher's ability to improve phonemic awareness, as the example below will show. One aspect noticed is that teachers think of phonics and phonemic awareness as the same thing. The quotation below highlights these two aspects.

P6: The thing that we should do. You know apartheid. Those books from that dispensation, they were, in Afrikaans we say 'klanke' (sounds). Those books allowed us to drill the phonics. To spell words. That taught us how to spell words, the phonics and how the sounds go. We have to go back to that."

Quantitative data indicates that 38.8% of the respondents to the questionnaire claim to always develop phonemic awareness, while another 38.8% claim to do that sometimes. Some of them (6.2%) seldom focus on phonemic awareness, while 10% never treat phonemic awareness. This shows that some attention is given to phonemic awareness, albeit not enough.

Modelling to learners seems to be the popular approach used by most of the interviewees to teach fluency, used by more than half of those interviewed. This participant elaborates how:

P2: "I guide them by pronouncing certain words. For an example, if I want them to say 'dolphin', I ask them to repeat the word after me ... I'll start first by reading with them at their pace, because they can't read fluently".

The quantitative data regarding fluency indicates that 45% of the respondents always work on fluency. Another 40% sometimes work on fluency. The remaining 15% is spread between the other three categories (uncertain, seldom, never). These numbers give an indication that not enough is done by the teachers to develop fluency.

Regarding the development of vocabulary, the teachers could only refer to the use of a dictionary, 'personal dictionary', discussions of difficult words, giving the learners the meaning of difficult words, giving learners homework, and making the learners read certain words daily. A personal dictionary is where the learners write all the new and familiar words. These words they have to practice at home and use them in sentences.

More than half (58.8%) of the respondents to the questionnaire do attempt to develop vocabulary, while 35% of them do it sometimes. Five percent said they are uncertain, while another 1.2 % said they seldom do. Based on this numbers one can argue that not enough is done to develop vocabulary.

6.3 Reading environment

The following issues emerged under reading environment. The interviewed teachers complained about lack of material that can be used to embellish reading classes. The participants' responses highlight the rotation system in their schools as one of the reasons why they find it impractical to decorate their reading classes accordingly. They try to solve the mentioned problem by forming groups in the classroom, also with the hope that this will open up space. Based on these discussions it can be argued that some of the classrooms in the Motheo district are not suitable for reading. 50% of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they seldom make an effort to decorate their classes, while 25% indicated that they never do.

6.4 Factors affecting reading instruction

Both the literature review and the interviewee's responses gave rise to the conclusion that there are factors that affect reading instruction. At the end the following factors emerged: time allocation, poor foundation, size of the class, lack of parental involvement, work load, the departmental policies, and the lack of reading material. These factors were included in the questionnaire during the quantitative study and the respondents generally agreed that these factors can be considered as impediments. They were given the following choices: totally disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree and totally agree.

The participants feelings were summarised as follows: time allocation (55% agree), poor foundation (38.8% agree), class size (53.8% totally agree), parental involvement (46.2% totally agree), work load (53% totally agree), promotion policies (56.2% totally agree) and lack of resources (47.5%) totally agree. These data shows that teachers are working in conditions that are not entirely suitable.

6.5 The use of technology

It emerged from the data that some schools in the Motheo district do not possess the technology necessary to develop reading. The following quote confirms this notion:

P1: *“We do not have TV’s. We do not have radios. We do not have anything ... We do not have laptops. We do not have anything, to be honest. I struggle a lot ... They have cell phones, but they can’t come with cell phones to school. They are not allowed at all”.*

It also emerged that some grade 4 English teachers do not possess the expertise to use technological devices. Only 2 of those interviewed were computer literate. During the quantitative phase of the study 45% of the respondents agreed that it is an important tool in the teaching of reading.

7. Discussions and implications

In order to reflect on the implications of the conclusions, literature was reviewed on the issues that emerged, and comparisons are made between the reviewed literature and the views of the participants. In the process, recommendations pertaining to the various implications are presented.

7.1 Reading methods

The following suggestions were proposed to address the problem of limited knowledge of reading methods: teachers becoming scholars and intensive in-service training, which is focused on reading methods. These two suggestions are in line with the views of Kramer (2007:98), who argues that training, support and on-going efforts for improvement are the cornerstones of effective professional teaching. It is further suggested that the DoE should ensure that the teacher training curriculum for languages is relevant, meaning that it must include the aspect of reading methods.

7.2 Components of reading

Literature review has shown that the DoE calls on the teachers to focus on components such as phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. Intensive in-service training was once more identified as a solution to improve the teacher’s knowledge of these components. Word recognition will not be discussed in this paper as more attention is put on it in the foundation phase. It has already been pointed out by Kramer (2007) that training and continued improvement will lead to effective professional teaching. Literature provided suggestions as to how these components of reading could be developed.

7.3 Comprehension

The following can be done to improve comprehension: teaching comprehension strategies to the learners, explaining the purpose of the reading strategy to be used, where, when and how to use it, modelling the use of the strategy to the learners, and providing guided practice (Wharton-McDonald & Swiger, 2009:512:513).

The DoE (2007:13-14) provides the following guidelines: activation of the learners' prior knowledge, reading aloud to learners, improving the learners' guessing skills, helping learners to use clues and illustrations in and around the text (cover page, paragraph and chapter headings, sub-headings, words in bold, index, photographs, tables, graphs, and cartoons), developing the learners' decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary skills, and higher-order thinking skills like analysing, evaluating and interpreting. According to Afflerbach and Cho (2009:77) the following may also help: involving, identifying, remembering important information, as well as monitoring and evaluating.

7.4 Vocabulary

The following are the suggestions made by Staudt (2009:146) about the development of vocabulary: looking for words that have several aspects for study, choosing and using words that are commonly used and that are useful in the content areas, focusing on words that the learners have trouble decoding, and focusing on segmenting, spelling patterns and morphology. If the learner continues to stumble over a word, the teacher should try to relate it to other words.

The DoE (2007:16) provides teachers with the following tips. Learners must be made to read regularly and read texts that interest them. Teachers must read aloud to learners at least once a week. Have a regular independent reading time. Make sure that every time you do read aloud, during shared and guided reading, you teach at least six new words. Demonstrate meanings of words. Give examples of the words in sentences. Encourage learners to use the new words orally in sentences formed by them. Display new words on a chart or on the wall. Give the new words to the learners to review at home as homework. Arrange for the use of a personal wordbook.

7.5 Fluency

One of the ways that can help improve the learners' fluency is repeated word study (Staudt 2009:149; Palumbo and Sanacore 2009:277). The DoE (2007:17) prescribes the following for teachers to improve fluency: re-reading text, explaining and motivating the learners about fluency, flooding the classroom with reading materials, daily independent reading, allowing the learners to choose a book that is familiar and suitable during group and independent reading sessions and explaining the importance of silent reading. Organising many opportunities for silent reading. Textbooks of other learning areas must also be used as a reading resource.

7.6 An environment conducive to reading

In addition to the strategies suggested by literature, the following suggestions were provided regarding the reading environment: intelligent time-tabling and innovativeness by the teachers. Teachers need to be flexible in order for them to ensure an environment suitable for reading lessons.

7.7 Factors influencing the teaching of reading

The literature study and the empirical study unearthed the following factors that can influence the teaching of reading: quality of teaching and adult illiteracy, time allocation, poor foundation, class size, parental involvement, workload, promotion policy, and lack of resources.

The issue of poor quality has been identified by the Department of Education, hence the implementation of QLTC (QTLC report, 2010:1). The department wants to ensure that there is quality teaching taking place in all schools.

The reluctance by parents to get involved can be solved through parental engagement, which can include programmes of meetings with parents. Discussions in these meetings should include reading methods and strategies. Since it is evident that some parents find it difficult to get involved in the education of their children, it emerged that it might benefit the learners and the schools if the latter can be given the power to refer children of the parents who are not co-operative.

It emerged from reviewed literature that the DoE was already doing something about the problem of time allocation (Curriculum News May 2011:6). The document shows that languages will be allocated more time when CAPS is introduced.

The DoE is also doing something about workload. The Curriculum News of May (2011:4-6) highlights that, according to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements, the following will be implemented as a way of reducing the teachers' workload in the intermediate phase: the use only one file, reducing the number of projects to be done by the learners and reducing the number of learning areas to six.

The DoE has not given any indication that it intends to reduce the size of classes. Strategies such as peer coaching, mentoring and team teaching were suggested from literature review to solve this problem (Otienna 2010:70).

The suggested approach to solve the problem of resources (lack of) was that teachers should be resourceful, and a lot more accountability should be put on the shoulders of the school managers. Managers should ensure proper care of available resources.

7.8 Use of technology

The study has drawn our attention to the reality that some schools in the Motheo education district do not have the necessary computer technology and computer software to use for reading, as well as the reality that some teachers still lack the capacity to use technological devices such as a computer.

On the issue of the laptop initiative by the DoE the following were suggested: Firstly, the department should speed up the roll out process. Secondly, it was suggested that the department should consider providing the software free of charge to those teachers and schools who already own computers and laptops. It might also be a positive step if the department can train teachers in the use of technology in reading classes.

Gudmundsdottir (2010:183) argues that even though computer instruction can be beneficial, it tends to benefit mostly those learners who use English as a mother tongue because the software is mostly in English. This calls on the DoE to engage with the different software companies and convince them to develop software in other official languages.

8. Conclusion

Data gathering and analysis culminated in the following conclusions: Firstly, grade 4 English teachers in the Motheo education district do not possess an in-depth knowledge of reading methods.

Secondly, grade 4 English teachers in the Motheo education district do not have a blue print of how they can develop the different components of reading such as comprehension, phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary.

Thirdly, it emerged that there are factors that can influence the teaching of reading such as: time allocation, poor foundation, class size, lack of parental involvement, workload, policies on promotion, and a lack of reading resources.

The fourth conclusion is that some grade 4 English teachers in the Motheo district fail to induce an environment conducive to reading due to reasons such as a lack of artefacts and time-tabling arrangements.

The last conclusion is that some schools in the Motheo district do not possess technological devices such as computers, and some of the grade 4 English teachers lack the expertise to use technological devices such as computers.

The above conclusions resulted in the following implications: the need for intensive training of education students and in-service training for practicing teachers to improve knowledge on reading methods. This will also improve their knowledge of the various components of reading.

Some factors such as time allocation, workload, and quality teaching are already being addressed by the DoE, except the lack of parental involvement, teacher-learner ratio, and lack of resources. Creation of a suitable environment is also a problem. It was argued that teachers must be proactive and design their own material. Revisiting the time-tabling format and resourcefulness were also highlighted as measures that can help to solve the problem of the reading environment.

Efforts are being made to address the issue of technology but they are not enough. The laptop initiative must be intensified and training on CAI must also be vigorously implemented.

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