

EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS AND LEARNERS TRANSITIONING FROM ISIXHOSA TO ENGLISH INSTRUCTION IN GRADE 4

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: August 2024 Revised: October 2024 Published: January 2025	<i>The South African Language in Education Policy stipulates that African languages shall be employed as languages of learning and teaching in South African schools, at least from Grades 1 to 3. After that, there must be a switch to an additional language - in most cases, English first additional language (EFAL), as is the case with most schools in Matatiele, Alfred Nzo West District, South Africa. The topicality of this transition has led to this study, which explores the experiences of Grade 4 EFAL teachers and learners in Alfred Nzo West District transitioning from isiXhosa to EFAL as a medium of instruction in Grade 4. Data for the study was collected from participants drawn from a school in the rural Eastern Cape Province, Alfred Nzo West District. The sample comprised two Grade 4 EFAL teachers and ten learners. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observations while reading English texts. The findings revealed that the learners struggle to read because they were accustomed to using their home language, isiXhosa, in Grades 1-3. Now, they are using English as their Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL), a language hardly spoken outside of the classroom. Besides, the findings showed that learners who were doing English home language in their previous schools, Grades 1-3, did not battle much with Grade 4 EFAL, since they relied on their prior linguistic knowledge accrued in these grades. To overcome Grade 4 EFAL learners' barriers to reading, the teachers rely on parental involvement, phonics, collaborative learning and learners' prior linguistic background. The study is important in underscoring the need to give Grade 4 EFAL learners age-appropriate reading materials because their comprehension is naturally developed as they acquire new vocabulary, and learners are cognitively engaged in less challenging texts.</i>
Keywords Reading skills; Code switching; English first additional language; Linguistic background; Phonics; Collaborative learning;	
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INTRODUCTION

The South African Language in Education Policy (LiEP) stipulates that African languages shall be employed as languages of learning and teaching (LoLTs) in South African schools, at least from Grades 1 to 3 (Department of Education, 1997). Thereafter, there must be a switch to an additional language - in most cases, English as LoLT (Department of Education, 1997). In this study, the learners' home language (HL) was isiZulu. HL-based bilingual programmes use the learner's HL to teach reading and writing skills in Grades 1-3. From Grade 4 onwards, learners gradually switch to English or Afrikaans at LoTL, and teachers should introduce these languages methodically (Manyike & Lemmer, 2014).

The goal of bilingual educational models is to use the HL in the initial stages so that learners can modify their literacy abilities and comprehension to participate more actively in class (Manyike & Lemmer, 2014). Unfortunately, some learners struggle to make that transfer

because they have not fully mastered their HL's core skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This is a significant problem because teachers are expected to devise original strategies from Grade 4 onwards to enhance the development of EFAL. The educational models created out of the South African Schools Act may succeed in teaching learners to decipher words from Grade 4 upwards; however, they may cause English reading challenges and fluency issues (Widodo & Dewi, 2019).

Posel, Hunter and Rudwick's (2022) report that only a minority of 'Africans' report speaking English most often outside the home and that most speak the same African language inside and outside the home. This finding suggests no correlation between English dominance and its prevalence. In addition, the low presence of indigenous African languages in most official and public spaces like schools and law is not a natural and inevitable occurrence but a result of several explicit language policies articulating the exclusion of indigenous languages from these public spaces. European colonial missionaries played a key role in their attempts to capture the spoken African languages into written form (Batibo, 2009). Hence, the low visibility and audibility of indigenous African languages in public spaces is; therefore, a consequence of coloniality and the broader marginalisation of African languages on the continent spaces is, thus, a consequence of coloniality and the broader marginalisation of African languages on the continent (Wildsmith-Cromarty, Reilly & Kamdem, 2023).

The study aimed to explore the experiences of Grade 4 EFAL teachers and learners in Alfred Nzo West District transitioning from isiXhosa to EFAL as a medium of instruction in Grade 4. The research questions of the study were as follows: What are the challenges teachers' face in teaching EFAL reading to Grade 4 learners in Alfred Nzo West District, South Africa? Which strategies do you use to overcome the reading challenges of Grade 4 EFAL learners in Alfred Nzo West District, South Africa?

Literature Review

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b), the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996a), and related regulations and policies on equity indicate that every South African learner should have access to learning and teaching, similar facilities, and equal educational opportunities. Unfortunately, most learners in rural areas are disadvantaged because access to adequate learning and teaching materials is not guaranteed. Even Cekiso, Rabeleman, Jadezweni, Mandende and Dieperink (2022) shared that learners in rural areas have a share of challenges, including parents' low level of education, little or no parental support, parents' low socio-economic status, and a lack of reading materials. Likewise, Evans and Nthulana (2018) reported that the hidden aspect of rural education in South Africa is the lack of exposure to English that both teachers and learners face; rurality may exacerbate learning through an additional language, such as English. The above implies that South Africa has learners from different environments that need to be considered in schools, as learners from disadvantaged backgrounds begin schooling with fewer early literacy skills than their peers from middle-class backgrounds because of the lack of a literate environment.

In a global context where English provides the opportunity for a better life, reading with understanding is still lacking in South African primary schools. Similarly, Foncha and Sivasubramanjam (2014) concur that the inability to read in the FP is a big problem that affects teaching and learning in South African schools. It is therefore important to explore the experiences of Grade 4 EFAL teachers and learners in Alfred Nzo West District transitioning from isiXhosa to EFAL as a medium of instruction in Grade 4.

Reading is a fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. English as a language is globally recognised as a medium of instruction; acquiring its proficiency is also viewed as having increased opportunities to access employment opportunities, higher education and increased exposure to different cultures and ethnic groups (Makena & Mpiti, 2020).

Besides, research shows that learners who read extensively and critically will be able to apply the gathered knowledge to further their speaking, listening, and writing performance; therefore, learners should continuously improve their reading ability since it will facilitate them to obtain knowledge and information available through online and offline sources (Taladngoen, Palawatwichai, Estaban & Phuphawan, 2020).

African language-speaking schools shift to the EFAL as LoLT in Grade 4 (DBE, 2011). The introduction of English at this stage may be slightly delayed. This statement aligns with the literature positing that reading with understanding should be encouraged from an early age (Klapwik, 2015). Moreover, there is evidence to support the idea that South Africa has poor levels of reading achievement. When evaluated across all 11 official languages, PIRLS (2016) in Spaul (2017) has shown that learners in Grade 4 cannot use their thinking and reasoning skills in reading comprehension. It is against this background that this study explores the experiences of Grade 4 EFAL teachers and learners in Alfred Nzo West District transitioning from isiXhosa to English as a medium of instruction in Grade 4.

According to Cummins and Swain (1986) and Cummins (1976), if a child has low proficiency in both languages, a child cannot avoid cognitive disadvantages, especially for the lower level in threshold hypothesis, it might bring negative effect on the child's development when they fail to achieve a certain level of second-language skills. In this context, this implies introducing EFAL from Grade 1 onwards in South Africa so that they master its basics from a younger age rather than waiting for them to be proficient in their HL in Grades 1-3. However, after later theory (threshold hypothesis) refinements, Cummins (2000:100) argued that disadvantages attributed to bilingualism are not an effect of bilingualism per se but rather are "a result of discriminatory schooling [...] when schools deny bilingual students opportunities to access literacy and comprehensible academic language in both L1 and L2," thus denying students the benefits of additive bilingualism and often leading to students' progressively falling "further behind grade expectations in their functional command of academic registers".

Phonics is another strategy to deal with challenges associated with transitioning from a HL to a language of teaching and learning (LoTL). This strategy is supported by Woore (2022), who contends that explicit phonics instruction (in the sense of teaching the systematic relationships between written symbols and sounds in an alphabetic language) is likely to be beneficial for modern languages students, and second language orthographic code can be a foundation skill in enhancing many other aspects of classroom-based additional language learning. However, Woore's (2022) assertion mentioned above, it is dismissed by Murphy Odo (2021), who claimed that despite considerable efforts made to understand the impact that instructional interventions have upon second language reading development, we still lack a clear picture of the influence that phonics instruction has upon reading in English as an second language. Even Van der Mescht (2023), in a study carried out in South Africa, cautioned that that the introduction of flashcards and texts designed for phonics practice into a methodology designed to promote reading for meaning has a cumulative impact on the time teachers spend on discussion, modelling comprehension strategies and silent reading. Potentially this limits learners to only one of the four roles of a reader, that is, a reader as code breaker.

In the South African context, several studies were carried out promoting the importance of code-switching in additional language settings, as is the case with this study (Seabela & Ncanywa, 2024; Grobler, 2018; Malindi, Gobingca & Ndebele, 2023). These studies advise that when teaching first additional language learners who already possess a fully developed language system of their home language, in the context of this study, isiXhosa, language teachers may consider code switching as a resource to teach an additional language (EFAL), and this may be enhanced by the conscious use of code-switching.

Cooperative learning exists when small groups of learners work to enhance their own and their groupmates' learning (Olaya & González-González, 2020). In a reading activity, group work

and interaction between learners helps learners concentrate on each other's reading ability; perhaps group members can choose a better, and more appropriate word through repetition (Azizi, Tkáčová, Pavlíková & Jenisová, 2020).

In the international context, culture is vital in teaching non-native speakers English. In a study examining the use of the cultural approach in teaching English to university student teachers, findings revealed that being culturally sensitive is necessary and beneficial as it allows students to use their knowledge of culture in situations of intercultural communication (Kostikova, Prishvina, Ilyushina, Fedotova & Belogurov, 2018). In the more African environment, in nations such as Kenya, which has 40 spoken ethnic languages, teachers need to employ varying strategies to teach English. In Kenya, a school-based case study found that warm learning environments that stimulate learners are one of the key strategies used in teaching EFAL (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013). However restrictive formal examination-orientated educational systems make it exceedingly difficult for teachers to be creative in their teaching methods (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013).

However, it is important to note that the successful strategies highlighted above need resource-heavy schooling environments and loads of teaching time. These may not all be achievable in the context of South Africa, where teachers normally mourn about insufficient time to provide adequate feedback and be able to assist struggling teachers (Sitsha, 2018). This study would therefore be critical to further understanding the experiences of Grade 4 EFAL teachers and learners in Alfred Nzo West District transitioning from isiXhosa to EFAL as a medium of instruction in Grade 4.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the reading challenges experienced by Grade 4 learners and the strategies used by their teachers to address these difficulties. As emphasized by Mohanasundar (2023), qualitative research is well-suited to studies that seek to provide deeper insights into complex problems by gathering participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research aims to answer the "how" and "why" of research questions, fostering a richer understanding of phenomena. In this study, teachers were interviewed within their classrooms to capture their firsthand experiences and strategies in their teaching environments. Concurrently, learners were observed during reading sessions to assess their reading behaviors and identify specific areas of difficulty. This dual approach allowed for a holistic exploration of the research problem.

An interpretivist paradigm underpinned the study, aligning with the views of Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), who argue that the primary goal of interpretivism is to understand the subjective realm of human experience. By embracing this paradigm, the research sought to interpret the lived experiences of both teachers and learners, recognizing that the meaning derived from educational practices is shaped by individual perspectives and contextual factors. The use of qualitative research and the interpretivist approach provided the framework necessary to investigate reading comprehension issues within the specific context of the school environment.

Research Participants

The participants in this study were drawn from a single primary school located in the Alfred Nzo West District of the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The study focused on two Grade 4 EFAL (English First Additional Language) teachers and ten Grade 4 learners, with five learners selected from each class. The selection of these participants was driven by purposive sampling, a technique that enables researchers to deliberately choose individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience to contribute to the research objectives. The two teachers were chosen based on their extensive experience in teaching Grade 4, making them

well-positioned to provide valuable insights into the reading challenges faced by their learners. The selection of ten learners aimed to create a manageable yet representative sample for observation and analysis. However, the limited number of participating teachers poses a potential limitation in terms of the generalizability of the findings to other schools or districts. Despite this, the depth of information gathered from the selected participants offers valuable insights that can inform future research and educational interventions aimed at enhancing reading skills among primary school learners.

Research Instruments

Data collection in this study was conducted using two primary instruments: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were employed to gather in-depth information from teachers regarding their strategies, experiences, and perceptions of the reading challenges encountered by learners. This format allowed for flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe further into interesting or unexpected responses while maintaining focus on the core research questions. The interviews addressed the central themes of the study, ensuring that relevant data were captured to inform the overall analysis.

In addition to interviews, learners were observed during reading sessions as they engaged with English texts. The observations were guided by a rubric aligned with the Grade 4 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), which provided a standardized framework for assessing reading proficiency. The primary researcher adopted the role of a non-participant observer, documenting the learners' reading behaviors and noting patterns or difficulties as they emerged. This non-intrusive approach ensured that the natural learning environment remained undisturbed, allowing for authentic observations of the learners' interactions with the texts. The observational data were complemented by detailed field notes, which were later coded and analyzed alongside the interview transcripts. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data. The combination of interviews and observations provided a comprehensive understanding of the reading challenges and instructional strategies within the classroom context, contributing to the overall robustness of the research findings.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was selected as the primary data analysis method for this study. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes that emerge from the data. This approach is particularly useful for exploring qualitative data as it enables researchers to uncover recurring ideas, experiences, and perspectives that are central to the research questions. Thematic analysis was applied to both the interview transcripts and observation notes, ensuring that the data were systematically organized and interpreted.

Ethical considerations played a crucial role throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the Walter Sisulu University ethics committee and the Maluti District Education Office, ensuring that the study adhered to established ethical guidelines. Informed consent was secured from all participants, including teachers and learners' guardians, prior to data collection. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms to all participants and safeguarding the collected data. By adhering to these ethical standards and employing rigorous data collection and analysis techniques, the study ensured the reliability and validity of its findings, contributing valuable insights into the field of language education and the enhancement of reading proficiency among primary school learners.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The participants' responses were segmented into two: Segment One-Teacher responses to interviews and Segment Two-Learner observations. The findings in Segment One-Teacher responses to interviews were presented in two themes that addressed the two research questions of the study.

Segment One: Teacher interviews

The teachers selected to participate in the interviews were comfortable sharing their experiences and provided consent beforehand. The interviews took place after school activities. The interviews were done one-on-one to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The interviews were audio recorded.

Theme 1: Challenges teachers face when teaching EFAL reading to Grade 4 learners

In this study, the learners used isiXhosa as their LoLTs before they moved to 4, and they were tellingly unprepared for English as their LoTL in Grade 4; hence T2 hinted that they were 'confused' by this language shift. We assert that linguistics barriers are not a preserve for the learners only but for EFAL teachers as well, considering that the majority of them are not native speakers of English. This assertion is echoed by Evans and Nthulana (2018) and backed by UNESCO (2010:28), which reports that *in most African countries, teachers are expected to teach learners to read and write in a language which is (a) unfamiliar to the learners, (b) in which they have little competence themselves to teach*. Thus, the participants had this to say:

T1: The language barrier is the challenge faced when Grade 4 learners transition to EFAL reading because it is their first time learning everything in English. The fact that their HL was the medium of instruction in their Foundation Phase makes it difficult for them to transition to English when they get to Grade 4.

T2: The HL as a medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase is the cause of the challenge when the learners transition to EFAL in Grade 4. The learners seem confused when they get to Grade 4 because they were not used to this language.

In this study, some teachers were still faithful to Cummins's threshold hypothesis (1976) in its unrefined state. However, the currency in applied linguistics is that if the first language is developed, it will be easier to develop a second language acquisition, including academic achievement. This implies that having strong skills in a first language is the most important part of developing a second language and benefiting from bilingualism. In contrast, T2 shared the following:

T2: According to my experience, this challenge is in all schools where EFAL is LoLT. The learners who can easily read in English used English as their HL in their previous schools.

Theme 2: What reading strategies can be used to teach reading to Grade 4 EFAL learners?

Since transition is challenging for teachers and learners due to their limited English proficiency, teachers resort to code-switching. This finding is similar to Sibomana's (2022) finding in Rwanda where Grade 4 teachers rely on code-switching to deal with both teachers' and learners' limited proficiency in English. Similarly, we advance that language teachers must draw upon their learners' code-switching practices because they are valuable cognitive tools that they can use to lighten the learners' cognitive load in mastering an additional language. Echoing the above, the participant shared thus:

T2: Trying to have extra reading activities that will help the learners to be familiar with this first additional language reading is a solution to this problem. However, it takes a lot of time. Sometimes, we end up code-switching.

The participants used phonic as a strategy to deal with challenges associated with transitioning from isiXhosa in Grades 1-3 to English in Grade 4, a strategy backed by Woore (2022) but dismissed by Murphy Odo (2021), as indicated in the literature review. The use of phonics as a worthwhile reading strategy is confirmed by one participant who asserted that:

T1: These challenges are mitigated by starting from scratch, where phonics needs to be introduced. They have to segment and blend the phonics, which also takes much time as the curriculum still needs to be fully covered.

In this study, cooperative learning is seen as an active process where Grade 4 EFAL learners actively participate in their learning development, working together in groups or pairs to accomplish their learning goals and acquire new knowledge according to their reading interests, needs and skills. Similarly, it has been reported in the literature review that reading activity, group work and interaction between learners help learners concentrate on each other's reading ability; perhaps group members can choose a better and more appropriate word through repetition (Azizi, Tkáčová, Pavlíková & Jenisová, 2020). Equally, one of the participants indicated that:

T2: We encourage them to read with others in groups or pairs to gain confidence.

Çalışkan and Ulas (2022) examined the effect of parent-involved reading activities on Grade 4 reading comprehension skills, motivation, and attitudes towards reading using a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design. The findings showed significant differences between the experimental and control groups, meaning that the parent-involved reading activities developed by the researchers had a positive effect on the students' reading comprehension, reading motivation, and attitudes towards reading. Likewise, Gay, Sonnenschein, Sun and Baker (2021) shared that parent involvement is a critical way for children to learn about the importance of education and develop reading skills. Similarly, one participant is positive that parental involvement hones the learners' reading skills, thus:

T1: To develop my learners' reading abilities, I reach out to the parents of the most struggling readers so that they can help them read at home. I even make phone calls or send them WhatsApp messages to this effect.

Segment 2: Learner observation

The selected learner participants were asked to choose any comprehension passages from the Department of Basic Education workbooks, which are revised and CAPs-aligned books. On the reading day, the learners were moved to a different classroom to focus on their reading without being interrupted by their peers who were not participants in this study. These newer reading spaces only had their Grade 4 teachers, the primary researcher and the other chosen learner participants.

Each learner was given five minutes to read the text. While each learner was reading, the teacher did not interrupt by correcting the words pronounced incorrectly and those difficult ones that the learners could not pronounce. While the learners were reading, the primary researcher made relevant notes, used the rubric to assess the reading and took visuals to help with the data capturing and analysis.

The learners were observed using the following criteria: fluency in reading the text, expression, and volume, where the tone and volume need to be loud and clear. The pronunciation of words was also observed to hear if the learners pronounced the words correctly. Lastly, learners' decoding skills were also considered. Below is the way the learners were grouped because of their performance.

Learner observations: L1, 4 and 5

Fluency: It was observed that L1, 4 and 5 could not read a sentence in English fluently.

Volume and Expression: The participant learners were not audible enough, as they lacked confidence and were shy. Literally, they were mumbling the words.

Decoding skills: The learners struggled to decode phonetically common sight words.

Pronunciation: Learners could not pronounce most of the words in the chosen comprehension passages correctly.

Learner observations: L3, 6, 8 and 10

Fluency: It was observed that L3, 6, 8 and 10 read less than three sentences with some difficulties.

Volume and Expression: They read in low voices. There was no facial expression at all, and they were reading without showing much understanding.

Decoding skills: These learners could decode some phonetically common sight words.

Pronunciation: They read the words but had difficulty pronouncing them correctly.

Learner observations: L2, 7 and 9

Fluency: These learners read at least a paragraph with a few words read incorrectly.

Volume and Expression: The volume was fair, but the reading was expressionless, where they just read with no pause, not adhering to punctuation marks.

Decoding skills: The learners could decode some phonetically regular and common sight words.

Pronunciation: They pronounced the words correctly but with some minimal difficulties.

Discussion

One key finding is that learners face linguistic barriers when transitioning from isiXhosa in Grades 1-3 to EFAL in Grade 4. This is in line with the assertion by Sibomana (2022) that language-in-education policies in Africa are believed to be a factor of poor quality education on the continent as language learners are not conversant with continue to take the lead as languages of teaching and learning. The issue of linguistic barriers among Grade 4 learners has been reported in other studies as an obstacle or circumstance that keeps learners apart; it prevents communication and bars access to advancement; it forces educators and education policymakers to take cognisance of the changing social issues that impact on successful learning and teaching in a multilingual community such as South Africa (Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2019; Buarqoub, 2019:68). To tackle the language barriers Grade 4 learners face, the participants suggested some strategies shared next.

When learners take turns to read in a group, that can help demystify their fears of reading. As learners do a group activity, it helps them learn from each other how reading can be managed; they learn how to pronounce certain words and how to project their voices, gestures, stress and intonation, to name a few in a classroom setting. Socially, it helps learners bond and accept each other's input. Even Azizi, Tkáčová, Pavlíková and Jenisová (2020) support the use of group activities to teach reading, as group members can choose a better and more appropriate word through repetition.

Another strategy used to deal with reading challenges faced by Grade 4 EFAL learners is parental involvement. Çaliskan and Ulas (2022) found parental involvement positively affects the Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension, motivation, and attitudes towards reading in Turkey. We say this under correction, there is a positive correlation between parental involvement and learner achievement. In a community where literacy is high, if language teachers communicate explicitly with the parents, give them the websites to find the reading materials for their children, and about whatever is expected of them, the parents are likely to be co-operative. Unfortunately, considering the context of the current study, rural Matatiele, Alfred Nzo West District, we make a casual claim that not all low-income parents in this area can be fully involved in their children's education to a larger extent, which can have negative

implications for their children's reading development in Grade 4 EFAL language. We make this claim considering that illiteracy and poverty are hardly inseparable.

The results highlighted that the teachers had to code switch between isiXhosa and English so that the learners could understand concepts better. Similarly, Maluleke (2019) highlighted that code switching is a teaching strategy that Mathematics teachers use in South Africa to enhance learner understanding. Strikingly, our teaching experience has taught us that code switching is used by both EFAL teachers and learners in the learning processes, resulting in a productive and stimulating learning experience of teaching reading to a Grade 4 EFAL class. Moreover, in this study, the temptation to code switch was high considering that the selected Grade 4 teachers and the learners shared a HL, isiXhosa, making it an escape route everytime they faced linguistic challenges when reading a given text. However, we advise that over-reliance on code switching can be a disadvantage because all formal and informal assessments that the learners will attempt will require the learners to stick to English, with no room for vernacular; otherwise, they will be penalised heavily.

The participants indicated using phonics to help Grade 4 EFAL learners manage their reading challenges. Cited literature in this study has reported that phonics instruction is likely to effectively promote learners' proficiency in an additional language such as English (Woore, 2022). We also support this assertion because our experience has revealed that phonics can be taught to EFAL learners in comparatively short segments and helps in other aspects of additional language learning, including lexical development, particularly in lower grades.

Regarding the observation results in this study, it is telling that majority of Grade 4 EFAL learners struggle with reading. As the findings show, the participants battled to read audibly due to lack of confidence in their reading abilities. This is not only a local challenge among rural children, but it is similar to the findings from a study among Chinese students who lacked confidence in expressing themselves when given a reading exercise in class (Zha, 2022). The learners' inability to read fluently could also be due to lack of exposure to reading English texts, and unfamiliarity with the subject under discussion in the read text. Thus, Grade 4 EFAL teachers need to inculcate the eagerness among the learners to read extensively, whether inside or outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, South Africa, like most developing economies, struggles to provide adequate reading materials to all schools because the economy cannot sustain itself unless other interested education and financial stakeholders come in with the needed reading materials, particularly for the most disadvantaged children in rural areas, as the school under study in Matatiele, Alfred Nzo West District.

Also, the observation results indicate that learners do not use paralinguistic features to aid their reading. Gestures are important when reading a given text because they give life to the read piece and indicate one's understanding of what they are reading. We reiterate that most reading exercises unaccompanied by gestures lull the audience to sleep; they inject boredom in the listener; hence, they will not bother following the exercise at hand. However, we caution that over-use of gestures can ruin the thrust behind the reading exercise, overshadowing the essence of undertaking the reading exercise.

The finding revealed that the learners struggled to pronounce the words correctly, and we take this predicament seriously, considering that pronunciation is pivotal in any additional language learning context, as in this study. We say thus under correction, many Grade 4 EFAL teachers are neglecting to teach pronunciation to their Grade 4 learners because they (teachers) are not proficient in this aspect, considering that the majority of them in South Africa are not native speakers of English. These Grade EFAL teachers are likely to face some overlaps because of the very different phoneme systems of their home languages, which could be isiXhosa or Sesotho versus the English language. These problems cascade to their EFAL as well. Regardless, teachers need to value pronunciation in language learning because sounds are

pivotal in language learning and communication. It is important to comprehend what you hear in the target language, EFAL, to enhance the encoding and decoding of messages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After discussion of the study findings, the study makes the following recommendations. It is imperative that Grade 4 EFAL teachers make use of the learners' prior linguistic knowledge to teach teaching in the target language. The English-only rule needs to be applied sparingly considering that most learners in rural areas, as the learners under study, are hardly exposed to English outside of the classroom environment. Besides, there is a need to avail many reading books that are age-appropriate so that the learners can have more reading exercises and be exposed to different subjects under, which will broaden their vocabulary base as well. Also, teachers should have reading lessons, even if it means having 'extra reading classes', which can informally be supervised by the learners' guardians at home. Lastly, Grade EFAL teachers should not neglect teaching pronunciation, as this exercise helps learners realise the overlaps between their HL and the LoTL when reading any given text.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to explore the experiences of Grade 4 EFAL teachers and learners in Alfred Nzo West District transitioning from isiXhosa to EFAL as a medium of instruction in Grade 4. This thrust was to identify the challenges teachers' face in teaching English First Additional Language EFAL reading to Grade 4 learners in Alfred Nzo West District, South Africa and explore the strategies they use to overcome the reading challenges faced by Grade 4 learners in Alfred Nzo West District, South Africa. The study has revealed that Grade 4 EFAL learners face some challenges as they transition from Grade 3 where they have been using their H/L as the LoTL, including linguistic barriers. This study has highlighted some measures teachers may take, including, parental involvement, phonics, collaborative learning and learners prior linguistic knowledge to mitigate reading challenges faced by Grade 4 EFAL learners. Equally so, it is important to give Grade 4 EFAL learners age-appropriate reading materials because their comprehension is naturally developed as they acquire new vocabulary, and learners are cognitively-engaged in less challenging texts.

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