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INVESTIGATING READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES USED BY TEACHERS DURING ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE READING INSTRUCTION

ABSTRACT

Since the purpose of reading is comprehension, the major goal of reading comprehension instruction is to help learners develop knowledge, skills, and strategies so that they become strategic readers who read for comprehension. Language teachers use reading comprehension strategies as an instruction tool to assist learners to develop into strategic readers. However, the range of strategies used by teachers is crucial. This paper presents classroom observations of reading comprehension strategy instruction used by four purposively selected English First Additional Language (FAL) teachers. The study was qualitative in nature and a case study design was chosen. The findings of the study reveal that teachers

did not provide opportunity to support learners' independent comprehension strategy use. Furthermore, the study has disclosed that the teachers' inability to engage learners in reading comprehension strategies might signify the teachers' lack of knowledge of how to incorporate reading comprehension strategies as an instructional tool during reading comprehension lessons. The authors recommend that the Department of Basic Education institute interventions to empower teachers on how to teach reading comprehension strategies.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, reading, reading strategies, reading instruction; English FAL teacher, English First Additional Language (EFAL)

INTRODUCTION

Despite well documented research in reading comprehension and the emergence of theoretical and classroom research in reading comprehension (Cekiso, 2012, 2017; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014), South African learners continue to face challenges in independent learning from reading. In support of this claim, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) provides insights into learners' low levels of reading comprehension and poor critical reading ability by means of benchmark achievement profiles (PIRLS 2006, 2011, 2016). The PIRLS results consecutively show that South African learners struggle with reading. The study found that Grade four learners were reading two grades behind their international peers (PIRLS 2006, 2011, 2016). The poor results by South African Grade six learners in the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) are a further indication of the education crisis. Specifically, the results of the SACMEQ study (2007) showed that out of the 15 countries that participated in the study, South Africa came tenth for reading literacy, performing behind poorer countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Swaziland. The concern about the low reading proficiency levels of South African learners is supported by considerable research claiming that South Africa has a reading crisis (Willenberg, 2018; Rule & Land, 2017; Spaul, 2016; Howie, van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman, 2011). In a bid to address this crisis, researchers have conducted various studies in an attempt to identify the contributing factors, with the most prominent being the teacher factor. Thus, the current study was conducted in response to the continuing reading challenges of South African learners in order to determine the challenges related to teachers' reading strategy instruction.

The reading proficiency of South African learners, which has been worsening as evidenced in the PIRLS results, is attributed to various factors such as poor teaching methods in the Foundation Phase (Rule & Land, 2017; Van der Merwe & Nel, 2012); lack of a reading culture (McEwan 2013); lack of reading material (Spaul, 2016); socio-economic factors (Taylor & Yu 2009; Pretorius and Lephala 2011); as well as linguistic challenges (Heugh, 2009; Jordaan, 2011). In addition, building on the focus on teachers, Nel (2011), Van der Merwe and Nel (2012) attributed the teachers' lack of understanding of reading instruction to inadequate preparation and support during university coursework at the pre-service level. This view is supported by Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) who argue that teachers themselves are not immersed in rich reading practices and therefore do not seem to have a clear understanding of reading concepts, reading development and reading methodology.

Consequently, research has focused on the role of teachers in developing their learners' reading skills. To this end, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) declare that there is clear evidence that teachers are not effectively developing learners' basic reading skills that support comprehension. The poor reading outcomes of learners as discussed above, displayed by the South African primary school learners, show that learners' basic reading skills are not well developed by their teachers, thus contributing to the learners' poor ability to read to learn and subsequent poor academic performance. Thus, attention to meaning and comprehension as well as critical reading, may be

neglected areas in the South African classrooms (Dreyer & Nel 2003; Klapwijk 2011; Zimmerman & Smit 2014; Zimmerman 2014). Although there are numerous studies on learners' reading with comprehension, we know little about how reading comprehension strategies are taught in the classrooms in South Africa. To fill this gap, the current study provides important insights into how reading comprehension is taught in the high school classrooms.

Specifically, the current study sought to investigate the reading comprehension strategies used by teachers in their English FAL (EFAL) classrooms. Information on teachers' reading comprehension strategy instruction could help to diagnose teachers' challenges in teaching reading comprehension strategies and thus, devise ways to develop teachers' instruction in reading comprehension strategies accordingly. The study was pursued out of the researchers' concern for the poor reading ability of learners as illustrated by high school learners in the Tshwane South District, since one of the researchers has taught EFAL in one of the schools in that district. Furthermore, in the South African context, the existing literature revealed no scholarly investigation on reading instruction practices of high school teachers in the Tshwane South District regarding reading comprehension and critical reading. Thus, this study seeks to explore and address the following research questions:

- Which reading instructional strategies do teachers use to teach reading comprehension in the Grade 8 English FAL classroom?
- How does the teachers' behaviour, as observed during reading comprehension lessons, support the use of reading comprehension strategies?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is considered a key competence in the modern information society, and there is a high demand for the comprehension of complex texts throughout learners' schooling (Magnusson, Roe, & Blikstad-Balas, 2018). This statement resonates with Bobkina and Stefanovas' (2016: 681) postulation that reading comprehension refers to the ability to interpret a text and make various inferences about it in a manner which can deliver different conclusions. This notion is echoed by Vaseghi, Gholami and Barjestech (2012: 406) who argue that reading comprehension is about thinking, that is, cogitating whilst reading. Therefore, reading comprehension involves engaging in the act of reading with a questioning mind, which will result in comprehension, evaluation and the decision to accept or reject what was read. Thus, the interaction between a text and the reader facilitates the reading process. For this reason Graves, Juel and Graves (1998) observe that comprehension of text involves the ability to interpret the written word, to conceptualise meaning from the text, to understand the intention of

the author, to be aware of the theme of the text, and to use language to create special effects. These abilities, in effect, refer to reading comprehension. Accordingly, Naiditch (2009: 94) reasons that for effective reading to transpire, the teacher should support the learners to connect the text and the real world. These demands seem to make it difficult for learners to become critical readers without the teachers' guidance on how reading comprehension strategies should be applied during the reading process. It is for this reason that instruction on reading comprehension strategies has become a present-day necessity.

The role of the teacher in the reading comprehension instruction process

The role of the teacher during reading comprehension instruction is to encourage and support learners to become active participants in their own reading process. Findings from various studies on reading comprehension pedagogies such as Kadir, Subki, Jamal and Ismail (2014), Naiditch (2009), Snow, Griffin and Burns (2005) as well as Burke (2002) have resulted in great emphasis on the teacher's role in the reading comprehension instruction process in the classroom. For example, Burke (2002) has declared that teachers' use of reading comprehension strategies during English FAL reading instruction is multifaceted, as there are various aspects to consider during the instruction process. Burke identified aspects such as: a) The teacher's interpretation of reading comprehension and the strategies used during instruction; b) The support that the teacher provides to learners during the instruction process; c) The way the teacher behaves or reacts to what happens during the reading comprehension instruction process. Based on the information gleaned from the above-mentioned studies, it is worth mentioning that learners' reading comprehension ability can significantly be influenced and supported by the teacher's application of knowledge of reading comprehension strategies.

Furthermore, Snow, Griffin and Burns (2005) conclude that the reading comprehension strategy instruction-learning equation is dependent on the teacher. This accentuates the key role of the teacher to assist in preparing learners to cultivate reading comprehension practices in and outside of the classroom. However, although the teacher is documented as the principal facilitator of reading comprehension in the English FAL classroom, paradoxically, Kadir, Subki, Jamal and Ismail (2014: 208) argue that teachers do not adequately accentuate reading comprehension strategies during English FAL reading instruction. Hence the significance of the current study.

Teaching reading comprehension strategies in the English FAL classroom

The literature reflects several studies conducted on reading comprehension strategies and how they are taught in the English FAL classrooms (Mokhatari & Reichard, 2002; Wallace, 2003; McNamara, 2007; Cekiso, 2012; Gunning, 2008; 275; Khabiri & Pakzad, 2012, Vaseghi and Gholami & Barjestech, 2012; Hassan, 2015). Reading comprehension strategy instruction may take various forms in English FAL classrooms,

because teachers guide the learning process using different instructional strategies. However, it is important that the teachers' reading comprehension instructional strategies are adapted regularly to accommodate the learning needs of the learners. Moreover, although reading comprehension instructional strategies may differ from teacher to teacher, reading comprehension instruction in all classrooms, as noted by Hassan (2015: 172), should share common reading instruction strategy objectives such as, among others, supporting independent comprehension and learners' engagement in reading comprehension dialogue. Raqqad and Hanim Ismail (2020) support Hassan's common reading instruction strategy objectives by declaring that teaching reading strategies should focus on promoting learner independence support.

Furthermore, educators need to scaffold reading lessons in order to support learners during instruction. Scaffolding instruction, as observed by Hassan (2015: 172), promotes a supportive learning atmosphere in which learners are guided to cultivate independent comprehension, resourcefulness, creativity, and in the context of this paper, reading comprehension ability. Teachers, thus, use reading comprehension strategies as an instructional tool (Vacca & Vacca, 2009; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2004), by facilitating instruction and the support process in the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). Woolfolk (2013: 59) refers to the ZPD as the space in which the teacher and the learner exchange understanding through interaction so that instruction can succeed. For this reason, McKenzie (1999) characterises the goal of scaffolding instruction as the maximization of learning. In effect, the application of a scaffolding instructional strategy enables the teacher to support and guide the instruction-learning process with reading comprehension strategies that are consciously chosen as purposeful methods of reading. Given the critical role that reading comprehension instructional strategies play in promoting learners' reading comprehension, the teacher's ability to develop these strategies in learners seems highly crucial. Thus, it is important to investigate how teachers conduct reading lessons to promote reading comprehension in the FAL classroom.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

A qualitative research approach was used in this study. The approach focuses on the provision of detailed analytical processes and in-depth discussions to understand a social or cultural phenomenon (Maree, 2016: 50-69). The qualitative approach selected provided the researchers with textual information (in the widest sense of that term), such as observation schedule recordings, for the understanding of the multiple facets of classroom critical reading instruction, in search of answers to the research questions. Aligned with the qualitative approach, a case study design was followed. Yin (2003: 13) defines a case study as "... an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context." Accordingly, this investigation was conducted

in a real-life (classroom) context and focused on the use of reading comprehension strategies by teachers during English FAL instruction.

Participants

With the focus on the reading comprehension strategies used by Grade 8 teachers during English FAL reading comprehension instruction, the sample consisted of four teachers who were purposively selected from two high schools in Gauteng, Tshwane South district. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003: 77) define purposive sampling as a strategy where “members of a sample are chosen with a purpose to represent a location or type in relation to the criterion”. Thus, researchers apply their own criteria when defining their sample. In the current study, the participants were selected because the researchers believed that their daily interaction with the EFAL learners could provide insightful information based on their knowledge and experience of teaching reading comprehension. The sample consisted of four teachers (two Grade 8 teachers in each school). Two female and two male teachers participated in the study. Their ages ranged between 27 and 58 years, and their qualifications ranged from Diploma to Honours degree.

Data collection methods

In this study, observations were used to solicit information from the participants. Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 145) state that observations as a qualitative data collection instrument are intentionally unstructured, providing rich and valuable information. Therefore, the observations were deemed relevant for the study, since they enabled the researchers to collect descriptive narrative data of the reading instruction-learning process as well as the behaviour of both learners and teachers. Observations were conducted during EFAL lessons following the Grades 8 timetables and one lesson per teacher was observed. The observation took about forty minutes per participant. Non-participatory observations of teachers were carried out in the classroom context, while they were teaching their learners how to read with understanding. The researchers developed an observation checklist. In order to collect data, the researchers believed that an instrument that would capture a range of teacher activities and reading comprehension strategies to scaffold reading to learn was necessary. Our instrument took into consideration the teachers’ role in scaffolding the use of reading comprehension strategies. The instrument was guided by the following reading instruction strategy objectives, with some of them supported by Hassan (2015: 172), and Raqqad, and Hanim Ismail (2020): 1. Teachers’ support of independent comprehension, 2. Teachers’ ability to engage learners in reading comprehension instruction. Hassan (2015: 172) divides the last reading instruction strategy objective into four. These are Teachers’ questioning technique, Teachers’ ability to provide feedback, Teacher modelling, and Teachers’ provision of hints to learners.

The above listed reading instruction strategy objectives helped the researchers to compare different lessons and teachers, as well as teachers’ classroom practices to

achieve these objectives. With the permission of the participants, audio-visual recording of lessons were made, in addition to the notes that were taken.

Data analysis

During data analysis, the researchers reviewed what was witnessed and recorded and synthesized the information together with the observations and words of the participants themselves. The first step was to transcribe the recorded data and present it as written text. The authors went through the transcript to check for accuracy and coded the data. The idea of coding the data was not to develop themes but to match the data with the six reading instruction strategy objectives already mentioned above. The idea was to understand how the teachers navigate through the process of achieving the reading instruction strategy objectives. This information was presented as narrative insights on the reading strategies used by teachers during English FAL comprehension instruction.

FINDINGS

Teachers' support of independent comprehension

This section deals with the information related to the nature of the independent reading activities provided by teachers in order to provide learners with an opportunity to practice the reading strategies. To this end, specific activities that foster independent reading and provide additional practice time for learners that allow them to see, learn and use a variety of reading comprehension strategies were required. Specifically, the focus was on the teacher's ability to provide rehearsal and practice opportunities for the learners. Concerning the above-mentioned expectations, it was important to reflect on what the teachers did in their classrooms. The following excerpts shed light on what took place in the three classrooms.

EXCERPT 1- Teacher A (School A)

Topic: Reading comprehension: The Fight

Teacher A: I told you yesterday to read the story, who can quickly tell me what the story is about?

Learner 1: The story is about a fight

Teacher A: What comes to your mind when you hear the word fight?

Learner 2: I think of conflict

Learner 3: Struggle madam

Teacher A: Was there any conflict or struggle in the story, if yes what was it all about?

Learner 2: Yes madam, there was a conflict in the story. It was between Oupa and Monde; who fought over a girl called Ayanda.

Teacher A: What happened, is there anyone who can elaborate on what Tom (not his real name) has said?

Teacher A asked one learner to stand up and summarize the story for the class. She told the learner to put what was in the story in his own words. As the learner was retelling the story, the teacher would correct grammatical errors and pronunciation of words.

EXCERPT 2- Teacher B (School A)

Topic: Reading comprehension: The Fight

Teacher B: Before we read let us quickly look at the characters that are in the story. Who has found one? Can you please tell us something about that character? Yes! (Pointing at a boy sitting in the corner)

Learner 5: There is Ayanda madam; and she was the girl who caused the fight in the story.

Learner 6: Oupa, the boy who was invited by Ayanda to attend a party.

Learner 7: Monde, he is the one who challenged Oupa to fight over Ayanda, I can say he is the troublemaker in the story.

Learner 1: There is also a group of girls who influenced Ayanda to invite Oupa to the party.

Teacher B: What do you think happened in the story? I will write your responses on the board so that we do not forget them, and we will come back and confirm if we were accurate with our guessing.

Learner 8: I think Oupa won the fight.

Learner 9: Ayanda and Oupa fell in love and went to the party together.

Learner 6: No, (shaking her head) There was never a date madam.

Teacher B: Okay, okay! Let us read and find out if what you say is correct.

EXCERPT 3- Teacher C (School B)

Topic: Reading Comprehension: The ant and the Dove

Teacher C: Morning class, I am going to read, listen carefully as you will also take turns reading. (*Reading*)

The Ant and the Dove

Once, an ant that had come to drink at a stream fell into the water and was carried away by the swift current. He was in great danger of drowning. A dove, perched on a nearby tree, saw the ant's peril and dropped a leaf into water. The ant clambered on to this and was carried to safety.

Sometime after this a hunter, creeping through the bushes, spied the dove asleep, and took careful aim with his musket. He was about to fire when the ant, which was nearby crawled forward and bit him sharply in the ankle. The hunter missed his aim and the loud report of the gun awakened the dove from her sleep. She saw her danger and flew swiftly away to safety. Thus, the ant repaid the dove for having saved his life in the foaming current of the stream.

Teacher C: Can someone else read? I will ask you questions after that.

Learner 1: Yes madam, (*Reading*) "He was in great danger of drowning" (drowning pronounced incorrectly) Teacher interjected: Teacher D: Drowning, read that sentence again. (Child read the sentence again correcting her mistake)

Teacher C: Alright thank you my child, (*rushing*) next! (*The next child read*)

The learners were asked about the moral of the story from the summary given by learners. The learners were asked to quickly go through the text and find the characters and the setting in the story and these were discussed in class.

EXCERPT 4- Teacher D (School B)

Topic: Reading Comprehension: Donna is missing

Teacher D: The story we are about to read has "colloquial language" in it, Do you know what colloquial means?

Learners: (with one voice) No sir!

Teacher D: Colloquial language is a slang and a slang is an informal language that is not appropriate grammatically but convenient for communication.

For instance as you speak among yourselves; you would say, can you see that girl I “tuned” you about, she is “dope”. (The class cracked with laughter). Tuned means “told” and dope can mean:

Learners: “hot, beautiful, pretty, very nice”

Teacher D: Give me sentences with examples of slang that you know, give the meaning also.

Learner 1: Hey Linda, yesterday was epic bruh! – (Hey Linda, Yesterday I was very good brother!)

Learner 2: I know girl, YOLO! - (I know girl, You Only Live Once!)

Class: Ncoooh, cool! (OH that is so sweet!)

Teacher D: Good! I am glad you know this language is not appropriate for formal conversation. I hope I will not see some of these words in your essays. Also, as we read note all the words that are slang in the text and see if you understand them by telling what they imply.

Learners: Yes sir!

Teacher D: Take your class workbooks, in your own words briefly describe Nikita’s personal encounter in the story.

Analysis of the findings

Teachers’ support of independent comprehension

All the above four lessons are reading comprehension lessons. The teachers seemed to use question and answer throughout their presentations. There is no evidence of the support of independent comprehension. The only independent work was done through giving learners the opportunity to do classwork or homework. In some cases, the learners were told to summarise the text in their own words. All these activities do not support independent reading and there was not specific reading comprehension strategy targeted for independent reading. One would expect the teachers to encourage the learners to practice or to rehearse the reading comprehension strategies. One of the reasons for this shortcoming could be that the four teachers did not seem to be aware of the explicit reading strategy instruction. In fact, not a single teacher identified a strategy and explained how it works. This kind of behaviour could not allow them to provide the opportunity for the learners to practice the reading comprehension strategies. In this context, one could also argue that even those reading comprehension strategies that were implemented by the four teachers were implemented by accident.

Teachers' questioning technique

Questioning is one reading comprehension strategy for promoting comprehension. Davoud and Amel Sadeghi (2015) are of the view that questioning helps to develop learners into critical readers, and therefore teachers are expected to encourage learners to strive actively to make sense of their world through questioning so that they become strategic and critical readers. They further point out that sometimes learners are encouraged to ask questions instead of answering questions. Learners' answering of questions indicates that teaching-learning is a one-way process: questions emanate from the teacher, not the learners, and there are no questions from the learner to the teacher. Questioning, according to Hill (2016), lies at the heart of comprehension, because it is the process of questioning, seeking answers and asking further questions that keep the reading going. Teachers therefore have the responsibility of helping learners to engage with texts through a range of different kinds of questioning techniques, so that learners are given the opportunity to delve deeper into the text. Thus, teachers are supposed to monitor learners' use of questioning and provide additional guidance as required.

Regarding questioning as a reading comprehension strategy, teachers in the current study demonstrated the following:

Teachers B and C above used questioning as a reading comprehension strategy. They used questions to probe for more information. Their questioning technique confirms their dominance of the lesson. In the lessons observed, not a single teacher encouraged learners to ask other learners or the teacher questions. The teachers did not encourage learners to ask questions about the text in order to construct meaning from the text. All the teachers engaged learners in lower order questions that did not allow the learners to evaluate, analyse, synthesize and apply information. The teachers' questions focused only on the recognizing and recalling level. For example, teacher C encouraged learners to remember information about ants, hunter and a dove. It is evident that this level of questioning does not contribute much towards developing critical thinking.

Teachers' ability to engage learners in reading comprehension strategy instruction

Teachers were expected to expose learners to a wide range of material to perform activities that would improve learners' reading comprehension. They were expected to assist learners to understand and interpret what is read and to make inferences. Teachers whose goal is to develop learners' reading comprehension skills should help learners to develop the skill of locating, evaluating, and organising, in order to retain what is read. Since the purpose of reading is comprehension, i.e. getting meaning from written text, the major goal of reading comprehension instruction is to help learners develop knowledge, skills and experiences so that they become competent readers (Texas Educational Agency, 2002). Teachers who are adept at this should be able to help learners arrive at generalizations, draw conclusions and make inferences and

applications. In addition, teachers are expected to train learners to read between the lines and beyond the text.

Concerning the above-mentioned expectations, it is important to reflect on what the teachers did in their classrooms. The following narrative reveal what took place in the classrooms in this respect.

The above excerpt 2 shows that Teacher B was encouraging the employment of a reading comprehension strategy – making predictions. This strategy involves the ability of readers to get meaning from a text by making informed predictions. Teacher B above used predictions to connect the learners’ existing knowledge to new information from a text to get meaning of what learners read. Another reading comprehension strategy that Teacher B used was guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context. The teacher encouraged the learners to predict before reading and to confirm or reject their predictions during the reading process. This strategy allows learners to interact with the text, as they do not rely only on the information provided by the text. However, the predictions used by teacher B are only applied at the level of individual words or vocabulary. She should perhaps also have asked the learners to guess the content of the story. For example, what the characters would do as the story unfolds, and support their reasoning for such guesses. During the process of reading learners would confirm or reject their guesses.

Teachers’ ability to provide feedback

Feedback from the teacher is another important reading comprehension strategy that learners need to learn to use. Thus, it is important for teachers to give learners immediate and actionable feedback as they engage in guided and independent practice. Teachers are often advised to avoid negative feedback as it might discourage learners (Dornyei 2010). Giving feedback is important, however, as it means giving learners an explanation of what they are doing correctly or incorrectly. Nonetheless, teachers are always encouraged to focus more on what the learners are doing right. Teachers may give feedback immediately after learners have shown proof of learning, and avoid discouraging learners and damaging self-esteem (Boakye 2015; Dornyei 2010). Both Boakye (2015) and Dornyei (2010) intimate that negative feedback discourages students and lowers their self-efficacy. Teachers are therefore advised to find a balance between not wanting to hurt a learner’s feelings and providing proper encouragement (Chalk & Bizo, 2004). Chalk and Bizo further state that teachers are to bear in mind that the purpose of giving feedback is to keep learners on target for achievement.

In the observed lessons, the teachers provided feedback in various ways. The following narrative provides evidence of the teachers’ feedback.

There is no doubt that teachers A and B above used positive feedback to encourage learners to learn, by nodding and acknowledgment especially of correct and appropriate answers. Teachers' responses show how they appreciate the learners' responses, and these are viewed as signs of encouragement.

Teacher modelling

During teacher modelling, the teacher describes the concept, and then models the desired outcome by using visual, auditory, tactile and or kinaesthetic instructional techniques while thinking aloud. This reading comprehension strategy provides high levels of learner-teacher interaction. The teacher models the strategy through thinking aloud to make their thoughts visible to the learners. The goal is to encourage learners to work independently afterwards. In the observed lessons, however, there was no explicit teacher modelling where teachers provided learners with a clear example of a skill or strategy.

Teacher providing hints

Hints guide learners to successful task completion. Hints steer learners in the direction of the correct answer or explain why their current answer choice is incorrect (Pol & Harskamp, 2008). Therefore, teachers are expected to provide hints rather than the correct answer. In that way they provide learners with another chance to practice their reading comprehension skills, and succeed at it. In other words, teachers are expected to provide specific pieces of knowledge and insight that will give learners an opportunity to find the correct answers. In that way learners will think critically and arrive at the answer on their own, rather than being spoon-fed by the teacher. Usher and Pajares (2006) are of the view that hints serve as a perfect way to guide learners toward mastery of the content, improve knowledge application and enhance performance.

Concerning the teachers' provision of hints in the service of critical reading strategy development, the observed lessons demonstrated the following:

In the above example, Teacher D used hints to direct learners to the correct answer. In a way, the effort was to engage learners to ultimately help themselves. In this case, the teachers are expected to provide clues that will guide learners towards the correct answer. Teacher D gave the learners two options in order to guide them towards the correct answer. For example, "Is Nikita a first- or third-person narrator?" The teacher directs learners to the correct answer and at the end, he adds some information to make sure that the meaning is clear.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study sought to investigate the reading comprehension strategies used by teachers during English FAL reading instruction. This section discusses the findings of the study in light of the aim of the study. The findings of the study revealed that teachers did not use any specific activities that fostered independent reading and provided additional practice time for learners. Specifically, the teachers were unable to provide rehearsal and practice opportunities for the learners. The importance of this strategy has been emphasised by Johnson and Keier (2010) who argue that independent reading allows learners to read and re-read materials in order to practice strategies introduced during reading instruction. They emphasize that rehearsal and practice are effective intervention strategies.

The study further showed that the majority of teachers used questioning (a critical reading strategy) in order to probe for more information from the learners. However, their questioning technique reflected their dominance of the lesson. Sadly, all the teachers engaged learners in lower order questions that did not facilitate learners' critical reading skills. To make the situation worse, one teacher focused only on oral reading and as such paid specific attention to pronunciation, without any focus on comprehension. This finding is in line with the findings of a study conducted in Thailand by Blything, Hardi and Cain (2019). The results of their study revealed that teachers asked more lower-order than higher-order challenging questions. Blything, Hardi and Cain argue that lower-order reading comprehension strategies involve memorization of basic information whereas higher-order reading comprehension strategies require understanding and application of knowledge.

The findings also showed that only one teacher used predictions to connect the learners' existing knowledge to new information from a text to get meaning of what they read. In order to achieve her goal, the teacher encouraged the learners to predict before reading and to confirm or reject their predictions during the reading process. However, predictions were limited to the meaning of unfamiliar words. No predictions were made at the level of the content of the text even though making predictions increases learner interest and improves their understanding of the text as stated by Oczkus (2005).

The findings further revealed that the majority of teachers provided feedback to their learners as a critical reading strategy. To achieve this, teachers responded immediately by nodding and giving compliments when learners provided correct answers. The use of feedback was likely to boost learners' engagement. A similar finding was made in Panhoon and Wongwanich's (2014) study, which concluded that teachers focused on giving compliments, and telling learners what was right or wrong.

Although teacher modelling was one of the targeted reading strategies, it was observed that not a single teacher used this reading comprehension strategy. The reason could be that the teachers were not aware of this explicit critical reading strategy. Based on

the situation one could assume that the teachers were not even aware of the reading strategies they were implementing. This finding supports previous research conducted by Loh (2009) that sought to find out if teachers practiced what they preached about reading by making the effort to model the act of reading. The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that even though the teachers believed in the importance of reading and modelling, they did not model reading in their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that teachers' approach to reading comprehension instruction reveals their lack of knowledge of how to incorporate reading strategies in the teaching of reading. This manifests itself in the teachers' inability to refer to the reading strategies, let alone model them. Their classroom activities do not allow learners to engage effectively with the text. Teachers seem to lack the skill to support or scaffold their learners' reading comprehension development. Thus, they may lack a proper understanding of teaching reading comprehension strategies. Even the reading comprehension strategies that were employed by teachers were not effectively used to guide learners' reading comprehension and later development into independent strategic readers. In other words, there was no clear plan of reading comprehension strategy development apart from reading comprehension instruction that took place in a haphazard manner. It was clear that there is an urgent need for teacher training on the teaching of reading comprehension strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the authors recommend that the Department of Basic Education should institute interventions to empower teachers on how to teach reading comprehension strategies. Such interventions should focus on explicit reading instruction. Research suggests that explicit instruction is a well-researched and highly effective instructional strategy, which is beneficial for both learners and educators (Brevic, 2019; Lencioni, 2013). According to Brevic (2019), explicit strategy instruction involves making learners cognitively aware of the thinking processes of good readers as they engage with text, and thus providing learners with specific strategies they can use. The authors recommend that teachers should be developed so that they can understand the reading comprehension strategy categories, such as pre-reading, during-reading and after-reading. There is no doubt that teachers should be exposed to various reading comprehension activities that they can implement in each category.

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