



Using Self-Directed learning to mitigate the Post-Covid-19 Pedagogical needs of Rural English First Additional Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

Perhaps, one major lesson that can be drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic is the danger of learners' over-dependence on teachers. This situation requires serious scrutiny, especially in rural schools where remote learning faces serious challenges. Therefore, enhancing learners' learning autonomy in the post-pandemic era is necessary. In response, this paper seeks to provide insights into how self-directed learning may be used to mitigate the pedagogical needs of English first additional language (FAL) learners in rural South African schools. Fifteen English FAL teachers in this study responded to the question: What could be done to promote rural English FAL learners' self-directed learning in the post-COVID-19 era? The paper follows a qualitative research design and adopts self-determination theory as a lens. The study uses observation, online interviews and document analysis for data generation. The findings indicate that English FAL teachers view self-directed learning as a tool to monitor learner progress, promote ownership, increase learning opportunities, and enhance school-home connections. Self-directed learning mitigates English FAL learners' pedagogical needs by fostering a sense of ownership among rural English FAL learners, designing activities that promote learner-centred learning, creating supportive learning environments, and increasing parental involvement. The study recommends that English FAL teachers may use tasks with clear instructions to allow learners to complete them independently and with less teacher dependency. In addition, parents and teachers may communicate consistently to maintain and strengthen home-school relationships that foster learners' self-directed learning and parental involvement.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been an unexpected shift in how teaching and learning occur in many classrooms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In many countries, a sudden and urgent transition from face-to-face teaching to

remote teaching and learning seemed logical and became common.¹ When taught remotely, learners enjoy the autonomy to learn in their places of preference (home, park). They also control their learning time and schedule. In addition, remote learning allows learners to determine and learn at their own pace.

Despite these advantages, as witnessed during the pandemic, remote learning is not accessible to all learners. In fact, in countries such as South Africa, this mode of teaching and learning excludes the majority of learners from rural schools.² Similar observations were made in Australia, where there was a need to provide computers to all learners to narrow this digital divide.³ There are several reasons for this to happen. The geographical location of many rural schools exacerbates the problem of inaccessibility. Many of these schools are located in remote and mountainous places where internet connection is either weak or completely unavailable.⁴ In some instances, some of these schools are deprived of essential services such as electricity and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure necessary for remote learning.⁵ In other instances, teachers and learners in rural schools lack the skills to administer and use the online mode of teaching and learning.

Although the world seems to step into what may be called the post-COVID-19 era, not much has changed for rural schools in South Africa.⁶ In other words, rural schools getting into this new era are still faced with the same challenges (poor internet connection, lack of online learning infrastructure, and technological devices) they had before and during the pandemic. This comes in light of the failure of the government's Operation Phakisa initiative to provide technological infrastructure and improve internet connectivity for rural and township schools across South Africa. As a result, the pedagogical needs of learners, such as those in rural English FAL classrooms, are likely to remain unfulfilled. In light of the shortcomings of remote learning in addressing the problems of rural schools during the pandemic and the sentiments shared by Dube that "... there is [a] need for an inclusive approach that caters for the lived realities of rural learners."⁷ This paper addresses this gap in research. In this regard, it adds that rural schools must embrace approaches that promote self-reliance and autonomy to survive in the post-COVID-19 era. The participants in this study are proactive in confronting the challenges and risks the COVID-19 pandemic poses to teaching and learning in rural schools. They identify the challenges and devise potential ways of using self-directed learning. Thus, the study aims to provide insights into how self-directed learning could be used to mitigate the pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. To achieve this aim, the following objectives guide this research:

- To determine rural English FAL teachers' perceptions of self-directed learning.

¹ Muhammad M M Abdel Latif, "Coping with COVID-19-Related Online English Teaching Challenges: Teacher Educators' Suggestions," *ELT Journal* 76, no. 1 (January 19, 2022): 20–33, <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab074>; Jian Tao and Yueting Xu, "Parental Support for Young Learners' Online Learning of English in a Chinese Primary School," *System* 105 (April 2022): 102718, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102718>.

² Bekithemba Dube, "Rural Online Learning in the Context of COVID 19 in South Africa: Evoking an Inclusive Education Approach," *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research* 10, no. 2 (June 15, 2020): 135, <https://doi.org/10.17583/REMIE.2020.5607>.

³ Brikena Xhaferi and Gëzim Xhaferi, "Online Learning Benefits and Challenges During the COVID 19 - Pandemic-Students' Perspective from SEEU," *SEEU Review* 15, no. 1 (July 1, 2020): 86–103, <https://doi.org/10.2478/seeur-2020-0006>.

⁴ Susanne M Owen et al., "Integrating Online Learning in Schools: Issues and Ways Forward for Developing Countries," *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research* 19 (2020): 571–614, <https://doi.org/10.28945/4625>; Aakash Kamble et al., "Learners' Perception of the Transition to Instructor-Led Online Learning Environments: Facilitators and Barriers During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 22, no. 1 (March 10, 2021): 199–215, <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v22i1.4971>.

⁵ Dube, "Rural Online Learning in the context of COVID-19 in South Africa."

⁶ Themba Ralph Mkhize and Mogamat Noor Davids, "Towards a Digital Resource Mobilisation Approach for Digital Inclusion During COVID-19 and Beyond: A Case of a Township School in South Africa," *Educational Research for Social Change* 10, no. 2 (September 12, 2021): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2021/v10i2a2>.

⁷ Dube, "Rural Online Learning in the context of COVID-19 in South Africa," 139.

- To explain how English FAL teachers use self-directed learning to mitigate the post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners.

Unpacking the pedagogical needs of English FAL learners in South Africa

Although the world seems to move into the post-pandemic era, the pedagogical needs of English FAL learners remain the same. This situation calls on the practitioners and teacher educators of the English language to become alert and responsive to the specific needs of this group of learners.⁸ With appropriate alertness and responsiveness to these needs, English FAL learners are more likely to obtain increased access to content knowledge and curriculum content.⁹ Among others, English FAL learners need to be supported in language proficiency, literacy development, and content knowledge.¹⁰

Attaining high proficiency levels in English remains critical even in the post-COVID-19 era.¹¹ According to Farren, proficiency in the English language enhances the chances of academic success for non-native speakers of this language.¹² This is particularly important because English FAL learners must complete all learning tasks in English and other content subjects.¹³ Cummins categorises language proficiency into Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).¹⁴ In other words, English FAL learners still need to develop oral and academic proficiency in the post-pandemic era.¹⁵ Oral proficiency involves beginning and sustaining conversations for social purposes where listening and speaking feature predominantly.¹⁶

Developing oral communication skills in English is critical for academic and social purposes.¹⁷ Going into the post-COVID-19 era, however, the development of oral proficiency remains problematic for many English FAL learners in South Africa. Dincer and Yesilyurt state that speaking skills remain underdeveloped in many English FAL classrooms.¹⁸ These learners struggle to express themselves in

⁸ Parvin Karimi and Reza Vahdani Sanavi, "Analyzing English Language Learning Needs among Students in Aviation Training Program," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 98 (May 2014): 852–58, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.491>; Dušica Karimanović, "The Challenges of Teaching English during the Outbreak of COVID-19," *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy* 2, no. 5 (October 4, 2021): 42–46, <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2021.2.5.172>.

⁹ Patrick Farren, "Addressing Needs of English Language Learners in Mainstream Classes: Lessons for Teacher Education in Ireland," *The Irish Journal of Education / Iris Eireannach an Oideachais* 41 (2016): 21–38, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24891697>; Sue Ollerhead, "Pedagogical Language Knowledge: Preparing Australian Pre-Service Teachers to Support English Language Learners," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 46, no. 3 (May 27, 2018): 256–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2016.1246651>.

¹⁰ Farren, "Addressing needs of English language learners in mainstream classes."

¹¹ Goodman Vusumuzi Ntombela, Hlengiwe Romualda Mhlongo, and Pravina Pillay, "Covid-19 and the Experiences of Educators with English as the Language of Learning and Teaching in the Intermediate Phase," *Gender and Behaviour* 18, no. 4 (February 1, 2021): 16567–80, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/gab/article/view/203377>.

¹² Farren, "Addressing needs of English language learners in mainstream classes."

¹³ Baba P. Tshotsho, "Mother Tongue Debate and Language Policy in South Africa," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3, no. 13 (2013), www.ijhssnet.com.

¹⁴ Jim Cummins, "Fundamental Psycholinguistic and Sociological Principles Underlying Educational Success for Linguistic Minority Students," in *Social Justice through Multilingual Education*, ed. T. Skutnab-Kangas et al. (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009), 19–35, <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691910-005>; Jim Cummins, "Bilingualism and Special Education: Program and Pedagogical Issues," *Learning Disability Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (November 1, 1983): 373–86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1510525>; J David Cummins, *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society* (Ontario, California: California Association for Bilingual Education, 1996).

¹⁵ Marco A. Bravo and Gina N. Cervetti, "Attending to the Language and Literacy Needs of English Learners in Science," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 47, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 230–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.900418>.

¹⁶ Kabelo Sebolai, "Distinguishing between English Proficiency and Academic Literacy in English," *Language Matters* 47, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 45–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2015.1124281>.

¹⁷ Ntombela, Mhlongo, and Pillay, "Covid-19 and the Experiences of Educators with English as the Language of Learning and Teaching in the Intermediate Phase."

¹⁸ Ali Dincer and Savaş Yeşilyurt, "Motivation to Speak English: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective.," *PASAA* 53 (2017): 1–25.

English.¹⁹ In other cases, they are reluctant to speak English in the classroom.²⁰ This reduces their motivation to participate actively in classroom activities.²¹ Academic proficiency is also essential for rural English FAL learners. In other words, they must be able to meet the cognitive demands of the English language in educational contexts.²² Using the mother tongue in learning a second and foreign language is not new.²³ The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 requires English to become the language of teaching and learning (LoLT) from Grade 4. In other words, non-native learners are taught all content subjects in English instead of their home languages. This means these learners spend only three years developing reading, writing and numeracy skills in their home languages. Pretorius argues that the transition happens while non-native English learners have not yet adequately developed these basic skills.²⁴ As a result, learners in the English FAL classrooms struggle with reading and writing, among other things.²⁵ Despite some improvements in the 2013 Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SAMEQ) results, the reading proficiency of many South African learners has become a cause for concern.

Furthermore, evidence from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006, 2011 and 2016 consistently shows that many English FAL learners struggle with reading. While some can read fluently, most learners do not understand what they are reading.²⁶ In other cases, English FAL learners read below grade level.

As with reading, possessing well-developed writing skills is essential for learning a language. Ngubane et al. view writing as a conduit for creating and expressing learners' ideas, thoughts and feelings.²⁷ According to Frans, writing propels learners to focus on linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary and spelling when learning a language.²⁸ Furthermore, writing prepares learners to think critically and develop innovative ideas.²⁹ Unfortunately, many English FAL learners in South African schools forfeit these benefits. These learners have poorly developed writing skills.³⁰ In other words, they struggle to write effectively and proficiently.³¹ The reasons for this state of affairs include

¹⁹ Mthembu Bheki and Pillay Pravina, "Strategies That Learners Employ In Acquiring Speaking Skills in English Second Language (ESL) in Township Schools," *Gender and Behaviour* 19, no. 1 (July 9, 2021): 17454–64, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/gab/article/view/210243>.

²⁰ Dincer, and Yesliyurt, "Motivation to speak English: A self-determination theory perspective."

²¹ Ji Young Choi et al., "Listening to Head Start Teachers: Teacher Beliefs, Practices, and Needs for Educating Dual Language Learners," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 54 (2021): 110–24.

²² Bravo, and Cervetti, "Attending to the language and literacy needs of English learners in Science."

²³ Noel Dassanayake, "Optimal Use of L1 and L2 in Teaching Chinese to Sri Lankan Students: Approaches and Challenges," *Studies in Learning and Teaching* 2, no. 3 (December 30, 2021): 21–32, <https://doi.org/10.46627/silet.v2i3.78>.

²⁴ E. J. Pretorius, "Reading Ability and Academic Performance in South Africa: Are We Fiddling While Rome Is Burning?," *Language Matters* 33, no. 1 (January 2002): 169–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228190208566183>.

²⁵ Hlengiwe R. Mhlongo, P. Pillay, and Mncedisi Christian Maphalala, "The Experiences of the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase Learners Involved in a Programme for Developing Writing Skills," *Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa* 7, no. 1 (April 12, 2018), https://doi.org/10.31920/EFE_7_1_18.

²⁶ "Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) - PIRLS 2006 Results," 2006, <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/pirls2006.asp>.

²⁷ Nomalungelo I. Ngubane, Berrington Ntombela, and Samantha Govender, "Writing Approaches and Strategies Used by Teachers in Selected South African English First Additional Language Classrooms.," *Reading & Writing: Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 11, no. 1 (2020): 2079–8245, <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v11i1.261>.

²⁸ T. Frans, "The Teaching and Learning of Writing, Reading and Speaking Skills of English as a Second Language in Grade 12 at Two Senior Rural Secondary Schools in Omusati Region," *Nawa Journal of Language and Communication* 11, no. 2 (2017): 56–76.

²⁹ Ngubane, Ntombela, and Govender, "Writing approaches and strategies used by teachers in selected South African English first additional language classrooms."

³⁰ Ngubane, Ntombela, and Govender, "Writing approaches and strategies used by teachers in selected South African English first additional language classrooms."

³¹ Mhlongo, Pillay, and Maphalala, "The experiences of the Further Education and Training (FET) phase learners involved in a Programme for Developing Writing Skills."

using inappropriate teaching strategies by English FAL teachers,³² teachers' hostile attitudes toward writing,³³ and a failure to prioritise the teaching of writing.³⁴ Limited English language exposure remains another concern for rural English FAL learners in the post-Covid-19 era. This exposure is attributed to teachers' limited English proficiency.³⁵ In other instances, teachers are ill-prepared to address the challenges of teaching English FAL.³⁶ In addition, learners' homes do not provide an English-rich environment. As a result, Hearing and speaking English outside the classroom is not a common practice for many rural English FAL learners. Despite these challenges, rural English FAL learners do not receive adequate support from their homes and schools.³⁷ In other words, there is a need to lessen learners' over-dependency on teachers.³⁸ For this to happen, Sadeghi et al. recognise the need for learners to be equipped with skills to find strategies to improve their learning without depending on teachers.³⁹

Perhaps, one major lesson that can be drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic is the danger of learners' over-dependence on their teachers. Going into the post-COVID-19 era, the need to equip learners with the skills to learn and manage their learning independently becomes more urgent. Pandemic outbreaks such as COVID-19 threaten the availability and accessibility of teachers in rural classrooms. Due to the challenges hindering remote learning in rural South Africa, rotational school attendance became the main opportunity for learners in rural schools to receive education (Statistics South Africa, 2020). This arrangement left most of these learners struggling without their teachers for extended periods. As a result, this compromised the quality of education for learners in rural schools (Pillay, 2021). According to Neak, self-directed learning proves an alternative strategy to improve the quality of education in times of pandemics.⁴⁰

Understanding self-directed learning in language teaching

The literature provides synonyms such as self-education, autonomous learning, independent learning, and self-regulated learning to refer to self-directed learning (SDL).⁴¹ Amani explains the SDL process regarding learners' roles when learning independently. Firstly, during SDL, learners regulate their learning. Secondly, they interact with the learning activities, material and each other. Lastly, they

³² Ngubane, Ntombela, and Govender, "Writing approaches and strategies used by teachers in selected South African English first additional language classrooms."

³³ Ernest A Pineteh, "The Academic Writing Challenges of Undergraduate Students: A South African Case Study," *International Journal of Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (September 25, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v3n1p12>.

³⁴ Ngubane, Ntombela, and Govender, "Writing approaches and strategies used by teachers in selected South African English first additional language classrooms."; Mhlongo, Pillay, & Maphalala, "The experiences of the Further Education and Training (FET) phase learners involved in a Programme for Developing Writing Skills."

³⁵ Norma Nel and Heléne Müller, "The Impact of Teachers' Limited English Proficiency on English Second Language Learners in South African Schools," *South African Journal of Education* 30, no. 4 (November 9, 2010): 635–50, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v30n4a393>.

³⁶ Ollerhead, "Pedagogical language knowledge: Preparing Australian pre-service teachers to support English language learners." Ntombela, Mhlongo, and Pillay, "COVID-19 and the experiences of educators with English as the language of learning and teaching in the intermediate phase."

³⁷ Ntombela, Mhlongo, & Pillay, "COVID-19 and the experiences of educators with English as the language of learning and teaching in the intermediate phase." Tshotsho, "Mother-tongue and language policy in South Africa."

³⁸ S.C. Mahlaba, "Reasons Why Self-Directed Learning Is Important in South African during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 34, no. 6 (December 2020), <https://doi.org/10.20853/34-6-4192>.

³⁹ Bahador Sadeghi, Mohammad Taghi Hassani, and Ahmad Dashtaki Hessari, "On the Relationship between Learners' Needs and Their Use of Language Learning Strategies," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 136 (July 2014): 255–59, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.324>.

⁴⁰ Neak Piseth, "Self-Directed Learning: The Way Forward for Education after the COVID-19 Crisis," *Cambodian Education Forum*, 2020, <https://cefcambodia.com/2020/08/03/self-directed-learning-the-way-forward-for-education-after-the-covid-19-crisis/>.

⁴¹ Mahlaba, "Reasons why self-directed learning is important in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic"; Neak, *Self-directed learning: The way forward for education after the COVID-19 crisis*.

assess their performance and self-correct where there is a need to do so.⁴² In short, SDL is a learning strategy where learners actively manage, direct and take responsibility for their learning with limited guidance from the teacher.⁴³

Self-directed learning is not foreign to South African language classrooms. To promote this strategy in the teaching and learning of English FAL, the country's curriculum disfavours rote learning. According to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), English FAL teachers are expected to help learners develop various language skills. They are also likely to help learners become independent lifelong readers and writers. Throughout learning English FAL, learners are expected to identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking. Xiao and Yang describe SDL as a "...core capability of lifelong learners."⁴⁴ In addition, SDL is learner-centred in that learners develop the skills to learn without depending too much on the teacher.⁴⁵ In other words, English FAL teachers facilitate learners' learning. In this regard, learners of English FAL get the opportunity and responsibility to continue learning outside the classroom.⁴⁶ They also set goals, devise different strategies to achieve them, and evaluate their performance.⁴⁷

Research provides several benefits of SDL inside and outside the language classroom. Generally, SDL is also known for improving the quality of education.⁴⁸ It also enhances learners' self-confidence and commitment to their studies.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it positively impacts the learning of writing and language acquisition.⁵⁰ Moreover, there is a link between SDL and improvement in learners' academic performance.⁵¹

Theoretical Orientation: Self-determination Theory

Scholars such as Cheng and Lee and Dincer and Yesliyurt argue that motivation remains central to learning and acquiring a foreign language such as English FAL.⁵² For Takahashi and Im, the concept of motivation includes different purposes for studying an additional language in a classroom.⁵³ Furthermore, Leal et al. assert that it is often depicted in learners' behaviour, interest and attitudes

⁴² Hamdan Amani, "COVID-19 Mandated Self-Directed Distance Learning, Experiences of Saudi Female Postgraduate Students.," *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice* 18, no. 3 (2021): 1–20.

⁴³ Made Dama Yanti, Luh Putu Artini, and Luh Gede Eka Wahyuni, "Teacher's Perception of Self-Directed Learning and EFL Students' Learning Autonomy during COVID-19 Pandemic," *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Undiksha* 9, no. 2 (July 22, 2021): 112, <https://doi.org/10.23887/jpbi.v9i2.32014>.

⁴⁴ Yangyu Xiao and Min Yang, "Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning: How Formative Assessment Supports Students' Self-Regulation in English Language Learning," *System* 81 (April 2019): 39–49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.01.004>.

⁴⁵ Amani, "COVID-19 mandated self-directed distance learning, Experiences of Saudi female postgraduate students."

⁴⁶ Adrienne Cheng and Cynthia Lee, "Factors Affecting Tertiary English Learners' Persistence in the Self-Directed Language Learning Journey," *System* 76 (August 2018): 170–82, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.06.001>.

⁴⁷ Do-Hong Kim et al., "English Language Learners' Self-Efficacy Profiles and Relationship with Self-Regulated Learning Strategies," *Learning and Individual Differences* 38 (February 2015): 136–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2015.01.016>.

⁴⁸ Neak, Self-directed learning: The way forward for education after the COVID-19 crisis.

⁴⁹ Amani, "COVID-19 mandated self-directed distance learning, Experiences of Saudi female postgraduate students."

⁵⁰ Sayed Masood Haidari, Tugba Yanpar Yelken, and Cenk Akay, "Technology-Enhanced Self-Directed Language Learning Behaviors of EFL Student Teachers.," *Contemporary Educational Technology* 10, no. 3 (2019): 229–45, <https://doi.org/10.30935/cet.590003>.

⁵¹ Umi Kalsum Mohd Salleh et al., "Roles of Self-Directed Learning and Social Networking Sites in Lifelong Learning.," *International Journal of Instruction* 12, no. 4 (October 2019): 167–82, <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.12411a>.

⁵² Cheng, and Lee, "Factors affecting tertiary English learners' persistence in the self-directed language learning journey.," Dincer, and Yesliyurt, "Motivation to speak English: A self-determination theory perspective."

⁵³ Chika Takahashi and Seongah Im, "Comparing Self-Determination Theory and the L2 Motivational Self System and Their Relationships to L2 Proficiency," *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 10, no. 4 (December 18, 2020): 673–96, <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2020.10.4.2>.

towards learning a first additional language.⁵⁴ However, many language classrooms still struggle to keep learners motivated to learn and acquire knowledge themselves.⁵⁵

To avert this challenge, Self-determination theory (SDT) places motivation at the centre of the learning process.⁵⁶ SDT remains one of the influential motivation theories in education and psychology.⁵⁷ In a classroom situation, the theory focuses on human motivation, personality and optimal functioning in the learning process.⁵⁸ The approach places varying forms of motivation on a continuum from the least self-determined to the most self-determined to satisfy individuals' psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. For this to happen, SDT distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and places these forms of motivation as the most self-determined form on the continuum.⁵⁹ The former involves the innate desire to engage in behaviour that leads to internal satisfaction and enjoyment without paying attention to external factors.⁶⁰ Most specifically, people need autonomy, competence and relatedness to become motivated.⁶¹ Autonomy in the language classroom stems from the learners' desire to control their own choices and decisions. An autonomy-supportive environment increases learners' academic performance.⁶² On the other hand, competence involves language learners' confidence in their abilities to perform and complete tasks independently. According to Nunez and Leon, there is a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and learners' competence.⁶³ The role of positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom remains critical in language learning.⁶⁴

For effective learning, learners must be motivated.⁶⁵ Language learning also requires extrinsically motivated learners. Integration is regarded as the most self-determined form of extrinsic motivation.⁶⁶ With integration, individuals focus on the behaviours they depict and employ to achieve their goals. Integration is also categorised into external, introjected, integrated and identified regulatory styles.⁶⁷ Each of these regulatory styles depends on the extent to which it has been internalised in the language classroom, such as rural English FAL.⁶⁸ For instance, integrated regulation is regarded as the

⁵⁴ Yendli Soranny et al., "Motivation and Attitude as the Fuel to Develop English Language Classroom Activities: A Self-Determination Study.," *HOW* 27, no. 2 (2020): 73–92, <https://doi.org/10.19183/how.27.2.557>.

⁵⁵ Cheng, and Lee, "Factors affecting tertiary English learners' persistence in the self-directed language learning journey.," Leal, and Ceron, "Motivation and attitude as the fuel to develop English language classroom activities."

⁵⁶ Dincer, and Yesliyurt, "Motivation to speak English: A self-determination theory perspective."

⁵⁷ Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior* (Boston, MA: Springer US, 1985), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>.

⁵⁸ Juan L. Núñez and Jaime León, "Autonomy Support in the Classroom," *European Psychologist* 20, no. 4 (October 2015): 275–83, <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000234>.

⁵⁹ Deci, and Ryan, *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*.

⁶⁰ Takahashi, and Im, "Comparing self-determination theory and the L2 motivational self-system and their relationships to L2 proficiency.," Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being.," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68–78, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>.

⁶¹ Deci, and Ryan, *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*.

⁶² Nunez, and Leon, "Autonomy support in the classroom: A review from Self-determination Theory."

⁶³ Nunez, and Leon, "Autonomy support in the classroom: A review from Self-determination Theory."

⁶⁴ Dincer, and Yesliyurt, "Motivation to speak English: A self-determination theory perspective.," Angela Ford, "Examining and Improving Classroom Environments through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory.," *Critical Questions in Education* 10, no. 1 (2019): 65–77.

⁶⁵ Aisyah Jiyantika Gitadewi et al., "Student's Concept Understanding and Motivation to Learn Through Flipped Classroom Learning Integrated with Nested Model," *Studies in Learning and Teaching* 3, no. 1 (April 30, 2022): 62–73, <https://doi.org/10.46627/silet.v3i1.105>.

⁶⁶ Deci, and Ryan, *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*; Ryan, & Deci, "Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and wellbeing."

⁶⁷ Takahashi, and Im, "Comparing self-determination theory and the L2 motivational self-system and their relationships to L2 proficiency.," Reiko Komiyama and Alessandra McMorris, "Examining International Students' Motivation to Read in English from a Self-Determination Theory Perspective.," *CATESOL Journal* 29, no. 2 (2017): 61–80.

⁶⁸ Komiyama, and McMorris, "Examining international students' motivation to read in English from a self-determination theory perspective."

most autonomous form of extrinsically motivated behaviour, while introjected regulation concerns not demonstrating incompetence in front of others.⁶⁹ Introjected regulation features third on the continuum of extrinsic motivation. This form of motivation is described as the behaviour learners display to prove their abilities and competence to others in the classroom. On the other hand, the external regulatory style involves being motivated to engage in activities for positive reinforcement. For instance, an additional language could be learnt in a classroom if learners see value in it.⁷⁰

Going into the post-COVID-19 era, the need for language learners to remain motivated to learn inside and outside the classroom becomes more critical.⁷¹ As a social condition, the classroom environment created by the pandemic negatively impacts the basic needs of rural English FAL learners.⁷² In an era such as this, the skilling of learners remains central to effective teaching.⁷³ As a result, English FAL teachers are responsible for ensuring that learners can regulate their learning with minimal teacher dependence. This kind of responsibility allows learners to be trained to devise strategies to improve their understanding.⁷⁴ When given autonomy, learners become highly motivated and effective in completing their tasks.⁷⁵ In this regard, the participants in this study devised different ways of training learners to become autonomous learners.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to generate data from fifteen (15) Bachelor of Education Honours students from the University of the Free State. The data for this study were generated through observation, document analysis and online interviews. The observation and analysis of documents (students' assignments) generated data explaining how English FAL teachers used self-directed learning to mitigate the pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. By assuming the observer-as-participant role, my focus was on the events that were taking place in the classroom. In other words, I observed how each participant assisted rural English FAL learners in completing various class tasks. As a data generation technique, document analysis guards against the "investigators' influence on research." In addition, this technique works well in situations where data collection is not feasible. Data to determine English FAL teachers' perceptions of self-directed learning was generated through online interviews. Hodder cautions against the risk of misinterpreting the contents and purpose of the documents under analysis.⁷⁶ As a result, online interviews were also conducted to verify and validate the contents of the documents the participants had submitted.

Procedure

As part of their coursework, the participants were given an assignment that took over three weeks to complete. In this assignment, each student was instructed to continue giving learners activities to complete independently. While doing this, the participants were required to support the learners and gradually withdraw that support during the learning process. During this process, they were observed and kept notes about the learners' activities and how they completed their tasks with minimal teacher

⁶⁹ Komiyama, and McMorris, "Examining international students' motivation to read in English from a self-determination theory perspective."; Ana Muñoz-Restrepo, Marta Ramirez, and Sandra Gaviria, "Strategies to Enhance or Maintain Motivation in Learning a Foreign Language," *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 175–88, <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v22n1.73733>.

⁷⁰ Takahashi, and Im, "Comparing self-determination theory and the L2 motivational self-system and their relationships to L2 proficiency."

⁷¹ Cheng, and Lee, "Factors affecting tertiary English learners' persistence in the self-directed language learning journey."

⁷² Ford, "Examining and improving classroom environments through the lens of self-determination theory."

⁷³ Munoz-Restrepo, Ramirez, and Gaviria, "Strategies to enhance or maintain motivation in learning a foreign language."

⁷⁴ Sadeghi, Hassani, & Hessani, "On the relationship between learners' needs and their use of language learning strategies."

⁷⁵ Cheng, and Lee, "Factors affecting tertiary English learners' persistence in the self-directed language learning journey."

⁷⁶ Ian Hodder, *The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture*. (California: Sage Publications, 2000).

dependency. After that, they wrote reflections after each lesson. The written reflections focused mainly on how learners were assisted in completing the activities independently in the rural English FAL classrooms.

Data Analysis

For analysis of all data, the study adopted the thematic approach to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge relevant to the aim of this study. The researcher followed an inductive approach to data analysis. In doing this, he adopted the guidelines recommended by Braun and Clarke.⁷⁷ These included: familiarisation with the data, identifying significant codes, formulating meanings, clustering themes, developing a detailed description, producing a fundamental structure and seeking verification of the basic design as the processes in analysis. Throughout, the utterances and written texts of the participants were quoted verbatim for analysis.

FINDINGS

The findings revealed that self-directed learning could be used to mitigate the post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. In addition, the study reported that rural English FAL teachers acknowledged self-directed learning as an essential strategy in the post-COVID-19 era. In this regard, the following themes emerged: Self-directed learning was viewed as a tool to monitor learner progress, self-directed learning promotes ownership, self-directed learning as a tool for increased learning opportunities, and self-directed learning as a school-home bridge. For the post-COVID-19 era, the effectiveness of self-directed learning can be strengthened by promoting a sense of ownership among rural English FAL learners, designing activities that promote learner-centred learning, creating supportive learning environments, and increasing parental involvement.

Rural English FAL teachers' perceptions of self-directed learning

Theme 1: Self-directed learning is viewed as a tool to promote learners' responsibility to learn

Due to this pandemic and the need to comply with COVID-19 regulations, many rural teachers spend less time with learners in the classroom. This made it difficult for teachers to constantly monitor and evaluate learners' progress. Similarly, learners lacked the necessary skills to monitor and report their progress. The following statements are worth noting:

Teacher 4: *Learners are responsible for their education...they can self-motivate themselves, manage time, and have self-discipline to achieve their goals.*

Teacher 6: *Learners consciously accept the responsibility for making decisions about goals and effort and hence become their learning change agents.*

Based on the utterances above, self-directed learning becomes more critical as the world advances into the post-COVID-19 era. According to the participants in this study, when rural English FAL learners are trained well in SDL, they may become responsible and report their progress accurately and consistently.

Theme 2: Self-directed learning promotes ownership

Teacher dependency by learners may indicate their attitude towards education and learning. In other words, they may not internalise the responsibility to learn independently and own the outcomes of the learning process. As evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, many rural English learners struggled to understand alone. Others struggled to learn without teachers' instruction and guidance.⁷⁸ This demonstrated that they regarded teacher-driven teachings as more critical than participatory learning experiences such as SDL. Elsewhere, these learners struggled with the skills necessary for self-

⁷⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

⁷⁸ Paisal Paisal, Regina Regina, and Dwi Riyanti, "Exploring the Challenge of EFL Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *KnE Social Sciences*, March 28, 2022, 318–326–318–326, <https://doi.org/10.18502/KSS.V7I7.10702>.

regulated learning during the pandemic. Going into post-COVID-19, the participants in this study felt a need to enhance learners' ownership and responsibility of learning through SDL. They viewed SDL as a tool to promote responsibility and learner accountability. They had this to say:

Teacher 2: *Since learners get to take power over their learning, they can play their strengths, interests, and style of understanding new information.*

Teacher 11: *Self-directed learning is having more responsibility and ownership for your learning.*

In addition, for other participants, SDL was also viewed as being able to change learners' attitudes towards learning and taking responsibility for it. The argument was that once learners developed a positive attitude towards learning, they confronted the post-pandemic era with resilience and courage to learn independently. The participants shed some light on the statements below:

Teacher 4: *Learners become more resilient, confident, and goal-oriented due to this learning model.*

Teacher 7: *Self-directed learning enables individuals to improve their self-confidence, autonomy, motivation and lifelong learning skills.*

Teacher 10: *Learners must be adaptable and resilient since they may not have quick exposure to the skills or resources they imagine.*

Theme 3: Self-directed learning as a tool for increased learning opportunities

The limited access to resources and learning opportunities exacerbated the challenges facing learners in rural classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases, these learners lacked technological devices, internet connectivity, and books necessary for exposure to information and learning opportunities.⁷⁹ However, the participants in this study believed that SDL could equip rural English FAL learners with the skills to explore and find information independently when incorporated correctly.

Teacher 5: *Self-directed learning requires flexibility, time and place to engage in independent learning.*

Teacher 6: *I think that self-directed learning should be made compulsory from grade 7 to 12 so that learners can get used to being own their learning agents from an early age...rural schools should be provided with necessary resources, technological devices and quality reading material so that learners can be self-directed from a young age.*

Teacher 9: *The learner does not rely solely on the teacher for information; instead, they use their research skills and are exposed to a vast amount of material from various sources.*

The above extracts indicated that although rural schools largely lacked the necessary resources to provide their learners with information, through SDL, these learners could develop the skills needed to look for information on their own. Such skills became more critical post-COVID-19 when physical contact between teachers and learners in the classroom remained unpredictable. Once learners develop the skills to learn independently and can search for information through various means, there may be some improvement in their academic performance.

Theme 4: Self-directed learning as a school-home bridge

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated national lockdowns necessitated changes in learning spaces. In other words, teaching and learning were no longer confined to formal classrooms. This situation also necessitated changes in roles. Learners' homes have become spaces for teaching and learning more than ever before. Similarly, parents became teachers and provided support while learners learned from home. Although lockdowns had eased significantly in South Africa and elsewhere, this arrangement continued into the possible post-COVID-19 era. As a result, SDL was viewed as a tool to bridge the school-home gap that often characterises rural schools. The views of the participants were captured in the following extracts:

⁷⁹ Nhlanhla Landa, Sindiso Zhou, and Newlin Marongwe, "Education in Emergencies: Lessons from COVID-19 in South Africa," *International Review of Education* 67, no. 1–2 (April 28, 2021): 167–83, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-021-09903-z>.

Teacher 2: *Parents from rural contexts lack the courage and motivation to develop their children, especially those not from higher education.*

Teacher 11: *Self-directed learning also called for parental involvement in totality; parents and society as a whole became part of each learner's education.*

Teacher 13: *I believe the level of readiness for parents and learners in rural contexts to start practising self-directed learning is very low.*

Teacher 8: *It can be lamented that most children in rural schools have illiterate parents.*

Teacher 14: *Learners need to be pushed by parents and teachers, so when they experience independent learning, they play more than they have to focus on work or reading.*

Teacher 15: *Learners from rural areas do not get enough support, especially from their parents, because most parents are not learned.*

Teacher 5: *I asked all English learners' parents to play an important role during the school closure, which included helping to ensure that their children follow the syllabus as well as emotionally aiding their children to retain their inspiration...where they could conveniently be disheartened from studying independently due to the absence of peer influence.*

According to the participants, the lack of parental involvement in rural schools affected learners' motivation and encouraged them to continue learning. This may be because most parents in rural spaces received little or no formal education. However, the use of SDL compelled these parents to participate in their children's education.

The use of self-directed learning in mitigating the pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners in the post-COVID-19 era

Theme A: Promoting a sense of ownership among rural English FAL learners

One observation in the literature was that learners seemed not to take full ownership and responsibility for learning during the pandemic. The participants in this study made a similar observation. They placed the blame squarely on other teachers' methods in the rural English FAL classrooms. Therefore, for SDL to succeed in mitigating the pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners in the post-COVID-19 era, the participants proposed the following:

Teacher A: *Teachers need to use methods that can enhance their ownership in this path, increase responsibility, and give them full support when they are learning on their own.*

Teacher C: *I wanted my learners to take full ownership of their learning while I facilitated the class, and I also wanted them to participate more in class. This method resulted in them mastering the content and gaining independence*

According to the extracts above, teachers must design activities requiring learners to work independently. In other words, when exposed to such activities, they may eventually develop the necessary skills to learn without much dependency on the teacher. In turn, they may realise the need to initiate and control their learning.

Theme B: Designing activities that promote learner-centred learning

The South African education system has arguably shifted towards a learner-centred pedagogy with the rest of the world. As a result, teachers needed to promote learner-centred learning in their classrooms. This may help in mitigating learners' pedagogical needs through SDL. The following SDL activities proved helpful in addressing these pedagogical needs:

Teacher A: *I provide learners with activities that enhance or promote critical thinking...after designing an activity ...ask learners question[s] that will tackle their prior knowledge, the importance of knowing about certain things, or questions that will motivate them to uncover new information about the topic.*

Teacher O: *They go home and work on how an essay is constructed, and when they come back, I ask questions based on the essay used to construct the rules. I do not get in the classroom to tell them rules*

but help them discover and construct the rules themselves. This really helps in supporting them in succeeding in self-directed learning.

Teacher C: *If they have difficulty, I asked leading questions and gave them clues; thus, this helped make sure my learners realise and build instructions by themselves rather than me telling them.*

Teacher E: *I let them read on their own to see where they are lacking and after I step in a little and read them a text and ask them to read after me...learners were given activities according to their cognitive level*

In summary, evidence from the above extracts indicated that minimal teacher intervention could help learners develop the skills to learn autonomously. In other words, exposing rural English FAL learners to a variety of learner-centred activities assists in making them regulate their learning.

Theme C: Creating supportive learning environments

The pandemic has exposed the social inequalities in rural communities worldwide. This has been shown through the availability of resources and the suitability of environments for learning. The supportive learning environments are characterised by access to print materials, motivated learners effective time management. However, as this paper argues, rural schools often have access to material written in English. Despite this challenge, the participants in this study asserted that SDL requires the creation of such environments to succeed in addressing rural English FAL learners' pedagogical needs. As a result, they had to devise ways of creating print-rich environments for the learners in resource-deprived schools. Their assertions were noted below:

Teacher J: *Learners are given enough documents to read at home: I print more papers, previous question papers for practice, and assignments.*

Teacher K: *I figured that using printed materials will help the learners achieve good marks...I opted for these materials because they are easy to use and readily available for the kids...some of the learners go through the material in order to advance their knowledge in English FAL learning. As a result, learning becomes enjoyable and less stressful for learners.*

Extrinsic motivation also added to the creation of supportive learning environments. Put differently, learners need to be motivated to initiate, control and own the learning process. The following activities proved successful in ensuring that SDL succeeds because rural English FAL learners remain motivated:

Teacher C: *I provided emotional support to my learners, which resulted in more positive attitudes and dispositions towards learning.*

Teacher F: *I believe that educational environments in which teachers can demonstrate zeal for the subject matter of their lessons promote the development of effective learning perceptions in pupils...*

Teacher C: *I guide and motivate learners, expanding the number of fruitful hours they work on academic tasks... I assisted learners in developing resilient attitudes towards learning, which assisted them in overcoming several of the possible issues presented by eLearning...*

Developing and using time management skills was paramount to successfully implementing SDL. As a result, the participants in this study also engaged learners in some time management activities. They had this to say:

Teacher L: *The first hour is dedicated to discussing their homework and giving guidance accordingly...the other is dedicated to learning and discussing the new content whereas the last is dedicated to doing the activities together and assisting the learners with any problems regarding content and activities.*

Teacher A: *I guide and motivate learners, expanding the number of fruitful hours they work on academic tasks*

Teacher D: *I also drew up a timetable to help them know which activity to finish on a specific date...I made sure that I simplified those activities; all group activities were changed to individual activities to make it easy for learners to work independently and develop strategies to complete the given activities.*

According to the above information, rural English FAL learners struggled to cope with the amount of school work they needed to learn independently. In most cases, they felt overwhelmed as they did not know where to begin with learning. For the successful implementation of SDL, it was essential to allocate specific times during which the learners must complete certain activities. In addition, dividing learners into various groups may reduce the pressure to complete the activities independently.

Theme D: Increasing parental involvement

At the height of the prevalence of COVID-19 cases in South Africa and elsewhere, the primary position that teachers held to facilitate and construct knowledge in the classroom has since been occupied by parents. This is especially true in rural schools where remote learning administration and use are virtually impossible. In other words, COVID-19-induced learning conditions require parental involvement and support for successful learning practices such as self-directed learning. The strong collaboration between the home and school is more important than ever. The participants in this study capitalised on this relationship to use SDL to mitigate the pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. Their activities are as follows:

Teacher J: *Convincing the parents to help the learners is also a successful way to ensure learners practice self-directed learning...communicating with parents makes them limit the duties and chores they give to and learners and observe them while studying...this way ensures that parents are accountable for their learners' progress.*

Teacher F: *I gave my learners worksheets to complete at home, and I made sure that they were enough for the time spent at home.*

Teacher B: *Currently, I try to collaborate with families by talking to parents about different activities learners need to do and how they must try helping them at home.*

Teacher C: *...Teachers can improve school-parent relations in order to provide parents with relevant assistance...I asked all of my English learners' parents to play an important role during the school closure...parental support throughout this stage greatly helped my learners in addressing the major difficulties of eLearning, encouraging positive and independent knowledge acquisition*

Teacher D: *I worked with parents to support those learners because it was difficult for them to work independently without assistance, so I asked parents to step in and assist those learners where they could, especially with reading and language.*

Teacher E: *Teachers must support student learning by working more closely with parents so that parents also know the teachers' expectations and monitor children's progress at home simultaneously...I created a WhatsApp group with parents of my learners so that we could discuss, and share important information regarding activities, reminders of tasks and teaching and explaining via recordings.*

The strong collaboration between schools and homes was paramount for the effective implementation of SDL in the post-COVID-19 era. In this case, consistent communication between teachers and parents solidified this partnership. Furthermore, it made parents hold learners accountable for their work while they monitor their children's progress and completion of different tasks.

Limitations of this Study Findings

This study presents the following limitation: Only fifteen English FAL language teachers participated in this study. As a result, the low number of participants means that the findings of this study cannot be generalised to all teachers in rural contexts.

DISCUSSION

The study explored the use of self-directed learning in mitigating the post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. In this regard, the study found that English FAL teachers viewed self-directed learning as a tool that promoted learners' learning responsibility. Similarly, Amani (2021) found that learners with high levels of self-directed learning were responsible for their learning. In

addition to increased commitment to learning, the study also found that English FAL teachers viewed self-directed learning as a tool to promote ownership. In this regard, they reported that English FAL learners began to change their attitudes towards learning and take ownership of their learning. Moreover, the study found that self-directed learning led to increased learning opportunities for rural English FAL learners. The findings were consistent with other researchers' findings (Damayanti et al., 2021). Lastly, the results indicated that English FAL teachers perceived self-directed learning as a tool to enhance home-school connection. This was a surprising finding because rural parents were often portrayed as being aloof and not concerned about their children's education. This change may be attributed to parents' spending time at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The participants in this study explained how they used self-directed learning to mitigate the post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. The study found that promoting a sense of ownership mitigated the post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. According to the participants, learners valued tasks they felt responsible for and controlled. Secondly, the study found that designing activities that promoted learner-centred learning mitigated learners' post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs. Similar to the results of the Damayanti et al. (2021)' study, the participants in this study involved learners in various activities in which they played an active role. Thirdly, the study found that rural English FAL learners' post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs were mitigated when teachers created supportive learning environments. This confirmed what other researchers found (Daar & Nasar, 2021). Finally, the study found increasing parental involvement mitigated the post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. According to the participants, parents monitored their children's learning activities. In other cases, they assisted their children in completing the given activities. Like the participants in other studies (Daar & Nasar, 2021; Wai-Cook, 2021), English FAL teachers communicated with learners' parents through online platforms to promote learners' self-directed learning activities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The inferences drawn from the data, theories and literature illustrated how self-directed learning could be used to mitigate the post-COVID-19 pedagogical needs of rural English FAL learners. In this regard, self-directed learning was perceived as an effective tool for monitoring learners' progress, promoting ownership, increasing learning opportunities, and enhancing school-home connections. For the post-COVID-19 era, the effectiveness of self-directed learning can be strengthened by promoting a sense of ownership among rural English FAL learners, designing activities that promote learner-centred learning, creating supportive learning environments, and increasing parental involvement. The study recommends that English FAL teachers may use tasks with clear instructions to allow learners to complete them independently and with less teacher dependency. In addition, parents and teachers may communicate consistently to maintain and strengthen home-school relationships that foster learners' self-directed learning and parental involvement.

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