

Reading Strategies of isiXhosa Home Language in the Foundation Phase in Chris Hani East District, South Africa



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ABSTRACT

The learners' poor reading performance is a culmination of a couple of factors because teachers are deficient in subject understanding that is needed to teach initial reading in African languages, including the isiZulu home language, effectively. Thus, this study explored the reading strategies of isiXhosa Home Language (HL) in the Foundation Phase (FP) in Chris Hani East District, South Africa. Data was gathered through individual semi-structured interviews with two Foundation Phase teachers in one primary school in Chris Hani East District, the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The findings revealed that learners can experience success through practising and consolidating new skills and understandings while also receiving appropriate support from home if homework is moderately given to them. Moreover, parental influence and parental involvement in children's reading often result in positive achievement for the child. Besides, participating in teaching workshops and observing the methods used by others could be very beneficial. The study concluded that there is low interest in reading among FP learners in isiXhosa HL, and the study's contribution is that this low intake of isiXhosa HL can be enhanced by a strong collaboration between FP teachers, the Department of Education, and parents or guardians. The study recommends that foundation phase teachers need adequate training in teaching reading isiXhosa HL in the FP to enhance their knowledge of phonological awareness and their inability to teach it effectively.

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INTRODUCTION

The present study was conducted at a time when South African educational scholars and practitioners were concerned about the reading competence of the learners across the grades and the teaching practices of Foundation Phase (FP) teachers handling indigenous languages, including isiXhosa Home Language (HL).

Reading ability in the FP is crucial in determining typical learning by developing proficiency in reading texts from an early age. Reading proficiency can also be defined as a knowledge of phonetic symbols or a comprehension of speech sounds, fluency skills needed in reading, and decoding unfamiliar

words.¹ In the South African context, the Foundation Phase refers to the first four years of schooling (Grades R–3), where the medium of instruction is the learners' home language.²

Ramabenyane describes reading as having "different but related meanings in the education context", which can refer to a "skill or a process", one of the four necessary language skills in turning the collection of written symbols (letters) into spoken language and a complex process of constructing meaning from the written text.³ Segooa adds that reading is "a process in which information from the text and the reader's background act together to provide meaning".⁴

The reading proficiency crisis in South African education is still crippling the country's educational system, and the continuous assessments of reading proficiency at school serve to highlight this problem. Combrinck et al. share that 78% of South African Grade 4 learners lack fundamental reading skills and lag at least six years behind the top-performing nations, with 8 out of 10 children unable to read for meaning.⁵ Language-specific processing barriers while attempting to recognise words in each language, which call for using language-specific reading strategies, hamper learning to read. In striving to improve early reading outcomes of learners in South African primary schools, the national curriculum provides material and instructional directions for teachers of reading in African languages.⁶ Despite such interventions to mitigate the challenge of low reading skills in South African learners, the challenge persists. This could allude to Ngema, who asserted that our country's reading issues are likely a result of the assumption that African Home Languages, or isiZulu HL in the FP, can be taught using the same methods as languages like English.⁷

Mpofu and Mavambe shared that learners read below their grade level and struggle to connect with the sensorimotor experiences, while reading is considered for non-readers with limited access to printed materials.⁸ Similarly, our experiences as classroom practitioners have indicated that learners are deprived of adequate opportunities to hone their reading skills in the classroom, especially in rural areas. Acquiring the skill of reading means that learners can access knowledge from different disciplines, for example, literacy, numeracy, and life skills. Thus, this study explored the reading strategies of isiXhosa Home Language in the Foundation Phase in Chris Hani East District, South Africa. The findings are presented subsequently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Television is a powerful technology although under-utilised by language educators. The expectation is that when television is viewed by children in the target language, in this study, isiXhosa HL, with appropriate subtitles, such programming can boost the learners' grammar and vocabulary and sharpen their language skills as well, often without the student making any special effort whatsoever.⁹ Most surprisingly, the benefits may even approach those of reading, especially in vocabulary size, even for passive viewers. Even Kosheleva shared that a TV series can be a reliable support whose role is for maintenance and exposure of the target language, for example, isiXhosa HL, and authentic material

¹ National Accessible Reading Assessment Projects, "Defining Reading Proficiency for Accessible Large-scale Assessments: Some Guiding Principles and Issues," 2006, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506576.pdf>.

² Department of Basic Education, *National Curriculum Statement* (Pretoria, South Africa: Government Publications, 2014).

³ Mamosebatho Julia Ramabenyane, "The Facilitative Role of Grade 1 Teachers in the Development of Reading Skills in Sesotho." (University of the Free State, 2012), 29.

⁴ Mapule Yvonne Segooa, "Exploring Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Reading in the Foundation Phase Classrooms," 2020, 17.

⁵ Sarah J Howie et al., "PIRLS 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2016 Grade 5 Benchmark Participation: South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement" (Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA), 2018).

⁶ Department of Basic Education, *National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in African Languages in the Foundation Phase* (Pretoria: DBE, 2020).

⁷ Millicent Ngema, "Exploring Teachers' Challenges in Teaching Reading Proficiency to IsiZulu Foundation Phase Learners at Rural Schools in KwaZulu-Natal," *Journal for Language Teaching* 55, no. 2 (2021): 195–217.

⁸ Nhlanhla Mpofu and Tsitsi Mavambe, "Teachers' Self-Reported Instructional Practices for Reading Comprehension Instruction to Non-Readers," *ELT Worldwide: Journal of English Language Teaching* 10, no. 2 (October 28, 2023): 340, <https://doi.org/10.26858/eltww.v10i2.51319>.

⁹ Allen Walzem, "Television in the Language Classroom: A Call to Embrace One of Our Most Powerful Resources," *Asian Journal of Research in Education and Social Sciences* 4, no. 4 (2022): 23–30.

availability.¹⁰ They can provide lifelike language reading skills, improving communication skills through both auditory and visual presentation of information.

Another important factor to consider when teaching reading to FP learners in isiXhosa HL is their level of phonological awareness (PA). Although PA is crucial in language learning, its implementation in most South African schools is questionable, as Schaffler, Nel and Booyesen reported FP teachers' inadequate knowledge of PA and their inability to teach PA effectively as a result of insufficient training coupled with their own limited proficiency in English.¹¹ Even Hani et al. share that early-grade teachers' ability to incorporate high-quality explicit phonological awareness (PA) instruction into the classroom helps children succeed in early reading endeavours and significantly reduces reading difficulties among children at risk for reading problems.¹² Teachers' deep knowledge of teaching PA is expected to affect their reading instructional practices inside the classrooms.

One of the primary aims of educational institutions is to make learners achieve certain educational goals. In this planned period, achieving goals is possible through effective learning. This is in line with Rahmani, Rexhepi and Rexhepi, who assert that the process of learning and engaging to achieve quality and success in any subject does not require the teacher to be always teaching in the classroom but involves using different approaches, including homework.¹³ The purpose of the homework should also be clearly communicated to students and, where possible, to parents. In this way, learners can experience success through practising and consolidating new skills and understandings while also receiving appropriate support from home. During the homework completion period, it is important for the teacher to provide avenues for students to contact the teacher if there are questions about homework before it is due.

Shared reading helps develop language and literacy skills, but some parents battle with face this activity, especially if they are illiterate. Parents are rarely used in some contexts in supporting early literacy development, including in the case of isiXhosa HL in the FP in this study.¹⁴ Similarly, Steiner, Hindin and Rizzuto examined children's reading performance and parents' use of reading support strategies throughout their participation in a family literacy programme at the word level with Grades 2 and 3 children.¹⁵ The parents used both discussion and oral reading strategies to support their children's readings, and findings showed children's gains in their reading rate, accuracy, and fluency, as well as on independent reading measures, from the beginning of the programme period to the end.

There are some advocates of reading gardens for children in the lower grades, depending on how resourceful the school is, in a bid to enhance the learners' reading abilities in the lower grades. Reading involves mental activity that can ensure the acquisition of a person's ability to comprehend an object maximally because language development increases along with cognitive development. School gardens are important spaces. Reading gardens can increase the beginning reading ability which can be seen from the improvement of development achievement concentration in reading symbols, signs, and letter sounds.¹⁶

In well-resourced schools, children can have access to the reading corner.¹⁷ Kosasih et al. add that the aim of a reading corner is to encourage interest in reading from an early age and help form children's

¹⁰ Inna Kosheleva, "Learning Potential of Modern TV-Series in the English Language Classroom: A Teacher's Perspective," in *Proceedings of the the First International Science and Practice Conference'Professional Polylogue in the Multilingual World: Language, Culture, Method'* Mgimo University, 2023.

¹¹ Duane Booyesen, Phumeza Mahe-Poyo, and Rosemary Grant, "The Experiences and Perceptions of Mental Health Service Provision at a Primary Health Centre in the Eastern Cape," *South African Journal of Psychiatry* 27 (2021): 1641.

¹² Hanady Bani Hani et al., "Phonological Awareness in Arabic among Early Grade Teachers," *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies* 22, no. 2 (2022): 171–92.

¹³ Leutresa Avni Rahmani, Burhan Reshat Rexhepi, and Flutura Gagica Rexhepi, "The Importance of Homework for Students in Primary Schools," *International Journal of Religion* 5, no. 5 (2024): 271–85.

¹⁴ Jenny Preece and Rachael Levy, "Understanding the Barriers and Motivations to Shared Reading with Young Children: The Role of Enjoyment and Feedback," *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 20, no. 4 (2020): 631–54.

¹⁵ Lilly M Steiner, Alisa Hindin, and Kerry Carley Rizzuto, "Developing Children's Literacy Learning through Skillful Parent-Child Shared Book Readings," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 50, no. 4 (2022): 539–53.

¹⁶ M. Rachmawaty, "Improving Beginning Reading Skill Through Mini Garden," in *2nd International Conference on Education Innovation (ICEI 2018)* (Atlantis Press, 2018), 189–92.

¹⁷ Faresha Fatikhani Nurhutamah and Dian Nuzulia Armariena, "The Influence Of School Literacy Culture Through The Utilization Of Reading Corner On Students' reading Interest," *Esteem Journal of English Education Study Programme* 7, no. 1 (2024): 339–47.

interest in reading from an early age so that they can develop positive reading habits throughout life.¹⁸ Besides, the reading corner helps improve literacy skills and broaden horizons and knowledge; it encourages creativity and imagination, becomes a fun place to learn, and builds independence.

As has been the case with human beings throughout history, teaching is neither an innovation nor a fleeting vogue. In the wake of the revolution of new teaching methods and theories, the competence of teachers in adopting new methods has become appealing to many educational researchers.¹⁹ Teacher education is a plan intended to improve an instructor's proficiency and competence so that he can meet the requirements of his work. It is, therefore, targeted to help teachers function in a variety of intimidating conditions that set off the unintended list of will and eagerness into the heart of the teaching-learning process.²⁰ Eventually, it is maintained that taking part in teaching workshops and watching others' teaching practices could be of great help. Effective workshops can aid teachers in adopting and adapting certain techniques in the teaching of the English language. Sharing experiences among experts in the field is the cornerstone of any workshop.

METHODOLOGY

This study was part of a postgraduate study, and this paper reported on qualitative data. Qualitative data serves to further explain and help to make inferences to answer a study's research question.²¹ This research study employed an interpretivist philosophy where meaning is interpreted from the individual's lens, and reality can be socially constructed. This paradigm can be used to provide a holistic, rich, and in-depth understanding of complex phenomena.²²

This study served to explore the reading strategies of isiXhosa Home Language in the Foundation Phase in Chris Hani East District, South Africa. It sought to answer two research questions: Why is it difficult for FP learners to read isiXhosa HL in the Foundation Phase in Chris Hani East District, South Africa? Which strategies can be used to support struggling learners in reading isiXhosa HL in the FP in Chris Hani East District, South Africa? Data was gathered through individual semi-structured interviews with two Foundation Phase teachers in one primary school in Chris Hani East District, the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Semi-structured interviews allow for some flexibility when qualitative data are collected, as the interviewee has more 'freedom' to express and ascribe meaning to their experiences.²³ Through the purposive sampling strategy, the primary researcher selected two participants, whose responses were audio-recorded, and content analysis was utilised for this qualitative study.

The researchers observed all ethical obligations, ensuring that the participants' privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and protection from harm were safeguarded.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The participants' responses are segmented into two sections to accommodate the two research questions in this study.

Section 1: Why is it difficult for FP learners to read isiXhosa HL in the Foundation Phase in Chris Hani East District, South Africa?

The findings revealed that for quite a while, cell phones had been labelled a distraction to schoolchildren, hence the participants felt that learners do not practise reading isiXhosa HL at home because they are always glued to the television sets, perhaps watching cartoons. This is despite claims by Walzem and

¹⁸ Asep Kosasih et al., "Reading Corner With The Theme" Exploring the World of Books Together" at SDN Kertawinangun 1 Cirebon," *SOCIRCLE: Journal Of Social Community Services* 3, no. 1 (2024): 49–61.

¹⁹ Rabia Abdul Karim, Salma Niazi, and Farida Saeed, "Need Analysis of Workshops for Effective Teaching among Teachers at Secondary School Level in Karachi, Pakistan," *Voyage Journal of Educational Studies* 3, no. 1 (2023): 71–84.

²⁰ Sara Moussedek, "Teacher Training: The Effectiveness of Workshops in English Language Teaching," *Revue Académique Des Études Sociales et Humaines* 13, no. 6 (2021).

²¹ John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage publications, 2017).

²² John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

²³ Liezel Cilliers and Carole Bloch, "A Reading Project to Improve Literacy in the Foundation Phase: A Case Study in the Eastern Cape," *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 9, no. 1 (2018): 1–7.

Kosheleva that television can help enhance children's language skills as long it has been re-adapted by new technologies into a source of language learning.²⁴ The study argues that there is a need to overturn the distractive potential of television by re-adapting it with new technologies into a source of language learning, particularly reading in one's HL, isiXhosa, in particular. FP learners are still too young to manage demands on their time and attention by switching between distracting watching television and productive multitasking when reading isiXhosa texts. They have yet to develop self-regulation strategies to disentangle themselves from over-watching television at the expense of fulfilling their educational obligations, such as reading for leisure and writing. Regarding television as a distraction to reading isiXhosa HL by FP learners, the participants had this to say, thus:

These kids are negligent, and they like to watch television too much. They struggle to move with the times, and they do not fear anything. Teaching is still the same in the sense that teachers are still doing their work of teaching learners. Learners promise that they grab what you are teaching, but when you follow them, you find nothing. Ed-1

Children are easily distracted by the media when they reach home. I know that children are passionate about watching cartoons on TV, so they hardly have reading time. Ed-2

According to the participants, learners are lacking in phonological awareness. This is shared under correction: since there are a few official instruments that explain how to develop phonological awareness in isiXhosa HL in the FP, teachers are also not developing phonological awareness tests for isiXhosa HL in the FP. The researchers find this ironic because the same teachers indicated that isiXhosa HL learners in the FP battle with reading because they are lacking in phonological awareness, yet the teachers are not exposing their learners to what they accuse of lacking in mastery. They made these submissions:

Phonological awareness is a problem for learners, who cannot differentiate between sounds and alphabets like b and d. Therefore, instead of saying baba, I will say dada. Another challenge they have is the segmenting of words. It is difficult for them to notice the direction, like left and right, in the alphabet; for example, b turns to right, and d turns left. This makes them read without mining, and they cannot read individually. Ed-2

... Lack of knowledge of sounds, unable to match, and breaking of words is still a challenge to our learners. We, as teachers, are too lazy to teach phonics, breaking and building words. Segmenting and blending are a problem (Utshatiso lwabaYeni nabaTshakazi). Ed-1

Although Songsirisak and Jitpranee cautioned that overloading homework does not motivate children to love reading outside of the school environment, learners can experience success through practising and consolidating new skills and understandings while also receiving appropriate support from home if homework is moderately given to the children.²⁵ This is in line with Rahmani, Rexhepi and Rexhepi, cited earlier in the literature review, who assert that the process of learning and engaging to achieve quality and success in any subject does not require the teacher to be always teaching in the classroom, but involves using different approaches, including homework.²⁶ All the cited advantages of homework could be the reasons the participants echoed the following knowing what the children are missing by not doing the homework. They submitted:

They are not doing their homework. Ed-1

²⁴ Walzem, "Television in the Language Classroom: A Call to Embrace One of Our Most Powerful Resources"; Kosheleva, "Learning Potential of Modern TV-Series in the English Language Classroom: A Teacher's Perspective."

²⁵ Prommin Songsirisak and Jutharat Jitpranee, "IMPACT OF HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT ON STUDENTS' LEARNING," *Journal of Education and Innovation* 21, no. 2 (2019): 1-19.

²⁶ Rahmani, Rexhepi, and Rexhepi, "The Importance of Homework for Students in Primary Schools."

I always indicate to my learners the work to read at home as homework, but I doubt if they ever read those reading pieces because they come back the following day blank as they were in terms of reading isiXhosa HL in FP. Ed-2

The study revealed that parental influence in children's reading often gives birth to positive achievement for the child. This is in line with the previous study by Steiner, Hindin and Rizzuto, indicating that parents who used both discussion and oral reading strategies to support their children's readings showed children's gains in their reading rate, accuracy, and fluency as well as on independent reading measures, from the beginning of the programme period to the end.²⁷ The researchers take that parents or guardians can influence their children's attitude towards reading in isiXhosa HL in the FP, not necessarily through direct tutoring but even through their actions and attitudes. If parents have a habit of buying a daily newspaper and reading it at home, their children are likely to imitate and develop a liking for reading. Of course, direct tutoring, thus, parental involvement, helps children sharpen their reading skills, if the parents read age-appropriate books to their children. Likewise, the participants are quite positive that parents' input in the reading of isiXhosa HL in the FP by their children at home can help make them expert readers, hence the following claims:

It is because what they learn from school stays at school. There is no help from their homes. Ed-2

I think these learners' parents should partner with us, the teachers, for successful reading of isiXhosa HL in FP. Parents must be more involved, though we know that they are not educated; they must provide support by even asking neighbours and other learners to help. Ed-1

Section 2: Which strategies can be used to support struggling learners in reading isiXhosa HL in the FP in Chris Hani East District, South Africa?

Children interact with the environment, involving the ability of oral and visual to explore the writings and prints that exist around them. Taking children to a reading garden helps them understand that the literacy environment is built inside or outside the classroom. The study echoes the assertion by the University of Reading that reading gardens can be useful in times of pandemics like COVID-19, which require social distancing to enhance teaching and learning.²⁸ Unfortunately, not many schools in poorly resourced areas have such spaces. Where the garden is, the teachers need to use age-appropriate activities that support the process of reading with the presence of symbols and written signs printed and installed in the garden. Moreover, inappropriate reading strategies lead to a lack of early reading skills in children. The importance of reading gardens is emphasised by the participants as follows:

I take my learners to the reading corner in the classroom, and sometimes, I take them to the corner of the schoolyard near the garden of the school. We practise reading the entire concept, and for example, we read words like, i-ga-di, u-ci-ngo, i-zi-tya-lo, u-m-hla-ba. They will read these words and clap as they break them. I encourage them to 'reason' the sounds as they read. Reading outside the classroom helps instil the importance of a garden while promoting their reading skills as well. Ed-1

There is a community playground near the school. It will help my learners to read. We will go there and play some games like skipping rope, soccer ball, and upuca. Others will play skipping rope, saying xhuma-xhuma. Another group will play soccer ball. While they play, they will be reading words like kha-ba, va-la, ve-la, u-pu-ca. Ed-2

Through reading, children may be able to attain excellent academic performance, develop great communication skills, and collect vocabulary that helps them to communicate well; excellent academic

²⁷ Steiner, Hindin, and Rizzuto, "Developing Children's Literacy Learning through Skillful Parent-Child Shared Book Readings."

²⁸ University of Reading, "Covid-19: Outdoor Learning Could Help Schools Reopen Safely – Expert Comment," 2020, <https://www.reading.ac.uk/news-and-events/releases/PR841013.aspx>.

performance acquired by students through reading will assist them in understanding other subjects.²⁹ Exciting and interesting media, such as flashcards should give initial reading activities. As reported earlier in the literature by January et al., flashcards can be used to help learners who struggle with reading.³⁰ Similarly, the participants resonated that:

Using flashcards, sentence strips, audio, and phonic awareness, to mention a few. Ed-1
I know that many teachers attempt to use flashcards to increase the learners' vocabulary, but I use them to sharpen their reading skills. Ed-2

Moreover, the use of wall charts in honing the learners' reading skills has been touted as effective. Likewise, Putri, Sofian and Bunau explored how to use wall charts to improve learners' reading abilities.³¹ Their findings were that the learners were happy to learn with visual aids; they became more active and paid attention than before without using wall charts. Besides, the wall charts helped to preserve information that is unchanged for future use. The study advances that in case the learners are clueless about what is in the wall chart, the teacher needs to give them a clue to stimulate their brains so that they can figure out the correct answer. Relatedly, one participant shared that:

My classroom has some wall charts, which I use to teach reading to my learners. I wish there could be many if resources could allow that. Ed-1

As reported in the literature, it is maintained that taking part in teaching workshops and watching others' teaching practices could be of great help. Sharing experiences among experts in the field is the cornerstone of any workshop. The participants believe that if the Department of Education offers many workshops, they can help empower teachers with more strategies for handling reading isiXhosa HL in the FP. The researchers assert that workshops can even be held at the school or circuit level to minimise logistical problems associated with the district or provincially-held workshops that involve longer travelling distances. The participants echoed:

The scarcity of workshops has a very bad effect on our teaching. Sometimes, you feel you need some more skills, but there is no one to empower you. The Department of Education must provide workshops for the content gap so that teachers have more strategies to eliminate these barriers. All reading activities must be done to prepare learners to become better readers. Reading days in school must be done so that others will challenge learners in a good way. Ed-1

African indigenous languages are insufficiently promoted despite the Constitution's requirement for equitable treatment of all 12 official languages. The South African Department of Education department intervened to promote the African indigenous languages and to increase the number of teachers for African indigenous languages in schools through the Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme.³² Besides, the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) was also put in place to promote various languages in unison. Despite these developments, the participants shared:

In our school, we have a shortage of teachers. The department must hire more teachers so much that isiXhosa teachers can deal with it only. This means that one teacher will deal with one subject only to drill learners more. Ed-1

²⁹ Nuligar Hatiningsih and Putri Adriyati, "Implementing Flashcard to Improve the Early Reading Skill," in *4th ASEAN Conference on Psychology, Counselling, and Humanities (ACPCH 2018)* (Atlantis Press, 2019), 291–94.

³⁰ Stacy-Ann A January et al., "A Comparison of Two Flashcard Interventions for Teaching Sight Words to Early Readers," *Journal of Behavioral Education* 26 (2017): 151–68.

³¹ Noni Ayu Hasma Putri, Sofian Sofian, and Eusabinus Bunau, "Improving Students' reading Ability By Using Wall Chart," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa (JPPK)* 11, No. 12 (2022): 3531–36.

³² Malefeu Maria Sigudla, Thembinkosi E Mabila, and Happy Mathew Tirivangasi, "Language Preferences Of Pre-Service Teachers Who Specialise In English And An African Language.," *E-BANGI Journal* 18, no. 9 (2021).

Another problem is that in Grade R, most of the educators who work there are not qualified. You will find yourself as a grade 1 teacher doing grade R work because you see the gap. Ed-2

The findings indicated that the participants use reading corners to develop their learners' reading abilities in isiXhosa HL in the FP. This is in line with Nurhutamah and Armariena and Kosasih et al., who shared that reading corners help encourage interest in reading from an early age and aid in forming children's interest in reading from an early age, so that they can develop positive reading habits throughout life. Similarly, the participants alluded, thus:³³

In schools, a corner library must be emphasised and must be active. Ed-1

I always encourage my learners to use our reading corners, though it is not as resourced as I would have wanted it to be. Ed-2

DISCUSSION

The first section of the findings addressed the challenges associated with teaching reading of isiXhosa HL in the Foundation Phase in Chris Hani East District, South Africa. Four key obstacles have been raised in the study: distraction due to technology, a lack of phonological awareness, learners not doing homework, and a lack of parental support.

Technology has been revealed as one obstacle to learning, as well as a lack of time to practice reading at home. Children love cartoons on television, and if unchecked, instead of doing schoolwork while at home, they may invest abundant time in watching the television. This uncontrolled television-viewing time by children in the FP may compromise the time meant for academic engagements when at home, such as reading, as supported in the literature by Walzem and Kosheleva.³⁴

Another challenge is the lack of phonological awareness, though the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement stresses its importance when teaching in the FP.³⁵ This scenario is worsened in that as the FP learners are lacking in this regard, teachers are equally ill-prepared to teach in ways that sharpen their learners' phonological skills, as supported by Schaffler, Nel and Booysen, who bemoaned FP teachers' inadequate knowledge of phonological awareness and their inability to teach PA effectively as a result of insufficient training coupled with their own limited proficiency in English.³⁶

Another pertinent issue raised in the study was that learners do not do their homework. Suppose a teacher gives them homework to practise a short reading piece in isiXhosa at home. Most of them are most likely to ignore that because they hardly value homework. It is known that with senior classes, as long as the learners know that the given task is not for formal evaluation, they do not complete the tasks. Tellingly, teaching and learning is now examination-orientated; hence, informal tasks are deemed irrelevant and a waste of time. Similarly, Songsirisak and Jitpranee cautioned against demotivating learners by overloading them with homework but called for moderation in giving homework to the learners.³⁷

The last obstacle in this section, as raised in the findings, is inadequate parental support in helping learners read isiXhosa HL in the FP. The researchers claim that this could be a result of parental attitudes towards African indigenous languages like isiXhosa, which they deem inferior to the English language. English is given a higher status; thus, guardians are more likely to help read English texts at the expense of isiXhosa because the former is undoubtedly the language of the world of work. Besides, in most rural areas, these children stay with their guardians or grandparents while their parents are away either working

³³ Nurhutamah and Armariena, "The Influence Of School Literacy Culture Through The Utilization Of Reading Corner On Students' reading Interest"; Kosasih et al., "Reading Corner With The Theme" Exploring the World of Books Together" at SDN Kertawinangun 1 Cirebon."

³⁴ Walzem, "Television in the Language Classroom: A Call to Embrace One of Our Most Powerful Resources"; Kosheleva, "Learning Potential of Modern TV-Series in the English Language Classroom: A Teacher's Perspective."

³⁵ Department of Basic Education, *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement*. (Pretoria, 2011).

³⁶ Debbie Schaffler, Mirna Nel, and Ria Booysen, "Exploring South African Foundation Phase Teachers' Understanding, Skills and Training Needs in the Teaching of Phonological Awareness," *The Language Learning Journal* 49, no. 5 (2021): 554–67.

³⁷ Songsirisak and Jitpranee, "Impact Of Homework Assignment On Students' learning."

or looking for employment. These guardians or grandparents may not be privileged to read isiXhosa, though they can speak it.

One of the strategies to support struggling learners in reading isiXhosa HL in the FP is to watch the other teachers teaching reading. Likewise, the FP teachers can attend workshops addressing teaching language skills in the FP at the school, circuit, district, or provincial level. By doing so, one can learn a few tips about handling this complex skill: reading. In cases where FP are trained to handle that phase, still, in the wake of the revolution of new teaching methods and theories, the competence of teachers in adopting the new methods has become appealing to many educational researchers, as supported by Karim, Niazi, and Saeed.³⁸ Also, teachers can use reading corners, but they need to have age-appropriate reading materials in isiXhosa HL. The issue of inadequate resources is a huge challenge in most countries, and South Africa is no exception.

The findings revealed that wall charts and flashcards are equally important in teaching reading isiXhosa HL in the FP. As reported by Putri, Sofian and Bunau, wall charts help improve learners' reading abilities and preserve information unchanged for future use.³⁹ Similarly, January et al., claimed that flashcards are crucial in sharpening children's sight word vocabulary in language learning.⁴⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations:

- Foundation phase teachers need adequate training in teaching reading isiXhosa HL in the FP to enhance their knowledge of phonological awareness and their inability to teach it effectively.
- The Department of Education needs to provide more age-appropriate reading materials in isiXhosa HL to make it easier for the teachers to teach reading skills to the learners.
- There is a need to raise awareness about the importance of investing in indigenous African languages in teaching and learning, as presently, they are deemed inferior to the English language.

CONCLUSION

The study has explored the reading strategies of isiXhosa Home Language in the Foundation Phase in Chris Hani East District, South Africa. The study has revealed a couple of challenges to teaching reading isiXhosa in the FP: distraction due to technology, lack of phonological awareness, learners not doing homework and lack of parental support. The highlighted solutions to the above challenges include establishing reading gardens and reading corners, using flashcards and wall charts, and having teachers attend workshops. The stance of the study is that since there is low interest in reading among FP in isiXhosa HL, turnaround can be enhanced by a strong collaboration between FP teachers and parents or guardians. Parents' behaviours indirectly mould children's habits; thus, if a family member enjoys reading, having materials like newspapers and novels, a reading culture will naturally form in their children. The collaborative efforts between the teachers and parents help stimulate the children's desire to read texts, be it at school or home.

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