IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

by

MOSEBETSI SAMUEL MOKOENA

BA, PGCE, B.ED (HONS), M.ED (cum laude)

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Philosophiae Doctor in Education

(PhD in Curriculum Studies)

in the

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION STUDIES

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

QWAQWA

November, 2019

Promoter: Dr. Cias Tsotetsi

_____

⬚ DECLARATION
_____

I, Mosebetsi Samuel Mokoena, declare that the thesis, **improving reading comprehension for English first additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach**, submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the University of the Free State is my own independent work.

All the references that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that this work has not previously been submitted by me at another university or faculty for the purpose of obtaining a qualification.

………………………………………….   ……….………………………

          SIGNED   DATE

ETHICS STATEMENT

GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

08-Jul-2019

Dear Mr Mokoena, Mosebetsi MS

Application Approved

Research Project Title:
Improving reading comprehension for English first additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach

Ethical Clearance number:
UFS-HSD2018/1565

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Prof Derek Litthauer
Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Digitally signed
by Derek
Litthauer
Date: 2019.07.08
16:07:46 +02'00'

_____

🔲 **LANGUAGE EDITING**

_____

To whom it may concern

Re: Confirmation of Language Editing Service

This is to certify that I, Dr. Moodiela Victor Mathobela (MA Linguistics, PhD) language edited **Mr. Mosebetsi Samuel Mokoena's PhD Thesis** entitled:

"IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH"

For further enquiries, please feel free to contact me.

I hope you find the above in order.

Kind regards,

Mathobela

Dr. Moodiela Mathobela
C: 063 073 3135
E: moodiela@yahoo.com
Date: 2 December 2019

_____

🔸 ABSTRACT
_____

This study aims to demonstrate how free voluntary reading (FVR) approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for English first additional language (EFAL) learners. It adopted a qualitative Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) and Social Constructivist Theory (SCT) as methodological and conceptual frameworks, respectively. In this regard, free attitude interviews, oral reflections and focus group discussions (workshops) were used to generate data from the ten participants in this study. The analysis and interpretation of this data was done at interpretive, descriptive and explanatory levels in accordance with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). For this study to achieve its main aim, the following objectives were central. One, to establish the need for the use of the Free Voluntary Reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Two, to identify the components and aspects necessary for free voluntary reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Three, to determine the conditions suitable for the use of the Free Voluntary Reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Four, to identify the possible threats to the use of the Free Voluntary Reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

This empirical data confirmed the existence of challenges in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension for EFAL learners. They included the following: persistent poor reading comprehension, continuous dependency on traditional pedagogic practices, a weak reading culture, and the use of English language.

To circumvent the above-mentioned challenges, the study proposed the free voluntary reading approach and demonstrated how it could be used in this regard. For effective use, the approach must focus on both the macro level (outside the classroom) and micro level (inside the classroom). At the macro level, the focus is on needs identification process, context analysis, creation of vision and a road-map to overcome the challenges. At the micro level, emphasis is on context evaluation, co-lesson preparation, teacher-scaffolding, and peer scaffolding.

The study found that mutual identification of the challenges that EFAL learners face pertaining to reading comprehension, creation of vision and setting out the road map to address the challenges, creation of a print-rich environment, instant access to reading materials, and co-lesson preparation are important in demonstrating how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The contribution of the following people and organisations in the success of this project is highly appreciated:

Dr. Thapelo Tsotetsi:

Your wisdom, passion and guidance contributed immersely to the success of this thesis. I really appreciate your critical comments and advice throughout this project. I really thank you, my supervisor.

Dr. Patricia Maseko:

Your contribution in this study is acknowledged. The critical comments you provided in the early stages of this study are highly appreciated.

Prof. Dipane Hlalele:

I thank you for providing support and fatherly advice when I really needed.

Faculty of Education (University of the Free State)

I am eternally grateful for making funds available for this study to succeed.

Dr. Moodiela Mathobela:

Thank you for efficient work in tackling language issues in this thesis.

Teachers and learners:

It is your invaluable participation and meaningful conversations that made this study possible. Thank you for finding courage to engage in the quest to tackle the challenges we are faced with head-on.

Ms Nomzamo Mngomezulu:

You may not have noticed it, but the enlightening conversations, support, words of encouragement and shared experiences have really impacted positively to the success of this research project. For all that, I am eternally grateful.

My lovely wife Makatleho Esther Mokoena

I want to thank you for your support, advice and courage throughout this long journey.

To all roots reggae musicians

I thank you for keeping me hopeful and awake through your conscious and well-informed lyrics. Indeed, "Natty never get weary, yet!"

_____

DEDICATION
_____

I dedicate this thesis to the following important people in my life:

My late mother Keletso Mokoena

You were the first one who saw my potential when I first went to school in 1995. Despite being poor, you made me believe that I could overcome any challenge. Above all, I thank you for ensuring that I went to school and got the education that you never had.

Makatleho Nonhlela Mokoena

There were times when I would not be at home because of this project. This would leave you with the sole responsibility of looking after our children while doing your own work too. Despite all this, you never complained, but you provided support and courage at all times. I will forever be grateful.

Dineo, Malebusa and Mabako

I dedicated this thesis to you all for the role you played in my school life. I thank you for looking after me, teaching me how to read, write and count in those early days. Today, your hard work has finally paid off.

To all teachers of Lesaoana primary school and Makgabane secondary school.

I dedicate this thesis to thank you for unlocking and nurturing the potential in me. I am proud to have had you as my teachers and mentors.

To all learners of Lesaoana primary school and Makgabane secondary school.

Many of you may have fallen through the cracks because of the system and challenges of life. However, I am grateful that you are still holding on wherever you may be.

To all my children

This thesis reminds you not to let challenges limit your imagination and abilities. Unlike your mother and me, you have everything prepared for you. However, you each have the sole responsibility of directing your own lives and making decisions for yourselves. You may have other aspirations in life (other than being academics), but make sure that you find fulfilment and happiness while doing your best in whatever you do. I am saying this to you and my grandchildren…

_____

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

_____

ALIA	Australian Library and Information Association
AR	Action research
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
DBE	Department of basic education
DRC	Democratic Republic Congo
DoE	Department of education
EE	Equal education
EFA	Education For All (EFA)
EFAL	English first additional language
FAI	Free attitude interviews
FAL	First additional language
FDG	Focus group discussion
FL	Foreign language
FVR	Free voluntary reading
ICTs	Information Communications Technologies
IFLA	International Federation of Library and Information Associations and Institutions
KZN	Kwazulu Natal
L2	Second language
LIASA	Library & Information Association of South Africa
LoLT	Language of learning and teaching
MI	Medium of instruction
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NICHHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

NRS	National reading strategy
PA	Pronunciation Anxiety
PAR	Participatory action research
PALAR	Participatory action learning and action research
PIRLS	Progress in International Literacy Survey
PRP	Primary Reading Programme
RT	Rauding theory
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SASA	South African Schools Act
SC	Social constructivism
SCT	Social constructivist theory
SEPs	School enrichment programmes
SL	Second language
SLT	Social learning theory
SLYSIG	School Library & Youth Services Interest Group (SLYSIG)
SSR	Sustained silent reading
UNESCO	United Nations Education and Scientific Cooperation (UNESCO), as well as Education For All (EFA)
USA	United States of America
UWC	University of Western Cape
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
APPENDIX B	LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
APPENDIX C	LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL
APPENDIX D	PARENTAL CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX E	CONSENT FORM FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS
APPENDIX F	TRANSCRIPTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The terms, such as 'extensive reading,' 'sustained silent reading (SSR),' 'pleasure reading,' 'book flood,' and 'independent reading' are all synonymous with 'free voluntary reading' (hereinafter referred to as FVR) (Yamashita, 2015:168). According to Grabe and Stoller (2011:286), FVR can be defined as "an approach to teaching and learning of reading in which learners (students) read large quantities of material that are within their linguistic competence." The term, 'reading' refers to "a way of recognizing letters and words and being able to get meanings from the text" (Foncha, Mafumo & Abongdia, 2017:8762). For Granville (2001:15), at the basic level, reading involves focusing on the decoding of texts, word recognition, phonics, etc. Furthermore, in the views of Van Staden and Bosker (2014:2), there is more to reading than recognising letters. To them, it is a cognitive process requiring the application of knowledge, skills and meta-cognitive strategies.

Van Wyk and Louw (2008:246) explain comprehension in terms of three levels: This involves comprehension that focuses on factual content and comprehension at an interpretive and analysis level. Moreover, at the centre of comprehension is the overall understanding and construction of meaning from the text (Bertram, 2006:6). In this study, these words, *reading* and *comprehension* have been combined to form a concept known as *reading comprehension*. According to Pardo (2004, cited in Coetzee, Van Rensburg & Schmulian, 2016:307), reading comprehension is "the process through which students apply prior knowledge and experiences when interacting with written text in order to gain meaning and understanding from that text within a particular socio-cultural environment." In the context of this thesis, this concept involves interacting with the text, deriving meaning from it, interpreting and analysing it, and then reflecting on it.

Post-apartheid South Africa ushered in curriculum and policy reforms for the country's education system. These reforms sought to transform the entire education system including pedagogical practices. As a result, there was a shift from the use of the traditional teacher-centred practices to employing more constructivist and learner-centred approaches in the classrooms (Van Staden & Bosker, 2014:1). The teaching and learning of second language (formally referred to as First Additional Language or FAL) to the majority of non-English speaking learners across the country was no exception. However, while many aspects of language teaching and learning in South African classrooms have been transformed to some extent, the teaching and learning of reading comprehension amongst these learners remains a challenge. As a result, their reading skills and comprehension abilities have been severely hampered (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008:245). This is evident in the poor performance of the country's learners in the national and international comparative studies (Mensah, Pillay & Sibaya, 2017:8749). For example, reporting on the National Reading Strategy (NRS), the Department of Education (DoE), revealed that more than half of learners in the intermediate phase performed far below average in the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) tasks in 2005, (DoE, 2008b). In this regard, Zimmerman and Smit (2014:2) point to the ineffective teaching and learning of reading comprehension in intermediate phase classrooms. Teachers in this phase emphasise the importance of decoding text at the expense of mastering reading comprehension skills.

In addition to decoding texts, Pretorius (2002) also refers to rote learning and verbatim recall that characterise the teaching and learning of comprehension. On their first participation in the Progress in International Literacy Survey (PIRLS) 2006, the country's Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners had the lowest achievement (Zimmerman & Smit, 2016:1). A similar performance was also demonstrated in the subsequent prePIRLS 2011 (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:1; Mensah *et al*., 2017:8749). Furthermore, the more recent PIRLS 2017 results showed no improvement in the reading comprehension of many learners across South African primary schools. According to Matier, Moore and Hart (2007), learners' poor performance in PIRLS results from the ineffective teaching of reading in schools. In this case, little emphasis is put on the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Studies have indicated that South African classrooms still have learners who are unable to read (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Makiwane-Mazinyo & Pillay, 2017; Mensah *et al*., 2017). Similar

observations were made by the DoE and it acknowledged that "South African youth do not read as well as their foreign counterparts" (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008:246).

Attempts have been made to improve learners' reading comprehension skills in South Africa and elsewhere. In the United States of America (USA), under the auspices of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD), the National Reading Panel's Teaching Children to Read identified a number of strategies to remedy the instruction of text comprehension. These procedures include comprehension monitoring; cooperative learning; graphic and semantic organisers; story structure; question answering in which feedback is given; question generation by the learner; summarising the main ideas; and multiple strategy teaching (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:2). In South Africa, the 2008 Government Gazette outlined the National Reading Strategy (NRS) (Republic of South Africa, 2008). The aim of this nationwide campaign was to improve the reading competence of all South African learners. In addition to addressing these challenges, government also responded to calls made by the United Nations Education and Scientific Cooperation (UNESCO), as well as Education For All (EFA) aimed at increasing literacy levels in 2015 (Mensah *et al.*, 2017:8749). In their recent study in South Africa, Foncha *et al.*, (2017) found that learners' reading comprehension skills can be enhanced if reading is viewed and taught as a social practice. In another study, Makiwane-Mazinyo and Pillay (2017:10453) point to the need for the training of teachers in teaching reading.

Moreover, recent scientific studies have focused on factors that affect reading literacy development, the use of technology-assisted reading for improving reading skills, and profiling classroom reading comprehension development practices (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008; Van Staden & Bosker, 2014; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Coetzee *et al.*, 2016). However, there still remains a dearth of scientific studies on how free voluntary reading (FVR) approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners in a rural high school within the South African context.

This situation continues despite the noted successes of this approach. For instance, according to Machet and Olen (1996:2), the use of learner-centred practices, such as FVR is more effective than direct instruction. Furthermore, implementing FVR in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension improves learners' academic performance (Denton, Wolters, York, Swanson, Kulez & Francis, 2015:81). Thus, the use of FVR as an approach for improving

reading comprehension for EFAL learners helps to inculcate a culture of reading. In addition, there is consistent evidence that FVR is effective for language acquisition (Cho, Choi and Krashen, 2008:69). Corroborating this, Warrington and George (2014:3) note that there is a strong positive relationship between reading attitude and intrinsic motivation. In a study in Australia, it is reported that there was an increase in learner motivation towards reading as a result of engaging in FVR activities (Barry, Huebsch & Burhop (2008) cited in Velluto & Barbousas, 2017:3). Likewise, reporting on the results of a study conducted in Korea, Cho *et al.,* (2008:70) revealed that learners in the FVR class showed more confidence and less anxiety towards reading in English. This is particularly important, as many EFAL learners lack confidence and become anxious when they read. In this regard, FVR enhances the reciprocal relationship between emotional development and reading (Yamshita, 2015:172).

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

The foregoing arguments necessitate the following question:

How can we use free voluntary reading approach to improve reading comprehension for English first additional language learners?

In order to respond to this question, the following objectives guided this study:

- To establish the need for the use of the Free Voluntary Reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.
- To identify the components and aspects necessary for free voluntary reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.
- To determine the conditions suitable for the use of the Free Voluntary Reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.
- To identify the possible threats to the use of the Free Voluntary Reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.
- To demonstrate how Free Voluntary Reading can be used as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFALlearners.

1.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by Social Constructivist Theory (SCT), also referred to as social constructivism, as a theoretical framework. As an auxiliary of the constructivist approach, social constructivism owes its origins to the works of Lev Vygotsky (Powell, [n.d]:243) and its development can be traced back to research traditions in disciplines such as education, sociology and cognitive psychology (Savin, 1986:11; Sandu & Unguru, 2017:52). As a lens, SCT calls for research that is interactive in nature. This is research in which knowledge is not passively received (Buzkurt, 2017:211); rather, it is research where both the researcher and the participants are actively involved in the creation of scientific knowledge. This knowledge is created from multiple perspectives and multi-faceted social realities (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:57). In other words, SCT calls for research where the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and meaning-making shifts from the individual (researcher) to the group of people. Therefore, it advocates the interaction between the individual, other social actors (participants), and the environment which leads to a collectively constructed meaning (scientific knowledge and reality) (Savin, 1986:211; Sandu & Unguru, 2017:52). In addition, SCT-couched research places importance on the relationships amongst all the interacting social actors involved in the construction of scientific knowledge, realities and meanings (Bozkurt, 2017:214; Sandu & Unguru, 2017:57).

The teaching and learning of reading comprehension seems to be a challenge at the school where the research for this study was conducted. In most cases, traditional instructional strategies are used to teach reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This study explores the extent to which interaction and context in the teaching of reading comprehension might be compromised. The study further examines the role of SCT, with its emphasis on interaction and the understanding of environmental contexts in which knowledge is constructed, and how it could contribute towards improving reading comprehension.

Lastly, SCT moves from the premise that "knowledge is constructed socially by the virtue of its discussion and mediation with others" (Bozkurt, 2017:211). Such a premise calls for the use of dialogical methods of data collection. Therefore, SCT is designed to support the use of these methods, which makes it a compatible theoretical framework for use in this study.

1.4. DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

Below are definitions of operational concepts central to this study, defined within the context they are used and understood in this study. Therefore, this eliminates confusion and misinterpretations that might result from the use of these concepts in this study. It should, however, be noted that in this chapter, only a limited definition of each concept is provided because more detailed definitions of some of them are addressed in the subsequent chapter.

1.4.1. Improve

According to Oxford Paperback dictionary and thesaurus (2009:467), to improve means to "make or become better." In the context of this study, this is understood as making EFAL learners' reading comprehension better through the use of free voluntary reading approach.

1.4.2. Reading comprehension

In its broad definition, reading comprehension refers to "…the process through which students apply prior knowledge and experiences when interacting with written text in order to gain meaning and understanding from that text within a particular socio-cultural environment" (Pardo, 2004 cited in Coetzee, Van Rensburg & Schmulian, 2016:307).

1.4.3. Additional language

 A language that a learner learns in addition to his or her own language (Wessels, 2007:381).

1.4.4. Free voluntary reading
According to Grabe and Stoller (2011:286), FVR can be defined as "…an approach to teaching and learning of reading in which learners read large quantities of material that are within their linguistic competence.

1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR)

Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) is used as a methodology and design anchoring this study. PALAR has been defined as an approach which combines

different genres of action research, as well as action learning (Wood, Louw & Zuber-Skerritt, 2017:123). On the basis of this definition, in this study, PALAR is understood as a research methodology which incorporates the tenets of both action research (AR) and action learning (AL) with the aim of ensuring equal participation and mutual creation of knowledge by all the stakeholders in a socially democratic and power-neutral research project.

As a methodological framework, PALAR is from the premise that there are different ways of knowing. These different ways involve putting people's experiences at the centre of knowledge construction. In other words, during this process, all co-researchers reflect and act critically on their concrete experiences of the social issue under study (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015:8; Schiller, Jaffray, Ridley & Du Plessis, 2018:3; Wessels & Wood, 2019:3). These critical reflection and action are characterized by collaboration, trust and team building (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:519). The mutually constructed knowledge is aimed at effecting social and educational change, as well as empowerment through democratic means and participation (Cloete & Delport, 2015:86; Wood *et al.*, 2017:123).

In this study, the co-researchers brought their different experiences in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. The PALAR methodology enabled us to reflect on the current poor state of teaching and learning of reading comprehension and act to effect the necessary change. Through equal participation and inclusion, in our team of co-researchers, we were able to share our experiences and ultimately devised a framework for improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners through the use of FVR approach.

The participants in this study were two EFAL teachers and eight learners at one rural high school. Undoubtedly, both teachers and learners bring different experiences into the classroom which impact on the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. The same was also true in this research project. By virtue of coming from different communities and each bringing their unique personal and communal experiences, this study created a platform where these stakeholders expressed their different realities with regard to how reading comprehension had to be taught and treated in the EFAL classroom. As it later emerged that EFAL teachers still use teacher-centred approaches in their classroom, learners were relegated to the periphery due to these pedagogical practices. This resulted in them being passive receivers of knowledge whose realities were neglected by teachers. The use of PALAR as the methodology in this study refuted this by creating the space for them to engage, reflect

and act on their realities and those of their teachers about reading comprehension and the use of FVR approach. Such engagements took place through Free Attitude Interviews (FAI), group discussion (workshops) and oral reflections.

In order to ensure anonymity of the co-researchers, the following pseudonyms were used for both Teachers-co-researchers and Learners-co-researchers. Learners were referred to as LEARNER AB, LEARNER CD, LEARNER EF, LEARNER GH, LEARNER IJ, LEARNER KL, LEARNER MN, and LEARNER OP. For teachers, the names TEACHER ST and TEACHER QR were used respectively. In addition, these workshops were conducted in an area where participants were able to express their views and thoughts freely and confidentially.

1.6. UNITS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used as a tool to analyse data. The origins and the evolution of CDA are attributed to the works of Fairclough (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & Joseph, 2005:370). CDA has largely been defined as "the study of speech beyond sentences" (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007:158). Alternatively, CDA has been defined as both theory and methodology tasked with analysing the politically, political-economic and socially inclined discourse (Fairclough, 2013:178). In addition, Rogers *et al.,* (2005:370) define CDA as a scientific paradigm that is centred on and intended to address social problems. Researchers use CDA to challenge domination through power (Rogers *et al*., 2005:366). Fairclough has developed a three-tiered framework. In this framework, an analysis was performed on three different levels: interpretive, descriptive and explanatory (Rogers *et al*., 2005:371).

It is important to note the appropriateness of both SCT and CDA in this study and the central aim to demonstrate how FVR can be used as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. As it was argued in the previous chapter, the rural schools and communities are perceived as powerless in solving their problems. Using both SCT and CDA challenges such discourse and both seek to destabilise (Liasidou, 2008:483) these polarised discourses. Creating the spaces for discussions between me and the co-researchers empowered them to solve their problems and led to the realisation of how dominance is maintained by those in positions of power. Moreover, CDA similarly to SCT, advocates transformative social agendas.

While SCT calls for the transformation of the perpetual and unequal power relations, CDA calls for transformation of language used as a tool of dominance in support of a transformative agenda (Liasidou, 2008:496).

1.7. AN OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ON IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR EFAL LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

The five objectives of this study are used as organising principles to systematise the discussion and presentation of data.

1.7.1. Key challenges justifying the need for the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners

In this section discussion centres on the challenges identified by the co-researchers, rather than those found in literature presented in Chapter Two. They included the following: persistent poor reading comprehension, continuous dependency on traditional pedagogic practices, a weak reading culture, and the use of English language.

1.7.2. Components and aspects necessary for the use of FVR approach

Through our discussions, free attitude interviews, as well as oral reflection, we were able to identify the following components to be necessary for FVR approach to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. These included: Promoting self-selected reading material and re-teaching reading skills, promoting the use of inclusive and learner-centred instructional strategies in EFAL classrooms, easy access to reading materials, encouraging positive attitude, and motivation and proficiency building in the use of English language.

1.7.3. Suitable conditions for the successful utilisation of FVR approach

The conditions that contributed to making the utilization of FVR approach successful included the following: Co-researchers preferred to choose and decide their own reading materials in

the EFAL classrooms, the establishment of drop-in boxes was found to be another condition necessary for learners to select reading materials, teachers became keener in modelling reading to EFAL learners, and changing of the classroom setting was effective in allowing teachers to provide necessary assistance to EFAL learners.

1.7.4. Potential barriers to the successful use of FVR approach

Our team identified a number of threats that could hamper the success of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. They were as follows: A dysfunctional school library, reading as an oratory activity, continuous use of teacher-centred methods in EFAL classrooms, and a lack of confidence among the EFAL learners.

1.7.4.1. Strategies used in circumventing the barriers to the successful use of FVR approach
Strategies for circumventing these barriers were identified by the participants as follows: establishing a school library committee, making reading fun, promoting co-lesson planning and presentation, developing habit of dictionary use and re-teaching of word-attacking skills, and seeking motivation from outside the school.

1.8. THE PROPOSED UTILIZATION OF FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

This section addresses the main aim of this study which is to demonstrate how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for English first additional language learners. For effective use, the approach must focus on both the macro level (outside the classroom) and micro level (inside the classroom). At the macro level, the focus is on needs identification process, context analysis, creation of vision and a road-map to overcome the challenges. At the micro level, emphasis is on context evaluation, co-lesson preparation, teacher-scaffolding, and peer scaffolding.

The study found that mutual identification of the challenges that EFAL learners face pertaining to reading comprehension, creation of vision and setting out the road map to address the challenges, creation of a print-rich environment, instant access to reading materials, and co-

lesson preparation are important in demonstrating how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

1.9. VALUE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study are intended to contribute to the current and further research on free voluntary reading, achieved by demonstrating how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. The findings of this study have potential benefits to schools, EFAL teachers and learners because they will shed some light about how to use this approach in order to improve reading comprehension.

1.10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has a number of limitations. First, it was undertaken in one rural high school with a small number of co-researchers. This fact makes it impossible to generalise the findings of the study to all high schools. Despite this, some of these findings may be applicable to some schools in similar rural context.

Second, although this study sought to demonstrate how FVR approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners, this demonstration was carried over a short period of time (3 months). Therefore, it remains a challenge to determine whether such improvement is sustainable or not. This serves as an implication for further research.

1.11. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

In her recent work, Letsie (2019:18) states that it is important for researchers to demonstrate transparency in their work. Alternately, it is essential for researchers to provide evidence of rigour within their work (Amankwaa, 2016:121) to address the criticism labelled against qualitative research (Cope, 2014:89). Among other things, this guards against deceit or

intentional duplication of research findings. Moreover, it assists in avoiding mispresentation of the views and information provided by co-researchers or research participants.

With the above advantages in mind, it is important to consider the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings in order to demonstrate and achieve trustworthiness of the findings in a qualitative study (Amankwaa, 2016:121; Cope, 2014:89).

Credibility involves the correct interpretation or the extent to which the findings depict truthful realities and views of the participants (Cope, 2014:89; Amankwaa, 2016:121). In this case, Kornbluh (2015:399) cautions against the practice by participants of neglecting their own viewpoints in favour of the researcher's findings, due to power dynamics that often exist between themselves and researchers. To avoid this situation, this study adopted the methodology of PALAR in order to address the power dynamics and power-relations between me and the partcipants, as well as among the participants themselves. In this regard, the space was created for interaction and discussions, which were characterised by balanced and equal participation of all participants throughout the entire research process. In addition, contrary to the conventional paradigms, PALAR requires co-researching throughout the research process, including the analysis and interpretation of data. Under such circumstances, the participants are empowered and become co-owners of the findings and interpretation thereof.

Another way of ensuring credibility of the findings involved the use of a variety of tools to generate data. In this study, data was generated through the review of literature, group discussions (workshops), Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) and oral reflections. When explaining dependability, Amankwaa (2016:121) states that it involves consistency of the findings and the extent to which they can be repeated. In this study, the meticulous step-by-step explanation of what each stage of the research process entailed makes it easy for another researcher to arrive at similar conclusions. In addition, the study provided a clear description of the data generation methods and the analytic methods of data. However, it should be noted that it would be difficult to achieve this goal due to the different and ever-changing conditions and circumstances which are specific to rural high schools.

Closely related to dependability is the criterion of transferability of findings. This involves ensuring that research findings can be applied to other contexts (Shenton, 2004:63). To ensure this, the study provided a description of the research site, number of participants, and the role each of these participants played in the research process. However, it should also be noted that every rural high school has challenges specific to it. Therefore, I caution in lieu, against the uniform application and generalisation of the findings of this study. Despite this, the findings of this study may reflect the experiences of EFAL teachers and learners in other rural high schools around the world.

The last criterion of demonstrating trustworthiness of a qualitative enquiry is refered to as confirmability. It is important for a qualitative study to demonstrate that the findings are void of the researcher's bias, predispositions and political inclination (Shenton, 2004:63; Cope, 2004:89; Kornbluh, 2015:399). In this study, the participants' responses were quoted verbatim. As a way of eliminating any misunderstanding and bias, the study adopted Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and consequently, the responses were analysed at interpretative, descriptive and explanatory levels. Furthermore, the study did not limit the participants to expressing their views only in English. Instead, the participants used vernacular in instances where they felt the need to do so. Their responses were transcribed in vernacular and then translated to English. Again, the translated versions of their responses were taken back to them to eliminate and clarify any misrepresentations and misunderstandings.

1.12. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical consideration in research involves considering what is proper or improper and right or wrong conduct when undertaking a research project (Sherman & Webb, 1998; MacMillan & Schumacher, 2001). To ensure proper conduct, I wrote to the Department of Basic Education and the related rural high school to request permission to conduct this study. I was also granted an ethical clearance by the University of the Free State to conduct this research. The ethical clearance number: **UFS-HSD2018/1565** was given. Similarly, an informed consent form (translated into Sesotho and IsiZulu) explaining the aims, methodology and the dissemination of data was developed by me with the intention of sending it to the prospective participants

or their guardians for completion. It is in this document that the participants' rights to participate in the study voluntarily or to withdraw at any time were highlighted. In addition, in order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and the school, pseudonyms were used.

1.13. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter One serves as an introductory chapter to this study with a focus on brief conceptualisation of FVR, preliminary literature review, problem statement, aims, research methodology and design, value and limitations, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Two begins with discussion on the theoretical frameworks that would have possibly anchored this study. In this regard, it provides justification for using only one of these theoretical frameworks. This discussion is followed by clarification of operational concepts used. Finally, it focuses on reviewing literature, both international and national, related to FVR approach and in alignment with the objectives of this study.

The focus of Chapter Three is on research methodology and design, data generation methods and units of data analysis.

Chapter Four consists of a presentation, analysis and interpretation of data related to FVR approach.

Chapter Five presents the findings, aspects for further research and the conclusions on the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Chapter Six discusses the proposed utilization of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

1.14. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter serves as an introduction to the topic: improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners: A free voluntary reading approach.

The next chapter reviews the literature pertaining to free voluntary reading approach.

CHAPTER TWO

IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The central aim of this study is to demonstrate how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. To achieve this aim, this chapter focuses on Positivism, Phenomenology and Social Constructivist Theory (SCT) as theoretical frameworks juxtaposed in this study. This is followed by the review of literature on reading comprehension and Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) approach.

2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this sub-section, the focus is on the two research paradigms juxtaposed in this study, namely: positivism and phenomenology. Then, there is a discussion on Social Constructivist Theory (SCT) to frame this study. The discussion focuses on the origins, objectives, nature of reality, relationship between the researcher(s) and the co-researchers, role of the researcher, as well as the rhetoric used in each of these theoretical frameworks. Finally, this sub-section provides arguments for the choice of SCT as the suitable theoretical framework for this study as opposed to either positivism or phenomenology.

2.2.1. Positivism as a theoretical framework

This positivist theoretical framework has the following characteristics:

❖ **Origins of Positivism**

Positivism owes its origins and development to the works of Auguste Comte, Locke, Hume and Bacon (Tsotetsi, 2013:26). The need to understand the nature of scientific reality (Moleko, 2014:14; Mathobela, 2015:38) propelled these philosophers to develop this theoretical framework. Influenced by the tradition of empiricism (Mokoena, 2017:14), they

concluded that scientific knowledge can only be constructed, attained, understood, and interpreted through empirical methods (Campbell, 2002:20). As a result, the explanation and verification of such knowledge would only require the use of these empirical methods.

❖ **Objectives of positivism**

According to positivism, logic and experience form the basis of scientific knowledge. As a result, Tsotetsi (2013:26) argues that this firm belief in the existence of verifiable physical phenomena makes non-empirical philosophical views and beliefs nonentity to the positivists. In other words, failure to provide a verifiable physical phenomenon when interpreting and explaining scientific knowledge to the positivist results in the outright rejection of such interpretation. Moreover, any statement that cannot be verified or refuted through observation or other empirical methods is viewed as unacceptable and untrue (Tsotetsi, 2013; Moleko, 2014; Mathobela, 2015). For example, the biblical statement, *"God created the heavens and the earth"* is regarded as invalid and unscientific by the proponents of positivism (Mokoena, 2017:14). This is because the statement cannot be verified or refuted through observation or other empirical methods. However, the same cannot be said about a statement alluding to the *"Big Bang"* in explaining the creation of the universe to any positivist (Mokoena, 2017:14).

❖ **Nature reality**

Positivism is from the premise that there is a single view of reality and knowledge. In addition to refuting the existence of other realities, it also discards the multiple perspectives of viewing and explaining the nature of reality. According to Mokoena (2017:14), this one-sided view of reality was used by Comte and his associates in their study and interpretation of society, social structures and human affairs. When conducting research, this view called for the use of empirical methods and objective means in obtaining reality or scientific knowledge (Tsotetsi, 2013:26). In this regard, the positivist researcher would use questionnaires to collect objective data as evidence. This would then be followed by the use of scientific means to interpret the newly constructed reality and knowledge.

❖ **The relationship between the researcher and the participants**

Positivism allows the participants a limited role in a research project. They are viewed as subjects at the researcher's disposal to provide him or her with the necessary data and evidence. In the main, the research process is entirely in the hands of the researcher whose responsibility is to collect data, analyse it and find solutions (Mertens, 2010:15) to help the problem-ridden participants. According to Mathobela (2015:40), this narrow and self-centered relationship advocated by positivism produces limited nature of reality and scientific knowledge which lacks different perspectives, multiple realities and the lived experiences of the participants.

❖ **The role of the researcher**

The positivist researcher is at the centre of the research process (Tsotetsi, 2013:26). While tasked with the sole responsibility of collecting the quantifiable and measurable data and then analyzing it through statistical and empirical data, this researcher must also ensure neutrality in the research process. To achieve this, positivism requires this researcher to be detached from the participants (objects or subjects). Relying on deductive reasoning guided by logical and theoretical underpinnings and observations (Mathobela, 2015:39), the positivist researcher's role also involves producing and interpreting a replica of the known reality (Mokoena, 2017:15).

❖ **The rhetoric used in positivism**

The nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participants in a research process influences how they interact. In my view, the obsession on researcher's neutrality and the absolute 'scientificness' in the construction of scientific knowledge and reality neglect the social aspect of participants. The use of words such as 'subjects' or 'objects' when referring to human participants proves problematic. Labeling human beings 'subjects' or 'objects' not only dehumanizes them, but this also renders them passive and unable to change their situations. Moreover, the concept of 'absolute reality' within the positivist literature further narrows the construction of reality and scientific knowledge, while neglecting other multiple realities, perspectives and the indigenous systems of viewing knowledge.

2.2.2 Phenomenology as a theoretical framework

Phenomenology has the following characteristics

❖ **Origins of Phenomenology**

The origins of phenomenology can be traced back to the works of Edmund Hasserl (Mokoena, 2017:16). This theoretical framework acknowledges the existence of a real world and this is filled with people's experiences. It further considers the role such experiences play in the development and construction of scientific knowledge. As a result, the combination of empirical methods, empirical account, phenomenological methods and accounts, as well as any information on people's lived experiences (Mathobela, 2015:41) is at the centre of creation of the scientific knowledge.

❖ **Objectives of Phenomenology**

Unlike in positivism where non-empirical philosophical beliefs and accounts are discarded in the construction of scientific knowledge, people's lived experiences in the real world are important in the development of such knowledge. While the empirical methods of collecting and analyzing data are at the center of positivism, phenomenology uses these methods to describe and analyse (Mathobela, 2015:41) these experiences. In this case, this theoretical framework is further committed to finding 'truth' and 'facts' when describing phenomena using these experiences. Lastly, contrary to positivism's outright rejection of any philosophical beliefs, phenomenology considers the assumptions people make about what constitutes nature of reality or scientific knowledge.

❖ **Nature of reality**

While positivism 'absolutises' truth and reality, phenomenology places the researcher's immediate experiences at the centre when viewing reality. As a result, the 'truth' attained through the use of objective, statistical and empirical methods is viewed as insufficient by the proponents of phenomenology. The argument here is that discarding immediate experiences and realities of the researcher and the participants makes the collected data the end-product of reality. According to Mathobela (2015:42), this line of thought is wrong because

phenomenology regards data collection as the first step in finding, building and understanding knowledge.

❖ **The relationship between the researcher and the participants**

Similar to positivism, phenomenology also places the participants at the periphery while placing the researcher at the center of the research process and creation of knowledge. In other words, there is still no mutual interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants. In this regard, the former is tasked with asking questions about the latter's experiences of the studied phenomena. These participants are expected to explain the phenomena they have experienced and how the experience was (Mathobela, 2015:42).

❖ **The role of the researcher**

The role of the phenomenological researcher is to describe the lived experiences of the participants without the involvement of the participants themselves. In addition, this researcher is also tasked with analysing and interpreting these experiences. This is then followed by the transformation of such experiences into textual data by the researcher (Mathobela, 2015:42). Being tasked with these roles, the implication here is that the power to create scientific knowledge still rests with the researcher.

❖ **The rhetoric used by Phenomenology**

Although there are differences between phenomenology and positivism in terms of the creation and definition of scientific knowledge, these two theoretical frameworks share similar rhetoric when addressing the relationship between the researchers and the participants, as well as their respective roles in the creation of this scientific knowledge. Similar to positivism, words such as *'subjects'* and *'objects'* are still used to refer to the human participants by the proponents of phenomenology.

Among other things, the purpose of the above discussions on positivism and phenomenology is to argue that either theoretical framework is unsuitable for this study. This argument emanates from the emancipatory and participatory nature, as well as the aim of this study.

Therefore, Social Constructivim (SC) is viewed as a suitable theoretical framework to anchor this study.

2.2.3. Social Constructivism as a theoretical framework

The focus here is on the origins, objectives, nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and the participants, as well as the roles of the researcher. The focus then shifts to the sub-section providing arguments for using SC as the appropriate lens anchoring this study.

❖ **Origins of Social Constructivist Theory**

As an auxiliary of constructivist approaches, Social Constructivist Theory (SCT) owes its origins to the works of Lev Vygotsky (Powell, [n.d]:243; Greene, [n.d]:48). In addition, its development can be traced back to research traditions in disciplines such as education, sociology and cognitive psychology (Savin, 1986:11; Sandu & Unguru, 2017:52).

Moreover, the development of social constructivism and SCT resulted from the need to include social life aspect in the learning process (Bozkurt, 2017:211). Piaget's pioneering approach to learning, regarded as cognitive constructivism, only focused on the involvement of individual cognitive processes and social interaction as important in the process of learning. In this case, the argument was that individuals independently construct ideas (Powell, n.d.; 241; Buzkurt, 2017:212). In other words, meaning-making was regarded as an individual activity (Savin, 1986:211) taking place within one's cognition. On the contrary, while acknowledging the involvement of both critical thinking process (Powell, n.d., 243) and social interaction (Bozkurt, 2017:212) in learning, Lev Vigotsky's social constructivist approach added the social and linguistic influences on knowledge acquisition (Bozkurt, 2017:212). This resulted in the three key elements of SCT: cognitive activity, cultural knowledge, and assisted learning.

❖ **Objectives of SCT**

At the centre of SCT is the emphasis on the shift from individual meaning-making to the one endorsing collective meaning-making (Savin, 1986:211). Such collective-meaning making is characterized by the interaction among social and communicative actors (Sandu &Unguru, 2017:52). Additionally, the SCT oriented research seeks to understand and explain how these social actors (individuals) take action, explain and describe their unique contexts (Gergen, 2005 cited in Sandu & Unguru, 2017:54). Similarly, through its sociological perspective, SCT also seeks to understand how social problems are created. In this study, understanding the reasons behind poor reading comprehension of learners at a rural high school is key. In other words, finding strategies straight away without understanding the factors contributing to poor reading comprehension would be faulty, according to SCT.

❖ **Nature of reality**

SCT refutes the existence of 'one-reality within probability' that is advocated by positivism. In contrast, it advocates for the realisation and acknowledgement of multiple realities (Simandana, n.d:154), perspectives, meanings and solutions in the creation of scientific knowledge or in addressing a social issue (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:51). Additionally, SCT view of reality is premised on the following:

- The world cannot be as known as it is, but rather a multi-faceted series of socially built realities.
- Language, communication and discourse have central role of the interactive process through which we understand the world and ourselves.
- Social actors build social realities through relational processes (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:57).

Furthermore, when creating this reality and addressing their challenges, SCT places people's different influences, realities, knowledge and experiences in the centre, rather than placing all responsibility on the researcher. Instead, reality is built through the social interactions and mediation with other knowledgeable people (Bozkurt, 2017:211). Vygotsky calls this space for social interactive learning Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Greene [n.d]:49). When

constructing multiple realities in this zone, SCT researchers study the "…state of affairs in an action arena as the outcomes of interactions between social actors and non-human entities" (Steins & Edwards, 1999:544).

Moreover, the social construction of reality can be analysed in terms of constructs that result from the interaction between social actors. Another way involves the analysis of constructive interactions and instances of social construction of reality. The final analysis involves "…context in which social construction takes place and the discursive mechanisms that generate it" (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:53).

At the centre of this interaction is collaboration (Powell, [n.d]:244), dialogue and consensus (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:53; Bozkurt, 2017:211). It is the use of these meaningful dialogues and collaborative teamwork in this research that accommodates SCT in this study. The reason for this is that SCT resonates with these collaborative interactions of creating knowledge. These methods were used in this study to address the question: *"How can Free Voluntary Reading approach be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners?* Although this question points to the existing problem, its response calls for multiple perspectives on and insights into finding ways to address the problem of poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners at a rural high school through the use of FVR as an approach.
,

❖ **The relationship between the researcher and the participants**

The egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the participants is at the centre of a SCT-anchored research. To enhance this relationship, SCT assigns equal status of power to these stakeholders in the research process. By doing this, Cottone (2007:194) and Bozkurt (2017:214) respectively argue that SCT emphasises the importance of the relationships and interpersonal relations in this process. These relationships are further enhanced by the notion that knowledge construction (research project) is a collective activity (Steins & Edwards, 1999:5440; Savina, 1986:211). This results in participants becoming interactive co-constructors (Bozkurt, 2017:211) of scientific knowledge. As a result, the SCT-anchored research calls for a shift from individual ownership of the research process to the collective ownership of this process and the findings.

Adding to this, SCT is "…attentive to the voices of the participants in research" (O'Donoghue, 2005 cited in Sandu & Unguru, 2017). In this case, it provides a space for the participants to contribute to their own emancipation rather than perpetuating the *'helper-helpee'* relationship advanced by positivism and phenomenology.

❖ **The role of the researcher**

The SCT researcher's role is to disavow the idea of *'bringing help'* to the *'problem-ridden'* participants that is advanced by both positivist and phenomenological researchers. In fact, SCT promotes the *'nothing about us, without us'* principle as it is observed in the roles and approaches assigned to its researchers during the research process. In this case, the SCT-guided researcher strives for the active involvement and meaningful participation of the people affected by the social problem. The researcher's role is to provide assistance and scaffold in the construction of knowledge (Savin, 1986:211; Mpofu & Maphalala, 2017:9258).

Moreover, the SCT-guided researcher is tasked with creating an environment built on respect, equality and trust in which equal collaborations and interactions among all stakeholders are at the centre. The aim of such environment is to allow for the construction of knowledge that is mediated by socio-cultural experiences (Greene, [n.d]:48). In the context of this study, both the researcher and learners engage in the FVR together in order to construct knowledge about how FVR may be used as an approach in improving reading comprehension. This is in contrast to the researcher coming with remedies to the problem of reading comprehension at the rural high school under study.

❖ **The rhetoric used by SCT**

At the center of SCT lie principles of social interactions, social justice, empowerment and equality. All these principles call for a more humane and accommodative rhetoric within the SCT discourses. The focus is on how SCT approaches the relationship between the researcher and the participants in a research project. In this regard, SCT adopts the rhetoric which empowers and humanises the participants. They are referred to as co-constructors rather than the mere *'participants*.' By referring to them as such not only *humanises* them, but this rhetoric also recognises and appreciates the power marginalised people have in addressing their own problems. This is contrary to referring to them as *'subjects'* or *'objects'* who are

totally controlled by a researcher in the laboratory, as it is the case in positivism and phenomenology.

Furthermore, SCT adopts the rhetoric that encourages collaboration and teamwork. The use of inclusive words such as *'we'* and *'us'* within SCT-guided discourses demonstrates the mutual relationship and 'oneness' that exists among all the stakeholders in the research project. This further demonstrates the existence of collective ownership of both the existing problem and the remedies found at the end of the research process. This contrasts the use of words such as *'I'* and *'it'* that not only dehumanises them, but also glorifies the powerful researcher with the aim of perpetuating the '*helper and helpee'* syndrome.

2.2.4. Reflection on the choice of SCT over Phenomenology and Positivism

The aim of this sub-section is to justify the use of SCT as the theoretical framework couching this study, as opposed to either phenomenology or positivism. The arguments focus on the position of the researcher in a research process, data generation methods, view of reality and ownership of research process and findings.

Firstly, both phenomenology and positivism place the researcher at the center of the research process. In this regard, the researcher is viewed as the *'expert'* who brings solutions to the perceived problems. If either theoretical framework was to be used in this study, I would be tasked with justifying the need for FVR approach. Additionally, I would be the only one who identified and assumed the challenges faced by the participants. All these come to the fact that using phenomenology or positivism would place me at the center of the research process, thereby making me an expert. In turn, this would endorse the '*helper-helpee'* syndrome which is disavowed by this study.

However, the use of SCT in this study enhances the participation of the co-researchers as opposed to limiting it by me assuming all the roles as the researcher. In this study, by assigning the '*participants'* and I the same status of being co-constructors, SCT allows maximum interaction and collaboration from justifying the need for FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners at a rural high school. This encourages the concept of interactive participation which is at the center of this study.

Secondly, both positivism and phenomenology are obsessed with the use of objective, statistical and empirical and phenomenological methods to collect and analyse data. This is due to the fact that researcher's neutrality is important to these theoretical frameworks. As a result, interaction and cooperation between the researcher and the participants is quite minimal. On the one hand, I would be tasked with asking the participants questions about their experiences of reading comprehension in EFAL classrooms. Thereafter, I would make description of such experiences and then draw conclusions. On the other hand, I would use the sampling techniques and other results obtained through statistical means to determine the conditions under which FVR approach can flourish. The bottom line here is that the use of either one would discourage collaboration and meaningful dialogue which are central to this study.

On the contrary, the use of SCT resonates well with the nature, design and data generation methods employed in this study. By its nature, this study is participatory and the qualitative methods of data generation are used to ensure equal participation. According to Mokoena (2017:22), the better way of understanding a social problem is to ensure the participation of the people affected by the problem in the quest to find the remedies together. Therefore, having SCT anchoring this study enables us (co-constructors and I) to own the existing problem, as well as FVR approach for improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners at a rural high school. This in itself calls for teamwork in finding solutions *with* the co-constructors, rather than finding solutions *for* them. In this regard, we are able to engage in meaningful discussions guided by the dialogical methods (Chilisa, 2012:253) about the issue of poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners. It is in these discussions where the co-researchers' feelings and attitudes (Tsotetsi, 2013:27) are considered and valued. Also, the dialogical methods enable the co-researchers to express their views freely through interactive dialogues, rather than being treated as objects in the science laboratory. All these come down to the ability of SCT to resonate well with equal participation and engagement in the meaningful dialogue, which are important in this study.

Thirdly, like phenomenology, positivism supports the idea of single-view of reality and knowledge. The implication here is that the responsibility of obtaining such knowledge lies with the researcher and it can be obtained through statistical and objective means (Tsotetsi, 2013:28). Using either theoretical framework in this study, I would be tasked with using these

scientific means to interpret and produce the replica of this reality. Such actions would then be against the attempt of this study to acquire many perspectives of how FVR can be used as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners at a rural high school.

The broad and diverse approach of SCT on the nature of reality proves contradictory to this single view of reality supported by both positivism and phenomenology. According to SCT, reality can be attained and viewed from multiple realities (Simandan, [n.d]:154; Sandu & Unguru, 2017:57). In this regard, the responsibility for the construction and interpretation of such realities is shared mutually by the researcher and the co-constructors. Here, SCT enables us to work as a team in identifying the barriers to the success of FVR and in recommending the strategies to address these barriers. Also, engaging the co-constructors in the construction of this reality eliminates the positivists' single-view of reality. What is clear here is that different perspectives are used in addressing the issue at hand as opposed to everything being viewed in my way. While doing this, SCT enables me to interpret the co-constructors' interpretations and explorations of reading comprehension. Consequently, the outcomes of the research project and the knowledge created are collectively owned. In short, the choice of SCT in this study further deepens my understanding of the co-constructors' experiences and interpretations of FVR.

Lastly, given the limited roles and power assigned to the participants in the construction of scientific knowledge, both positivism and phenomenology hold the view that the research process and the findings belong to the researchers and the scientific community. In other words, these researchers come into the communities and 'extract' knowledge then return to their laboratories. The use of either theoretical framework would perpetuate this *'hit and run'* syndrome which this study guards against.

However, in addition to removing all the power from the researcher, SCT calls for the collective ownership of the research process and the findings thereof. This helps in making the co-constructors realise the power they possess in solving their problems, thereby emancipating themselves. I think that the co-constructors are more likely to identify with the findings of the process in which they participated. Consequently, the use of SCT in this study makes the co-constructors feel to have contributed positively to their own emancipation and to own the means through which they were emancipated. This is because SCT discourages me from 'rescuing' them, rather to collectively devise the means through which such

emancipation could be attained. In this case, how can FVR approach be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners?

With the above arguments in mind, I argue that choosing SCT over phenomenology and positivism as a lens in this study was appropriate.

2.3. DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

This sub-section aims to clarify the concepts used in this study in order to avoid confusion when reading this thesis. The following concepts are central to this study:

2.3.1. Additional language

A language that a learner learns in addition to his or her own language (Wessels, 2007:381).

2.3.2. Reading comprehension

Pardo (2005) defines reading comprehension as "…the process through which students apply prior knowledge and experiences when interacting with written text in order to gain meaning and understanding from the text within a particular socio-cultural environment."

2.3.3. Rural and high school

This concept of 'rural' is used and understood in this study to be referring to a large area occupied by a low population whose lives depend on agriculture and natural resources and characterised by the poor conditions of roads, limited access to Information Communications Technologies (ICTs), and limited or lack of services such as clean water, electricity, sanitation, health and educational facilities (Hlalele, 2013:563). A rural high school is then a high school found in a large area characterized by poor conditions of roads, limited access to ITCs and a lack of necessary services.

2.3.4. Free voluntary reading (FVR)

According to Velluto and Barbousas (2017:1), FVR is a reading programme in which learners are expected to read a variety of books for a specified period of time. Within the context of this study, FVR involves voluntary reading sessions during which learners read a variety of books for pleasure and comprehesion.

2.4. RELATED LITERATURE

2.4.1. A review of literature related to free voluntary reading (FVR)

The terms such as 'extensive reading,' 'sustained silent reading (SSR),' 'pleasure reading,' 'book flood,' and, 'independent reading' are all synonymous with FVR (Yamashita, 2015:168). The origins of FVR can be traced back to the works of Stephen Krashen. According to Grabe and Stoller (2011:286), FVR can be defined as "…an approach to teaching and learning of reading in which learners read large quantities of material that are within their linguistic competence." Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2002:193) add that FVR means engaging in large quantities of reading material in order to enhance general understanding of the material. This further helps develop reading habits and build up knowledge of vocabulary.

Furthermore, FVR allows for interpretations from different perspectives. Firstly, it can be viewed as a cognitive process (Yamashita, 2015:170). In this case, this cognitive view of FVR draws from tenets the Rauding Theory (RT). According to this theory, reading a text in an additional language follows the hierarchical reading processes. Scanning of the text comes first. This involves word recognition as the reader is expected to find a target word. Skimming follows the first reading process. In this case, the focus is on locating the main idea of the text. This process is also characterized by proposition encoding. The next process is called rauding. During this process word recognition and the complete understanding of each sentence and integration of meaning across the sentences in the whole text is essential (Yamashita, 2015:170). The process of learning requires advanced cognitive skills such as interpreting, synthesising and evaluating the ideas expressed in the entire text. This process is also characterised by comprehension and remembrance of the selected pieces of information. The last process focuses on memorisation. This involves the reader's attempt to remember the precise ideas and information expressed in the text (Yamashita, 2015:170).

Secondly, FVR can be viewed as an affective process. This view focuses on the notion that "… emotional state of mind is conducive to attitude and motivation that encourage continued engagement in reading" (Yamashita, 2015:172). Motivation and attitude form an integral part of FVR because at the centre of FVR is the need to read for pleasure. Additionally, positive

attitude and intrinsic motivation boost readers' cognitive functioning (Yamashita, 2015:173) in order for him or her to continue engaging in the text.

Thirdly, FVR can be seen as a pedagogical approach. In this case, Robb and Kano (2013) provide two distinct options of using FVR in the classroom. Replacement refers to the administration of FVR during normal school hours (Robb & Kano, 2013). In other words, it means infusing FVR practices in the delivery of curriculum related activities during the lessons. On the contrary, the additive option of FVR involves the use of FVR instructional practices outside the regular class hours (Yamashita, 2015:174). The use of either FVR instructional practice concurs with the aegis of learner-centred and constructivist teaching and learning. The support for this type of learning is derived from the notion that learners' background knowledge and linguistic skills enhance reading comprehension (Yamashita, 2015:173).

In addition, FVR is characterised by the reading of a large quantity of reading materials. It is also characterized by the notion of reading for a sustained and silent reading. Moreover, FVR requires that reading material be easily arranged and appeal to the readers' pleasure (Yamashita, 2015:169). Through his comprehension hypothesis (formerly referred to as in-put hypothesis) theory, Krashen put forth the basic conditions for FVR in the acquisition of additional language. These require the input to be abundantly available, comprehensible and slightly above students' current level of competence (Renandya, 2007:135).

Similarly, Su (2008:75) puts forth the general principles of FVR. These include such things as a print-rich environment, self-selected books, modeling by teachers, literature discussion groups and, read-aloud activity

2.5. A REVIEW OF LITERATURE RELATED TO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

2.5.1. To establish the need for the use of Free Voluntary Reading approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners at a rural high school

First, while many aspects of language teaching and learning in the South African classrooms have been transformed to some extent, the teaching and learning of reading comprehension amongst these learners remains a challenge. As a result, their reading comprehension has

been severely hampered. This is evident in the poor performance of the country's learners in the national and international comparative studies (Mensah, Pillay, & Sibaya, 2017:8749). For example, reporting on the National Reading approach (NRS), the Department of Education (DoE) (henceforth referred to as Department of Basic Education (DBE)), revealed that that more than half of learners in the intermediate phase performed far below average in the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) tasks in 2005, (DoE, 2008b). On their first participation in the Progress in International Literacy Survey (PIRLS, 2006), the country's Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners had the lowest achievement (Zimmerman & Smit, 2016:1). Similar performance was also demonstrated in the subsequent prePIRLS 2011 (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:1; Mensah *et al*., 2017:8749). Furthermore, the more recent PIRLS 2017 results showed no improvement in the reading comprehension of many learners across South African primary schools. Studies have indicated that South African classrooms still have learners who are unable to read (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Makiwane-Mazinyo & Pillay, 2017; Mensah *et al*., 2017). Similar observations were made by the DBE and it acknowledged that "…South African youth do not read as well as their foreign counterparts…" (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008:246).

Second, closely linked to the preceding argument is the notion that FVR responds to the call for the use of interactive instructional strategies which are currently not in use (Granville, 2001:15) in the EFAL classrooms across South Africa. Similarly, in their recent study in South Africa, Coetzee, Van Rensburg and Schmulian (2016:307) point to the need for the implementation of differentiated instruction in enhancing reading comprehension. In another recent study aimed at exploring how students can be trained to develop their reading skills in LoLT (English), in South Africa, Foncha, Mafumo and Abongdia (2017:8764) point to the same effect. The use of strategies such as FVR in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension is important for various reasons. Firstly, they enable the reader to apply a repertoire of knowledge, skills, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies during the reading process (Van Staden & Bosker, 2014:2). In the application of these various skills and strategies, the reader becomes an active meaning-making individual. Granville (2001:15) posits that meaning-making can take place in three ways. Through the text-based reading, the meaning of the text can be derived from the text itself. In this case, the focus is on the literal understanding of the text (McMaster, Van den Broek, Espin, Pinto, Janda, Lam, Hsu, Jung,

Leinen & Van Boekel, 2015:29). In other words, there are no hidden meanings except for what the author of the text puts forth. The reader's role is to discover the correct meaning as put forward by the author (Granville, 2001:15). The interactive reading, however, requires the reader to be an active participant in the process of meaning-making (Wang, 2014:384). This way of meaning-making takes the background knowledge, experiences and diverse cultures of learners into account in order to enhance their reading comprehension (Granville, 2001:15). This is the basic characteristic of many comprehension tasks offered in high schools (McMaster *et al.*, 2015:29). It is through the critical socio-cultural readings that political and historical context is considered when fostering reading comprehension in EFAL classrooms. Further, Coetzee *et al.*, (2016:307) add that the content of the text and its readability need to be considered when fostering reading comprehension. Furthermore, McMaster et al., (2015:29) provide additional reasons that make readers to struggle comprehend ing the given text. These include:

- [Readers] may not have (or efficiently access) relevant background knowledge.
- [Readers] [m]ay not make connections among relevant text-based information.
- [Readers] [m]ay not integrate background knowledge with text-based information to draw inferences.

Secondly, the use of interactive strategies such as FVR in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension improves learners' academic performance (Denton, Wolters, York, Swanson, Kulez & Francis, 2015:81). Reporting on the findings of their study aimed at determining the effects of free voluntary reading on English second language readers in South Africa, Machet and Olen (1996:1) concluded that "…experimental group gained more than the control group." In Taiwan, Ying Lee and Krashen (1996:689) attribute the learners' significant performance on a writing examination to the use of FVR as an approach. In another study in Korea, Kim and Krashen (1998:515) reported on the positive link between free reading and vocabulary development for Korean high school students. In the study exploring reading habits and academic success in rural Kenya, Mugambi (2015:354) asserted that the academic success results from engagement in voluntary leisure reading.

Forth, the use of FVR as an approach for improving reading comprehension for EFAL language is needed for inculcating the culture of reading. The findings of the study conducted by Van

Staden and Bosker (2014:1) indicated the need to read across the curriculum. These findings concur with the earlier observation by Matier Moore and Hart (2007) that the cause of low levels of literacy achievement including reading comprehension in South Africa is the ineffective teaching of reading and absent emphasis on reading across the curriculum. Similar observation was done by Mugambi (2015) in Kenya. Moreover, the reading and language programmes offered in schools do not cater for pleasure reading (Machet & Olen, 1996:2). Under these circumstances, Krashen (2006:43) cautions that learners in such schools are at risk of struggling with language development and literacy competencies such as reading comprehension.

As remedy, Makiwane-Mazinyo and Pillay (2017:10453) call on teachers to engage learners in reading for pleasure. In their study, Fonch *et al.*, (2017:8762) found that engaging in such a social practice simplifies the teaching and learning of reading. In addition, another study carried out in Ethiopia found that pre-exposure to pleasure reading urged learners to engage in more self-regulated learning. This was further fuelled by the freedom to choose the texts and subjects they were interested in (Ferede & Nchindila, 2017:2). Not only does reading for pleasure motivates learners to read more books, but it also impacts positively on their cognitive functioning, comprehension, and learning (Yamashita, 2015:173).

Lastly, there is consistent evidence that FVR is effective for language acquisition (Cho et al., 2008:69; Bautista & Marulanda, 2018:53). Goctu (2016:74) opines that when EFAL learners are provided with the tool such as FVR and the opportunity to apply the additional language, such learners are at a greater chance of succeeding in acquiring this language. Furthermore, when comprehensively analysing studies on FVR, Nakanishi (2015) revealed the positive link between FVR and improved reading proficiency. In another study in Japan, Yamashita (2007) pointed to the improvement in reading comprehension of Japanese learners as a result of engaging in FVR. Fields (2017:199) reported on the "…significant gains" on the TOEFL scores at the end of a two-month FVR approach. This author also noted the improved reading levels of Japanese learners after undergoing the FVR sessions. Similarly, there is a growing interest among researchers and teachers in FVR as an instructional option in EFAL learning and teaching (Su, 2008:76; Yamashita, 2015:173).

In summary, the need for the use of FVR as an approach for improving EFAL reading comprehension is triggered by the partly transformed instructional strategies that dominate

EFAL classrooms in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Moreover, FVR is necessary in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension to improve learners' academic performance. Additionally, the use of FVR as an approach is needed for inculcating the culture of reading in EFAL classrooms. Lastly, the use of FVR is effective in language acquisition.

2.5.2. To identify and discuss aspects necessary for the successful use of free voluntary reading approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners at a rural high school

For optimal functioning of FVR, it is necessary for EFAL learners to have freedom to select the text they want to read (Su, 2008:75; Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009:383; Vellutto & Barbousas, 2017:2). These texts are at the level or slightly below the level of learners' linguistic competence (Renandya, 2007:135; Fields, 2017:199) in the additional language (Bamford & Day, (2004) cited in Yamashita, 2015:169). These self-selected reading materials encourage learners to become lifelong readers with improved reading competence (Astuti, 2014:43). Also, these self-selected and self-decided texts are significant for the success of the FVR approach (Bautista & Marulanda, 2018:53). In their study in USA, Mcquillan and Au (2001:225) found that there is a positive association between access to self-selected reading material and reading frequency among EFAL learners. These authors also found that learners' increased motivation to engage in reading activities could be attributed to the access to self-selected reading materials.

Motivation of EFAL learners is another aspect necessary for the successful implementation of FVR. This is because spending time on reading motivates learners (Goctu, 2016:73). According to Fields (2017:197), FVR requires self-motivated learners. Learners can engage in two different types of motivation. On the one hand, extrinsic motivation involves reading in response to external demands. In other words, learners are motivated by the stimuli from the surrounding environment. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation comes from the interest a person derives from engaging in an activity (Warrington & George, 2014:67) such as

participating in FVR. In other words, this form of motivation also consists of a person's perceived competence to perform the activity (Mcquillan & Au, 2001:227) such as FVR.

Regardless of its form, motivation of learners proves necessary for FVR to be successful. For example, in their study in Antigua and Barbuda, Warrington and George (2014) found that there is a strong positive relationship between reading attitude and intrinsic motivation. Moreover, the results of the comparative study by Ferede and Nchindila (2017) in Ethiopia indicated that after engaging in FVR exercise, public school learners were more extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to read than their counterparts in non-public school. In a study in Australia, it was reported that there was an increase in the learner motivation towards reading as a result of engaging in FVR activities (Barry, Huebsch & Burhop (2008) cited in Velluto & Barbousas, 2017:3). Also, reporting on the results of the study conducted in Korea, Cho, Choi and Krashen (2008:70) revealed that learners in the FVR class showed more confidence and less anxiety towards reading in English. The same, however, was not the case with the control group which did not attend the FVR sessions.

Other aspects which are closely linked to motivation involve learners' interest and positive attitude towards FVR. There are two forms of interest that exist when it comes to reading (Schiefele, 1991 cited in Mcquillan & Au, 2001:226). The focus of situational interest is on the impact an environment has on individual interest. Alternatively, this form of interest monitors how individual interest towards an activity increases or decreases. However, with regards to individual interest, the importance is put on a person's inclination to engage in an activity as well as "...one's realisation of that interest through the actual engagement in the activity" (Mcquillan & Au, 2001:226) such as reading. As a result of high interest levels in reading, Cho et al., (2008:71) noticed that some learners from the experimental group spent longer time in library as compared to their counterparts. This, in turn, made the FVR sessions successful.

Besides EFAL learners' interest towards FVR in EFAL classrooms, it is important to consider their attitudes towards reading and FVR as an approach (Yamashita, 2015:172). With EFAL learners adopting a positive attitude, FVR assists in the improvement of reading comprehension (Goctu, 2016:74). According to Liem (2005), the success of the six computer science students in Vietnam could be attributed to the positive attitudes these learners had towards the additional language administered during the FVR sessions. Similarly, Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009:383) conducted a comparative study in Saudi Arabia and the results

indicated that the success of FVR could be attributed to the participants' "…more positive attitudes toward reading."

Teacher modeling is another component of FVR. Modeling has been defined as "…the patterning of thoughts, beliefs, strategies, and actions after those displayed by one or more models" (Loh, 2009:95). Alternatively, borrowing from the Social Learning Theory (SLT), modeling also involves learning through the observation of attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, consequences, and actions of others (Chiou & Yang, 2006:724). In the classroom situation, modeling is essential for the development of learners' literacy skills (Fisher & Frey, 2015:68) such as reading comprehension. In addition, it is effective in influencing learners' behaviour (Methe & Hintze, 2003:617). According to the proponents of Social Learning Theory, this influence becomes effective when the teacher's beliefs and behaviours are perceived as important by the learners (Loh, 2009:95). Additionally, drawing from the works of Bandura (1986), Sternberg (2000) puts forth four factors that are critical for the successful modeling to occur. These include:

- The model stands out in contrast to other competing models.
- The model is liked and respected by peers.
- The model is perceived to be similar to the observer and,
- The model's behaviour is reinforced (Chiou & Yang, 2006:725).

Various studies have reported on the success of FVR where successful modeling has taken place. In their study in USA, Fisher and Frey (2015) note the improvement in learners' achievement following teacher modeling. In another study aimed at evaluating teacher modeling as a strategy to increase student reading behaviour, which was conducted in the USA, Methe and Hintze (2003:617) concluded that "…teacher model of FVR is an effective functional intervention that can be used to increase student engagement." In Singapore, Loh (2009) observes teacher modeling to be effective in motivating learners to engage in FVR.

Another concept similar to modeling is scaffolding. In fact, "…scaffolding support in the form of modeling" (Buenner, 2013:19). The origins of scaffolding are traced back to the works of social-cultural theorist, Lev Vygotsky (Samana, 2013:338). Scaffolding involves providing a learner the necessary support in order for the learner to attain a particular skill (Buenner, 2013:18; Salem, 2016:98). In this case, Pishghadam and Ghardiri (2011:50) argue that learners

should be given tasks whose level of skill and knowledge demand exceeds what the learners are able to do. The proponents of socio-cultural theory refer to this as Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011:51).

Additionally, scaffolding can be understood in terms of its six principles. These include van Lier (1996) who also describes the features of pedagogical scaffolding in terms of six principles: continuity, contextual support, inter-subjectivity, contingency, handover, and flow.

- Continuity refers to where scaffolding recurs over a period of time, and involves a combination of repetition and variation.
- Contextual support refers to the activity which is structured in order to create a safe, but challenging environment for learners. The participation of the learners is encouraged without force, and errors are tolerated.
- Inter-subjectivity emphasizes mutual engagement among all parties in the interaction.
- Contingency means that elements in the activity can be changed, not fixed or scripted, and is able to be changed based on a moment by moment situation to handle a problem at hand.
- Handover refers to when the expert is aware when to hand over the task to the novice when the novice shows signs of being ready for part of the task.
- Flow is actions which all participants are jointly orchestrated so that the interaction flows in a natural way. The contribution comes from all participants.

Furthermore, scaffolding requires that the support ceases immediately once the learner has learned to master this skill. Such support is often provided by an expert (Salem, 2016:98) such as parents, teachers and peers. Samana (2013:339) provides different degrees of scaffolding. In this regard, it can take place through expert adults. For instance, in the classroom, teachers become the expert adults. Additionally, learners can also scaffold each other. The bottom line, nonetheless, is that regardless of who provides scaffolding, the role of the expert becomes important in the learning process as this expert facilitates and enhances the rate at which this process takes place (Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011:50; Salem, 2016:98).

When it is carried out correctly, scaffolding enhances learning and improves the will to engage in self-initiated activities (Salem, 2016:98) such FVR. In addition, the study by Pishghadam and Ghardiri (2011) revealed that scaffolding improves learners' performance in reading

comprehension. In a comparative study conducted in Italy, Samana (2013) found that scaffolding was done by teachers to improve students' performance in the EFL classroom. Finally, in their study in Canada, Gagne and Parks (2013:195) noted the increased success rate in the instances where scaffolding was used.

2.5.3. To determine the school conditions suitable for the use of Free Voluntary Reading approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners at a rural high school

First, for the optimal functioning of FVR as an approach to improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners at a rural high school, the school must provide a print-rich environment. The typical print-rich environment consists of sufficient equipment for reading and writing, as well as functional signs and symbols that stimulate and attract learners' attention (Neuman, 2004:91). According to Nassimbeni and Desmond (2011:98), learners must be exposed to this environment throughout their primary and secondary education. In this case, it is essential for the classroom in which FVR is administered to be well-resourced with learning materials such as books (Su, 2008:75). According to the comprehension hypotheses (Krashen, 2004), for FVR to be successful, there are essential conditions in such a classroom. These include ensuring that the input is abundantly available, comprehensible and slightly above students' current level of competence (Renandya, 2007:135).

In their study in Taiwan, Ying Lee and Krashen (1996) found that well-designed and resourced print environment contributed positively to the amount of free reading undertaken by Taiwanese learners. In a comparative study by Blachowicz and Ogle (2008) cited in Paton-Ash and Wilmont (2015:2) reported that learners from print-rich environments performed better than their counterparts who came from the opposite environments.

Second, for FVR to function and to be successfully implemented, the existence of a functional library at a school is important. The literature provides different models for school libraries. These include Classroom libraries, including shared classroom libraries, permanent libraries or mobile library collections of various types of serving clusters of school, and centralised (traditional) school libraries (Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:85).

Regardless of the model a particular school adopts, a functional school library remains important for teaching and learning. In their school library manifesto in 2000, International Federation of Library and Information Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) jointly expressed the following:

> The school library is essential to every long term strategy for literacy, education, information provision and economic, social and cultural development.

Similarly, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in South Africa summarised the importance of the functional school library in the following manner:

> Much research in developing and developed countries has focused on the factors which, when employed effectively, can improve the outcomes of learners. Many of these investigations pointed to the positive causal relationship between performance of learners and the provision of school libraries. In a major international study, for instance, researchers concluded that, all other things being equal, student performance increases by between ten and twenty-five per cent when a stalked, staffed and fully-funded library is in operation within a school (Equal Education, 2010:64b)

Firstly, the school library inculcates the culture of reading (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:63; Yaji, Dala & Danburam, 2017:30) among learners. It is very important for learners to develop the reading habit as it is likely to impact positively on their reading achievement (Yaji *et al*., 2017:30). In this regard, the results of a recent study by Clark (2010) in the USA indicated a significant relationship between reading attainment and school library use. In another study, Krashen, Lee and McQuillan (2012:26) state that access to school library was a significant prediction of scores on the PIRLS test written by learners from over forty countries. For this to happen, the school library exposes learners to a wide variety of information and a plethora of reading materials. Also in its collection, a functional school library is able to cater for different learners by providing a diverse subject matter (Paton-Ash &Wilmont, 2015:2). In its 2006 School Library Manifesto, UNESCO calls for school libraries to provide each school learner with the minimum number of ten books. With a variety of interesting books to choose

from in the school library, learners and teachers are more likely to engage in FVR (Da Souza, 2010:37; Krashen, 2016:2).

Secondly, the functional school library assists in addressing challenges of poor achievement and poor reading comprehension. According to Jager, Nassimbeni and Underwood (2007:137), making the school library functional may contribute to addressing problems of illiteracy, poor performance in mathematics and science in a developing country like South Africa. This can be achieved when this library caters for learners' needs to read for pleasure (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:59; Lo & Tsang, 2009:20). When this is realised, the school library plays a significant role in addressing reading and comprehension problems (Yaji *et al.,* 2017:33). Consequently, learners demonstrate the improved reading, writing and comprehension skills (Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011:98). Such improvement results from the observation that learners whose school has a functional library tend to read more than their counterparts whose school library is non-existent or dysfunctional (Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006: 734; Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011:96; Krashen, Lee & McQuillan, 2012:27).

Thirdly, the functional school library plays a significant role in changing learners' attitude towards reading in general and FVR in particular. In this case, Yaji *et al.,* (2017:34) state that the school library impacts positively on learners' attitudes towards reading (Yaji *et al*., 2017:34). For instance, the recent study by Clark (2010) in the USA found that young learners who use libraries hold positive attitudes towards reading. In another study, Nassimbeni and Desmond (2011) also found that learners became more interested in reading compared to others whose school library could be labelled as dysfunctional. Similarly, the development of positive attitude towards reading is important for successful implementation of FVR approach. For example, Liem (2005) reported that the success of the six computer science students in Vietnam could be attributed to the positive attitudes these learners had towards the additional language administered during the FVR sessions. Likewise, Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009:383) conducted a comparative study in Saudi Arabia and the results indicated that the success of FVR could be attributed to the participants' "…more positive attitudes toward reading."

Finally, the functional school library is central in supporting the school curriculum (Mojapelo & Dube, 2014:8). In some cases, it serves as a resource centre for curriculum delivery at a high school (Mojapelo, 2015). In other cases, it assists by providing material necessary for some parts of school curriculum (Lo & Tsang, 2009:20). In other words, the fully equipped and functional libraries enable these stakeholders to execute the curriculum related activities. In this regard, a functional school library initiates reading programmes whose emphasis is on the development of the following capabilities:

● Resource-based capabilities: abilities and dispositions related to seeking, accessing and evaluating resources in a variety of formats, including people and cultural artefacts as sources. These capabilities also include using information technology tools to seek out, access and evaluate these sources, and the development of digital and print-based literacies.

● Thinking-based capabilities: abilities and dispositions that focus on substantive engagement with data and information through research and inquiry processes, processes of higher order thinking and critical analysis that lead to the creation of representations/products that demonstrate deep knowledge and deep understanding.

● Knowledge-based capabilities: research and inquiry abilities and dispositions that focus on the creation, construction and sharing the products of knowledge that demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding.

● Reading and literacy capabilities: abilities and dispositions related to the enjoyment of reading, reading for pleasure, reading for learning across multiple platforms, and the transformation, communication and dissemination of text in its multiple forms and modes to enable the development of meaning and understanding.

● Personal and interpersonal capabilities: the abilities and dispositions related to social and cultural participation in resource-based inquiry and learning about oneself and others as researchers, information users, knowledge creators, and responsible citizens.

● Learning management capabilities: abilities and dispositions that enable students to prepare for, plan and successfully undertake a curriculum-based inquiry unit (IFLA, 2015, 17–18).

In addition to the above roles, the following objectives are central to the functional school library:

- To support the teaching and educational work of the school by supplementing classroom work with further reading.
- To equip students with skills that will enable them to learn more effectively through using the variety of materials held within the library.
- To develop in students the habit of reading both for pleasure and for the purpose of gathering information which is not taught as part of the curriculum.
- To develop in students an enquiring mind that will continue to prompt them to use the library later in life (Herring (1986) cited in Mutungi, Minishi-Majanja & Mnkeni-Saurombe, 2014:154).

The following factors need to be considered for a school library to become functional:

- Comfortable seating-the library should have comfortable seating, which includes carpenting, chairs, tables, etc.
- Sufficient number of books- that is five to six copies per child.
- Sufficient area-where a small community of readers should be able to occupy the area.
- Literature and promotion (theme-oriented displays and props)- such as bulletin boards, displays, posters and book jackets, which relate to the books should be attractively exhibited under a regular basis (Lo & Tsang, 2009:22).

Therefore, the availability of well-trained teacher-librarians and school librarians in a high school is also necessary for the successful implementation of FVR approach. It is important for a school library to be managed by a qualified librarian (Evans, 2014:107). For one to become a teacher-librarian, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) put a recognized teaching qualification and a qualification in librarianship as one of the pre-requisites (Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:85). According to De Souza (2010:36), schools that are run by well-trained and suitably qualified librarians perform better than their counterparts.

Whether school or teacher-librarians, they both play a central role in the management and functionality of a school library. In this regard, they are tasked with providing an environment conducive for teaching and learning (Small, 2018:8). In this case, a free and well-designed

learning space such as the library is key for successful implementation and functioning of FVR and other curriculum obligations (Mojapelo & Dube, 2014:8).

Another role played by these stakeholders involves ensuring collaboration and enhancing relations amongst the community, teachers and learners (Burns et al., 2016:101) when it comes to issues affecting reading. Consequently, this impacts positively on both the functioning and implementation of FVR. To demonstrate this, the findings of the study conducted by Sheldon and Davis (2015) noted the improvement in relations and collaboration between the learners and the school librarian. This resulted in the increased likelihood of learners using the library for curriculum related activities, such as research and free voluntary reading.

Moreover, while ensuring their involvement in pedagogical activities such as curriculum delivery and support, (Ash-Argyle & Shoham, 2012:1; Mojapelo, 2015; Burns, 2018:55), school librarians are also concerning themselves with social well-being of other stakeholders at a high school. For instance, the study conducted by Soulen and Wine (2018) in the USA established that through their expressions of empathy and encouragement, school librarians contributed positively to the teachers' resilience. In addition to teaching learners about media and information, both teacher-librarians and school librarians are responsible for motivating learners to engage in reading programmes such as FVR (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:63; Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:85).

Lastly, considering the significant roles they play in FVR in particular and reading in general, as well as in the ever changing library environment, the impact of both teacher and school librarians' attitude on these two processes is important. In the recent past, school libraries and school librarians were tasked with providing learners with reading materials. Nowadays, however, this role has since changed to include placing learners' needs at the centre (Ash-Argyle & Shoham, 2012:3). This includes catering for learners' values, attitudes and promoting critical thinking and creativity (Yaji *et al.*, 2017:34), as well as being aware of classroom pedagogical practices (Burns, 2018:55). Furthermore, by adopting positive attitude, they also assist in attracting new readers while retaining existing ones (Paton-Ash & Wilmont, 2015:2) in the school library, in turn promoting FVR. Moreover, in the USA, a study by Sheldon and Davis (2015:vi) found that teachers attributed the increased number of learners who use the

school library to the good relations and positive attitude that developed between the school librarian and themselves.

As a matter of fact, the existence of effective leadership also enhances the optimal functioning of FVR in a rural high school. In this case, the school's principal plays a central role in the development of a school library, which is important for FVR. The principal is in control of the finances and budget of the entire school. As a result, he or she has the latitude to buy the resources needed for the functional school library, as well as the appointment of qualified personnel who can manage this library effectively (Paton-Ash & Wilmont, 2015:2). With this in mind, it is also important for such a principal to possess characteristics and skills for strong leadership (Mackey, Pitcher & Decman, n.d.,39). These skills and characteristics play a significant role in enhancing relations and collaboration between teachers and the school librarian (Ash-Argyle & Shoham, 2012:1). For them to be effective, school librarians must collaborate with other stakeholders (Burns, Howard & Kimmel, 2016:101). In this regard, Kachel (2018:48) cautions that unless the principal exercises this responsibility, the collaboration between these two stakeholders is bound to fail. In some instances, this is due to the low regard with which school librarians are held by their teacher-colleagues (Shandu, Evans & Mostert, 2014:14). In other instances, school librarians are undermined because they are not viewed as partners in the educational process (Ash-Argyle & Shoham, 2012:4).

In addition to the skills and characteristics, the study by Ash-Argyle and Shoham (2012) established that effective communication between the school principal and all stakeholders is an important factor contributing to improvements in learner achievements. In the case of FVR, this finding places communication at the centre of the relationship between the principal and school librarian. It is through this effective communication that these two stakeholders may agree on the frequency of library use (Ash-Argyle & Shoham, 2012:4). With such agreement in place, the FVR session could be properly designed and administered.

Besides possessing effective communication skills, Mackey *et al.*, (n.d,52) identified three concepts by which school principals may add value to the school reading programmes such as FVR. These include the principals' vision of the reading programme, the educational background the principal brings with him or her, and how the principal defines and applies his or her role as an instructional leader within the school.

In the same study in USA, Mackey *et al.*, (n.d.52) found that there is a positive relationship between the three concepts and student reading scores.

2.5.4. Identifying possible barriers that may impede the use of free voluntary reading approach in improving reading comprehension for English first additional language learners

❖ *Lack of functional school libraries*

The first barrier hampering the successful use of FVR is the lack of school libraries. While fully aware of their role in promoting reading, South Africa suffers from a dearth of functional school libraries. As recent as 2011, more than seventy percent of schools in South Africa lacked libraries (DBE, 2011a:23). Where they exist, only seven percent of school libraries in this country are functional (Evans, 2014:107; Mojapelo, 2015:36). The other remaining school libraries are in a dire state. According to NEEDU 2012 report, many school libraries remain under-resourced (NEEDU, 2013:42). In their recent study in Gauteng Province, Paton-Ash and Wilmont (2015) observed that some school libraries lack books, while others have books which are either old or unappealing to learners' interests. In this case, learners' choice of books is limited. This hampers the established fact that the more access learners have to books, the more they engage in free voluntary reading (Krashen, 2012:27). In other words, the use of FVR is impeded by an under-resourced school library.

In many cases, school libraries are under-staffed and managed by unqualified people (Sheldon & Davis, 2015:1). One study conducted in the Katlehong Township established that only twenty-nine percent of the schools in the area employed qualified teacher-librarians (Shandu *et al.,* 2014:14). As a result, teacher-librarians lack necessary library skills (Mojapelo & Fourie, 2014:125). For instance, the study by Shandu et al., (2014) found that seventy one percent of teachers manage school libraries without acquiring necessary professional skills. In an attempt to arrest the situation, schools resort to appointing a full-time teacher to manage the school library during his or her 'spare time' (Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:88). Consequently, they struggle to guide learners into accessing functional information (Yaji *et al.*, 2017:33) and reading materials for FVR.

This state of desperation that school libraries face is further exacerbated by the little attention school leaders give to the importance of such facilities within their schools (Ash-Argyle & Shoham, 2012:4). Another contributing factor is that there is no national policy pertaining to libraries in South African schools (Mojapelo, 2015:36).This happens despite the six consecutive drafts and propositions for a national policy since 1997 (EE, 2010:1). Adding to this, in 2012 the DBE published what it calls the National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services (DBE, 2012). These national guidelines fail to effect any changes in the current situation because they are not legally binding on the education department to ensure that each school has a functional library. Moreover, the recent amendment to the South African Schools Act (SASA) (No.84 of 1996) to make provision for all schools to have a library facility or media centre facility or library stocks (DBE, 2015:11) has its shortcomings. In this case, it remains silent on issues pertaining to provision of reading materials and staffing in school libraries (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:65; Mojapelo, 2016:62).

The challenge of inadequate and dysfunctional school libraries extends beyond the South African borders. In Nigeria, the study by Yaji *et al*., (2017:30) reported on the lack of functional school libraries. These authors also noted the wide-spread lack of equipment and information resources throughout the country's school libraries. Similarly, in their study scrutinising the status of school libraries in Kenya, Mutungi *et al*., (2014:150) found that school libraries are under-resourced.

The issue of understaffed school libraries and unqualified teacher-librarians is also a reality in other countries. For instance, the results of the study by Ash-Argyle and Shoham (2012) in Israel indicated that the inadequately qualified librarians were perceived to have low levels of advanced cooperation. Due to lack of training, there was no clear understanding of the duties and obligations of teacher-librarians in Ethopia. The posts for school libraries are occupied by unqualified teachers in Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:87).

The factors discussed above are not specific only to South Africa. The results of the study by Ash-Argyle and Shoham (2012) in Israel revealed that school principals lack understanding and knowledge about the importance of a school library and its role in contributing to teaching and learning. Similar observation was made in Ethiopia (Boelens & Van Dam,

2012:87). In Botswana, Boelens and Van Dam (2012) report that the problem of staffing in school libraries is common place.

Calls were made to the Kenyan government to develop national policy regulating and support school libraries. However, such calls were ignored. This resulted in the sustained challenge of inadequate resources in the school libraries across the country. In other parts of the country, school libraries lack infrastructure such as computers (Mutungi *et al*., 2014:150). In the DRC, the lack of nationwide government policy regulating school libraries resulted in the appointment of teacher-librarians despite being computer illiterate (Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:86).

Under the conditions similar to the ones discussed above, whether in South Africa or elsewhere in the world, getting learners to read as much as possible and become lifelong readers as FVR demands becomes difficult (Astuti, 2014:43). In fact, these conditions result in low literacy levels (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:58).This, ultimately fails to improve learners' reading comprehension.

❖ *Inadequately trained teachers of EFAL as a challenge*

The issue of inadequately trained teachers of EFAL is the second challenge facing FVR in high schools. While they may be well-trained in other aspects of teaching language, EFAL teachers still face the challenge of teaching reading comprehension due to insufficient training (Makiwane-Mazinyo & Pillay, 2017; Malda, Nel & Van de Vijver, 2014). I am on the view that both institutions of higher learning, such as former teacher colleges and universities and the DBE are at fault here. On the one hand, the curriculum taught in these institutions does not cover the content on how to teach reading comprehension to EFAL learners. In fact, the literacy intervention programmes found in many South African universities are skewed towards the traditional approaches to English academic development (Millin, 2015:105). On the other hand, the DoE also fails to address this issue, despite the diagnostic reports pointing to many learners struggling with reading comprehension.

❖ *The use of traditional instructional strategies*

The third challenge facing FVR is that teachers are reluctant to adopt the interactive instructional strategies such FVR and other approaches that require them to "…move beyond a mere content" (Andreassen & Brate, 2011:521). The teaching of reading comprehension in South African classrooms still centers on the use of traditional instructional practices such as rote learning, verbatim recall and oral modes of information dissemination (Pretorius, 2002). This happens despite the realization of the need to move beyond the generic approaches to teaching and learning (Mathieson, 2012:549). In most cases, learners are only taught to engage with text at a superficial level (Granville, 2001:15). The EFAL teachers focus on teaching learners the decoding skills (Machet & Olen, 1996:2; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:1) at the expense of reading comprehension. According to Bertram (2006:7), the good decoding skills do not automatically translate to reading comprehension. Studies have pointed to the ineffectiveness of direct instruction on teaching and learning of an additional language. For example, in their study in South Africa, Machet and Olen (1996:2) found that the use of learner-centred practices such as FVR are more effective than direct instruction.

Moreover, the use of traditional methods in the classroom perpetuates the challenge of learners who struggle with reading (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008:346; Makiwane-Mazinyo & Pillay, 2017:10453), comprehending and writing. Additionally, it hampers learners' ability to master the three levels of comprehension. Zimmerman and Smit (2014:1) point to the failure by teachers to contextualise the teaching of reading comprehension and other reading skills. Another observation is the failure by learners to "…demonstrate key skills associated with literacy…" (DoE, 2008b). This reinforces the view that poor teaching of reading comprehension " …can impact negatively on learners' ability to make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, as well as examining and evaluating content using the language of learning and teaching" (Foncha, Mafumo & Abongdia, 2017:8763).

Similar observations are made internationally. For instance, the Norwegian schools still limit the teaching of reading comprehension to asking learners about text content after reading. In America and Europe, teachers resort to asking learners about the contents of the text they

have read (Andreassen & Brate, 2011:520).The teachers' reluctance to engage Malawian learners in FVR included the following reasons:

- Prioritising time: Teachers consider their main purpose is to help students pass the examination.

- Attitudes to fiction: Some teachers consider that fiction is not appropriate to formal education.

- Teaching styles: Teachers are reluctant to engage in one -to-one assistance.

- Difficulty of the books: A major reason for underuse was that much of the language (especially vocabulary) of the books was not known to the students (Williams, 2007:75).

❖ *The use of English as the medium of instruction*

The fourth challenge facing the success of FVR involves the use of English as an additional language. While recognising the other eleven official languages, English remains the *lingua franca* in South Africa. This situation is aggravated by the fact that mother-tongue is left in the periphery. In fact, learners in this country spend only three years reading and learning in their mother-tongue (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:61). In other words, the remaining nine years of schooling are spent learning almost all subjects in English. This continues despite the evidence that non-native speakers of English require between five and eight years of learning English before they can use it as a language of teaching and learning (Heugh, 2005:7; Cruickshank, 2006:140; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007:51).

In light of the above facts, exposing learners to English as an additional language and *lingua franca* before Grade seven impacts negatively on their learning. Firstly, learning in an additional language has a negative impact on learners' motivation to read (Fields, 2017:198). According to Heyd-Metzuyanim (2013) cited in Mulaudzi (2016:164) learners in EFAL classes in South Africa are reluctant to participate in learning activities such as FVR, as a result of learning in English. In some cases, this may result from the negative attitudes learners might have towards learning in an additional language. Such negative attitude is intensified by the limited availability of books written in learners' indigenous languages in school libraries (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:62). Many publishers' reluctance to publish books in vernacular

adds to this problem (Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011:99). The limited access to reading materials written in their mother-tongues makes them reluctant to participate in FVR.

In other cases, psychological problems such as the anxiety these learners experience when they are learning in the additional language come to the fore. Anxiety can be understood in terms of its dimensions. The first dimension involves the reaction of additional learners to situations, information and stimuli perceived as threatening. The second dimension is described in terms of the observable physiological symptoms such as dry mouth, pounding of heart, etc. The last dimension of anxiety is understood by the presence of features such as irritable and impatient behaviours associated with people avoiding threatening situations (Baran-Lucarz, 2014:452).

Studies have shown the impact of different types of anxiety in the educational settings. Internationally, studies have shown the challenges that are encountered by learners who learn through English as a Foreign Language (FL) or Second Language (L2), especially where it is regarded as the Medium of Instruction (MI), as it is the case in many countries. The first challenge which affects the additional learners in the classroom is known as Pronunciation Anxiety (PA). Baran-Lucarz (2014:453) defines PA as:

> A multi-dimensional construct referring to the feeling of apprehension experienced by non-native speakers in oral-communicative situations, due to negative or low pronunciation of self-concept and to beliefs and fears related to pronunciation. Its occurrence is evidenced by the typical cognitive, physiological/somatic and behavoural symptoms of anxiety.

What is clear from this definition is the notion that PA is caused by low self-confidence which results from self-perception of additional learners' competence in the English language. The findings of the study by Baran-Lucarz (2014:460) in Poland observed that learners who have high levels of PA are less likely to participate in a range of activities such as reading and speaking in EFAL classrooms.

Moreover, in demonstrating the first dimension of anxiety (see above) and how it impacts on EFAL in the classroom, Indriani (2016:97) reveals the findings of the study in which the

additional language learners' active participation was thwarted by their reluctance to speak in class because they felt "…inadequate in front of others". In addition to PA, there are other language specific anxieties. These include listening (comprehension) anxiety, writing (apprehension) anxiety, reading anxiety, speaking anxiety, and grammar anxiety (Baran-Lucarz, 2014:452).

Lastly, the insufficient exposure to the additional language often renders learners incompetent in that language. While in many cases these learners master decoding skills, they struggle with necessary comprehension skills in English (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:2). Consequently, the EFAL classrooms are full of learners who struggle to read (Makiwane-Mazinyo & Pillay, 2017:10453; Van Wyk & Louw, 2008:346). According to Machet and Tiemensma (2009:61), when learners view themselves as incompetent in an additional language, they are less likely to engage in FVR.

The same findings have been documented by international researchers. As is the case in Thailand, EFAL learners in South Africa lack the necessary skills to master reading comprehension (Ninsuwan, n.d.:1836). Similar observation is made among the Iranian learners (Rahimi & Ghanbari, 2011:1072). Other studies such as the study by Zarrinabadi, Ketabi and Abdi (2014:216) report that some learners refused to actively participate in the whole-class activities because they felt that other learners "… were linguistically superior to them." In a study conducted by Bautista and Marulanda (2018) in Colombia, poor vocabulary impacted negatively on students' attitude towards FVR and reading in general. Edstrom (2013:294) also adds that proficiency levels and interactional styles of learners impact on their willingness to participate in the learning activities such as FVR. Similarly, Bautista and Marulanda (2018:52) point to learners' poor proficiency in English which discourages them to engage in FVR. These findings further concur with the earlier findings of the study where Amoutenya (2002:53) indicated that proficiency in English impedes active participation because Zambian learners could not express themselves clearly in that language. Similar problems were experienced in Tanzanian secondary schools (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004:67).

In summary, this situation hinders the success of FVR because it requires learners who possess positive attitudes and who are motivated to read. Also, research has shown that for FVR to be successful, it needs learners who are competent in the medium of instruction.

❖ *Low self-efficacy of teachers and learners as a challenge*

The fifth challenge that can hinder the success of FVR involves both teachers' and learners' self-efficacy. Protheroe (2008:45) distinguishes between personal teaching efficacy and general teaching efficacy. While the personal teaching efficacy focuses on the teacher's belief and confidence in his or her ability to teach, the general teaching efficacy involves the faith the teacher has on the ability of teaching to reach struggling learners (Maja, 2015:42). While high self-efficacy can promote learning in general and participation in FVR in particular, it can also hinder the success of FVR. According to Maja (2015:46), teachers with low self-efficacy engage in the following behaviours which may impact negatively on FVR. These teachers may use more authoritative or restrictive methods when dealing with challenging behaviours, devote time to non-academic matters, criticise learners for their failures, and give up on learners who do not succeed quickly.

Learners' self-efficacy plays a role in promoting their participation in the learning process, and it can also hinder such participation. The findings of the study conducted by Tsawani, Harding, Engelbrecht and Maree (2014:45) in South Africa indicated that learners from the low performing rural schools stated that the low expectations their peers had of them discouraged them from participating actively in learning. Similar results were reported in the study in Zambia where Amoutenya (2002:67) reported that learners indicated that their peers laughed at them when they attempted to participate in the learning activities. As a result, they assumed the passive role of just listening to the teachers.

❖ *Poverty and rurality*

The sixth challenge facing the success of FVR is poverty. Owing to the racially segregating laws, there still exist two worlds in South Africa. The first one is the affluent world with resources and facilities. Another world, however, is characterised by lack of resources and

facilities such as school libraries. This situation leaves eighty-five per cent of the country's citizens without access to library resources (Partners, 2006 cited in Nassimbeni& Desmond, 2011:96). In fact, there are virtually no libraries in the former homelands (Hart, 2010:81). For instance, the recent study in Limpopo found that only ten per cent of the province's population has access to library services (Mojapelo& Fourie, 2014:125).

Such a situation has had a negative impact on the larger communities in which learners live. Firstly, the culture of reading has been severely hampered. This is because many parents remain illiterate and they lack the literacy skills to assist their children develop the necessary skills (Machet and Tiemensma, 2009:62) to improve reading comprehension in English. Secondly, the issue of parental involvement in the education of their children is affected negatively. According to Singh *et al.* (2004:303), non-involvement of parents from rural areas put learner performance in general and active participation in particular, at jeopardy. In cases where parental involvement was taken for granted, Wells (1996, cited in Singh *et al.,* 2004:303) found that a large number of teachers blamed the school's poor performance and low levels of participation of learners squarely on the ignorance and the absence of parents.

In other instances, the impact of poverty extends beyond learners' homes. It affects learners' performance negatively at school. The researchers, Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004:303) in one rural learning ecology found that the conditions in some homes of learner participants in that study were not conducive for studying. Additionally, although his report focused on the learner participation in the After-School Programs in the Western Cape, Prinsloo (2008 cited in Mokoena, 2017:53) found that half of the learner participants in his study shared a small room with other family members. In other words, rural and poor homes fail to provide learners with the quite space for learning and reading (Rasan, 2006:179).These observations from these three respective studies demonstrate the conditions under which majority of rural learners live. The failure by homes, schools and communities to inculcate the culture of reading in learners impacts negatively on learners' willingness to develop reading habits and participate in FVR (Machet&Tiemensma, 2009:59).

At school, poverty manifests itself in the form of lack of funds. In South Africa there is no legislated and approved school library policy pertaining to funding of school libraries (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:65). As a result, schools are not legally obliged to allocate funds for

libraries services. For instance, in their study in Katlehong, Shandu et al., (2014) identified lack of funding as a challenge to the provision of library services by the schools around this township. In another study in Limpopo, Mojapelo (2016) found that due to lack of building facilities and dysfunctional libraries, only a handful of schools offer library services. In addition to limited resources, dilapidated buildings are a commonplace in many rural high schools. Mojapelo (2016:65) asserts that poverty has left many schools with insufficient classrooms and dilapidated buildings.

Internationally, according to Krashen (2016:2), learners who live and study in impoverished conditions do not have sufficient reading materials. Mugambi (2015:554) makes similar assertion about Kenya. Furthermore, the studies conducted in rural communities of the US show that these learners are exposed to limited book at their homes and schools (Krashen, 2004). In Kenya, the socio-economic status of rural parents was found to be another contributory factor to lack of access to reading materials (Mugambi, 2015:554). Similar observation was made in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where lack of funding led to the building of small library with limited books. And in Botswana, a lack of financial support impeded on the training of school-librarians (Boelens& Van Dam, 2012:86). In Australia learners blamed their home conditions for their lack of voluntary reading at home (Velluto & Barbousas, 2017:3).

In addition, Hofmeyr (2018:3) points to the close association that exists between the child's household composition and the child's educational outcomes. In other words, the home conditions hinder the success of FVR. In rural areas homes fail to provide a print-rich environment. In some cases, there is not enough space available for children to engage in FVR while at home. Adding to this, the illiterate parents further impact negatively on the children's motivation to engage in FVR.

Lastly, the limited budgets that rural schools face also deteriorate the situation. The provision of FVR becomes difficult because these schools struggle to allocate funds for libraries. In some cases, these schools fail to fill in the library posts. In other cases, full-time teachers are appointed to be responsible for school libraries. Furthermore, the limited funds contribute immensely to the shortage of resources in the school libraries. In some instances, schools fail

to buy any interest books for FVR purposes. In other instances, they resort to using old and outdated books for FVR. All these issues hamper the success of FVR.

In summary, whether the poverty is experienced in the community, home or school, it has negative consequences for FVR. Rural communities lack information because of limited access to libraries. Consequently, there is a continuous increase of illiteracy in these communities. Also, inculcating the culture of reading becomes problematic for rural communities. In such situations it becomes difficult for FVR to flourish.

2.6.1. Strategies used to circumvent the above challenges

❖ *Strategies used in South Africa*

According to Foncha *et al.,* (2017:8764), there is a need to pay attention to the classroom teaching of reading. In this case, the recent study in South Africa by Makiwane-Mazinyo and Pillay (2017) recommends that EFAL teachers need to be trained to teach reading. These researchers further state that teachers also need to be equipped with the necessary skills they can use to encourage learners to engage in FVR. Teachers also need to understand what reading comprehension entails. Van Wyk and Louw (2008:346) distinguish the three levels of comprehension. On the level of comprehending factual content, the learner is expected to recall and evaluate information in terms of its importance. The observation in the EFAL classrooms is that emphasis is on sub-skills and other technical strategies such as word recognition, phonics, etc. (Granville, 2001:15).

The next level of comprehension focuses on the interpretation of content. The expectation here is that the EFAL learner is able to identify the main idea and make assumptions based on the content of the text. This is followed by the ability to draw conclusions and evaluating the message and content of the text. However, the reality in many South African EFAL classrooms is that teachers assume that by mastering of decoding skills, the EFAL learners will master reading comprehension (Pretorious & Currin, 2010, cited in Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:21).

On the last level of comprehension, the emphasis is on analysis and application of what is learnt from the text. At this level, the EFAL learner is expected to make informed and reasonable decisions about what he or she has learnt from the text. This happens with the intention of making informed decision about how the content of the text apply to the real life events and scenarios (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008:247).

The implementation of the National Reading Strategy (NRS) in 2008 was another step towards promoting reading across the country. Specifically, it was aimed at improving reading competence among all the learners (Mensah *et al.,* 2017:18749).The strategy identified six focus areas requiring attention. These include teacher competency, libraries, teaching conditions, print environment, language issues, and inclusive education (Department of Education, 2008:8-10).

The formulation and the implementation of a national policy regulating school libraries has been proposed as a panacea for challenges facing school libraries in South Africa. The existence of such a policy would compel principals and governing bodies to ensure functional libraries in schools (Paton-Ash & Wilmont, 2015:1). The functional libraries are well-stocked and they expose learners to a wide variety of interesting reading material and functional information services for academic and pleasure purposes (Mojapelo & Dube, 2014:8).

In an attempt to respond to calls for legislation, KwaZulu Natal (KZN) DBE developed a provincial policy- the School Library Policy of 2003. According to this policy, a school may adopt a centralised model of a library where learners can collect reading materials and other related resources from a central venue. Another school may use a classroom model where an individual classroom is used for collection and storage of reading material. The last model is that a school may follow a cluster where key locations are designated for collection of reading materials.

This provincial department also developed the KZN Reading Policy Guidelines in 2005. At the centre of these guidelines is expectation that schools in the province develop a Reading Programme for academic and FVR purposes (KZN DoE, 2010:6).

Following on the example set by the provincial department, the national DBE then passed what it terms the National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services in 2012.

According to Mojapelo (2015:44) having a national policy regulating school libraries serves the following functions, among others:

- [It serves as]…the foundation on which the development of the school library is built.
- It focuses on the effective utilisation of library and information-based resources to support the curriculum and promotion of life-long and independent reading and learning.
- It clarifies the aims, vision and objectives for the existence of the school library.

Attempts have been made to address the issue of unqualified librarians and teacher-librarians in South Africa. In this regard, the recently published KZN Reading Policy Guidelines of 2005 call for the training of teacher-librarians. This policy further recommends that trained librarians involve other stakeholders in the creation of literacy policy for each school (Evans, 2014:109). In other instances, the partnership between EE and University of Western Cape (UWC) is another step towards addressing this challenge. In this case, the institutions' Department of Library and Information Science has embarked on a series of short courses aimed at training assistant librarians. Similarly, the School Library and Youth Services Interest Group (SLYSIG) under the auspices of Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) has been undertaking the training of teacher-librarians (Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:88).

In a South African study, Rasana (2006:175) states that schools and school librarians should take cognizance of the following factors if they want learners to engage in FVR. They should consider that learners:

- Do have preferred reading material.
- Have preferred authors.
- Have a preferred language they read in.

The pilot study attributed the low impact of the donated books in these very poor schools to insufficient training of teachers and principals in the value and use of books for voluntary reading. In the larger study, the book donation was accompanied in each case by extensive training of the class teachers receiving the books, based on principles derived from the pilot. The training covered the following topics:

- The benefits of reading for pleasure and for information

• Display of books

• How to promote and manage the borrowing of books by children

 • Ways of reading with children for enjoyment, including speculating, dramatising, drawing

• Ways to improve fluency and comprehension, e.g. paired reading, silent reading (Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011:97).

Lastly, recommendations have been made to address the lack of funding, which plagues school libraries. One such recommendation was put forth by ELTIS in 2003. It suggested that all schools should budget ten per cent of their allocated budget towards library development and services. It also proposed that school engage in fundraising activities (Evans, 2014:109).

In addressing the challenge of insufficient books and lack of positive learning environments, the Library and Information Services Transformation Charter is a document commissioned by Government with the brief to:

• Define the challenges facing the sector

• Provide a clear framework of principles and mechanisms for effecting the changes needed for the sector to contribute to the elimination of illiteracy and inequality and build an informed and reading nation' (The Library and Information Services Transformation Charter 2009:vii). In addition, Biblionef received a National Lottery grant to make book donations to 60 poorly resourced schools in four provinces. These included schools, each in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. Each school was given 300 books - 40% in English, and 60% in the mother tongue of the school.

❖ *Strategies used in other countries*

Similarly, the call for teachers to change their teaching techniques of reading comprehension extends beyond South African borders. The problem of teachers focusing only on teaching decoding skills was addressed in different ways. In Norway, the national curriculum dictates that teachers teach learners different strategies that improve the reading comprehension

(Andreassen & Brate, 2011:520). In other cases, McMaster *et al.* (2015:29) used the following factors to enhance EFAL learners' reading comprehension:

- Type of questions-To make meaningful connections between parts of the text, readers must identify the causal and logical relations among events.
- Causal questioning approach- Can be labour intensive, because it requires aligning questions with the causal structure of text and appropriately placing them to direct the readers' attention to information more relevant to establishing coherence.
- General questions- May not necessarily prompt connections among the most relevant text elements and thus, may not contribute to a coherent representation.

These researchers further advise that it is important for teachers to be cautious of the reasons that may impede reading comprehension. Learners may struggle because:

- They may not have (or efficiently access) relevant background knowledge.
- They may not make connections among relevant text-based information.
- They may not integrate background knowledge with text-based information to draw inferences.

Moreover, Denton *et al.*, (2015:82) found that the strategies that include the use of self-regulated learning strategies assisted in enhancing reading comprehension of US learners. Also, Astuti (2014:43) opined that the complexity of sentences should match the learners' language development. In a Japanese study, it was reported that reading simplified texts at the level of learners' linguistic competence was an effective strategy in enhancing reading comprehension (Beglar & Hunt, 2014:29). In this regard, Fields (2017:198) cautioned that the failure to simplify the language used in reading texts runs the risk of learners engaging in decoding the text. In Taiwan, teachers are encouraged to engage learners in a read-aloud activity. In this regard, Su (2008:76) states that "…[t]eachers should read aloud to their students a passage from the book they are reading and talk about why they chose to read it and what they like about it, since both listening to and discussing books is one way of encouraging learners to read".

In addressing the problem of dysfunctional libraries and lack of exposure to diverse reading materials in Kenya, Mugambi (2015:353) called for the strategies aimed at promoting reading

across the curriculum, as well as the establishment of fully equipped school libraries. In the USA, Mcquillan and Au (2001:225) called for increased opportunities for learners to have access to reading materials. In this case, these authors recognise the role that homes, school and communities could play in addressing this challenge.

Learners' access to reading materials has been found to promote the amount of reading learners may engage in. The study by Macquillan and Au (2001:225) established the positive relationship between increased access to reading materials and frequency of reading. Such a relationship has the potential to influence learners to become lifelong readers (Astuti, 2014:43). In 2009, the ABC project Kenya implemented school libraries mentorship programme in the country's Coast Province. This project was aimed at mentoring learners to develop reading habits in order to promote reading and access to a wide variety of reading material (Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:87). Donations of books to school libraries by international organisations have attempted to promote reading among Congolese learners (Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:86).

When addressing the challenge of learners' negative attitudes towards English as an additional language, the model for Acquisition and Development of Second language Reading Attitude proved useful. In order to change learners' attitude, learners should:

- Favour reading books in their native language.
- Have had a positive previous experience learning to read in a target language.
- Have a good perception of the target language, culture, and the people.
- Are in a positive [additional] language reading classroom environment with favourable teacher, classmate, and materials (Day & Bamford, 1998 cited in Ro & Chen, 2014:50).

In addition, Cho *et al.*, (2008:69) found FVR to be effective in mitigating learners' anxiety associated with learning in a foreign language. Their findings revealed less anxiety towards English and the improved interest and confidence of Korean learners towards this foreign language.

For teachers to deal with the problem of low self-efficacy of learners, Boerma, Mol and Jolles (2015:553) demand teachers to pay attention to what they call reading self-concept and reading task value. Reading self-concept involves recognition of a person's perceptions that result from his or her interactions and experiences with the environment. In this case,

teachers need to be mindful of reading activities they expose learners to. In other words, the more familiar the experiences expressed in the text are to the learners, the more likely the learners may prefer to read such reading material. On the basis of the familiar experiences, the learners' self-efficacy may improve.

Reading task value consists of intrinsic value and the importance of the task. The former involves learners' opinions in relation to their ability to the task to invoke their interests. The latter places an emphasis on the practical significance of the task and the subjective importance of fulfilling it successfully.

Researchers found motivation to be an effective strategy to address the problems associated with a lack of interest in reading. In fact, motivating learners to read is at the centre of teaching (Mucherah & Herendeen, 2013:569). In some cases, learners became more motivated when the teachers modelled the reading strategies (Parker & Hurry, 2007:299) and when they saw their teachers read too. In other words, observational learning could be used as effective strategies (Loh, 2009:93; Robson, Blampied & Walker, 2015:47). In the Netherlands, Boerma, Mol and Jolles (2015:549) found that motivated learners were more likely to engage in reading more diverse materials when compared with their counterparts. Their findings also revealed that those learners were confident about their reading skills.

Moreover, the findings of the study by Warrington and George (2014:67) revealed a strong overlap between reading attitudes and intrinsic motivation. In other words, motivation may assist in changing learners' attitudes towards reading. In their study in the USA, Ro and Chen (2014:4) found that learners' positive attitudes contributed to their improved interest in reading. Also, Boerma *et al.*, (2015:553) advice that the following factors about reading attitudes need to be considered:

- Specific reading experiences
- The readers' belief about the outcomes of reading
- The expectations of significant others

In Zambia, a new educational policy has been put in place. This policy resulted in the implementation of Primary Reading Programme (PRP). The aim of this policy is to improve reading levels and encourage learners to engage in FVR (Jere-Folotiya, Chansa-Kabali, Munachaka, Sampa, Yalukanda, Westerholm, Richardson, Serpell & Lyytenen, 2014:418).

2.7. Emerging issues: Lessons from the review of literature

Initially, it has emerged that FVR approach responds to the call for the use of interactive instructional strategies which are currently not in use in the EFAL classrooms across South Africa. The use of interactive strategies such as FVR in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension improves learners' academic performance. Also, the use of FVR contributes to inculcation of the culture of reading. There is also consistent evidence that FVR is effective for language acquisition

Furthermore, it has also emerged that for its optimal functioning, FVR requires EFAL learners to have freedom to select the text they want to read. It is also important for these learners to be motivated. On the one hand, FVR has been found to motivate learners to engage in reading. On the other hand, it has emerged that FVR requires self-motivated learners. In addition to motivation, the attitudes of EFAL learners towards reading and FVR need to be considered for this approach to succeed. Apart from the role learners play in making FVR succeeds, the literature has shown that the school must provide a print-rich environment. The typical print-rich environment consists of sufficient equipment for reading and writing, as well as functional signs and symbols that stimulate and attract learners' attention. This further involves ensuring the existence of a functional school library. Above all, the existence of effective leadership also enhances the optimal functioning of FVR in a rural high school.

Finally, the review of literature has revealed that FVR approach may not succeed where there are no functional libraries. Another issue that emerged is that when EFAL teachers are not adequately trained, the success of FVR approach may be limited. As a result of this derisory training, these teachers become reluctant to adopt the interactive instructional strategies such as FVR in the EFAL classrooms.

2.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a critical discussion of the free voluntary reading approach. The focus was on the need for this approach, its components, and the school conditions suitable for the functioning of this approach. Then, the focus shifted to the possible challenges faced by FVR both nationally and internationally. This was intertwined with the identification and discussion of remedies that have been used in South African high schools and high schools

elsewhere. The chapter ended with a concise discussion of issues emerging in the literature study and how those set the gap that this study aims to bridge. What has emerged in the chapter is that the FVR approach presents several opportunities for schools and EFAL learners. In this case, FVR calls for the use of more learner-centred methods in the EFAL classroom in order to assist learners to become independent and lifelong readers. Such a call is in line with both the country's educational initiatives and CAPS. In discussing the conditions conducive to the application of the FVR approach, the chapter has indicated the importance of functional libraries and training of EFAL teachers, among others.

The next chapter presents the research design and methodology used in demonstrating how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners in a rural high school.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY ON IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on reviewing the literature on FVR as an approach for enhancing reading comprehension for EFAL learners. However, it began by focusing on three theoretical frameworks, namely positivism, phenomenology and SCT. The attention was given to the origins, nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the rhetoric used in each of these theoretical frameworks. For the purpose of this study and the detailed justification, SCT was decided as a theoretical framework to couch this study towards the realisation of the main aim of recommending how FVR can be used as an approach for improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

This chapter focuses on discussing the design and methodology employed in this study. In this case, Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) is chosen as a methodology to generate data. As was the case in SCT (see chapter 2), the details are given about the origins, nature of reality, relationship between the researcher and the participants, role of the researcher, and the rhetoric used in PALAR. In addition, attention is given to the principles of PALAR and how they relate to SCT and this study. This is followed by the discussion on the suitability of PALAR as a methodology to generate data in this study.

Following this, the chapter focuses on research design. In this case, the discussion is on Free Attitude Interview (FAI), oral reflections and focus group discussion as methods employed in this study and their relevance to this study and SCT. Then, the participants in this study are profiled and their individual contributions in this research project are discussed. This is followed by the SWOT analysis as well as the discussion about the different stages of PALAR and how they are followed in this study and to what extent they support SCT as a theoretical

framework anchoring this study. The focus shifts to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the method of data analysis. This is followed by the justification for the use of CDA in this study. Before focusing on ethical considerations and their adherence in this study, the discussion starts by describing the research site. Finally, the summary of the whole chapter is given.

3.2. METHODOLOGY

This sub-section, discusses methodology used in this study.

3.2.1. Defining Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR)

Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) has been defined in a variety of ways. First, Zuber-Skerritt (2018:515) defines PALAR as "…a kind of action research that integrates various concepts and processes, including lifelong learning, collaborative action learning, participatory action research and action leadership." Similarly, PALAR has been defined as an approach which combines different genres of action research, as well as action learning (Wood, Louw & Zuber-Skerritt, 2017:123).   On the basis of these definitions, in this study, PALAR is understood as a research methodology which incorporates the tents of both AR and AL with the aim of ensuring equal participation and mutual creation of knowledge by all the stakeholders in a socially democratic and power-neutral research project.

3.2.2. Origins of PALAR

The origins of PALAR could be traced back to the works of two philosophies, namely PAR and AL (Cameron & Allen, 2013:139; Wood *et al.,* 2017:123). Alternatively, according to Zuber-Skerritt (2015:6), PARLA emerged from the partnership between ALAR and PAR researchers following the fourth ALARA conference in Colombia in 1997.

Lastly, origins of PALAR can be traced back to the need by researchers to challenge the traditional view of research. In this case, they challenged the sole existence of science as the only truth and acceptable knowledge. Secondly, they challenged the theory/practice of dualism. In this case, these researchers went to the reflexive process to decolonize themselves in the research process. Finally, these researchers challenged the notion of being secondary to logic and theory. Instead, they sought the methods which allow them to be sources of truth (Balankrishnan & Claiborne, 2017:186).

3.2.3. Epistemology of PALAR

As a methodological framework, PALAR is from the premise that there are different ways of knowing. These different ways involve putting people's experiences at the centre of knowledge construction. In other words, during this process, all co-researchers reflect and act critically on their concrete experiences of the social issue under study (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015:8; Schiller, Jaffray, Ridley & Du Plessis, 2018:3; Wessels & Wood, 2019:3). These critical reflection and action are characterized by collaboration, trust and team building (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:519). The mutually constructed knowledge is aimed at effecting social and educational change, as well as empowerment through democratic means and participation (Cloete & Delport, 2015:86; Wood *et. al*., 2017:123).

In this study, the co-researchers brought their different experiences in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. The PALAR methodology enabled us to reflect on the current poor state of teaching and learning of reading comprehension and act on effecting the necessary change. Through equal participation and inclusion, in our team of co-researchers, we were able to share our experiences and ultimately devised a framework for improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners through the use of FVR approach.

3.2.4. Ontology of PALAR

While the traditional and conventional paradigms argue for the existence of single view of reality, PALAR advocates for the existence of multiple realities. In other words, it"… appreciates questions and seeks answers from new angle" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2012:2). This manifests in the inclusion of the marginalized and voiceless members of the society (Green & Kearney, 2011:55; Fox & Fine, 2015:47; Fletcher, Mcphee & Dickson, 2015:1). Through their participation as co-researchers, these community members bring, reflect and act on their diverse realities, personal and communal experience (Helyer, 2015).

The participants in this study were EFAL teachers and learners at one rural high school. Undoubtedly, both teachers and learners bring different experiences into the classroom, which impact on the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. The same was also true in this research project. By virtue of coming from different communities and each bringing

their unique personal and communal experiences, this study created a platform where these stakeholders expressed their different realities with regard to how reading comprehension had to be taught and treated in the EFAL classroom. As it later emerged that EFAL teachers still used teacher-centred approaches in their classrooms, learners were left in the periphery by these pedagogical practices. This resulted in them being passive receivers of knowledge whose realities were neglected by teachers. The use of PALAR as the methodology in this study refuted this by creating the space for them to engage, reflect and act on their realities and those of their teachers about reading comprehension and the use of FVR approach.

3.2.4. The relationship between the researcher and the participants

The traditional conventional methods ensure that the researcher has power over the research process and the participants themselves. However, PALAR challenges this powerlessness of the researched by empowering them to not only influence, but also to control the research process and their lives (Cameron, 2015:126). It achieves this by challenging the traditional power relations and by creating knowledge through democratic means (Wood & Louw, 2018:284). While doing this, the researcher and the participants treat each other with respect and fairness (Akkara, Vaseenonta, Kirdmalai & Promnin, 2016:29).

Moreover, PALAR distinguishes itself from the scientific traditional methods by refuting the subjectivity of the researched and the superiority of the researcher. In fact, PALAR practitioners place emphasis on subjective disposition of the co-researchers and themselves (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:514). Consequently, PALAR calls for reciprocal, democratic, power-neutral and egalitarian relationship among all the stakeholders in the research project (Kearney, Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013:121). To achieve this, PALAR researchers are required to engage in relationship building and team building (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:518). These mutually supportive relationships (Wood *et al.*, 2017:123) are characterised by trust, cooperation and respect (Kearney *et al.*, 2013:127; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). Throughout the phases of the research process, both PALAR researchers and co-researchers learn with and from each other (Schiller *et al.*, 2018:3).

Additionally, by its nature, PALAR is inclusive and democratic (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015:14). As a result, it calls for the use of more 'democratic' methodologies which encourage and develop co-researchers' teaching and learning praxis (Cameron, 2015:125), as opposed to the less dynamic approaches that use the researched as the 'feeders' of data to the researcher. PALAR requires all these stakeholders to engage in critical self-reflection of their feelings, thoughts and actions (Kearney *et al.*, 2013:119). These methodologies facilitate communication and sharing of ideas between the researcher and the researched and this further affords them equal status and contribution in the research process. Such exchange of information is important because for PALAR to work, it calls for the inclusion of the underprivileged people who are affected by the issue under study (Green & Kearney, 2011:55). In other words, PALAR encourages the mutual and collaborative identification of the problem, reflection on its root causes and evaluation of possible solutions (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013:5).

3.2.5. The role of the researcher

As PALAR assigns similar and equal status between the researcher and the researched, the PALAR-oriented researcher's role does not involve ordering everyone around (Kearney *et al.*, 2013:122). In contrast, the role of the researcher is to transform this power-imbalanced situation in the research process through dialogue and conscientisation (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013:1; Wood & Louw, 2018:284). They achieve this by engaging in continuous critical and self-reflection throughout the research project (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:518). This results in the empowered co-researchers who are ontologically, axiologically and epistemologically informed about their situation and themselves (Wood *et al.*, 2017:123). Additionally, the co-researchers become empowered to gain control over their lives, ownership, and production of knowledge that is necessary to transform their lives and to overcome oppression (Cameron & Allen, 2013:139).

Moreover, the PALAR practitioner becomes a member of the community (Kearney *et al.*, 2013:115). This researcher is tasked with facilitating collaboration amongst the oppressed people with the aim of empowering, rather than 'solving' problems for them (Kearney *et al.*, 2013:115). This role involves challenging the status quo of inequality and pursuing social justice, self-determination and democratic participation through social inclusion (Wood *et al.*, 2017:123; Zober-Skerrit, 2018:514).

3.2.6. Axiology of PALAR

PALAR places a particular importance on language use. In this case, at the centre of PALAR literature is the language that promotes democracy, empowerment, mutual respect, social justice, and emancipation, among other things. The language used in PALAR –couched research papers is often personal (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:516). The first-person writing style is often illustrated through the use of pronouns '*I*' and '*We*' in many PALAR publications. This acknowledges the contribution and mutual ownership of the problem under investigation, solutions found, as well as the knowledge constructed. Such knowledge is created through common action and critical reflections by all stakeholders in the research project (Green & Kearney, 2011:48). Also, the use of active voice places the responsibility of the research and its solutions on both the researcher and the co-researchers. In other words, PALAR is accountable to the participants (Datta, Khyang, Khyang, Kheyang, Khyang & Chapola, 2015:582).

As a way of ensuring equality and empowerment, a PALAR-oriented study requires researchers to get rid of their expert-status (Schiller *et al.*, 2018:3). Instead, PALAR practitioners assume equal status with participants. Consequently, they are referred to as co-researchers. The aim here is to ensure that learning and growth become a two way process. Additionally, this power-balanced situation assists to maintain trust and respect among all the stakeholders in the research project (Wessels & Wood, 2019:3).

In addition, PALAR values humanity (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). For instance, while the scientific traditional methods use phrases such as data collection, PALAR refers to such process as data generation. While the insinuation in the former methods is that the researcher comes and collects data from his *subjects* or *objects*, PALAR acknowledges to a large extent that data is generated *by* and *with* everyone involved in the research, rather than being *extracted* from them. Such acknowledgement reinforces the notion of a shared ownership of the co-generated knowledge and reality.

3.3 KEY PRINCIPLES OF PALAR

The focus of this sub-section is to discuss the key principles of PALAR and this is done in conjunction with the demonstrations of how they have been applied in this study. The model of PALAR consists of what Zuber-Skerritt (2012:217) calls the 7C's. These include:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Commitment
- Coaching
- Critical and self-critical attitude and reflection on action
- Competence
- Character building

3.3.1. Communication

Communication is central to PALAR paradigm. It provides the opportunity for the marginalised voices to be heard and recognised (Ann-Liao, 2006:107; Burger, 2017:8). According to Isawaki, Hopper and Whelan (2017:155), such a platform enables integration of these voices in decision-making and learning. As a result, an effective, power-balanced exchange of ideas can commence at the early stages of the PALAR-anchored research (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:519). Therefore, this leads to relationships, vision and team-building. In order to build positive and meaningful relationship among co-researchers, the following factors need to be considered:

- Showing respect
- The use of youth-centred communication and engagement techniques based on the principles of dignity and respect toward humanity
- Being non-judgmental (Iwasaki, Hopper & Whelan, 2017:155)

In addition to building positive relationships, communication empowers people in order to bring social changes (Ann-Liao, 2006:8). In this regard, PALAR dictates that such communication must be of a participatory nature. When it is participatory, communication places decision-making in the hands of the people affected by a social problem (Sackey, Clark

& Lin, 2017:229). In other words, the marginalised groups become active solution-seekers, rather than being passive recipients of solutions from the expert- outsiders.To achieve this, participatory communication creates a platform that encourages free dialogue and discussions (Barranquero, 2011:163; Thomas & Narayan, 2016:120; Sackey *et al.*, 2017:229). It is in these free settings where these groups express their concerns, define their problems, formulate solution and act on the newly found solutions (Burger, 2017:8). In this study, co-researchers were afforded the opportunity to critique and challenge the way in which reading comprehension was taught in EFAL classrooms. As a result, they were empowered to effect change and propelled teachers to design reading comprehension activities and lessons in a manner suitable for their needs, situations and learning styles.

It is through PALAR that participatory communication calls for multiple view-points to form part of the discourses (Maxey, 2000:791). The research team was organised and it consisted of two EFAL teachers and eight EFAL learners. This situation allowed not only the integration of marginalised voices of learners, but it also made possible the multiplicity and exchange of realities and experiences of both EFAL teachers and learners. In this case, EFAL learners expressed different realities and experiences pertaining to the way they prefer reading comprehension to be taught in the EFAL classroom. This translated into power being shared equally among all stakeholders and allowing them to learn from each other throughout the research process (Iwasaki, 2017:155).

Furthermore, these spaces allow co-researchers to address the issue of power relations in the creation of knowledge. Here, both the researchers and co-researchers seek to harmonise power issues when assuming their positions in the research process (Iwasaki, 2017:155). Consequently, communication within PALAR facilitates the use of people's knowledge and the use of bottom-up approaches characterised by mutual respect and fair relation-building (Iwasaki, 2017:155). Adding to this was the new image of myself and my role as a researcher that changed in the participants' eyes. Contrary to viewing me as a superior knowledgeable teacher, the participants, especially the EFAL learners, started to view me as a partner who was equally contributing to effecting the necessary social change, which, in this case, involves changing the manner in which reading comprehension was taught and how FVR could be used as an approach.

Another way of addressing power-relations involves recognition of local forms of knowledge (Sackey *et al.,* 2017:230). The participants in this study, through the focus group discussions and FAI interviews, learned from each other about how FVR could be used as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

In summary, participatory communication enhances the research process when it:

- Promotes community identification of needs and problems
- Develops cognisance of the skills and talents within the community, thereby allowing self-direction in acting in its best interests
- Develops decision-making skills
- Create a climate in which a community can make decisions
- Values and strengthens local knowledge system
- Develops group process skills which bring consensus through negotiation and conflict resolution
- Creates a direct channel of communication between the community citizens and the decision-makers
- Molds a vision of the future through commitment and ownership by the community (Rajasunderam, 1999 in Maxey, 2000:791).

3.3.2. Collaboration

PALAR encourages the type of collaboration that is characterised by equality and partnership. In this case, all members of a research team participate as partners with equal status and power. In other words, for it to be successfully implemented, PALAR requires equal participation and partnership of both the researcher and the participants. They are empowered to regain control over their situations (Smith *et al*., 2006:854). In this study, not only did the co-researchers regain control, but their understanding of FVR approach was enhanced. As a result, they were able to associate with the approach and viewed it as relevant to their needs, such as including the need to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

These collaborative partnerships are aimed at generating team spirit, enhancing relations and communication (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:519). However, these partnerships extend beyond these interactions (Rossetti, Sauer, Bui & Ou, 2017:177). They contribute to ensuring human dignity, empowerment, social justice and civic participation (Langhout & Thomas, 2010:61). Moreover, at the centre of these partnerships are the egalitarian relationships that guide the creation of mutual knowledge (Saltiel, 1998:6; San Antonio, 2018:31). The creation of such knowledge seeks to address the needs of the local community (San Antonio, 2018:31). While doing this, PALAR requires that co-researchers collaborate and engage in critical thinking and self-directed creation of knowledge (Gomez-Lainer, 2018:1).

According to Rossetti *et al*., (2017:177) collaborative partnerships have the following components:

- Communication
- Commitment
- Equality
- Competence
- Trust
- Respect
- Shared decision-making
- Leadership

In addition to this, Hartman (2017:18) summarises the characteristics of successful partnerships. They include:

3.3.3. Trust

Collaborative partnerships become successful when they are guided by mutual trust and respect. In this study, the partnership amongst all the stakeholders succeeded because of the mutual respect, equal power and equality enjoyed by each co-researcher. The fact that each member's views were listened to without any judgement enhanced the collaboration and shared decision-making pertaining to improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

3.3.4. Common purpose

While both competence and commitment are essential, shared aims and vision enhance collaboration partnerships even further. In this study, at the beginning we developed a clear vision and the road-map for the research project. This helped us (co-researchers) to realise that we were all affected by the challenge of poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners. As a result, we understood that the solutions and decisions should be shared by every member of the research team. It further became clear that we needed to work as equal partners in order to achieve the main aim of developing a framework to demonstrate how FVR can be used as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

3.3.5. Commitment

PALAR as an inclusive and holistic approach (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:514) requires all co-researchers to work collaboratively in the pursuit of a common goal (Wood *et al.*, 2017:123). Guided by open and fair communication based on the principles of mutual respect, trust and equal relationships, the PALAR project calls for a complete commitment from the co-researchers. This commitment becomes meaningful because it comes from people who are directly affected by the problem (Zuber-Skerrit, 2015:14). One way of ensuring complete commitment of co-researchers to the research project, involves the existence of democratic and inclusive dialogue throughout the project (Wood & Louw, 2018:284). The co-researchers also become committed when they are allowed to contribute, reflect and learn throughout the research phases (Schiller *et al.*, 2018:3). In this case, PALAR dictates that co-researchers must learn through doing (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015:14), rather than to watch someone (expert) solving a social problem for them.

In this study, the discussions in which the co-researchers participated in were characterised by dialogues and information-sharing. The prompts were useful in initiating these meaningful conversations amongst all co-researchers. They also proved to be effective in ensuring contributions by all the co-researchers as they enabled multiple views to emerge and

contribute to the creation of knowledge. In other words, demonstrating how FVR approach could be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners was a collaborative effort.

3.3.6. Coaching

Zuber-Skerritt (2011:7) opines that during a PALAR-anchored research project, leadership role is not confined to the researcher. On the contrary, the power-balanced and egalitarian relationships amongst co-researchers enable any member of the research team to assume and alternate leadership roles. In the context of this study, the idea of coaching was understood as each member's ability to work with other members of the research team throughout all cycles of PALAR. This is due to the fact that PALAR encourages capacity building and empowerment of all co-researchers (Green & Kearney, 2011:55; Kearney *et al*., 2012:405). We started by identifying our priorities as a team. This involved determining the order in which the objectives and areas of research process needed to be attended to first. Also, all members worked together to identify the challenges that would hinder the success of FVR at this school. We further worked as a team and coached and guided each other in devising strategies to circumvent those challenges.

3.3.7. Critical and self-critical attitude and reflection on action

PALAR requires co-researchers to remain vigilant and conscious throughout the process of knowledge creation. Among other things, they are conscious of their own experiences and those of others in the research team. These diverse experiences necessitate the need for learning and critical reflection (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:515). Critical reflection involves evaluating the design and implementation of the PALAR –anchored research project. Apart from evaluating the research process, co-researchers engage in critical self-reflection. They evaluate their own participation, roles and the impact their participation has had on the research project.

Engaging in such activity enables co-researchers to understand themselves and others better. This further extends to appreciating their own contribution and that of others in the creation of knowledge (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013:8; Wood & Louw, 2018:288; Zuber-Skerrit,

2018:519). Most importantly, I argue, is the realisation and recognition of the power they (individually and collectively) possess to change the status quo. For instance, prior to this study, the learner-co-researchers were not aware of the power they possessed to influence decisions about how reading comprehension could be taught and treated at this school. In other words, they had accepted the traditional top-down approach that teachers used in the design, planning and execution of reading comprehension lessons in the classroom. However, during the course of this study, they contributed to the discourses around teaching and improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Their participation also involved co-planning lessons with teachers, selection of books they wished to read, and taking decision pertaining to teaching methodologies and teaching aids which accommodated their different and diverse learning styles.

Furthermore, reflection enhances the relationships amongst the co-researchers. When reflecting on their own actions and those of others, PALAR requires the participation of all team members (Schiller *et al*., 2018:3). Guided by honest and open discussions, co-researchers learn from each other, evaluate whether their inputs worked or not, and search for additional ways to remedy the situation (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:516).

This exercise does not only ensure consensus on these solutions by co-researchers (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013:8), but it also empowers them and augment their understanding of PALAR's epistemology, ontology and axiology (Wood *et al*., 2017:123; Zuber-Skerrit, 2018:519). For instance, in the early stages of this project, it was difficult to make co-researchers to understand what PALAR was about. Initially, teacher-co-researchers seemed to have thought that I came here to *help* them with *their* problem pertaining to the teaching of reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Similarly, learner-co-researchers opted to assume the passive role in this regard. Clearly, they both did not view themselves as competent and powerful agents to change the status quo. Their prior expectation seemed to have been that as a Doctoral student, I had brought with me solutions for this problem. It was only later during the focus group discussions that they realized their roles and how the PALAR methodology expands their understanding of the meaningful contribution they could make in addressing social and local problems. This new understanding refuted the initial perceptions they had of themselves and the roles they could play in ensuring social transformation and educational development.

3.3.8. Competence

PALAR puts some emphasis on collaborative action leadership (Wood & Louw, 2018:284; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:519) during the research process. Action leadership is essential for facilitating PALAR activities and placing decision-making power in the hands of the affected communities (Sackey *et al*., 2017:229). In order to ensure this, PALAR obliges that action leadership should not be dominated by expert–researchers (Kearney et al., 2013:122; Schiller, 2018:3). On the contrary, it encourages competent action leaders to emerge anywhere and alternate within the research team (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011:7). In other words, power-sharing and co-learning are central to action leadership (Iwasaki *et al*., 2017:155). Such insistence ensures that co-researchers scaffold and empower each other throughout the research process (Cloete & Delport, 2015:86). This is essential because the ultimate goal of PALAR is to empower marginalised communities to become critical and independent problem-solvers (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015:15). Also, PALAR is aimed at giving them a voice in the creation of knowledge (Burger, 2017:8).

3.3.9. Character building

Although PALAR is concerned with the empowerment of communities, empowering individuals is also important. The instance of common ownership, PALAR instills the notions of sharing and caring among co-researchers. Also, equal relationships between academic researchers and local people are central to PALAR. These relationships reinforce the need for both PALAR practitioners and co-researchers to develop trust and honesty. In this study, the process of building trust between the co-researchers and I began earlier. It started with informal conversations with my colleagues (teachers) and learners. The trust was further enhanced by the fact that in addition to being colleagues, we all shared similar challenge of poor performance, which may be attributed to poor reading comprehension of EFAL to some extent.

In addition to these relationships, PALAR requires meaningful conversations amongst people who are involved in addressing a social problem. For such dialogical communication to

succeed, PALAR practitioners become non-judgmental and receptive to multiple viewpoints. It is this exposure to multiple realities that makes them to appreciate diversity of everyone in the research team. Through focus group discussions and prompts, this study created a platform for meaningful discussions to take place. The creation of this conversational space allowed multiple viewpoints to emerge. The fact that the conversations were guided by Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) and that power relations were balanced, precluded team members from judging each other. This was particularly important in defusing teachers' immediate urge to evaluate and assess what others (learners) are saying. Similarly, the learners' need to attain approval from adults (teachers) and the fear of being judged by peers when expressing their thoughts were also diminished.

Lastly, this methodology entails the emancipation of the marginalised communities and individuals. Consequently, PALAR inculcates the concept of *Ubuntu*[1] which is characterised by sympathy, compassion, honesty, and respect among others. This helps the PALAR practitioners to realise that we are interdependent and social challenges need a collaborative and collective effort. From the onset, in this study, I drew the attention of co-researchers to the type of language that we would use. I emphasised the use of non-discriminatory language in favour of the one that promoted inclusion, respect and collective ownership of the research project. In this regard, while we appreciated diversity in its various forms, we developed our identity as a team rather than a group. This notion of a team illuminated the fact that we depended on each other for the success of this project and ultimately, improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners through the use of FVR approach.

3.4. THE SUITABILITY OF PALAR AND SCT IN THIS STUDY

The use of other traditional scientific methods would have been detrimental to this study. First, using either positivism or phenomenology would have impeded the aim of empowering both teacher and learner co-researchers. According to these traditional conventional methods, the role of the research is to *help* the participants and *solve* their problems.

On the contrary, the use of both PALAR and SCT in this study was helpful in creating space for empowerment of these co-researchers. In this regard, I did not bring solutions to the problem

---

[1] I am because you are

of poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners, but we (the co-researchers and I) identified the problem, acknowledged it, analysed it and demonstrated how FVR could be used to overcome it. Through this partnership, we were able to integrate the multiple realities and experiences that each stakeholder brought into this research project.

Second, the use of positivism or phenomenology to couch this study would have negatively affected the relationship between the co-researchers and me. These conventional scientific methods argue for the social distance between the researcher and the participants. In other words, as a way to ensure objectivity of data, I would have kept the interaction between myself and the co-researchers at a minimal. In this case, my role would have been limited to gathering data, analysing it, interpreting the results and providindg solutions to the problem. Similarly, the participants would have been only tasked with providing data or exposing themselves as objects to be used by me in this study. This situation disregards the participants' experiences and knowledge, and it also perpetuates the polarized power-relations between these stakeholders by fostering the relationship characterised by researcher's superiority. In such a situation, the voices of the marginalised learners are ignored (Myende, 2014:27).

Conversely, the use of both PALAR and SCT in this study guarded against this situation, while it also promoted the relationship based on mutual respect, equality and partnership in every phase of this research process. As an indication of mutual respect and partnership throughout this research process, the co-researchers and I shared similar and alternating roles of researching, analysing the problem, interpreting the results, and demonstrating how FVR approach could be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. As a result of the shared roles and acknowledgement of the power they possess, the participants in this study were given the status of co-researchers. This arises from the need to eliminate the existence of an oppressive relationship between the academic researcher and the participants (Glassman & Erdem, 2014:214).

Third, the choice of both PALAR and SCT in this study refuted the perception that people in rural communities and high schools have internalised their powerlessness. In other words, they are incapable of participating meaningfully in the quest to find solutions to the existing

problems. As a remedy, these rural people rely solely on the authorities and researchers to challenge the oppressive conditions they face every day.

To challenge this view, PALAR and SCT focus on the emancipation of marginalised people and the development of their capacities (Ilac, 2018:4). In this study, both PALAR and SCT enabled the co-researchers to make valuable contribution to their own emancipation as opposed to being *'rescued'* by the researcher. In this regard, community members through their contributions of books and newspapers, and teachers and learner-co-researchers in this study were able to work together demonstrating the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This is in spite of the many challenges that affect their rural learning ecology. In short, in spite of these challenges, rural people can still contribute to efforts and projects aimed at effecting social change and improvement in their conditions (Myende, 2014:27). This idea fits well with the stance held by SCT on the capabilities of marginalised people to effect social change. They also achieve this by revealing their knowledge to the researcher (Ilac, 2018:4).

Finally, the PALAR-SCT combination in this study broke the conventional top-down way of conducting research. In this regard, both positivism and phenomenology argue that the research process is initiated by the researcher who identifies the problem (Mokoena, 2017:70). After extracting data from the rural people, this researcher then proposes the solutions he or she considers effective and suitable in solving the problem. In addition to being non-participatory and untransformative, such a research is highly characterised by the researcher's complete control over all the aspects of the research.

On the contrary, this study corroborated the bottom-up approach of conducting research as required by both PALAR and SCT respectively. These two respective theoretical and methodical frameworks encourage the mutual identification of problems, collective data generation and analysis (Baum *et al.*, 2006:854; Blake, 2007:412). In short, instead of the research being led by the researcher as is the case in a positivist research, the PALAR-SCT research requires that the researcher facilitates the process and generate meaning through interaction (Ilac, 2018:4). In addition, the collaborative and power-neutral relationships amongst all the co-researchers in this study enhanced this non-hierarchical approach because everyone contributed as an equal partner, problem-solver, thinker and a learner. For example, the identification of the issue to be studied and how it should be studied

(methodology and design), as well as the recommendations were all agreed upon by all the co-researchers, as opposed to being imposed on them by me. In fact, the participants participated in all the cyclic phases of this PALAR based research process.

Moreover, the use of this bottom-up approach in this study further fits well with the notions of self-awareness and conscientisation by rural communities, which are central to this study. In this regard, by participating in this study, the learner and teacher co-researchers realised the unjust and polarised way in which decisions were taken pertaining to the teaching and learning of reading comprehension in the EFAL classrooms. Contrary to teachers being the sole decision-makers and lesson planners who scaffold learners, this study afforded learners to partake in lesson planning and scaffolding. This bottom-up approach further enabled them to notice the power they possessed both to solve their problems and to influence decisions that are taken by those in charge of the classroom setting, lesson planning and presentation.

3.5. THE STAGES OF PALAR

Contrary to following the linear process of identifying the problem, analysing it and providing solutions as advocated by the conventional research methods, PALAR follows a collaborative cyclic process. This cyclic process guards against the *hit and run* syndrome (Loughran & McCann, 2015:712) that is often witnessed in the positivist and phenomenological research projects. In contrast to alienating communities from research projects, PALAR requires communities to participate equally and collaboratively in the identification of the problem, data generation, analysis, reflection and deciding on the way forward in terms of what actions should be taken, given the mutual discovered findings (Smith *et al.,* 2006:854; Blake, 2007:412; Ungar *et al.,* 2015:712; Houh & Kalsem, 2015:263; Mokoena, 2017:72).

The stages of PALAR are as follows:
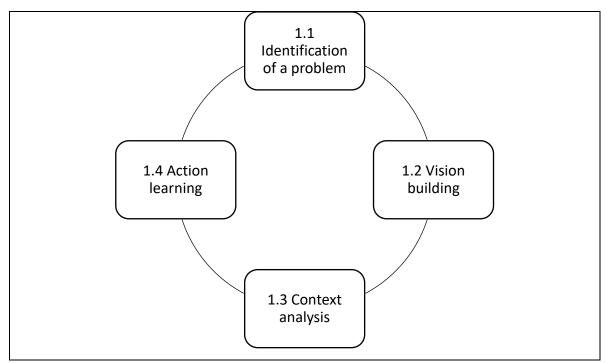
Figure 3.1: PALAR CYCLE 1

Unfolding of cycle 1

3.5.1. Identification of problem

As a research methodology, PALAR is concerned with empowering both individuals and communities to solve their own social problems. Before commencing on this research process, my colleagues (EFAL teachers) and I often had informal conversations about the poor performance of EFAL learners. We also engaged in similar discussions with other teachers from other schools during the training focus group discussions organised by the DBE. We all regarded poor reading comprehension of EFAL learners to be a significant contributory factor to the problem of poor performance in rural schools. Not surprisingly, the annual diagnostic reports on the performance of EFAL grade 12 learners pointed to the same effect. As teachers, we tried to discuss ways of improving reading comprehension of EFAL learners.

Following these discussions from the training workshop, we (my colleagues and I) deliberated about the performance of the EFAL learners at our school. However, we could not find the immediate solutions. Instead, we put the blame squarely on learners as the ones who were not doing their school work. Although we could not realise and acknowledge our role in perpetuating the problem of poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners, we all agreed

that it needed to be remedied swiftly and collaboratively. We then decided to talk to our EFAL learners in their respective grades about this issue. Almost across all the grades, learners admitted that reading for and with comprehension posed a challenge to them. It also emerged that although they were acknowledging their lack of effort in school activities, especially reading, they also stated that we were equally to blame. Specifically, they pointed to the way we presented lessons in class. Most of them felt that these reading lessons were dry, teacher-centred and monotonous.

This mutual experience and identification of the existing problem prompted us to engage in this research project. The aim of this project was to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners through the use of FVR approach. To achieve this aim, we collectively agreed that PALAR was the appropriate methodology. Both EFAL teachers and learners were invited to participate voluntarily in this project. The following procedure was followed in this regard: Firstly, permission was sought from the Free State Department of Education to conduct this research project. Before meeting the co-researchers, I sent out invitations to all stakeholders and requested them to participate in the study, pasting others around the school building and inside the classrooms. This was an attempt to maximise accessibility to all the willing co-researchers. In addition, I personally took copies of these invitations to the offices of all educators at this school, and collected them after two days. This was an attempt to allow the co-researchers sufficient time to decide on their willingness to participate. Also, it afforded the willing co-researchers a chance to seek clarity where they might have not understood anything in the invitation itself. This further proved to be important for the willing minor co-researchers (school learners) who had to get consent from their parents or guardians before participating in the study.

The second part of the preparatory stage involved the choice of the venue (research site) for the discussions, oral reflections and FAI. A request was made to the principal to use one unoccupied and secluded classroom in the vicinity and permission was granted. The choice of this classroom over others was determined by three factors, namely, the classroom was within the school yard and this made it easy for us to access it without any difficulty; when sessions were held during school hours, it was possible to be aloof from destructions; and in addition to being safe, this classroom had enough furniture to be used by co-researchers.

3.5.2 Vision building

After the mutual identification of the existing problem, the next phase of PALAR involves the start-up focus group discussions. These discussions are aimed at facilitating the formation of collaborative partnerships among team members. This creates the space for co-researchers to forge working relationships, set the vision for the team, and action plan (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013:6).

In this study, the forging of working relationship was enhanced by the creation of shared vision for the research team. According to Overman (2010:28), vision can be explained as "…the ability to formulate and express original ideas, enabling others to consider options in new and different ways." Despite its importance, the literature has so far distinguished between personalized and socialised vision. The former is characterised by one person, especially the leader, coercing others in the group to identify with his or her vision. In this case, the minimal participation further diminishes the likelihood of ownership of such a dream by others. In the latter, the focus is on the commonly created and shared vision (Komives *et al.*, 2013:81). Collaboration and equal participation of all members is central in this regard (Overman, 2010:20; Komives *et al.*, 2013:81). In addition to owning this shared vision, socialised vision empowers the members and impacts positively on their confidence and feelings of satisfaction (Ryan, 2006:7; Avidov-Ungar *et al.*, 2014:705).

Shared vision was central in this study. Smit and Scherman (2016:6) postulate that a clear vision assists in the formulation and articulation of ideas. This in turn, enhances the creation of a platform in which collaboration and participation among all stakeholders thrives. In this regard, the team comprised of two EFAL educators and eight EFAL learners. In our second workshop, we focused on what the team wanted to achieve. The question that was central to the discussions was: *How can we use FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners?* I outlined the objectives of the study as the road-map to achieve this goal.

Another way of forging working relationships in this study involved the discussions around creation of scientific knowledge. I deemed it necessary for the team to know and understand their roles in creating this knowledge. This exercise helped in two ways: First, it made them realise that research or knowledge creation is not only meant for academics and experts from

the urban settings. In other words, it challenged the notion that knowledge should reflect only the interests of the powerful and reinforce their positions in society (Baum *et al.*, 2006:845). This challenged the notion that rural people are incapable of addressing social ills. Second, these discussions ensured that these participants became empowered to challenge the preconceived ideas of what research was. This was important as it sought to diminish the perceived dependency of rural schools on experts from the periphery. This is because in many instances, the powerful research bodies and researchers exploited and misrepresented the indigenous communities, knowledge, and cultures (Baum *et al.*, 2006:855).

We started addressing the notion of power relations in the research project. From the onset, I explained that the PALAR methodology sought equality among all team members. As a result, we all agreed that we enjoyed the same status of being researchers who shared equal responsibilities. While this ensured equal ownership, it also assisted in ensuring equal participation of all team members throughout the stages of this research project. At first, it appeared as though the co-researchers could not understand the research title or the research question. I had to spend some time explaining to them and in one instance the co-researchers were quarrelling among themselves as to whether it was necessary to undertake this research. Agreement on the issue of roles and responsibilities of each participant followed, and with myself as a temporary facilitator, I proposed that we elect people who would be taking minutes of the subsequent meetings. I also emphasised that these roles and responsibilities would rotate. In other words, at the second meeting, Participant A would be the scribe, timekeeper or facilitator. That role would be assumed by Participant B in the subsequent focus group discussions. This rotation applied to all the roles, scaffolding, responsibilities and members (myself included) in the group. This was done to ensure that all co-researchers had an opportunity to contribute and voice their opinions.

Lastly, SWOT analysis enhanced vision building in this study. After everyone assumed particular roles and responsibilities, we performed a SWOT analysis, defined by Dyson (2004:632) as a method used in the formulation of a strategy. It is intended to assess the possibility of the success of an organisation (group) in achieving the intended aims by identifying the perceived strengths and weaknesses of that organization (group). The aim of our study was to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners through the use of FVR approach. It also focuses on both opportunities and threats which may be posed by the

environment in which the organization (group) operates. The intention here was to devise ways to capitalise on the strengths and opportunities, while finding ways to eliminate both the weaknesses and threats.

In our first meeting, we began by discussing the strengths and opportunities of the group. We evaluated first for the strengths of our team. We were all working in the same school which made it easy for us to work together and to cement relationships that already existed. This creation of a mutual and trusting relationship is regarded as essential in a PALAR couched study. Since we were all teachers, we shared similar experiences, which made it easier to rally around this project and work with each other for the common goal of demonstrating how FVR approach could be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This in itself made us determined to find ways of effecting change.

The focus then shifted to the threats and weaknesses of our group in achieving the goal of demonstrating how FVR approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. The first challenge was the issue of time. Most members of this group stayed in a nearby town, so they could not join the discussions after school. In cases where they would, they felt they were pressed for time and needed more time to participate in the study and voice their concerns. Another weakness was the amount of work they were expected to perform at school.

3.5.3. Context analysis

The first phase of context analysis involved the choice of co-researchers and the research site. As emphasised by PALAR, there must be a mutual relationship between the researcher and the co-researchers, the majority of whom in this study were my colleagues and learners, people with whom I had built close relationships over the years. In addition, central to this study was both an emancipatory and transformative agenda. Consequently, it is important to ensure the direct involvement of those affected by the problem every day (Hough & Kalsem, 2015:265). In this regard, in the recent years, it has been the intention and duty of all the stakeholders (teachers and learners) to ensure the improvement of reading comprehension

for EFAL learners at this rural high school.These were the people 'appropriate' for this study. It is also important for those affected by the problem to have the interests of the entire affected community at heart, rather than their unique individual interests.

The second phase involved the analysis of the co-researchers and their respective contributions to this study. According to Hough and Kalsem (2015:263), it is important for the voices and concerns of all stakeholders to be included in the process of knowledge creation. This seeks to address the challenge of alienation and marginalisation of rural people by the powerful in the society (Glassman & Erdem, 2014:206). This perception is perpetuated by the need by the powerful to maintain the status quo. In order to tackle this perpetuation, the inclusion of rural learners as co-researchers was appropriate because in general, they are the ones about whom these negative views are held and expressed by the teachers. They are viewed as being lazy to study or outright stupid. Having them as co-researchers challenged these negative views and made them realise and regain their power to influence decisions that affected them. In a situation where decisions were taken *about* someone rather than *with* someone, it showed high levels of disregard and subordination. As a response to these challenges, engaging learners in discussion sessions, oral reflections and FAI about how FVR is implemented, helped to challenge the existing status quo, which favoured the teachers.

Also, learner–co-researchers were included because they were directly affected by this situation. They were the ones for whom reading comprehension activities were planned and undertaken. In short, learners were the ones who were taught and expected to participate actively during reading comprehension lessons. Both SCT and PALAR call for the researcher to focus on and include people who are directly affected by the problem with the aim of creating harmonious and democratic relationships.

The third phase of context analysis involved the identification of constraints that would have impeded this research project. In other words, these challenges that contributed to poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners at this rural high school. The data generated through focus group discussions, oral reflections and FAI, enabled our team to identify the following barriers: dysfunctional school library, unavailability and shortage of newspapers and books, as well as a limited access to a local library. The school under study was located in

a rural area and it was given a partial Section 21 status. As it is often the case with rural schools, this school was plagued by lack of resources, including the competent human resources, and textbooks. With regard to human resources, the school did not have a qualified school librarian or trained teacher librarian. There was nobody available for administrative and management issues in the library. This in itself worsened the situation because it was impossible to get the actual number of books that were available at this school. The planning of FVR activities was negatively affected. Additionally, the library was disorganised. Although shelves were available, books were not properly arranged and packaged. This situation made it difficult to obtain relevant books from the school library. Consequently, we had to delay the beginning of FVR activities.

Another challenge facing this project was the unavailability of reading material that co-researchers were interested to read. Both newspaper and magazine sections of the school library were empty. Instead, the library was full of many academic books, which the co-researchers felt that they were outdated. Under such circumstances, it was difficult to keep co-researchers motivated to engage in FVR activities.

Lastly, the public library in the area posed another challenge to this research project. Some co-researchers had difficulty accessing the services of the local library. For example, they could not borrow books from the library because they did not have the library access cards. Many of them did not have identity documents that were required for one to be given this access card. In addition, there was no relationship between the school library and the public library. As a result, there was no sharing of information and resources, such as old newspapers and magazines.

3.5.4. Action learning

The research team met on the 10th of July to draw the action plan. The agreement was that the three objectives of the research project were the following:

I.   The establishment of a functional library

II.   Creation of drop-in boxes

III. Increasing access to local library

The reflections about the above challenges led us to come up with an action plan to remedy these problems. The learning sets included the revival of a school library committee, the development of resources boxes and the application for library cards. As a response to the dysfunctional school library, we engaged the school principal in this matter. The agreement was reached that school library committee had to be revived. The committee members agreed to take charge of the management and administration of the school library. However, before the committee could assume its roles, the community members assisted with the cleaning and shelving of books in the school library.

The problem of unavailability of newspapers and magazines in the school library was also addressed. In this case, we asked both teachers and learners at this school to collect and bring old newspapers and magazines. Similar request for these items was also extended to local businesses and the local library. We then placed drop-in boxes in various places across the school yard. Some of these boxes were placed in the administration office, as well as in every classroom. We agreed that each member of the research team would be responsible for each drop-in box in every class.

The invitation of administrators from the local library assisted in forging relations between the public library and the school library. In addition to informing learners about the importance of a library, they also assisted in encouraging all learners (co-researchers included) to apply and obtain library access cards.

When all these things were in place, we held a two-day workshop where we reflected on the success of the strategies. Through team discussions, oral reflections and FAI, co-researchers revealed that there was a little improvement in EFAL reading comprehension, despite engaging in FVR. Nonetheless, they were quick to note the positive contribution made by the conditions around the school. However, it emerged that the challenge remained in the way reading comprehension was taught in EFAL classrooms. In this regard, the research team concluded that we needed to find strategies that could be used by both teachers and learners to improve reading comprehension in EFAL classrooms. While this workshop concluded cycle

1 of PALAR, it also called for review of our framework. Such a review necessitated cycle 2 of PALAR.
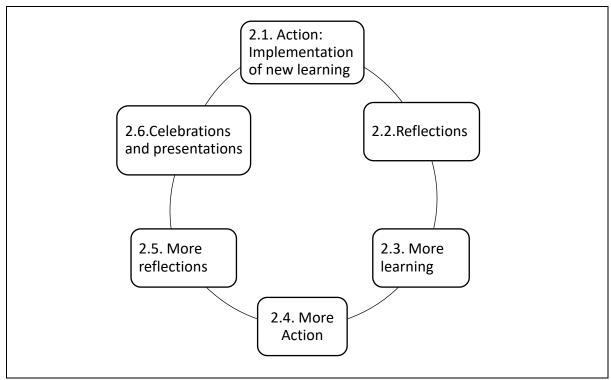
Figure 3.2: PALAR CYCLE 2

3.6. Unfolding of cycle 2

Cycle 3.6.1. Action: Implementation of new learning

The previous workshop ended with the team agreeing on finding strategies that could be used in the EFAL classrooms to improve reading comprehension. While the focus of the focus group discussions in cycle 1 (see figure 3.5.1.) was on conditions outside the school, the team felt that much impact of this framework could be achieved in the classroom. In other words, for the FVR approach to achieve the desired outcomes, the EFAL classrooms should be considered. The data generated through team discussion, oral reflections and FAI revealed

that the creation of a print-rich environment should be considered in the classroom. Consequently, the team put up boxes in each EFAL classroom. These boxes were filled with books of different genres ranging from magazines, newspapers to maps and covering a range of topics.

Cycle 3.6.2: Reflections: Oral reflections and free attitude interviews

At this stage of our project, it became important to monitor the progress of the FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. In this case, the co-researchers reported their experiences and observations through oral reflections and prompts guided by the free attitude interviews. In the previous workshop, the team had decided to create print-rich environment. Through oral reflections, the co-researchers reported that there was a change in their attitude towards reading and books in general. As a result, the readily available books increased their frequency of reading. Others revealed that their motivation to read could be attributed to the large variety of books from which they could choose.

Despite positive accounts on other aspects, such as improved motivation to read, they still pointed to the need to improve reading comprehension. While acknowledging some improvement in this regard, they felt that the team could still do more to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners through FVR approach. As a result, there was a need for another workshop to implement more strategies.

Cycle 3.6.3: More learning

To this far, the co-researchers had developed the habit of reading a variety of books for pleasure. It was also clear that they were experiencing with books outside those prescribed for academic purposes. At this workshop, it was agreed that their need to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners would be addressed through the use of more learner-centred methods in the EFAL classroom. Furthermore, the co-researchers suggested the inclusive and mutual lesson planning in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension activities. Moreover, learner-co-researchers highlighted the need to learn word-attacking skills and dictionary use. This, they argued, would help them to decipher and understand difficult words in the text.

Cycle 3.6.4: More action: Implementation of improved learning

At this phase of the research process, co-researchers were expected to implement the new learning autonomously. With regard to co-lesson planning and co-teaching, the following actions were noted:

- Teacher-Co-researchers made available the template for learner-co-researchers. They both designed a lesson in accordance with the prescripts of CAPS.

- When choosing a text to be read, they equally ensured that the text complied with the requirements of CAPS in terms of difficulty levels and length.

- When it came to the reading, learners were able to select the texts they deemed interesting.

- The reading exercise became more learner-centred with teachers assuming the role of being facilitators rather than instructors.

- Learners became active participants because they were able to interchange the leading and scaffolding roles during reading.

On the part of actual reading and comprehension, they were able to use the word-attacking skills that they were taught during the co-lesson planning. Moreover, learner-co-researchers developed the habit of using dictionary when reading. While some preferred bringing real dictionaries to class, others used the digital dictionaries installed in their cell-phones.

Cycle 3.6.5: More reflections: Oral Reflections and Free Attitude Interviews

In the subsequent meetings, the team reflected on and evaluated the success of the framework. In this regard, it sought to determine the extent to which the co-researchers had understood and adopted the notion of reflective and participatory practice, as demonstrated through the cycles of PALAR during this research study. Also, this reflective stage was important in determining whether the co-researchers had been empowered in accordance with prescripts of PALAR. Through discussions, oral reflections and FAI, it became clear that there was a steady improvement in the reading comprehension for EFAL learners. To demonstrate this, learner-co-researchers were given a text to read and reflect on. Through their responses, it became evident that they were able to apply the newly learned word-attacking skills. Moreover, the newly acquired and improved vocabulary that resulted from

regular dictionary usage and frequent reading enhanced their comprehension of the text. During the FAI, they stated that teacher-co-researchers also modeled reading the same text, rather than just choosing one learner to read it. Consequently, there was a change in learner-co-researchers' perceived difficulty of the text.

During FAI, teacher–co-researchers responded to the question: *Presently, what do you think should be considered if we need to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners?* While this reflective question sought to determine the views of co-researchers regarding the framework, it also wanted to establish the extent to which they identified with the framework (ownership). Through oral reflections, teacher-co-researchers emphasised the use of learner-centred methods in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. They also highlighted the importance of involving learners in the planning, design and presentation of lessons pertaining to reading comprehension in the EFAL classroom. A critical analysis of their responses revealed that they identified with this newly developed framework for improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

3.6.6. Presentation and celebration

The final workshop took place on the third week of October. While the purpose of this workshop was to share information relating to the findings of this enquiry, it also created the opportunity for individual presentations and team celebrations. The team requested permission from the principal of the school to conduct individual presentations at the school's assembly. Team members engaged in different roles. For teacher-co-researchers, their task was to organise the event and equipment for celebrations. Learner-co-researchers divided themselves into two different sub-teams. The first sub-team decided to engage in a 'spelling bee' activity. One member of the team read a text, and then the remaining members were asked to spell words verbally. The second sub-team collected different reading materials such as magazines, newspapers and books from drop-in boxes. These were used for reading for pleasure at the school assembly.

It was after these reading festivities that other learners approached our team and asked to join. Following these requests, I presented the idea to the staff and they showed enthusiasm in the creation of a reading culture at the school. Consequently, we were granted the slot in the school time-table. In this regard, it was decided that every Thursday, forty-five minutes would be set aside for FVR. This period was solely used for reading and everyone (SMT,

teachers and learners) was expected to engage in FVR. As a way to ensure empowerment and independence, learners chose the reading materials from the drop-in boxes and the library. For teachers, they also read, facilitated and modeled FVR. Generally, the idea was to inculcate the culture of reading in learners, while improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners in particular.

3.7. DATA GENERATION METHODS

Firstly, this sub-section discusses the methods used for generating data in this study. Free attitude interview (FAI), oral reflections and focus group discussions (FGD), were used to generate data. Secondly, this sub-section justifies the choice of these methods and how they fit into PALAR and SCT anchoring this study.

3.7.1. Free Attitude Interviews

Generally, interviews enable the participants in a study to express their feelings, thoughts and perceptions without restrictions (Chitera, 2009:77). Similarly, Free Attitude Interview (FAI) allows the participants to explore their own ideas and suggest solutions (Sekwena, 2014:68) and challenge the oppressive and marginal conditions. When engaging in this exploration of ideas and conversations, Mokoena (2017:76) states that these conversations begin with a question posed to the participants as a way to initiate discussions. The participants were asked the following question which was central to this study: *How can we use FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners?* In this regard, Myende (2014:89) advises that the participants must reflect on this question and expand the discussions further.

How was FAI 'fit for purpose' in this study? At the centre of both PALAR and SCT is the accommodation of multiple realities and perspectives in the creation of knowledge and challenge of the unjust conditions. In this study, through focus group discussions guided by FAI, the platform was created in which different stakeholders (learners and teachers) explored and discussed various ways of addressing the problem of poor reading comprehension. Adhering to the call by both PALAR and SCT for participants to be

collaborators and co-researchers, focus group discussions guided by FAI managed to produce a framework for improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Lastly, the fact that FAI enabled the participants, especially learners in this study to engage their teachers on '*how to teach*' and '*what to do*' in order to improve reading comprehension resonated well with the emancipatory and empowerment agenda supported PALAR, SCT and this study. In this regard, they were empowered to voice their opinions, which were never considered before because of the authoritative and teacher-centred practices in EFAL classrooms. With such engagement, it was established through FAI that teachers themselves were empowered through the realisation of the power possessed by their learners to effect change in reading comprehension lesson planning and teaching.

3.7.2. Oral reflections

Despite lack of a universal definition of reflection, (Huang, 2012:3), Allas, Leijen and Toom (2017:603) state that it is "a cognitive process carried out individually or with the help of others to extract knowledge from experiences." For Rogers (2001:41), reflection could be associated with terms such as active engagement and examination of individual's response to a situation.

When used as a tool for data generation, reflection (oral or written) can be applied in different forms. Reflection-in-action allows participants to reflect on their experiences while they are addressing a social problem (Allas *et al.,* 2017:603). This form of reflection leads to what Wickam (2018:44) calls knowing-in-action. In this regard, participants create and reflect on the knowledge while they are taking action. Another form, reflection –on- action provides the participants with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences following an intervention (Allas *et al*., 2017:603). According to Wickam (2018:44), this form of reflection empowers participants with the ability to apply the new knowledge in different settings.

The use of oral reflections to generate data in this study was appropriate for three reasons. One, its cyclical nature (Huang, 2012:4) fitted well with the processes of PALAR. In this regard, while this cyclical process does not have a specific starting point, reflection is an important part of PALAR methodology. Two, for it to be successful, reflection placed equality at the centre (Allas *et al*., 2017:603). Similarly, PALAR seeks both the empowerment and equality in the knowledge inquiry. In this case, reflection and PALAR call for power-balanced

relationships among the co-researchers. This study provided a platform for discussions to continue in power-neutral settings. In this regard, the co-researchers were able to reflect on their experiences about EFAL reading comprehension. Three, both oral reflections and PALAR created the space for multiple realities and viewpoints in the knowledge inquiry. The oral reflections during the focus group discussions allowed for both teacher-co-researchers and learner-co-researchers to be aware of their teaching and learning processes, needs and behaviours.

3.7.3. Focus group discussion (Workshops)

Within the context of qualitative research, a focus group discussion (FGD) is understood as "a process of acquiring and producing in-depth information, where individuals can discuss ideas in a free environment…" (Memduhoglu, Kotluk & Yayla, 2017:280). In this study, FGD is understood and utilised as a data generation tool which is characterised by free-flowing information sharing sessions and discourses that occur in power-neutral social settings. These discourses are not dominated by the researcher because FGD places limitations on researcher's roles (Gugglberger, Adamowitsch, Teutsch, Felder-Puige & Dur, 2015:129).

In this study, FGD was characterised by the use of prompts. While they ensured maximum participation, prompts also allowed co-researchers to express their opinions freely (Tanga & Maphosa, 2018:4). As opposed to providing co-researchers with a list of questions, FGD enabled the prompts to be directed to the whole team in order to stimulate discourses about how to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners through the use of FVR approach. Not only does this wide distribution of questions (prompts) facilitate participation, but it enhances interpersonal communication as well (Phan, 2018:409).

3.8. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

In this section of the study, the focus is on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the tool used to analyse data. The origins and the evolution of CDA are attributed to the works of Fairclough (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & Joseph, 2005:370). CDA has largely been defined as "…the study of speech beyond sentences…" (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007:158). Alternatively, CDA has been defined as both theory and methodology tasked with analysing the politically, political-economic and socially inclined discourse (Fairclough, 2013:178). In

addition, Rogers *et al.,* (2005:370) define CDA as a scientific paradigm at whose centre is the intention to address social problems. Through description and interpretation, CDA seeks to challenge the way in which social practices are changed and transformed (Rogers *et al.*, 2005:370). In addition, CDA challenges the conditions of inequality with the aim of transforming these conditions (Roger *et al.*, 2005:366). Adding to transforming the unequal conditions, CDA notes the manner in which language as a tool is used to maintain power in society.

It is important to note the appropriateness of both SCT and CDA in this study and the central aim to demonstrate, how FVR can be used as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. As it was argued in the previous chapter, the rural schools and communities are perceived as powerless in solving their problems. Using both SCT and CDA challenges such discourse and both seek to destabilise (Liasidou, 2008:483) these polarised discourses. Creating the spaces for discussions between me and the co-researchers empowered them to solve their problems and led to the realisation of how dominance is maintained by those in the positions of power.

Moreover, CDA, similarly to SCT, advocates transformative social agendas. While SCT calls for the transformation of the perpetual and unequal power relations, CDA calls for transformation of language used as a tool of dominance in support of a transformative agenda (Liasidou, 2008:496). This study, as alluded to in the previous chapters, seeks to empower the participants and challenge the polarised decision-making that undermines the design, teaching and learning of reading comprehension. In addition, similar to this study, both CDA and SCT are emancipatory and discovery in nature. Participants challenged the discourses which portray rural people as powerless and voiceless to change their social situations. In this study, these participants were able to discover the power they possess to change their situations and allowed them to be involved in meaningful and open discussions with their authorities. For example, not only were learner participants able to voice their thoughts and experiences in front of their teachers, but the platform was created for them to influence decision-making with regard to the design and implementation of reading comprehension lessons.

For researchers to use CDA to challenge domination through power (Rogers *et al.*, 2005:366), Fairclough has developed a three-tiered framework. In this framework, analysis is performed on three different levels: interpretive, descriptive and explanatory (Rogers *et al.*, 2005:371). The first level involves the analysis of both written and spoken text (Rogers *et al.,* 2005:369), which calls for both spoken and written text to be transcribed in order to derive the deeper meaning. Since CDA seeks to challenge power and domination often carried in discourses, in this study the spoken data was transcribed verbatim. Such transcription helped to avoid the possible misinterpretation of the participants' words and ensured it had access to the data (Myende, 2014:92) they generated. Such access increased the participants' ownership of the results generated by the study and their ownership of the entire research project.

The second level of analysis involved the discursive practice. At this level, the focus was on language structures, notably production, consumption and interpretation of texts (Rogers *et al.*, 2005:370) by the participants. The main aim was to make them aware of how language was used at local, institutional and societal levels (Myende, 2014:92; Rogers *et al.*, 2005:370).

At the third level of analysis, the focus was on discourses as a social practice (Myende, 2014:92), about explaining the impact of social issues such as gender, race, and power, among others, on the construction of knowledge and how it is perceived by those who receive such knowledge. Such explanations are aimed at critiquing, reflecting and understanding how social structures are designed and transformed the way they are. These three levels are summarised in the figure below:
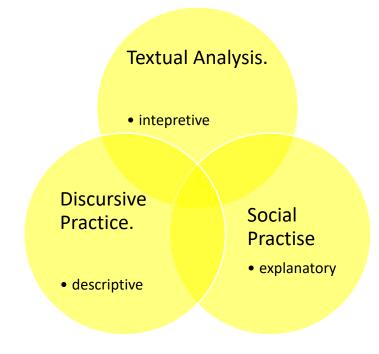
FIGURE: 3.3. Three tiers of CDA

3.9. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH SITE

This study took place in a rural high school referred to as Pitsaneng (pseudonym), categorised as a quintile one[1] and falling under section 20. A school in this category depends largely on the department of education for everyday functions. This school had 21 academic staff, two administration clerks, one non-staff member[2] as well as two SGB members. Among the academic staff were three HoDs, one head of Natural Sciences (in the GET phase as well as Physical Sciences in the FET phase) and the other leads (Economic and Management Sciences in the GET phase and Commerce in the FET phase). The third HoD is responsible for supervising Human and Social Sciences in the GET phase, while heading History and Geography in the FET phase respectively. The school begins with Grade 8 and ends at Grade 12. The total number of enrolled learners stands at 750.

3.10. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I am of the view that when working with rural communities, one needs to be mindful of the sensitivity and fragility of these communities towards researches conducted in their settings. Rural people tend to be more fragile because in the past, they were not treated well by the researchers. In an attempt to adhere to the ethical aspects of research, following a number of presentations in the SURLEC/SULE focus group discussions in which I presented my research proposal, I eventually wrote the summary of my study outlining its objectives, and ethical considerations to the Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State seeking permission to undertake this study. After ensuring that this study complied with the ethical requirements, the committee granted the permission. The following ethical clearance number UFS-HSD2018/1565 was given.

Because this study was conducted in a school setting, I found it important to write a letter to the Free State Department of Education (FSDoE) seeking permission to conduct this research process. In the Free State, it is important to seek permission of the principal before anyone can undertake any activity within the school yard. In this case, I wrote another letter to the principal of the school in which this study was undertaken seeking permission. The principal was the one who might simplify access to these stakeholders. Permission was granted.

For all the participants, letters seeking consent (translated into Sesotho and IsiZulu) were written and handed to them for acknowledgement. In these forms, the objectives and the main aim of this study were discussed. In addition, it was stressed that participants were participating on totally voluntary basis and they were at liberty to abandon the study without any consequences to themselves. Learner participants were given forms and letters to inform their parent(s) or guardian(s) of their intention to participate in this research process. In this regard, parents granted permission for their children to participate in this study.

To ensure confidentiality, all participants signed a 'confidentiality form' (attached in the appendices). It should be noted that this form was not a contract between me and the participants, but was used as a means to minimise the possibility of leaking of sensitive information about or revealed by any participant in this project. In addition, the use of pseudonyms ensured the protection of both the school and all participants. These pseudonyms were also used when recording the participants' voices on the voice-recorder.

As required by both PALAR and SCT, the inclusion of participants in the research process was critical. In this regard, I met with them and discussed the problem with them, with the intention of ensuring that they became part of this study from the beginning. We also discussed and decided on how the research process would unfold. We further agreed on the times and venues for our focus group discussions. With regard to number of sessions, we could not agree on a specific number, but rather we agreed that the number of sessions would be determined by the issues at hand, as well as the pace at which these were discussed. Sessions were held at any point should the need arise.

3.11. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began by defining PALAR as the conceptual framework couching this study.Then, this was followed by justification for the use and relevance of both PALAR and SCT as theoretical framework and conceptual framework, respectively. From there, the focus was on the principles, as well as the stages of PALAR. Also included in these stages were issues such as SWOT analysis, profiling of participants, among others. Following this, the chapter focused on data generation methods. In addition to explaining the method, justifications for using such methods in this study were also provided. The method of data analysis was discussed and reasons for the use of CDA to analyse data in this study were also highlighted. The description of research site then followed. Finally, this chapter focused on the ethical considerations, as well as how they were adhered to in this study.

The next chapter focuses on data presentation, analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA ON IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR EFAL LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim, central to this study is to demonstrate how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This chapter presents data generated in an attempt to achieve this aim. When generating this data, the study aligns such generation with the objectives of this study. Firstly, this study sought to demonstrate and justify the need for the use FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Secondly, it sought to discuss components and aspects necessary for FVR approach. Thirdly, it identified the school conditions that would be necessary for the successful functioning of FVR approach. Fourthly, the focus shifted to discussing possible threats to the successful functioning of FVR approach.

In addition, data and discourses generated under each of these objectives is analysed at three different levels. Firstly, there is analysis of discourse at a textual level. Secondly, the discourse is analysed as a social practice. The third analysis involves discourse as discursive practice. However, it should be noted that in some instances, the analysis may be at two levels depending on the actual utterances of the co-researchers. While doing this analysis, the chapter focuses on how key elements of SCT emerge throughout the study.

4.2. KEY CHALLENGES IMPACTING ON READING COMPREHENSION FOR EFAL LEARNERS

During the discussions, the co-researchers felt that it was necessary for the team to begin by identifying factors or challenges that contributed to poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners at this high school. In other words, these are the challenges that justify the need for the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. The identification of these challenges, according to the co-researchers, would enable the team to

device strategies and a clear plan to overcome them, and how such strategies may be relevant in improving reading comprehension. These challenges include: Poor performance of EFAL learners in reading comprehension, dependency on the traditional instructional practices in the EFAL classrooms, and the absence of the culture of reading.

4.2.1. Poor performance of students in reading comprehension

The persistent poor performance of EFAL learners on reading comprehension pointed to the need for the use of FVR approach. In this case, literature has pointed to the consistent poor reading performance of South African learners in both international and national studies (Rule & Land, 2017:1). For example, the 2011 Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ III) placed South African learners' reading at the fourth position out of the 15 African countries. Locally, the Annual National Assessment (ANA) indicate that performance in EFAL remains unsatisfactory across the grades (DoE, 2014). This is due to the fact that South African classrooms still have learners who are unable to read (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Makiwane-Mazinyo & Pillay, 2017; Mensah *et al.*, 2017).

With the afore-said in mind, during our discussion, it was revealed that poor performance in reading comprehension called for an intervention such as FVR. In this case, the co-researchers had this to say:

Teacher QR: *As you know Mr Mokoena, one of the challenges that our learners face is that of reading with understand. They just lack the skill to do it. As a result, their performance is affected badly. For instance, in my class, the highest learner obtained around 28 out of 80 in paper 1.*

Teacher ST: *Yes…. That's true what ntate [name omitted] is saying paper 1 is problematic for these learners. They are struggling with section A and that section carries lot of marks. Their performance in this section really gives them problems. This needs to be addressed speedily.*

Learner AB: *Yoooh (surprised)…paper 1 is my weakest problem. For me I find text too long and sometimes they write difficult words that we don't know or understand. I just read and read and still ha ke understand, Sir.*

Teacher QR: *The problem is not only here in grade 10 and 11. Since I started teaching grade 8 last year, I have noticed that they also have the same problem like their sisters in grade 10 and 11. The problem I think is a lack of vocabulary and reading skills as it has already been mentioned.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the statement "*…[a]s a result, their performance is affected badly"* **Teacher ST** recognises the poor performance of EFAL learners as a result of poor reading comprehension. Similar observation is made by the colleague **Teacher QR** and recognises the urgency with which this challenge needs to be addressed. Furthermore, **Learner AB** is quoted as saying: "*…paper 1 is my weakest problem"* to indicate that poor reading comprehension has negatively affected her academic performance in general. By indicating that "*the problem is not only here in grade 10 and 11"* **Teacher QR** shows the extent to which the problem of poor performance has spread .All these messages of urgency call for the transformative and learner-centred approach, such as FVR, which is at the centre of this study.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

The statement, "*…[t]his needs to be addressed speedily"* perpetuates the perception that people in rural societies cannot deal with the problems. By omitting the subject in this statement, **Teacher QR** is expecting the solutions to poor reading comprehension to come from the periphery, especially those in the positions of power.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

Social constructivist theory is from the premise that people need to be part of their own learning and creation of knowledge. In other words, for knowledge to be created, people need to be actively involved (Bozkurt, 2017:211). As this study is couched by SCT, it seeks to discourage the perception of *helplessness* of rural people as suggested in the above statement by **Teacher QR.** Through the use of FVR approach, this study seeks to empower both teachers and learners to address the problem of poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners, rather than relying on the district officials to address it.

Following the acknowledgement and realisation of the dire state of reading comprehension for EFAL learners, the team felt that it was necessary to dwell on the issues that contributed to this poor performance. In this regard, it was not surprising that both learners and teachers raised similar factors. Below are excerpts from the transcripts:

Teacher QR: *They just lack the skill to do it*

Learner AB: *For me I find text too long and sometimes they write difficult words that we don't know or understand. I just read and read and still ha ke understand, Sir.*

Teacher ST: *The problem I think is a lack of vocabulary and reading skills*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

On the one hand, the statement by **Teacher QR** that "*…they just lack the skill to do it*" acknowledges that EFAL learners lack the skills necessary for reading with understanding. In other words, these learners were not adequately taught how to read for comprehension. In the same statement, on the other hand, is the realisation that there is a need for these learners to be empowered. Adding to this, **Teacher ST** states that "*…the problem … is a lack of vocabulary.*" As a way to validate this claim, **Learner AB** interjected and stated her frustrations that result from lack of skills to read for understanding. These statements confirm that learners are not exposed to a variety of books that enrich their vocabulary. It is for this reason that the FVR approach proposed in this study is necessary for empowering these learners with these skills. Consequently, there may be improvement in the performance and reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The words, "*…I find a text too long and sometimes they write difficult words that we don't know or understand. I just read and read and still ha ke understand* [I still fail tounderstand]*"* demonstrate the element of inter-textuality and coherence. By stating how she approaches a reading activity, **Learner AB** gives a demonstration and a confirmation of the lack of reading skills and limited vocabulary that were mentioned by other co-researchers. In doing so, she shows that not only is she aware of the discourses around her, but she is also experiencing

the effects of poor reading comprehension as a result of a lack of more learner-centred approach such as FVR.

4.2.2. The use of traditional pedagogical practices in EFAL classrooms

The recent studies in South Africa point to the need for the implementation of differentiated instruction in enhancing reading comprehension (Coetzee, Van Rensburg & Schmulian, 2016:307; Rule & Land, 2017:1; Malebese, 2017:16).   In another recent study aimed at exploring how students can be trained to develop their reading skills in LoLT (English), in South Africa, Foncha, Mafumo and Abongdia (2017:8764) point to the same effect. The use of learner-centred pedagogical practices in reading education is beneficial in a number of ways. Firstly, they enable the reader to apply a repertoire of knowledge, skills, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies during the reading process (Van Staden & Bosker, 2014:2). In the application of these various skills and strategies, the reader becomes an active meaning-making individual. Despite the positive impact, the use of learner-centred approaches has on reading comprehension, according to the co-researchers, the EFAL teachers continue to make use of rigid and traditional pedagogical practices. The discussions began with Teacher-co-researchers' reflections on their own pedagogic practices in the teaching of reading and reading comprehension. The remarks of the co-researchers are captured below:

Teacher ST: *"I normally prepare a small text for them to read. They read individually. Yes…I want them to read aloud so that I can hear how he/she pronounces words."*

Teacher QR: *Just to add on what Mr ST is saying I also interject sometimes when I hear that the learner is struggling with pronunciation or he simply can't read a word. I think this gives a chance not only to learn how to pronounce that word, but also its spelling. Again, I do pause and explain meanings of some words where I feel that there is a need for such intervention. This is because I know that these learners have limited vocabulary. It seems like they were never taught word-attacking skills in lower grades. This is a serious problem, really. Before I start asking them questions, I usually summarise the text or ask one my learners to give a brief overview of the text. By doing this I am trying to see if they have understood and they have been part of the reading process.*

Learner EF: *In class, we are being used these simple questions, but in the actual test or exam they ask us difficult questions and words.*

Learner GH: *For nna neh [For me]…when I understand when meener[teacher] is teaching but masengione*[but when I am working alone] *it becomes difficult because some words wedon't know them. Sometimes you find that the passage is talking about something you don't understand and it mean the whole passage will be hard to understand and write correct answers.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

Teacher ST is quoted as saying "*Yes…I want them to read aloud so that I can hear how he/she pronounces words"*to demonstrate that the EFAL teachers still place emphasis on proper pronunciation, decoding skills and fluency at the expense of comprehension. On the other hand, this statement signifies the rigidity with which the act of reading is practiced. In other words, reading is regarded as an oratorical performance.

Similarly, the assertion by **Teacher QR** that, "*I also interject sometimes when I hear that the learner is struggling with pronunciation or he simply can't read a word*" also indicates that teachers' pedagogic practices perpetuate the act of reading at a superficial level. By stating that "*… I do pause and explain meanings of some words...*" **Teacher QR** is implying that their emphasis on decoding skills and the teacher-centred nature of reading in the EFAL classrooms fails to assist learners with enough vocabulary. Consequently, this contributes to poor level of reading comprehension in the EFAL classrooms.

Under such classroom practices, Granville (2001:15) points to the need for other interactive approaches. The FVR approach suggested by this study can play an important part in this regard. On the contrary to placing more emphasis only on decoding skills and fluency, FVR enables EFAL learners to develop additional skills necessary for reading comprehension. They include being able to identify the main idea of a text, building necessary vocabulary and knowledge of grammar (Renandya, 2007:135; Yamashita, 2015:168).

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

In the statement, "*…Just to add on what Mr [name omitted] is saying*" is the element of intertextuality. In general, **Teacher QR** is building onto what has been said by other co-

researchers. In particular, his assertion is an acknowledgement of the use of teacher-centred pedagogical practices in EFAL classroom. Additionally, the use of the logical connector *"also"* indicates that the use of these strategies is widespread in EFAL classrooms. Moreover, this connector points to the element of coherence as it signifies that **Teacher QR** is aware of the discourse around him.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

In the statement, "*I normally prepare a small text for them to read"* reveals that teachers still dictate on what needs to be read. In other words, learners are not given an opportunity to participate in the decision-making about what they can read. This practice does not only place the educator at the centre of the learning process, but it also renders learners passive recipients of knowledge. This practise is what both this study and SCT refute. While the teacher' role involves providing necessary scaffolding for effective and efficient learning, SCT encourages learners to become active agents in their own learning (Astuti, 2014:43).

Additionally, the SCT proponents argue for the multiplicity of viewpoints and realities in the creation of knowledge. Similarly, through the FVR approach, this study seeks to create a platform where EFAL learners are able to influence decisions in the teaching of reading comprehension in EFAL classrooms.

Following the discussion on how they teach reading comprehension in the EFAL classroom, the team felt the need for Teacher-co-researchers to reflect on how they assess reading comprehension. In other words, we wanted to know how they determine whether or not learners have understood the text.

The following views were expressed:

 Teacher QR: *Before I start asking them questions, I usually summarise the text or ask one my learners to give a brief overview of the text. By doing this I am trying to see if they have understood and they have been part of the reading process.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The statement by **Teacher QR**, "*I usually summarise the text or ask one of my learners to give a brief overview of the text*" demonstrates EFAL classrooms are dominated by teacher-centred strategies that are used by teachers to assess learners' comprehension. The use of such strategies is derived from the misconception teachers have about decoding skills and reading. In this regard, they believe that good decoding skills automatically lead to reading comprehension (Pretorius & Currin, 2010 cited in Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:21). This misconception negates other important aspects of reading comprehension, such as recalling of factual information and context.

In the statement, "*I am trying to see if they have understood and they have been part of the reading process*" **Teacher QR** demonstrates that reading is still treated as an individual activity, rather than being a social activity. Furthermore, through his assertion, **Teacher QR** reveals that EFAL learners are still exposed to the traditional assessment strategies that support the teacher-centred pedagogical practices.

All these challenges signify the need for FVR approach to reading comprehension. Such an approach becomes important because it makes teaching reading easier. Moreover, it assists in presenting reading as a social practice (Foncha et al., 2017: 8762).

Analysis of discourse as social practice

Being quoted as saying, "*Before I start asking them questions, I usually summarise the text or ask one my learners…*" **Teacher QR** reveals how society expects conversation between teachers and learners. In this case, the teacher is tasked with asking questions and the learner is expected to respond. However, what is missing here is the learner's voice on how she may want the content material to be delivered to her. Contrary to society's expectations, this study attempts to provide EFAL learners space and platform to contribute to the discourses around the teaching of reading comprehension in their classrooms.

After these oral reflections, it was time for Learner-co-researchers to express their views. The following excerpts were transcribed:

Learner EF: *In class, we are being used these simple questions, but in the actual test or exam they ask us difficult questions and words.*

Learners GH: *For nna …when I understand when meener is teaching but masengione [For me, I do understand when the teacher is teaching, but problems begin when I have to read and questions alone] it becomes difficult because some words when do know them. Sometimes you find that the passage is talking about something you don't understand and it mean the whole passage will be hard to understand and write correct answers.*

Analysis of discourse of a textual level

Due to lack of innovate and alternative pedagogic and assessment practices in EFAL classrooms, EFAL learners find the activity of reading difficult and uninteresting. For example, **Learner EF** makes the assertion that "…*In class, we are being used to these simple questions, but in the actual test or exam they ask us difficult questions and words."* As evident in this statement, the approaches that are currently in use have not led to the desired outcomes. Instead, through these approaches, EFAL learners develop ineffective strategies which lead them to respond to comprehension questions without proper engagement and complete understanding (Granville, 2001:15). The indication in this statement is that EFAL classrooms are in need of an alternative approach to the teaching of reading and reading comprehension (Coetzee *et al.*, 2016:307).

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

Within the SCT perspective, learners are supposed to be provided with constructs which are essential for finding meaning in their social world (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:53). When engaging in this meaning making process, learners become active co-constructors (Bozkurt, 2017:211). However, the assertion that "…for *me, I do understand when the teacher is teaching, but problems begin when I have to read and questions alone"* demonstrates a different practice in EFAL classrooms. According to **Learner GH,** the use of traditional pedagogical practices has created a *dependency syndrome.* In this regard, EFAL learners are unable to initiate reading activities, read independently and think critically. In other instances, it becomes difficult for EFAL learners to bring their experiences and contexts into the reading process as shown in the following statement: "*Sometimes you find that the passage is talking about something*

you don't understand." In both instances, learners' experiences, background and interactions seem ignored in the EFAL classroom. This is a direct contrast to the assertion by SCT that learners' background knowledge, capabilities and learning styles should be considered (Astuti, 2014:43). Under such circumstances, both social and cognitive aspects of constructivism become difficult in the classroom. Consequently, reading with comprehension becomes even more problematic and justifies the need for the use of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

4.2.3. The absence of a culture of reading

The combination of home, school and community plays an important role to the development of reading culture and literacy in general (Mcquillan & Au, 2001:226). However, if this fails to prevail, Krashen (2006:43) warns that this will have serious consequences for EFAL learners' language and literacy competencies. Additionally, if any of these institutions fail to provide this culture of reading, poor reading habits are likely to follow (Yaji et al., 2017:30). Moreover, the non-existence of libraries in rural areas (Hart, 2010:81) perpetuates the absence of a reading culture. Similarly, in our discussions relating to the reading culture in the school and around the community, the following remarks became noteworthy:

Teacher ST: *As you are aware Koena,[researcher's surname] these children come from community that does not really value education so much. You can see by the way these children behave here in the location. Studying is not one of the things they enjoy doing. Most prefer to be in taverns rather than reading their books. You give a learner a school activity to do at home; I tell you she will come back to school without having that activity.*

Teacher QR: *As my colleague is saying, it seems like the problem is the in the community. These learners don't receive support and they also lack roles models. If you ask them a simple question about any issue that happens in the current newspapers, they do not know. You see the other day I was speaking with the Economics teacher [name omitted] and he told me that his learners are not aware of current news. He said the problem was that learners do not have access to newspapers. I think you are also aware that there is no shop that sells newspapers around here.*

Teacher ST: *Again, in English classes we face similar problem. When it's time for oral presentations learners struggle to bring newspapers and magazines to read or to use in preparation for presentations. In most cases you find three or more learners sharing one paper from a newspaper. In other cases, one learner in a particular class, let's say 11 B and the other in maybe 11C will be using the same newspaper article.*

Teacher ST: *The way manner in which they struggle with reading shows that they have limited exposure to reading materials at home. Of course there is a local library but they seldom borrow books from it...our school library is in shambles as you know.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

Teacher QR and **Teacher ST** are quoted as saying "*…have limited exposure to reading materials at home"* and "*… learners do not have access to newspapers"* to demonstrate that learners' culture of reading is lacking as a result of not having enough reading materials. As a result, these learners lack motivation to read. On the contrary, "*most prefer to be in taverns rather than reading their books,"* according to **Teacher ST**. This statement denotes that reading is regarded as a laborious activity, rather than a recreational and exciting one.

By stating that " *[y]ou give a learner a school activity to do at home; I tell you she will come back to school without having that activity"* shows how the absence of reading culture impacts on the EFAL learners' attitudes towards their school work. As a result of this attitude, they do not take school activities such as reading seriously as it is evident in the statement that "*…In most cases you find three or more learners sharing one paper from a newspaper. In other cases, one learner in a particular class, let's say 11 B and the other in maybe 11C will be using the same newspaper article."* While these assertions may reveal learners' care-free attitudes towards reading on the one hand, they show the state of desperation that rural schools and communities endure, on the other.

Analysis of discourse as a social practice

When both **Teacher QR** and **Teacher ST** state that "*…these children come from community that does not really value education so much"* and "*…it seems like the problem is there in the*

community" they are showing that the absence of reading culture within the community has a direct impact on learners' attitudes towards reading. In other words, these learners fail to see the importance of reading, as they seem to adopt societal practices.

Similar to Teacher-co-researchers, Learner-co-researchers expressed the following remarks:

Learner AB: *But kodwa Meneer nawe uyazi ukuthi ukufunda kuyakhathaza [But Sir, you know that reading is tiresome]. So when I get home I do my homeworks, do my home chores and watch tv or chat on my phone.*

Learner IJ: *Yes…that's true we need some time to relax cause [because] we spend much time at school. So at home you can't get enough time because the parents will be calling you all around and sending you all over. Even when you try to tell them that you are reading, they are not going to listen to you. They tell you that you have enough time to study at school.*

Learner OP:*Hayi!... [Exclaimed]I do have magazines at home but hayi yoo ayabora shame. The problem is that they are old and out-dated even the newspaper amadala nawo.* [I do have magazines and old newspapers at home, but they are boring]

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The statements "…[*b]ut Sir, you know that reading is tiresome"* and "*I do have magazines and old newspapers at home but they are boring"* uttered by **Learner IJ** and **Learner AB** respectively, show that there is a need to revive learners' reading culture. For this to happen, there is a need for making reading a fun and enjoyable experience, as opposed to making it a laborious activity. As a result of lack of finding fun in reading, EFAL learners prefer to spend time on other activities, which may be detrimental to their academic performance and reading comprehension.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

The use of the phrases, "…*I do have magazines and old newspapers at home"* as well as "…*there is no shop that sells newspapers around here"* demonstrates that reading is not regarded as an important activity by the community. In this case, the community appears as another contributory factor to the absence of the culture of reading among the EFAL learners.

In the statement, "…[*e*]*ven when you try to tell them that you are reading, they are not going to listen to you. They tell you that you have enough time to study at school"* it is shown that the learners do not receive enough support to engage in reading for pleasure when they are at home. In this situation, the rural society still fails to establish the connection between home and school. As evident in the above excerpt, learning is expected to take place only in a school environment.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

In the assertions, "…*these children come from community that does not really value education so much*[and]*it seems like the problem is the in the community"* there is an element of intertextuality and coherence respectively. In addition to being aware of the discourses about the community's impact on EFAL learners' culture of reading, both **Teacher ST** and **Teacher QR** support each other's observations. While doing this, they reveal the need for an approach that would change learners' attitude towards reading.

4.2.4. The use of English as language of learning and teaching (LOLT)

While recognising the other eleven official languages, English remains the *lingua franca* in South Africa. This situation is aggravated by the fact that mother-tongue is left in the periphery. In fact, learners in this country spend only three years reading and learning in their mother-tongue (Machet &Tiemensma, 2009:61). In other words, the remaining nine years of schooling are spent learning almost all subjects in English. This continues despite the evidence that non-native speakers of English require between five and eight years of learning English before they can use it as language of teaching and learning (Heugh, 2005:7; Cruickshank, 2006:140; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007:51).

In light of the above facts, exposing learners to English as an additional language and *lingua franca* before Grade seven has a negative impact on their learning. The effects of this exposure continue beyond the 7th grade. Some of the effects include: a negative impact on learners' motivation to read (Fields, 2017:198). According to Heyd-Metzuyanim (2013 cited in Mulaudzi, 2016:164) learners in EFAL classes in South Africa are reluctant to participate in

learning activities such as FVR. In some cases, learners may develop negative attitude towards learning in an additional language. Such negative attitude is intensified by the limited availability of books written in learners' indigenous languages in school libraries (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:62). Many publishers' reluctance to publish books in vernacular adds to this problem (Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011:99). The limited access to reading materials written in their mother-tongues makes them reluctant to participate in FVR.

Unsurprisingly, the issue of English being used as a medium of instruction came up during the workshops and oral reflections. Firstly, learner-co-researchers were the first ones who raised this as a challenge that would impede the success of the FVR in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Similarly, teacher-co-researchers supported the views expressed by the learners. When responding to the prompt about the impact of English language on their reading comprehension and whether it may impede the success of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension, co-researchers expressed mixed opinions:

Learner KL: *Eish …that's another problem cause [because] you see English is not our mother's tongue or a home language. So when you read a book and there is something that are you not understanding maybe a bombastic word, you become confused and you end up not understanding anything.*

Learner OP*: Vele*[For real] *this thing make things difficult for us menner*[teacher] *cause[because] sometimes you want to read a book, like a story but at the end you fail because of this language.*

Learner KL: *Like le nou menner*[Like now, Sir] *it is difficult for other learners to join us here because maybe they think that we will be speaking English or reading those difficult words. Even in class I think we are struggling because we don't have enough dictionaries that we can use and this is affecting our self-esteem.*

Learner OP: *As for me I find it difficult to read in class because when you don't know how to pronounce a word, other learners start to laugh at you. I think if was in our home language I was going to read very much. Like for example, now I finished reading all my Zulu story books because I understand easy.*

Learner MN: *My problem is the same to that of **Learner KL** because I don't know many English words and it become difficult for me to answer questions correctly. Also, it is not easy to continue reading something that you don't understand. Some times when the teacher is doing it in class I understand but when it is time for me to read it become worse.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the expression, "…*that's another problem cause you see English is not our mother's tongue or a home language*" **Learner KL** points to the challenge that is brought by the use of English as a medium of instruction in EFAL classrooms. The statement by **Learner OP** that "*Vele [for real] this thing [the use of English language] make[s] things difficult for us*" confirms the challenge that is posed by the use of English language on learners' reading comprehension. One such challenge involves understanding the written language. By adding that "…*sometimes you want to read a book, like a story but at the end you fail because of this language,*" **Learner KL** demonstrates how the use of English language may impede learners from engaging in reading approaches such as FVR and its success.

By its nature, FVR is free and voluntary and as a result, it requires participation from all stakeholders. However, the use of English language may threaten its success as evident in the extract from **Learner KL:** "…*it is difficult for other learners to join us here because maybe they think that we will be speaking English or reading those difficult words.*" This statement also reveals that many EFAL learners lack confidence to interact with texts written in English.

The statement by **Learner OP** introduces another challenge that is brought by the use of English as a medium of instruction on learners' reading comprehension and the success of FVR approach. In this case, she mentions that, "*as for me I find it difficult to read in class because when you don't know how to pronounce a word…*" According to this co-researcher, word problem is another challenge that may impede the success of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension. In this regard, the failure to recognise a word and to pronounce it correctly affects reading comprehension negatively. **Learner OP** also adds that, "*I think if was in our home language I was going to read very much like for example, now I finished reading all my Zulu story books because I understand easy*" in order to demonstrate that they find reading English books very challenging as compared to the ones written in their mother tongue.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The subsequent statements that "*...even in class I think we are struggling because we don't have enough dictionaries...*" and "*...when you don't know how to pronounce a word*" by both **Learner KL** and **Learner OP**, respectively indicate the element of coherence and intertextuality. While their utterances demonstrate that they are both aware of the discourses around them, they also build on each other's opinions in order to amplify the impact of problems brought about by the use of English as a medium of instruction on the improvement of reading comprehension and the success of FVR approach.

Analysis of discourse as a social practice

Given its colonial and apartheid history, the South African society often associates a western language such as Afrikaans or English with intelligence and power. In the phrase, "*when you don't know how to pronounce a word, other learners start to laugh at you*" **Learner OP** reveals that those who struggle to express themselves properly in English are perceived to be less intelligent. In other words, the use of English language inhibits some learners to engage and interact with the language or texts produced in the language for fear of being ridiculed. Furthermore, this anxiety hampers learners' motivation to engage in FVR and reading comprehension. The phrase, "*I think if it was in our home language I was going to read very much. Like for example, now I finished reading all my Zulu story books because I understand easy*" demonstrates that EFAL learners become more enthusiastic to read and understand texts written in their mother tongue.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

The social constructivist theory encourages the adults (teachers) to be attentive to children's (EFAL learners) zone of proximal development (ZPD). In this case, these teachers are expected to provide sufficient support throughout the process of knowledge creation and meaning making. In other words, while providing support; EFAL teachers become mediators during this learning process (Salem, 2016:98). However, at the school under study, EFAL teachers seem to be failing in this regard as **Learner MN** succinctly puts it: "*Sometimes when the teacher is doing it in class I understand but when it is time for me to read it become worse.*'' This statement points to the fact that EFAL learners do not get adequate support from their teachers.

Additionally, SCT dictates that learners should also scaffold each other (Samana, 2013:339). By stating that "*other learners start to laugh at you*" **Learner OP** indicates that FVR is not likely to succeed, as long as others are ridiculed instead of being supported by their peers.

In the expression, "*…when the teacher is doing it in class I understand…*" **Learner MN** confirms the knowledgeable status that is accorded to adults (teachers) and the important role they need to play in providing guidance and support in the use of English, in order to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners, on the one hand. On the other hand, the comment, "*…but when it is time for me to read it become worse*" signals that the lack of support from peers adds to the challenge posed by the use of English language as a medium of instruction.

After listening to learners' comments and views about the impact English use as the LoLT may have on the success of FVR, teacher-co-researchers added their voices to the discourse. The following remarks were worth noting:

Teacher QR: *I do believe that the use of English for learning and teaching purpose is important because it exposes learners to the real world of work and information. Almost every piece of information available in the world today is in English. Also, the expectation and reality out there is that English has become the main language of communication throughout the world.*

Teacher ST: *Just to add on what my colleague is saying, some of the learners here are going to the institutions of higher learning after completing grade 12 where they will be expected to communicate and write in English. Therefore the use English as LoLT is crucial.*

Teacher ST: *The main reason why children struggle with reading comprehension is that many of them lack necessary reading skills and vocabulary that are needed to read English texts with understanding…in some cases they can't even write or read a single sentence.*

Teacher QR: *I think again the problem becomes worse because our learners are lazy to read. Most of them do not give themselves enough time study. They also lack the desire and motivation to use dictionaries. As a result, they have a very limited vocabulary. I do think that the problem begins at primary schools where these learners are not taught how to read. They lack basic rules of grammar.*

Teacher ST: *I wish you could see the struggle that these learners go through when it's time for oral presentation where they have to do the prepared reading activity. You will find them*

struggling to find reading materials such as newspapers and magazines. This shows that they are not used to reading English in their homes.

Hey! These learners meneer[Sir], let's say you give this one a text to read, as soon as he comes across a word he can't understand, the problem begins. What I have also noticed is that they lack confidence to express themselves in the language. So under such circumstances, this approach may fail to achieve the intended outcomes.

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

Both **Teacher QR** and **Teacher ST** are respectively quoted as saying "...*the use of English for learning and teaching purpose is important*[and] [t]*herefore the use English as LoLT is crucial*" as a way of acknowledging the fact that particular attention should be paid to the teaching of English.

Following this realisation, however, is the series of challenges that are brought by the use of English as LoLT. For example, the statement, "*many of them lack necessary reading skills and vocabulary,*" demonstrates that EFAL learners' reading comprehension and the success of FVR approach at this school may be hampered if learners are not taught proper reading skills and the strategies are not devised for them to improve their vocabulary. In another statement, **Teacher ST** indicates that "[t]*hey lack basic rules of grammar*" as another challenge that may discourage EFAL learners from engaging in FVR in order for their reading comprehension to improve.

This lack of knowledge in grammar and basic reading skills discourages learners from reading voluntarily. **Teacher ST** is also quoted as saying, "*You will find them struggling to find reading materials such as newspapers and magazines.*" In this regard, the phrase emphasises that the success of FVR in improving reading comprehension may be thwarted by the limited interaction EFAL learners have with reading material written in English. In addition to other things, this study, through the introduction of FVR approach, attempts to increase learners' exposure to a wide variety of reading material.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

In the expression, "...*he comes across a word he can't understand, the problem begins*" is the element of intertextuality. In this case, the assertion that limited vocabulary that EFAL

learners have may impede them from engaging in FVR is related to the assertion made by **Learner KL** earlier. Again, the element of coherence is found in the statement "…*just to add on what my colleague is saying…"* Here, **Teacher ST** is building on what has already been said by about challenges that are brought by the use of English language to the success of FVR approach. While supplementing what has been already said, the use of this phrase also demonstrates that these co-researchers are aware of the debate around them and they have shared similar experiences.

4.3. COMPONENTS AND ASPECTS NECESSARY FOR IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR EFAL LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

While the previous section focused on discussing challenges that justified the need for FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners, in this section the focus is on discussing the proposed solutions to the above challenges. The co-researchers deemed the following aspects and components necessary for the success of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFL learners:

4.3.1. The existence of a functional school library

A functional school library is essential for reading and all related academic activities. While a school library assists in promoting reading (Yaji *et al*., 2017:33; Boelens & Van Dam, 2012:85), it also motivates learners to become independent and voluntary readers, as well as life-long learners (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:58; Lo & Tsang, 2009:20). In addition, it supplements the work done by teachers in the classroom as it provides learners with further reading opportunities (Mutungi *et al*., 2014:154). In turn, having this increased access to reading material leads to more reading (Krashen *et al*., 2012:27). For optimal functioning, FVR needs a well-run school library. In this regard, co-researchers expressed the following remarks:

Teacher QR: *The issue of a library needs to be addressed immediately. I do think that if the library is well-equipped it is possible for us to work. I mean, we cannot use the school library in its current form. It really needs some serious attention.*

Learner OP: *Yes...library e important because re thola chance ya ho bala and hape ho quite.[*Library is important because it offers a peaceful place to study*]. There are some books maybe that we may find and read.*

Learner KL: *Hape don't forget the issue of furniture, coz mona sekolong we don't have enough chairs and tables.[*Again, do not forget the issue of furniture because we don't have enough chairs and tables*]. I think we should organise it first.*

Learner MN: *That library, if you want to use it we need to ask laboMama baseSeriti to clean it first. [If you want to use that library, we need to ask for help from the cleaning team] And then we ask them or we go there and arrange and pack all the books.Yah! angithi guys you remember ukuthi labantwana bakamatric bebalala lapho during the camps.[*Yes, you guys can still remember that matric learners used the library as their sleeping space*]. So we need to clean the place first and then we must find the key to keep it clean. For now we cannot read in there.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the statement that, "…*the issue of a library needs to be addressed immediately…it really needs some serious attention"* is the indication that a functional school library is a necessary condition for the success of FVR approach. Additionally, this assertion demonstrates the significant role that a functional library can play in making FVR approach and other reading activities successful in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. According to **Learner KL,** a functional school library is the one which is clean and well-equipped. It also allows for reading and other related activities. Similarly, **Learner OP** stressed the importance of having an organised school library. Among other things, she states that a well-run library may motivate learners to read more because "…*it offers a peaceful place to study."* In this regard, the statement that "…*we go there and arrange and pack all the books"* shows that

when the library is well-organised, it becomes easy for EFAL learners to access reading materials which are essential to the success of FVR approach.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The words, "…*library is important"* demonstrate that **Learner OP** is aware of the discourse around her and that the functional school library is an important aspect for the success of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Similarly, the assertion that, "…*do not forget the issue of furniture"* made by **Learner KL** shows the element of coherence as it builds on the point raised by teacher QR earlier. Based on both their assertions**, Learner KL** and **Teacher QR** put an emphasis on making the school library to become a more enjoyable and well-equipped learning environment.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

The utterances, *I mean, we cannot use the school library in its current form. It really needs some serious attention…* [and] *we don't have enough chairs and tables"* by both **Teacher QR** and **Learner OP** respectively call for analysis of discourse as social information. In this case, by considering the context in which these assertions were made, the issue about lack of furniture and the dire state of the school library becomes their social reality that they are all familiar with. With these shared experiences and knowledge, these co-researchers become valuable participants in this study, as their experiences resonate with what this study seeks to achieve.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

The phrases, "*we go there and arrange and pack all the books*…[and]*I think we should organise it first"* by both **Learner KL** and **Learner MN** demonstrate the willingness to participate in the creation of new knowledge. In this regard, SCT encourages learners to take the initiative in the creation of such knowledge. As evident in these expressions, learners have become aware of the power they possess in changing their own social realities through interaction and negotiation. This action supports the stance taken by SCT that knowledge is created through active participation as opposed to passive reception (Bozkurt, 2017:211). This realisation comes as a result of their experiences and personal meanings (Stein &

Edwards, 1999:544). Furthermore, the use of the inclusive pronoun "we" by **Learner KL** in the above utterance demonstrates the realisation that social reality results from a collective effort, rather than an individual one (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:54).

This situation resonates well with this study as it encourages active participation of EFAL learners in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Through their participation, they are empowered to influence decisions about what they learn and how they are being taught. Additionally, by participating in a team, the study allows for the existence of multiple realities in addressing the problem of poor levels of reading comprehension among EFAL learners.

4.3.2. The establishment of a print-rich environment

Reading forms the integral part of the process of learning. Therefore, for it to be done efficiently, the EFAL classroom should provide suitable conditions. One way of achieving this involves the establishment of a print-rich environment. Providing enough furniture and other resources in the EFAL classroom is more likely to make the FVR approach succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. According to Neuman (2004:91), learners are more likely to be stimulated in a classroom where functional signs and symbols   are visible at all times. In addition to these pictures and symbols, the bulletin boards, posters and book jackets should be exhibited (Lo& Tsang, 2009:22) in the EFAL classrooms. Moreover, FVR is more likely to succeed in the classroom which increases easy access to a variety of books.

In light of the above, the following remarks were made:

Learner AB:

Yes, Meneer [Sir]for example the classroom does not motivate us to study because it's dirty and the walls are all empty. There is nothing that encourages you to read or anything about reading for that matter.

Learner EF:

I think that having pictures on walls like it used to be when we were in lower grades. Back then the walls would be decorated with pictures and drawing us and some difficult words. That used to help me a lot especially with spelling.

I would also suggest that if we paste pictures and rules about grammar, spelling and reading skills will help a lot. Yabona [You see] Sir like maybe some notes on how to read for comprehension will help us understand better cause will be applying them in class

Learner KL:

I think the problem is that our classes are not locked and the pictures will not be safe. Other learners bazozalana[will come here] *and they will tear everything apart.*

Learner GH:*Mina [me] I would suggest that we keep a box for each class. In this box we keep old newspapers and magazines and other books that we may find interesting. This will help us to read while others are making noise when there is no teacher in class.*

Learner CD:*Ngiyayisupporta le idea ya pictures on the wall cause it is gonna help motivate some of us to become like the person who is reading on there*[I do support the idea of pasting pictures on the wall]. *I would also suggest that may be if paste pictures of celebrities who are reading will also motivate us kakhulu [a lot], Sir.*

Teacher ST:

I also concur with what other co-researchers are saying. Perhaps I may add that we can also exhibit some of your works (learners). Some of you here are poets while others write wonderful essay and stories. I do believe that if we do that it will go a long way in motivating learners and encourage them to read voluntary.

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

Learner AB is quoted as saying "*…there is nothing that encourages you to read or anything about reading for that matter"* to show the realisation that in their current conditions, EFAL classrooms fail to provide the environment that encourages FVR. In the same vein, this statement proposes the creation of a print-rich environment as necessary for FVR to result in improved reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Similar views are expressed in the assertion that "*… having pictures on walls like it used to be when we were in lower grades…"* to recognise the importance of images in motivating learners to engage in FVR and enhancing

their reading comprehension. In other words, it can be deduced from this statement that there is hope that once the classroom environment becomes conducive, there is a likelihood of improved reading comprehension and successful implementation of FVR approach.

According to **Learner EF**, "…*the walls would be decorated with… some difficult words"* when EFAL learners are continuously exposed to the terminology that is used in comprehension test activities, their vocabulary will mostly improve. When this happens, their reading comprehension improves as a result of engagement in FVR. Furthermore, the use of such reading materials in the EFAL classrooms contributes positively to the word-recognition and spelling, as **Learner AB** attests, "*that used to help me a lot especially with spelling."*

Apart from having pictures and learners' work displayed on the walls, **Learner KL** introduces the issue of safety in the EFAL classrooms. In the statement, "*I think the problem is that our classes are not locked and the pictures will not be safe"* demonstrates that engaging in FVR will remain difficult if learners' safety and security remain neglected. In other words, for FVR to become successful in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners, the environment in which activities are done should be secured.

Lastly, according to **Learner GH**, FVR is more likely to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners when these learners have easy access to reading materials. In her words, she states that "…*I would suggest that we keep a box for each class. In this box we keep old newspapers and magazines and other books that we may find interesting."* Alternately, she realises the impact the non-existence of books has had on EFAL learners' reading comprehension and their willingness to engage in FVR.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

In the statement, "*I do support the idea of pasting pictures on the wall"* **Learner CD** shows that she is aware of the discourses around and the necessary conditions under which FVR approach may succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. In other words, these utterances come from the realisation that pictures play a role in enhancing reading comprehension. Similarly, the element of coherence contained in the statement "*I also concur with what other co-researchers are saying"* demonstrates that the shared

experiences of poor levels of reading comprehension for EFAL learners have made co-researchers eager to find solutions to this challenge. Through participation in this study, it is envisaged that co-researchers become empowered to challenge the status quo of excluding the views of EFAL learners in the way reading comprehension is taught in the EFAL classrooms.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

When viewed as social information, the analysis at this level focuses on the social reality of the co-researchers and the context in which statements are made. By stating that "… *past[ing] pictures of celebrities who are reading will also motivate us"* **Learner KL** shows that she and other EFAL learners are faced with the school environment that fails to stimulate and motivate them to engage in FVR and improve their levels of reading comprehension. In addition to this failure, EFAL learners are faced with the reality of unsafe schooling environment.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

The utterances, "*I would also suggest that if we paste pictures and rules about grammar, spelling and reading skills will help a lot."I would also suggest that may be if paste pictures of celebrities." I would suggest that we keep a box for each class"* by **Learner AB, Learner KL** and **Learner EF** respectively, indicate that they become aware of the power they have in influencing decision-making about finding ways to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Moreover, these assertions resonate with the SCT's notion of collective construction of reality within the commonly shared social environment (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:52). In this case, by allowing each co-researcher to suggest aspects which are necessary for the success of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension, EFAL learners contribute to changing the status quo.

Similarly, **Teacher ST** is quoted as saying "…*I also concur with what other co-researchers are saying"* to demonstrate that he recognises the role he has to play in the EFAL classroom. Instead of being the sole decision-maker about what is best for EFAL learners, this statement serves as recognition of multiple realities that exist in the EFAL classroom. Furthermore, by

saying that"…*perhaps I may add that we can also exhibit some of your works [learners]"* **Teacher ST** provides guidance about what kind of material may be beneficial to EFAL learners. While his assertions act as scaffold to EFAL learners, they also signify the central role teachers must play in the creation of print-rich environment in order for FVR approach to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

4.3.3. Teacher modelling

While physical environment can influence one's interest to engage in reading, interest can also affect one's motivation to engage in reading (Mcquillan & Au, 2001:226). One's own belief in one's competence and a willingness to engage a reading activity are central to motivation to read. In other words, there is a relationship between one's attitude towards reading and one's intrinsic motivation (Warrington & George, 2014:67). With this in mind, for FVR to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners, it is important that these learners become extrinsically and intrinsically motivated (Fields, 2017:197). To achieve this, teacher modelling is essential during FVR (Loh, 2009:95; Goctu, 2016:74). In turn, teacher modelling leads to learners' interest in reading a wide variety of materials (Boerma *et al*., 2015:549). FVR seems to be successful where teachers tailor their modelling in accordance with learners' instructional needs (Fisher & Frey, 2015:63).

In light of the above, the co-researchers expressed their views below:

Learner AB: *Our teachers do not motivate us to read. I mean you hardly see a teacher reading a newspaper here at school.*

Learners CD: *Yebo mngani* [Yes my friend*] it's true vele. You can see how we struggle to get newspapers here at school. It shows ukuthi abothisha bethu do not read. They only know the textbooks not even a simple magazine. This thing is affecting us too as learners.*

Learner MN*: Uyazi if ubona omunye unmuntu reading a book, you also develop the interest to read. [You know, if you see another person reading a book, you also develop the interest to read]. And again abothisha [teachers] are our role models we should see them read. It does not help ukuthi yithisodwa who read in class. Abothisha nabo they must read [Teachers must read too].*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

By stating that, "…*if you see another person reading a book, you also develop the interest to read"* **Learner MN** demonstrates the impact teacher modelling can have on EFAL learners. In this case, these learners are more likely to engage in FVR if they see their teacher doing it. In the same vein, **Learner CD** points to the danger of lack of teacher modelling. In his statement, he argues that it affects their interest and motivation to engage in FVR. In other words, the assertion that "…*this thing [lack of teacher modelling] is affecting us too as learners"* is a realisation that for FVR to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners, teacher modelling is a necessary component thereof. Adding to this is the statement by **Learner MN** that "…*Abothisha nabo they must read [Teachers must read too]."* These utterances demonstrate the realisation that EFAL learners are looking up to their teachers. In other words, the decision about what to read should not rest with teachers alone. Rather, it should be the collective decision of both teachers and EFAL learners as this study attempts to promote this notion. It is the view of this study that when EFAL learners are given an opportunity to influence decisions about how reading comprehension is taught and addressed in EFAL classrooms, there may be improved reading comprehension.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

On the one hand, the statement, "…*and again abothisha [teachers] are our role models we should see them read"* means that for FVR to succeed, the society should see the teachers reading. On the other hand, it demonstrates that teachers are held at high esteem by the society. In this case, they are viewed as persons who provide guidance and empowerment. Consequently, it becomes easier for their behaviours to be emulated by the learners. While this statement may carry some weight, this study recognises the void that this view creates. In this case, it renders other people (EFAL learners) totally dependent on the teacher to decide solely about teaching and learning of reading comprehension. This study seeks to challenge this status quo by arguing that EFAL learners participate from the planning of the lesson, selection of reading material to the actual execution of the reading activity.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

In the phrases, "…*I mean you hardly see a teacher reading a newspaper here at school…They only know the textbooks not even a simple magazine"* by **Learner AB** is the element of intertextuality. Here, the co-researchers corroborate each other's observations about the need for teacher modelling. Additionally, through these utterances, they demonstrate that teacher modelling is an important component of FVR approach.

A close analysis of the statement, "…*and again abothisha [teachers] are our role models we should see them read"* reveals the element of coherence contained in this statement. In this regard, **Learner MN** is aware of the discourses around her. Her assertions demonstrate her understanding and realisation of the importance of having teachers modelling reading in the EFAL classroom.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

By stating that "….*It does not help ukuthi yithisodwa abafundayo eclasseni [It does not help if we are the only ones who read in class]"* **Learner MN** makes an appeal for teacher modelling. Here, she realises the positive effect teacher modelling may have in making FVR successful in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Moreover, her utterances imply that they currently lack motivation to engage in FVR because they do not receive enough support from the EFAL teachers. In this regard, SCT proponents argue that learners need continuous modelling throughout the learning process. Through modelling, learners become exposed to multiple realities as envisaged by SCT. In this study, teachers modelling included reading books that addressed the instructional needs of EFAL learners. Furthermore, the platform was created for learners to engage in peer-modelling and this increased their chances of being exposed to different realities and perspectives. Similarly, the discussions and oral reflections in this study provided learners an opportunity to present their realities to their EFAL teachers with regards to the teaching and learning of reading comprehension in the EFAL classroom.

4.3.4. Effective scaffolding

In addition to modelling, successful FVR is characterised by high levels of scaffolding. In fact, scaffolding has shown to impact positively on learners' performance in reading comprehension (Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011:49). This is achieved by providing temporary assistance to learners until they become independent readers who possess the required reading skills (Scharlach, 2008:22; Samana, 2013:338; Salem, 2016:98). While scaffolding by teachers is effective, peer-scaffolding is equally important (Gagne & Park, 2013:195).

During our discussions, Teacher-co-researchers were asked to reflect on the issue of providing necessary support to EFAL learners. The following remarks were note-worthy:

Teacher QR: *Supporting weak learners in the FVR is one of the most important things to do. I do think that most learners need support with pronunciation while others can't read with understanding. So as a teacher my work involves bringing the best out of every learner.*

Teacher ST: *We have most weak learners coming through the system. They really need support in almost everything they do. Giving them continuous support allows you as an educator to identify those who have challenges with regards to reading comprehension. I would suggest that we provide them with necessary reading materials, and form reading clubs so that they can support each other too.*

Teacher QR*: Unlike their counterparts in the former model c schools, our learners lack a strong support system in their homes. They don't have parents who can monitor them or even read with them after school.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The phrase, "…*supporting weak learners in the FVR is one of the most important things to do"* demonstrates the realisation that for FVR to succeed, there is a need for EFAL learners to be supported by the educator. In this statement, it is also clear that prior to the intervention by this study there was no sufficient support for learners during the teaching and learning of reading comprehension despite the need to do so. In the same vein, the statement by **Teacher ST** that "…*giving them continuous support allows you as an educator to identify those who*

have challenges with regards to reading comprehension" indicates that teachers are aware of their roles and the challenges that EFAL learners face with regard to reading comprehension. Moreover, it indicates that FVR is more likely to succeed if EFAL learners receive support on continual and sustained basis. For more improved result, according to **Teacher ST**, the support should come from both the school and outside the school. The words, *"… provide them with necessary reading materials, and form reading clubs"* provide examples of support that would be beneficial to EFAL learners. This observation concurs with the view raised by the EFAL learners that they preferred the classroom where they received adequate support.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

By stating that *"…learners lack a strong support system in their homes"* **Teacher QR** depicts the society in which the school is situated. In its view, this study makes an observation that learners reflect social reality of the societies they come from. These learners come from the society which separates school from the home. In other words, school and home are not viewed as interdependent, but as sole and unrelated social institutions. Despite this distorted view, the Teacher-co-researchers continued to recognise the important contribution other social institutions can make in advancing the success of FVR in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

These assertions, *"Supporting weak learners in the FVR is one of the most important things to do* [and] *we have most weak learners coming through the system"* by **Teacher ST** and **Teacher QR** respectively, demonstrate the element of intertextuality. In this case, not only do they share similar reality and experience, but they are also aware of the discourses around them. These discourses are around providing sufficient support to EFAL learners until they become independent and active readers who read with comprehension. Additionally, the element of coherence is contained in the phrases *"…. I do think that most learners need support with pronunciation* [And] *I would suggest that we provide them with necessary reading materials"*.

In this regard, these co-researchers build on each other's views about the kind of support they can provide to EFAL learners. In other words, they both agree that for FVR to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners, support from both teachers and parents is an essential aspect.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

According to SCT proponents, interaction and negotiation are important in the creation of knowledge (Bozkurt, 2017:211). In their view, these collaborative and collective interactions are important for learners' intellectual development and acquisition of knowledge. Such acquisition is facilitated by the presence of effective scaffolding. This point is augmented by the phrases, "…*supporting weak learners in the FVR is one of the most important things to do* [and]…*as a teacher my work involves bringing the best out of every learner.*" Additionally, these assertions demonstrate the understanding that EFAL learners need continuous support and collective action in order for FVR approach to succeed in improving reading comprehension. They further concur with the notion that for knowledge to be meaningfully constructed, learners need to become active participants. This study argues that learner participation must not only be limited to learners interacting with reading material. In contrast, it proposes that this participation should include lesson planning, selection of reading materials and actual delivery of the reading comprehension lesson in the EFAL classroom. This view stems from the belief that learners can construct knowledge best when they are being guided. This is in opposition to having knowledge constructed for them, as it is currently the case in EFAL classrooms at the school under study.

4.4. SCHOOL CONDITIONS CONDUCIVE FOR THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF FVR APPROACH

There are quite a number of conditions under which FVR approach can succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. The discussion focuses on how the aspects identified by the co-researchers were addressed. In other words, unlike in the previous sub-section where CDA was used to analyse the three objectives of this study, this portion provides a critical reflection on the actions that were taken by the team. This reinforces the

requirement by PALAR that co-researchers need to be seen "in-action". It should be noted, however, that these actions were informed by the discussions and free attitude interviews.

4.4.1. Conditions which contributed to the establishment of a functional school library

During our discussions and oral reflections, the issue of the school library featured prominently. The co-researchers expressed concern about the dire state of the school library and the impact it had on their ability to engage in FVR. As a result, we decided that we needed to make the school library functional and beneficial to our team.

Firstly, we agreed that we needed to talk to the school principal and request the permission to use the library. With oral permission granted, in our initial visit to the library, we discovered that it served other purposes instead of its primary ones. It was once used to store food for National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). This is a government-initiated programme aimed at providing learners with free meals during school time. Also, we discovered that it was used as a bedroom by grade 12 learners during the School Enrichment Programmes (SEPs) during examinations. The remnants of these items were still evident. In response, we requested the members of ECWP to assist in the cleaning of the school library and the shelving of books.

Secondly, the team decided on furnishing the library. This proved to be problematic because the school faced the challenge of inadequate furniture. We then requested the services of the local business man who agreed to refurbish the old furniture at a reasonable cost. In this case, the school raised funds to pay for the services. Ultimately, the conducive space for reading was created in the library with well-arranged furniture, packed shelves and posters on the walls. We managed to divide the library into different sections with each section being properly labelled.

Thirdly, after all the cleaning and arrangements had been done, the team decided on selecting people who would run the library. It became quite clear in the beginning that none among us had the experience nor expertise in library management and other related activities. As a response to this, the team concluded that all members would take this role on rotational basis. In other words, one team member would be in charge of the library for a week before

another one would assume responsibility for the same period. The main responsibility of this member involved opening and closing the library after school while also facilitating the borrowing and returning of books used for FVR purposes. Generally, through collaborative effort between the team members and the school, it resulted in making the school library a functional entity. This act of collaboration resonates with the principles of SCT as a theoretical framework anchoring this study. In this regard, SCT requires knowledge to be created from multiple realities and viewpoints.

4.4.2. Factors which led to the establishment of a print-rich environment

Apart from making the school library functional, the team members suggested that there was a need to have "little libraries" in the EFAL classrooms. The idea was that we needed to increase the accessibility of reading material in the classrooms. This idea was necessitated by the fact that the school library was only operational after school hours because all the stakeholders were engaged in other academic activities. To achieve this, we started by creating what we called 'Reading boxes' in each EFAL classroom. These boxes contained old newspapers and magazines which learners were asked to collect from their homes. These reading materials were made accessible to both Learner-co-researchers and other EFAL learners.

For a print-rich environment to be successfully realised, it is required that the classroom stimulates EFAL learners to read. In this case, we asked learners to bring and paste posters and big pictures in the classroom. Following the advice of Learner-co-researchers, we pasted the pictures depicting celebrities and influencial people reading. They had earlier stated that they were more likely to be motivated and inspired to read if they saw one of the celebrities do it. All this resulted in EFAL learners spending time reading for pleasure instead of waiting for the teacher to bring something that needed to be read.

4.4.3. Conditions that contributed to effective modelling by teachers

The success of effective teacher modelling was based on various things. First, Learner-co-researchers expressed the notion that they would like to see teachers engaging in FVR. By hearing first-hand from the learners, EFAL teachers realised that learners were also interested in what they read as teachers. Consequently, as EFAL teachers, we made the agreement that every Thursday would be dubbed "Reading Thursday." The idea behind this project was that each EFAL teacher would set aside one hour for reading. This activity involved EFAL learners selecting reading materials from the 'Reading boxes' in their classroom and from the school library. It was during this time that both EFAL learners and teachers engaged in the silent reading. However, before the commencement of each reading session, EFAL teacher would read one text and demonstrate to learners how to use reading skills. In this case, learners watched when the teacher scanned and skimmed the text for information. In addition to this, the teacher also demonstrated how to use word -attacking skills. In each of these occasions, the teacher had the dictionary handy. In addition to using the dictionary for vocabulary purposes, it was also used to search for different context in which a word could be used. In all these, learners were asked to make inputs and various contexts in which such a word could be used and its relevance to the rest of the text.

4.4.4 Factors that contributed to the successful scaffolding by teachers

While the role of EFAL teachers included modelling for learners, it also extended to providing support to these learners during the FVR. As stated above, teachers demonstrated how to apply all the skills necessary for reading comprehension. In this case, the classroom setting made it possible for teachers to provide this support to the struggling learners. It allowed learners to seat in groups and tackle the text in their groups. This arrangement also enabled teachers to attend to learners' questions readily and effectively. The instant feedback that learners were receiving acted as a form of scaffolding too. Furthermore, the readily available dictionaries and a variety of reading materials made scaffolding easier for teachers and learners.

Apart from the classroom environment, the attitudes of both Teacher-co-researchers and learner-co-researchers played a significant role in the success of scaffolding. In this regard, learners were enthusiastic to engage in FVR and to receive assistance from the educators. Unlike in the beginning where Learner-co-researchers were viewed as being lazy to study, the Teacher-co-researchers recognised the change in the attitude learners displayed in general, and FVR in particular. Another contributory factor to this change in attitude involved the co-lesson planning and selection of reading materials during the FVR. This was important as it challenged the status quo which placed learners at the periphery of lesson planning and selection of reading materials for reading comprehension. With such a positive change in place, Teacher-co-researchers felt it was necessary to provide the support.

4.5. Threats on the implementation of FVR approach

As a team, we identified the following barriers that could impede the success of the FVR approach. These include: a lack of functional libraries, inadequately trained teachers of EFAL, the use of traditional instructional strategies, the use of English as the medium of instruction, low self-efficacy of teachers and learners, and poverty and rurality.

4.5.1. A lack of functional libraries

The school under study is located in a rural area and is surrounded by farming communities. As it is often the case with high schools in these rural areas, a lack of resources is evident within and around this school. The non-existence of a functional school library is at the centre. As recent as 2011, more than seventy percent of schools in South Africa lack libraries (DBE, 2011a: 23). Where they exist, only seven percent of school libraries in this country are functional (Evans, 2014:107; Mojapelo, 2015:36). The other remaining school libraries are in a dire state. In other words, some school libraries lack books, while others have books which are either old or unappealing to learners' interests (Paton-Ash & Wilmont, 2015).

When asked to comment on the status and functionality of the school library, **Learner AB** stated the following:

" …*Oh wait! Do you really call this a library? There is no library here at school. In fact, we only know the place as a library but the reality is there is no library there*."

Analysis of discourse at textual level

From the above utterances, the learner simply directs attention to the dire state of the school library. In other words, she points to the need for making the school library functional in order for them to engage in FVR. What also emerges from these utterances is that the non-existence of a functional library hampers the ability of learners to engage in FVR. Furthermore, the above statement also reveals that reading for pleasure does not take place at this school.

Analysis of discourse as a social practice

In the phrase "…*we only know the place as a library but the reality is there is no library there*" it is indicated that the culture of reading is not inculcated in the school and the society around the school. It further shows that the school library has been neglected to such an extent that it only remains by just the name.

Analysis of discourse as a discursive practice

The use of the pronoun "we" in the above phrase further demonstrates **Learner AB**'s awareness of the discourses around the functionality of the school library. In other words, she and other learners in our group are aware of the negative impact the absence of a functional library has on their ability to engage in FVR.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

At the centre of SCT perspective is the notion that learners learn through collaboration with others. In other words, it places emphasis on the interactions between individuals within a particular social context (Sivan, 1986:211; Sandu & Unguru, 2017:52). Therefore, the use of the pronoun "we" in the above extract demonstrates the notion of taking collective effort in solving problems and learning in educational settings.

 Eager to speak, **Learner EF**, raised her hand and added the following:

"*To add to what he has just said, I think our library needs a serious upgrade. There are no books in there. No chairs, no table.* Everything *is just a mess there*".

Analysis of discourse at textual level

The phrase "*I think our library needs a serious upgrade"* demonstrates the realisation by this co-researcher that the dire state of the school library poses a challenge to the success of FVR. Similarly, a lack of books is identified as another problem hampering the success of FVR at this school. Furthermore, this expression shows her willingness to contribute in making the school library functional. In turn, this will contribute to improving reading and reading comprehension for EFAL learners at this school. The appeal here is that there should be enough material for learning and reading.

Analysis of discourse as a discursive practice

The words, "[T]o add to what he has just said…" reveal coherence because **Learner EF** is building on what has already been said about the negative impact the dysfunctional school library has on FVR. Also, they show that this co-researcher is not only aware of the discourses around her, but she is also part of such discourses.

Analysis of discourse from social constructivist perspective

The assertion, "*There are no books in there. No chairs, no table.* Everything *is just a mess there*" concurs with the view that the aim of a social constructivist perspective is affording the co-researchers to understand, explain, act and describe their social context (Gergen, 2005). As it is evident in the above expression, the co-researchers' world is that of neglect, deprivation and chaos. All these hamper the success of FVR in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners at this school.

Learner IJ added by explaining how seriously is the need for a functional school library. Her opinions were captured in the following expression:

"*A school is a place for learning and studying, right? But then what happen if the same school fail to give us, learners a space to read and do our homeworks? Some of us we come from amakhaya [homes] where we don't get time and space to study quietly*"

Analysis of discourse at textual level

The above utterances point to the recognition of the important role a functional library plays in their learning. In doing so, she also highlights the failure by the school to become a suitable place (a functional library) for them to engage in FVR and other school related activities.

Analysis of discourse as a discursive practice

The words, "*But then what happen if the same school fail to give us, learners a space to read and do our home-works?*" signify the extent to which she has lost the courage and interest in engaging in FVR as a result of a lack of dysfunctional school library. This further demonstrates that when a school fails to create an environment conducive for reading for pleasure in particular, and reading in general, learners tend to develop negative attitude towards reading. Moreover, by asking the rhetorical question in the above expression, **Learner IJ** shows that not only is she aware of the discourses taking place around her, but she is building on the challenges that have been identified by other co-researchers. In this regard, she points to another difficulty brought about by the non-availability of functional school libraries and how this impacts on herself and other learners around her.

Analysis of discourse as a social practice

The statement, "*Some of us we come from amakhaya [homes] where we don't get time and space to study quietly*" reveals that the society pins its hopes on a school to provide unhindered teaching and learning. Alternatively, learners are not expected to take learning and reading home. While this view is short-sighted, the absence of functional libraries both at a school and in the community worsens the situation. This situation makes the need for FVR approach in order to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners at this rural high school more relevant and urgent.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

The above utterances embody a reaction to the status quo at this school. As evident in the preceding expressions, such realities are shared by different co-researchers through discussion. This concurs with the view held by SCT that knowledge is a multi-faceted series of realities (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:57; Bozkurt, 2017:211). This sharing of information through

discussions was made possible by using SCT to anchor this study. The formation of this team guided by the principles of SCT provided the platform for co-researchers to view the challenge of reading comprehension for EFAL learners from multiple perspectives and realities. Furthermore, SCT allows for the inclusion of the experiences of co-researchers in the construction of reality (Simandan, n.d:154). In this regard, while expressing the opinions of **Learner IJ**, the above utterances also reveal her experiences and those of other EFAL learners at this school.

When asked for their contributions on the dysfunctional school library, both teachers **QR** and ST had this to say, respectively:

Teacher ST: *" Eh…you see eh wena [you] Meneer [Sir], I can really say that I am aware of what other co-researchers are saying. All they have said so far is the truth. Our library does really affect the moral and motivation of learners to engage in reading and most importantly writing their school work negatively"*

Teacher QR: *Ja, [Yes,] Chair [Chairperson] this dysfunctionality manifests in different ways. For example, lack of furniture in the library and the school in general makes engaging learners in reading even more difficult. Another issue is that of old and redundant books. Again these books are not well kept because there are shelves where they can be arranged and packaged."*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In their respective responses above, both teachers agree that if the library remains dysfunctional, their plans to engage learners in reading remain severely hampered. The dire state of the school library discourages learners to participate actively in their own learning. In other words, they realise the need to have a well managed library for FVR to succeed.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The elements of coherence and intertextuality are evident in the phrase "…*I can really say that I am aware of what other co-researchers are saying"* expressed by **Teacher ST**. What emerges from this expression is the acknowledgement of the existence of the challenges that contribute to the ineffective teaching and learning of reading comprehension for EFAL learners at this rural high school. However, the fact that nothing has been done despite this

knowledge and awareness simply seems to point to lack of motivation and effective leadership at this institution.

Analysis of discourse from the social constructivist perspective

In the above expression, **Teacher QR** uses the words "*… what other co-researchers are saying.*" This signals a shift from viewing himself as the teacher who enjoys a privileged position in comparison to learners. In other words, he views himself as being on equal position with other participants whose common goal is to solve the problem of reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This is due to the fact that SCT seeks to promote power-balanced interactions (Bozkurt, 2017:211). Not only does this shift solidify the relations between him and other co-researchers, but it also shows the importance of having positive and balanced relationship in the process of social construction of what is real (Cottone, 2007:194), as demanded by SCT.

Again, the words, "*All they have said so far is the truth*" concur with the notion expressed by SCT that consensus and collective action is important in the construction of knowledge and reality (about any social challenge (Stein & Edwards, 1999:544). This further shows the ownership of the problem and the willingness to contribute to solving it. Such willingness derives from the view held by SCT that knowledge results from interactions and mutual intervention of different stakeholders (Tanil, 2014:492).

Lastly, by stating that "*…this dysfunctionality manifests in different ways*" Teacher QR demonstrates that the challenge of dysfunctional library can be viewed in different ways. This utterance further points to the observation that SCT calls for multiple realities in the construction of knowledge.

Before the commencement of another meeting, **Teacher QR** felt that we needed to revisit the issue of training of educators in library use and management. He pointed out that it was necessary for us to understand this issue and how it would affect the success of the FVR in particular, and reading comprehension in general. The remarks are as follows:

Teacher QR*: When it comes library management, I am totally glue-less. Is that not supposed be the responsibility of the School Management Team? Even in that regard no training has*

been offered to us the newly qualified teachers. This simply means, if we as teachers do not know how to run and use a library there is no way our learners will know and spend time there.

Teacher ST: *That is why…as you know Mr Mokoena… that our school library is used as a place for storing food of feeding scheme during the year and it is also used as bedroom… (laughs)… during winter classes and during the final examinations in December.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

By being quoted as saying *"…I am totally glue-less"* **Teacher QR** reveals that lack of training in library management is a challenge that hampers the success of FVR as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Moreover, the question, "…*is that not supposed be the responsibility of the School Management Team?"* indicates that lack of training has led to confusion and ignorance about the roles and responsibilities of managing a school library. In addition, this question demonstrates that the school library has become dysfunctional because teachers lack necessary capacity and skills to manage it. In short, lack of training of teacher-librarians has left the school library in complete non-existence. This situation has deteriorated to the extent that the school library is used for other unrelated things as **Teacher ST** reports that "… *our school library is used as a place for storing food of feeding scheme during the year and it is also used as bedroom"* and under these circumstances, encouraging and expecting learners to engage in reading activities is almost impossible.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The element of intertextuality is contained in the statement "…*That is why…as you know Mr Mokoena…"* because **Teacher ST** builds on the information that is already known to me and other co-researchers. This statement also points to the experience and knowledge we all shared at this school.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

In the statement "…*even in that regard no training has been offered to us the newly qualified teachers"* **Teacher QR** recognises absence of the platform for knowledge-sharing. Through this statement, he demonstrates the unwillingness of more experienced officials of DBE to provide training and scaffolding. SCT requires that adults (teachers) model behaviour and learners learn through imitation and observation. However, at the school under study,

Teacher QR has said the following: "*if we as teachers do not know how to run and use a library there is no way our learners will know and spend time there*". This situation creates problems for learners because teachers find it difficult to model good behaviour (reading) to learners. Also, this utterance shows how lack of training of educators leads to discouraged and unmotivated EFAL learn

4.5.2. Continuous view of reading comprehension as a static process

Our team comprised of two teachers of English. They have both recently graduated from university. One is holding a teaching degree while another holds a postgraduate qualification. With almost four years of being teachers at this school and their age, one would expect them to be highly trained and conversant with the developments in the teaching and learning of English as a first additional language. For instance, one would expect them to be familiar with challenges facing learners who learn through this language. Challenges which range from lack of resources to learning problems such as inability to read with and for comprehension. Additionally, one would be obliged to believe that solutions to such problems were known to them.

On the contrary, it was revealed during the focus group discussions that they were facing challenges similar to other teachers of English who have been in the teaching profession for decades. Similarly to their counterparts, they were also lacking the solutions to address the problem of teaching learners how to read with understanding. More shockingly, they, like their counterparts, were searching for solutions from the periphery.

During this discussion session, the focus was on how reading comprehension activities were taught and viewed in their classrooms. It further went on to include the teaching of reading for and with comprehension. The responses were captured as follows:

Learner EF: "*I am sorry to say this…(laughter)…but our teachers are not really flexible. Uhmm…I mean like you will find a teacher just giving you a text and says that someone must read. For me, that makes the entire activity boring and difficult*"

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

When **Learner EF** says *"…our teachers are not really flexible…"* she is implying that teachers of English fail to make the reading fun by trying new ways of doing things. In this case, she points at their failure to incorporate more learner-centred approaches in their lessons. Alternatively, she seems to suggest things would have been different if teachers were open to experimenting with various teaching approaches, such as FVR when reading comprehension activities were taught in the EFAL classroom.

Analysis of discourse as a social practice

The statement, *"…but our teachers are not really flexible"* demonstrates the expectation the society has on teachers as social agents. In this regard, learning is viewed as a one-way process. The responsibility of ensuring what and how a learner learns seems to be placed squarely on teachers. This means that from the planning stage to the final stage of a reading comprehension activity and how the activity would be executed in the classroom, such responsibility lies solely with the educator.

Analysis of discourse from the social constructivist perspective

The use of the expression *"…our teachers are not really flexible"* tends to relegate the learners to the periphery and also undermines their role in the process of learning. From this remark, one may deduce that learning is viewed as a one-way process. This notion places the teacher at the centre of learning, while the learner remains a passive receiver of knowledge. Through the use SCT, this study seeks to challenge the status quo. In this regard, SCT views learning as a two-way process which is not only placing the learners at the centre of learning, but also, it ensures that the learners are actively contributing to their own learning. Moreover, SCT is from the premise that social reality is constructed through meaningful interactions and collaboration with others (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:52). As is the case in this study, learners took part from the lesson planning, collection and selection of texts, which would be read in class, in the manner in which the actual lesson would unfold in the EFAL classroom.

It was during these discussions that **Learner GH** added the following:

Yes, that's true. Most times you will be reading something that you have never read before. I wish that our teachers could do things differently instead of having one learner reading the entire passage and then expect us to answer questions assessing our understanding. That is not fair, really.

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The statement "*…most times you will be reading something that you have never read before"* implies that learners are not exposed to a variety of reading exercises. As a result, the limited exposure to various reading material has increased their difficulty to read for pleasure and with understanding. Moreover, this struggle points to the shortcomings in training of teachers to teach reading comprehension to learners who lack reading materials, such as the learners at the school under study. It is through these focus group discussions and oral reflections that this study seeks to use FVR approach to bridge this gap. However, instead of suggesting possible solutions for both teachers and learners, the co-researchers in this study worked collaboratively and collectively in finding ways to use FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The elements of coherence and intertextuality are found in the expression, "*I wish that our teachers could do things differently."* While this utterance indicates **Learner GH**'s state of being aware of the discourses around her, it further shows that she shares similar experience that is brought by teachers' failure to use more learner-centred methods when dealing with reading and reading comprehension.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

By choosing these words in her speech, "*Most times you will be reading something that you have never read before,"* **Learner GH** demonstrates the disjuncture that exists between teachers and themselves as learners. In other words, teachers seem to be oblivious to the learners' prior learning experiences. In addition, this utterance shows that learners still have the desire to interact and experience with reading material that appeal to their interest.

When asked to reflect on his teaching methods and capabilities, **Teacher ST** stated the following:

I think the problem goes back to our training as language teachers in different universities. Although I have recently qualified as a teacher, I cannot remember a course which dealt with how to teach learners to read for and with understanding. Instead, the emphasis was on learning theories and teaching methods.

Reflecting on the same topic and almost immediately, **Teacher QR** added to what his colleague had said. He made the following remarks:

*Adding to what **Mr ST** has just said, I had the same problem. So when I started teaching here I just did the way my teachers taught me. You know our teachers would simply have each learner reading a paragraph and then questions would follow. Basically, that's what I have been doing. I really never had a time to think of any alternative way of doing it. Or have I ever thought of how the way I treat this concept plays a role in hindering my learners' performance and comprehension.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The statement, "*I think the problem goes back to our training as language teachers in different universities…*" shows that **Teacher QR** acknowledges the insufficient training to teach reading and reading comprehension. Also, he is aware of the problem and its consequences on the performance of EFAL learners in activity that requires reading comprehension.

Moreover, by saying that "*…the emphasis was on learning theories and teaching methods*"**Teacher QR** acknowledges the fact that he and others still continue the use and preference of teacher-centred methods in the EFAL classrooms. Alternatively, he points to the poor training on the application of these theories and methods in the EFAL classrooms in high schools.

Analysis of discourse as a discursive practice

The following words: "*…adding to what **Mr QR** has just said...*" demonstrate the element of coherence. In this case, not only is **Teacher ST** aware of the discourses around him, but he also adds a new dimension to the discourse by stating that "*…so when I started teaching here I just did the way my teachers taught me*". These words reveal the experiences that he and other teachers have had as a result of the use of teacher-centred methods in EFAL classrooms.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

In the utterance, "*I just did the way my teachers taught me*" by **Teacher QR**, it demonstrates society's reluctance to accept change. As members of society, EFAL teachers find it difficult to change, whilst the rest of society remains stagnant or transforms at a slower pace. Similarly, learners do not see the need for a change to occur in the learning and teaching of EFAL reading comprehension. This situation is bound to affect teachers and their pedagogical practice and delivery in the EFAL classroom.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

By stating that, "*…I really never had a time to think of any alternative way of doing it…*"**Teacher QR** points to the existence of lack of the ability to consider different viewpoints and realities in the construction of knowledge. Furthermore, the statement: "*I just did the way my teachers taught me*" indicates the feeling of hopelessness and unwillingness to participate in the emancipation of oneself, while the words "*…or have I ever thought of how the way I treat this concept plays a role in hindering my learners' performance and comprehension*" signify how the teaching of reading comprehension for EFAL learners has remained unchanged, despite evident problem of poor performance. Unfortunately, this learned helplessness has the rippling effect on the teaching and learning of reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Following these reflections, which demonstrated the gap in their training as EFAL teachers, the focus of the discussion shifted to the role the DBE has played in an attempt to address this challenge. The responses of the two Teacher co-researchers are captured below:

Teacher QR: *I am glad that we are here today participating in this study trying to deal with this problem. I really would want to contribute and see the framework working.*

Teacher ST: *Unlike my colleague here, I have been struggling with this issue for quite a long time. When I started attending workshops organised by the department, I was under the impression that such issues would be addressed. For instance, I was at a particular workshop late last year (2018) and my Learning Facilitator also alluded to this fact. So if LFs have the same problem as us, then who do we turn to as teachers of English?*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

Being quoted as saying "… *I have been struggling with this issue for quite a long time"* **Teacher ST** shows that the lack of training in the application of learning theories and learner-centred methods has hampered the reading comprehension for EFAL learners in high schools. Additionally, the use of the words "*When I started attending workshops organised by the department, I was under the impression that such issues would be addressed. …"* demonstrates that not enough effort has been put in place to address this challenge.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

These words "*I was under the impression that such issues would be addressed…"* point to the dependency and reliance on someone with expertise to solve the problem for rural people. In other words, the society expects those in the position of power to create solutions. This statement, "*so if LFs have the same problem as us, then who do we turn to as teachers of English?"* summarises this argument.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The use of the phrase "*…unlike my colleague here"* demonstrates the element of intertextuality, while it also brings different experiences into the discourse. In other words, teachers have had different challenges that were brought by the inadequate training both at institutions of higher learning and DBE. These diverse experiences enhance our understanding to the challenges facing FVR as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

The feelings of helplessness are summed up in the following expression: "*…so if LFs have the same problem as us, then who do we turn to as teachers of English?"* In this expression, it is evident that the teachers do not see themselves capable of addressing the problem of poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners. In other words, Teacher-co-researchers failed to recognise the fact that they are in the position in EFAL classrooms. Moreover, that they can change the poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This study sought to address this perpetual perception that rural people become powerless in solving their own problems.

4.5.3. Over-reliance on the use of traditional instructional strategies

The literature continues to show that teachers are reluctant to adopt the interactive instructional strategies and other approaches which require them to "…move beyond a mere content" (Andreassen & Brate, 2011:521). The teaching of reading comprehension in South African classrooms still centers on the use of traditional instructional practices such as rote learning, verbatim recall and oral modes of information dissemination (Pretorius, 2002). In most cases, learners are only taught to engage with text at a superficial level (Granville, 2001:15). The EFAL teachers focus on teaching learners the decoding skills (Machet & Olen, 1996:2; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:1) at the expense of reading comprehension.

The school under study was no different from others in South Africa and around the world. During the discussions and oral reflections on the methods that teachers used in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension, the following realities became apparent:

Teacher ST: *Our teachers would simply have each learner reading a paragraph and then questions would follow.*

Learner AB:*You know at times you feel like you are not part of the lesson cause [because] you will be listening to someone reading a text without really interacting with it.*

Learner CD:*Eish…sometimes it becomes boring especially when the text is difficult and the teacher chooses someone who reads so badly. Yoo you would feel like walking out because the text becomes even more difficult.*

Learner AB: *I think if maybe we would be allowed to choose our own texts that we can read. Ya bona…I mean the one that maybe a person would understand and not struggle to get through it.*

Learner EF: *Sometimes Nna [me] I wish hore we would just read without the need to answer questions thereafter. I mean these questions become difficult that's why most of the time I struggle to get correct answers.*

Teacher QR: *As I said before, we know of these methods but when it comes to putting them into practice, that's where real problems begin. I mean in every diagnostic report learner performance in section A of the exam paper 1 is always not good.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the statement "*our teachers would simply have each learner reading a paragraph and then questions would follow*" **Teacher ST** reveals that the use of traditional teacher-centred approaches is not a new phenomenon in the EFAL classroom. In addition, he brings his past experiences into the classroom and incorporate these approaches into the EFAL classroom. Informed by these experiences, learners in **Teacher ST**'s classroom remain passive recipients of knowledge. In turn, their participation and interaction with comprehension texts remain limited to listening to one of their classmates reading.

Learner AB states that "*You know at times you feel like you are not part of the lesson*" to demonstrate the extent to which the use of traditional approaches limits their learning and acquisition of knowledge in the EFAL classrooms. Furthermore, this statement seems to suggest the teacher-dominated EFAL classrooms discourage them from interacting with various texts. Additionally, by stating that "… *you will be listening to someone reading a text without really interacting with it*" **Learner AB** demonstrates that not only does teachers' failure to use other methods increase their passivity in the classroom, but it also hampers their efforts to read with comprehension.

Meanwhile, **Learner EF** points to other problems caused by teachers' reluctance to use other learner-centred approaches. She states that, "…*sometimes it becomes boring especially when the text is difficult*" to demonstrate that perhaps if these methods were used by EFAL teachers, learning and teaching of reading comprehension would have been easier and more appealing to them as learners. However, in the rigid and teacher-dominated approaches, their attitude towards reading and comprehension remain negatively affected.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

By stating that "…*our teachers would simply have each learner reading a paragraph and then questions would follow* [and] *the teacher chooses someone,*" both **Teacher ST** and **Learner CD** demonstrate what the society expects of learners and teachers. As for learners, they are expected to follow instructions without asking any questions. In this case, while it is evident that learners are not ready for questions, the educator makes the final decision. For example, "…*the teacher chooses someone.*" In other words, any challenge to the authority is discouraged by the society, especially in rural communities. This top-down approach often characterises the traditional instructional strategies.

Analysis of discourse as a discursive practice

In their respective comments**, Learner AB** and **Teacher ST** stated that "…*at times you feel like you are not part of the lesson* [and] *you would feel like walking out."* While these statements may be complementary, they also demonstrate the element of coherence. In other words, **Teacher ST** builds on what has already been stated by **Learner AB**. This is important because in addition to being complementary, these utterances indicate that these co-researchers are both aware of and have become part of the discourses around them.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

The words, "*simply have each learner reading a paragraph and then questions would follow"* demonstrate the powerful position that teachers still hold in the EFAL classrooms. It is this position that makes them center of learning and relegate learners to the periphery. Under such circumstances, teachers fail to provide both modelling and scaffolding, which are necessary for learners to construct their knowledge in the EFAL classroom. This teacher-dominated classroom setting poses a challenge to the improvement of reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

By stating that "…*at times you feel like you are not part of the lesson* [and] *you would feel like walking out,"* **Learner CD** and **Learner AB** both point to the lack of inclusivity, empowerment and support that is encouraged by SCT. These utterances reveal that the use of traditional instructional strategies in the EFAL classrooms frustrates learners and fails to provide sufficient and necessary support to tackle the challenge of poor reading comprehension.

Learner AB brings another dimension to the discussion when she stated that, "…*you will be listening to someone reading a text without really interacting with it."* In its nature, SCT requires learners become active participants in their construction of knowledge. This reciprocal interaction is important for joint construction of meaning within a social context (Sivan, 1986:211; Bozkurt, 2017:211). However, as demonstrated above, the use of traditional instructional strategies makes this important aspect of learning difficult. Consequently, poor reading comprehension for EFAL learners has been hampered by the use of these methods.

 When asked to reflect on his experiences about the continuous use of traditional instructional strategies, **Learner EF** added the following:

"Sometimes Nna [me] I wish hore [that] we would just read without the need to answer questions thereafter. I mean these questions become difficult that's why most of the time I struggle to get correct answers."

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the statement, "*I wish hore [that] we would just read without the need to answer questions thereafter," it* demonstrates the desire for the use of more flexible approaches such as FVR in the EFAL classrooms. These approaches would expose learners to various sources of information. On the contrary, the use of teacher-centred strategies limits learners' ability to construct knowledge. In this regard, learners are expected to engage in rote learning and then regurgitate facts immediately after reading a text. Due to their rigidity, "*…these questions become difficult…"*

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

When stating that, "I *wish hore [that] we would just read without the need to answer questions thereafter,"* **Learner EF** points to the source of his frustration. A lack of flexible and more learner-centred approaches in the EFAL classroom has had a negative impact on reading comprehension. This manifests in developing negative attitude towards reading and answering questions that assess his comprehension.

Similarly, **Teacher QR** made the following remarks during oral reflections:

"As I said before, we know of these methods but when it comes to putting them into practice, that's where real problems begin. I mean in every diagnostic report learner performance in section A of the exam paper 1 is always not good."

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

It is incorrect to assume that teachers are not familiar with approaches that could be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. On the contrary, they are aware of these methods and their benefit as stated in the following phrase by **Teacher QR**: "*we know of these methods." Furthermore,* the statement, "*…in every diagnostic report learner performance in section A of the exam paper 1 is always not good"* demonstrates that teachers are aware of the impact the use of traditional instructional strategies has on EFAL learners' performance

and reading comprehension. Despite this knowledge, **Teacher QR** puts the blame on the inadequate training on how to implement these approaches in the classroom.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

In the remarks, "…*but when it comes to putting them into practice, that's where real problems begin,"* **Teacher QR** fails to provide the solution to the perceived problem. Instead, the expectation is that someone from outside would provide the much needed solution. However, SCT dictates that there should be interaction and negotiations among people who are in similar social context (Steins & Edwards, 1999:544; Sandu & Unguru, 2017:54). Furthermore, SCT encourages that for them to gain knowledge on how to use learner-centred approaches such as FVR; learners need to become active participants (Bozkurt, 2017:211).

4.5.4. Low self-efficacy of teachers and learners

Another challenge that can hinder the success of FVR involves the self-efficacy of both teachers and learners. According to Protheroe (2008:45), personal teaching efficacy focuses on the teacher's belief and confidence in his or her ability to teach. While high self-efficacy can promote learning in general and participation in FVR in particular, low self-efficacy may have the opposite effect.

During the workshop, teacher-co-researchers and learner-co-researchers felt that it was necessary to reflect on self-efficacy and the impact it may have on the success of the FVR approach on the improvement of reading comprehension for EFAL learners. The following remarks were noteworthy:

Teacher ST:

As a teacher, your primary role is to teach and guide to discover new information in the process of learning.

Teacher QR:

But with the kind of learners we have these days, one is never sure of what to expect really. First, they are quite different from us. These days they have all the resources at their disposal

but they are lazy to make use of them. No matter how hard you may make your learners to understand something, if they are not prepared to do it, there is nothing one can do.

Teacher ST:

With these learners everything should be prolonged. For instance, here at school we have weekend classes, holiday classes and afternoon classes. We sacrifice our time to make them understand what we teach them.

Teacher QR:

In my class I normally teach my learners about the skimming and scanning. I also try to encourage the use of dictionaries. In fact, I do allow them to use their cellphones to look words which are difficult for them. Despite these efforts, they still struggle to read with comprehension.

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

Teacher ST is quoted as saying, "…*as a teacher, your primary role is to teach and guide learners to discover new information in the process of learning"* to indicate that he is certain about his role and the ability to teach learners. This statement further shows the understanding that teachers have regarding the role of guiding learners to the discovery of new information, rather than discovering information for them. By making such assertion, one would expect EFAL teachers to match this assertion with the actual pedagogical practices in the EFAL classrooms. However, as shown earlier in this study, this was not the case. Instead, the dependency on traditional instructional approaches had the potential to hinder the success of the FVR approach.

The statement, "…*but with the kind of learners we have these days, one is never sure of what to expect really"* by **Teacher QR** provides a sharp contrast to the previous one. It demonstrates the lack of belief in one's ability to teach and ensuring that learning takes place. In other words, it is often difficult to remain optimistic in the situation where learners struggle with grammar, reading, low self-confidence and limited access to reading material, among other things.

In the statement, "…*no matter how hard you may make your learners to understand something, if they are not prepared to do it, there is nothing one can do"* **Teacher ST** has just

realised that the success of FVR may not be possible if EFAL learners do not have high self-efficacy.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

In a statement, "*…We sacrifice our time to make them understand…"* **Teacher QR** demonstrates that high self-efficacy is central to the successful completion of any activity. However, he feels that their sacrifices are in vain because there is no improvement in EFAL learners' self-efficacy.

On the question of whether they believed that they were competent to improve reading comprehension, learner-co-researchers made the following comments:

Ke nahana hore [I think that] what we are trying to do can succeed only if we as learners we start believing in ourselves and take our work seriously. I mean as you can see now other learners did not want to come here because banemahloni [they are shy] and the some lack motivation.

Honestly speaking our teachers are making sacrifices for us to perform well but sometimes they do not we lack confidence to stand up to read and ask questions when we do not understand.

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The words "*…what we are trying to do can succeedonly if we as learners we start believing in ourselves''* serve as an acknowledgement and realisation that when learners lack confidence in their ability to perform a particular activity, the success of an initiative such as FVR may not be achieved. In addition, by stating that "*and take our work seriously,"* **Learner EF** implies that when they are given tasks that assess their reading comprehension, such activities are not taken seriously.

These reflections were very important because at the centre of this study is an attempt to transform the way in which reading comprehension was taught and treated in EFAL classrooms. Moreover, they enabled all of us as co-researchers to examine our beliefs about teaching and learning. More specifically, it sought to give learners an opportunity to influence decisions and participate in finding solutions to challenges facing them. This was in contrast to the notion that learners should remain passive receivers of information and new

knowledge. Similarly, the responses of the teacher-co-researchers lacked in-depth self-introspection as it became apparent that they became defensive and put blame mainly on their learners' self-efficacy.

In the assertion, "…[t]*hey also lack the desire and motivation to use dictionaries."* The essence of this statement is that FVR may not succeed unless adequate resources and other study materials to aid the use of English as medium of instruction are made readily available.

4.6. REMEDIES TO CIRCUMVENT THE ABOVE THREATS

This sub-section discusses how the challenges encountered in the study were remedied. The remedies included the following:

4.6.1. Establishing a school library committee

As it is the case in the literature, it became evident to our research team that we needed to find the solution to the problem of the dysfunctional school library. After all the cleaning and arrangements had been done, the team decided that establishing a library committee would be useful in addressing this problem. However, it became quite clear in the beginning that none among us had the experience nor expertise in library management and other related activities. As a response to this, we elected committee members who would run library activities on rotational basis. In other words, two team members would be in charge of the library for a week before others would assume responsibility for the same period. The main responsibility of this committee involved facilitating the borrowing and returning of books used for FVR purposes, while also opening and closing the library after school. This new development assisted in changing the school library from being a storehouse for food and other items. It also helped in changing learners' attitude towards reading.

On addressing the issue of untrained teacher- librarians, we developed a partnership between our school and the local library. In this regard, we requested one librarian from the local library to workshop our team. The focus of this one–day workshop was on enlightening us on the basic running of a small library such as ours.

4.6.2. Making reading fun

As a remedy to the challenge of the perceived static nature of reading, we decided to make reading comprehension a more flexible and enjoyable process. In this case, we came up with the idea of infusing fun activities such as spelling and word games in the reading comprehension lessons. This situation assisted in getting rid of rigidity of the reading process. Additionally, it made comprehension easier because learners were allowed to work collectively within a social context where there was enough scaffolding from both teachers and peers. In this case, the issue of scaffolding concurs with the notion held by SCT that, learners need gradual guidance throughout the learning process and knowledge creation. Furthermore, it enabled teachers to experiment with other ways of dealing with reading comprehension problems in the classroom. This is in contrast to only engage learners in the series of monotonous questions.

4.6.3. Promoting co-lesson planning and presentation

As stated elsewhere in this study, lesson planning and presentation have been the prerogative of teachers. In this instance, EFAL teachers decided on the use of an instructional strategy, the nature and contents of the text to be read, and type of questions to which learners would be expected to respond. As evident in this study, the co-researchers pointed to the status quo as a barrier to reading comprehension. In response, we engaged in co-lesson planning and presentation. In this case, learners were involved in the decisions around teaching approaches, the nature and content of the text, as well as the actual presentation of the lesson.

In addition to creating an opportunity for EFAL learners to become active participants, co-lesson planning also allowed for tailoring of reading comprehension lessons in accordance with learners' various learning styles, thereby accommodating them. Moreover, it diminished teacher dominance in the classroom, while it promoted meaningful scaffolding and modelling. In contrast, it encouraged learner-centred nature of learning where learners construct their own knowledge with minimal interference from the teacher as required by the social constructivist theory.

4.6.4. Developing habit of dictionary use and re-teaching of word-attacking skills

With the acknowledgement of the challenges that English language brings to reading comprehension for EFAL learners, it became important that for successful FVR, we needed to find the remedy to some of these challenges. Throughout this study, co-researchers constantly mentioned the limited vocabulary as one of the barriers. As a result of this, they reported that it became difficult to engage in FVR and reading in general. In response to this, the Teacher-co-researchers felt that it was necessary to empower learners with knowledge around dictionary use. With such knowledge in hand, it would be easier for EFAL learners to develop the habit of dictionary use. This assisted in improving their vocabulary which in turn, would encourage them to engage in FVR and ultimately, improve their reading comprehension.

During our discussions, other co-researchers raised the problem of depending too much on the dictionary use. They pointed to the fact that dictionaries were not allowed in the examination rooms. The general feeling was that they needed to be empowered on how to deal with difficult words in the texts during examinations. This challenge was addressed through the continuous teaching of word-attacking skills. During the discussions, Teacher-co-researchers engaged in modelling in order for learners to learn how it is done. The focus was not only on deciphering the word, but also on understanding the context in which such words were used. Thereafter, they were encouraged to perform the same exercise in the newspapers and other reading materials contained in the 'reading boxes.'

4.6.5. Seeking motivation from outside the school

The perception of self and others' abilities to perform and complete a particular task is important. As it was evident in this study, Teacher-co-researchers had the negative perception about EFAL learners' ability to read with comprehension or to engage in FVR. Not only do such perceptions destroy relations, but they also impact on how learners perceive their abilities to engage in FVR and to use it as an approach to improve their reading comprehension. SCT places much emphasis on collective action which involves peole in addressing the challenges (Steins & Edwards, 1999:544; Bozkurt, 2017:212). As a remedy to

this situation, the team decided to seek motivation from outside the school as a way to improve the morale of both teachers and learners.

4.7. EVIDENCE INDICATING THAT FVR APPROACH WAS EFFECTIVE

This sub-section discusses evidence to show that the FVR approach was successfully implemented.

The main focus of this sub-section is on providing evidence to indicate that FVR approach was successful in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This discussion is aligned to the objectives of the study.

4.7.1. Evidence of improved learner performance in reading comprehension

The teaching and mastering of reading skills is important for improved reading comprehension (Van Staden & Boster, 2014:2). Unlike in the past where learners used to engage with the text at the superficial level (Granville, 2001:15), where emphasis was on decoding of the text (Zimmerman & Smith, 2014:3), EFAL learners in this study developed and applied different skills required for reading comprehension. The responses below provide the evidence:

Learner AB: *"I am now able to understand what I read better than before. I am no longer struggling if I don't understand a word or a sentence as I used to before coming here."*

Learner CD: *"Nami tisha [Even me too, Sir] it's no longer difficult to answer questions. I also answer questions in the test that we wrote. It's easy now for me to summarise the story or the text that I just read now because I understand. This is because you gave us tips like we have to look at the situation that they talk about in the paper and then match it with what we already know. This is helping us a lot."*

Teacher QR: *"On that point I think that by always encouraging dictionary use has really helped a lot. I can also say that we did the great job by revisiting and re-teaching word –attacking skills. This becomes more helpful during the exams and test where dictionaries are inaccessible."*

Learner GH: *"For me I would say that the improvement in my comprehension of what I am reading e tlisitwe ke taba ya tsheba*[has been brought by knowing*] how to interpret questions and words, and to be honest, that used to give me problems."*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

By stating that *"…I am now able to understand what I read better than before,"* **Learner AB** demonstrates that there has been a change in her performance when it came to reading comprehension. In other words, her levels of reading with comprehension have improved since engaging in FVR.

Similarly, in his own words, **Learner CD** states that *"… it's no longer difficult to answer questions. It's easy now for me to summarise the story or the text that I just read now because I understand."* His assertions provide the evidence that he has shifted from just decoding words in a given text. His focus has now moved to applying the necessary skills and he measured his competence with his ability to summarise what he had read.

For **Learner GH**, improvement in reading comprehension is evident in his ability to interpret questions and words. For successful implementation of FVR approach, EFAL learners and teachers explored and discussed different levels of comprehension. The first level included comprehension of factual information. In this case, EFAL learners demonstrated retention and recall of necessary information. They also showed competence in their ability to interpret various contexts. This concurs with the observation by Van Wyk and Louw (2008:247) that improved reading comprehension is demonstrated through the ability to recognise the relationship, similarities and disparities between concepts. By stating that *"…how to interpret questions and words… used to give me problems"* he is revealing that the word-attacking skills that were modelled by EFAL teachers were successful. As a result, he noticed improvement in his performance in reading comprehension related activities.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

In the statement, *"…this is because you gave us tips like we have to look at the situation that they talk about in the paper and then match it with what we already know"* **Learner CD** demonstrates that there has been a shift from the way reading comprehension was taught in EFAL classrooms. In this regard, the instructional strategies that teachers used were in

congruent with learners' social realities. It also emerged during oral reflections that the texts that were read in EFAL classroom failed to tap into learners' prior knowledge and lived realities. However, according to the above assertion, successful implementation of FVR challenged the status quo. Through successful intervention and implementation, FVR approach enabled co-researchers to design lessons and select reading materials which encouraged learners' prior knowledge and social realities.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

Learner CD is again quoted as saying, "…*It's easy now for me to summarise the story or the text that I just read now because I understand.*" By implementing FVR approach through scaffolding and modelling, EFAL teachers were able to demonstrate how to apply basic principles of reading. As the intention of this study, the emphasis was not on decoding skills, but on the application of diverse reading skills within the context of FVR.

To demonstrate successful implementation of FVR approach, **Teacher QR** stated that, "…*encouraging dictionary use has really helped a lot.We did the great job by revisiting and re-teaching word –attacking skills. This becomes more helpful during the exams and test where dictionaries are inaccessible.*" In this regard, **Teacher QR** demonstrates that the success of FVR in improving performance in reading comprehension came as a result of effective support provided to EFAL learners.

4.7.2. Evidence of teachers' use of learner-centred instructional strategies

According to Andreassen and Brate (2011:521), it is important for teachers to use a variety of instructional strategies to allow learners to become active participants in the EFAL classroom. These are strategies that come from the premise that learners possess the ability to learn according to their specific background knowledge and learning styles (Astuti, 2014:43). Among other things, teachers can engage in modelling as another way of shifting from dependency on traditional instructional strategies. In other instances, EFAL teachers may employ methods that require learners to reflect on reading. The free voluntary reading approach flourishes where learners' individuality, independence and preference are

considered (Yamshita, 2015:174). The successful implementation of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners is highlighted in the subsequent extracts from oral reflections:

Learner GH: *"I think what helped us the most ilendaba yokuthi othisha did not only ask anyone of us to read and then answer questions [I think what helped us the most is that teachers did not only ask anyone of us to read and then answer questions]. Bayenze izinto ngedlelaehlukile this time. We selected the books ourselves and they were very interesting to us and we were able to understand them better unlike in the past when you will be reading something that you don't even understand.*

Learner EF:*"For nna I can say that working in pairs or groups help us to discuss our answers and share information about the text. We were also allowed to use our dictionaries which helped us when there are words which we don't understand"*

Learner KL: *"This time atleast we taught our teachers something…I mean like the way we learn and what kind of stuff we enjoy reading."*

Learner OP: *"I can say that being able to share information with other learners and for us being the ones who are in control of everything. The presentations …yes the reflections also help us a lot because we could see our mistakes. Teachers were ready to help and they way were studying was not the same.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The statement, "*…teachers did not only ask anyone of us to read and then answer questions"* is the indication that there has been a change in the way learners were taught reading comprehension in EFAL classrooms. As evident in the above utterances, following the FVR approach, EFAL teachers no longer used teacher-centred approaches when teaching reading comprehension. Rather, they employed more learner-centred approaches which required that all learners become active participants. According to **Learner EF,** "*in pairs or groups help us to discuss our answers and share information about the text"* was really helpful as it enabled them to share valuable information. In this regard, learners became part of the creation of knowledge as opposed to being the recipients.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

In the phrases "*we were able to understand them better unlike in the past…* [and]…*they way were studying was not the same*" is the element of coherence. In this regard, both **Learner EF** and **Learner GH** build on each other's views about the use of more inclusive learner-centred strategies in the EFAL classroom. These new ways of teaching incorporate learners' background knowledge and exposes them to variety of gaining information. In this case, they were able to seek information on their own and this had a positive impact on their reading comprehension. Consequently, this shift in the teachers' preferences occurred as a result of the FVR approach.

Analysis of discourse as social practice

On the one hand, by stating that "*…this time atleast we taught our teachers something*" **Learner KL** demonstrates the society's views on teaching and learning. The society places teachers at the center of the process of learning. In other words, they are the ones who teach and they cannot be taught. As for learners, according to the above utterance, they are viewed as passive recipients of knowledge in the construction of which they have little influence.

On the other hand, the above statement shows the successful implementation of FVR. Through FVR, learners were able to change the status quo. In other words, this study gave them the platform to influence decisions about the use of teaching methods employed in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Following this intervention, co-lesson planning and promotion of self-selection of reading texts facilitated the shift from dependency on traditional instructional strategies in the EFAL classrooms. The phrase "*…for us being the ones who are in control of everything*" elucidates this point.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

Among other things, SCT concerns itself with issues of justice and empowerment. In other words, it always strives for creating spaces for the voices of the marginalised to be heard (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:53). These voices become especially important in understanding social realities and the creation of knowledge from which these marginalised groups benefit. Both reality and knowledge are created through social interactions and mediation (Bozkurt, 2017:211). This point is illustrated in the phrase "*…teachers were ready to help.*" Through FVR

approach, teachers became mediators who facilitated the process of learning. Unlike prior to the implementation of FVR approach, learners were actively involved in the construction of knowledge. The use of more inclusive strategies to teach reading comprehension in EFAL classrooms coupled with the creation of a print-rich environment enabled teachers to abandon the traditional ways of teaching, where the emphasis was on coding skills and pronunciation, rather than on comprehension and meaning-making.

Moreover, SCT comes from the premise that social realities and knowledge are generated through collective effort by the community rather than the effort of an individual (Cottone, 2007:193; Mpofu & Maphalala, 2017:9257). The successful implementation of FVR approach in this study encouraged collective generation of knowledge and interpersonal relationships between EFAL teachers and learners. Through FVR approach the new understanding of social realities of EFAL learners emerged as **Learner KL** states that "…*This time atleast we taught our teachers something…I mean like the way we learn and what kind of stuff we enjoy reading."* In addition to challenging the status quo, this statement is an indication of being empowered to deal with future problems. This is in contrast to the perception that rural communities fail to solve their own challenges. In the context of this study, both EFAL teachers and learners realised that there was a problem of poor reading comprehension as this was reflected in the academic performance of the latter. Instead of looking for assistance from external researchers and other senior officials in the DBE, they participated voluntarily in this study to address this challenge.

4.7.3. Evidence of presence of culture of reading

The literature continues to paint a bleak picture about the culture of reading in South Africa. As a result of this, schools continue to have learners who cannot read independently (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014:3). Similarly, the parents in rural community lack literacy skills too (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:62; Van der Mescht, 2015:2). Partly, this situation can be blamed on external factors such as unsupportive literacy environment from home and community (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:58) and poverty (Krashen, 2016:2). For instance, majority of the South African rural population do not have access to the functional public library (Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011:96; Evans, 2014:107; Mojapelo & Dube, 2014:8), while a small number of public schools have functional libraries (Patton-Ash & Wilmont, 2015:1). Under such

conditions, the reading culture is severely hampered. This is particularly true because libraries are tasked with inculcating the culture of reading (Yaji et al., 2017:30).

However, being exposed to a variety of reading material makes learners eager to read and learn more (Paton-Ash & Wilmont, 2015:2; Ferede & Nchindila, 2017:2). Similarly, in schools where libraries have become functional, there is an increase in access to reading materials and in the frequency of reading (De Souza, 2010:37; Krashen et al., 2012:27). In addition, this access to reading material and functional library leads to improved academic performance (Clark, 2010:4).

With the two realities juxtaposed in the literature, it became apparent in this study that there had been a successful implementation of FVR approach. The following remarks were noteworthy:

Learner CD: *"I'm very happy that we were able to make student cards that they need before they can allow you to borrow books from the library etown."*

Learner MN: *Since we started here I'm no longer shy to borrow a book from the library or from the boxes and just read.*

Learner AB: *Some learners have approached me and asked if we could start some sort of reading club here at school. Even if we have competitions I think am ready.*

Learner IJ: *"I see no reason of making noise when the teacher is not around, I normally would prefer to read a magazine from the boxes in our class and read. I feel like I can do this everyday especially because we choose what we want to read."*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the statement, "…*since we started here I'm no longer shy to borrow a book from the library or from the boxes and just read"* **Learner MN** demonstrates a change in the way reading was perceived before the implementation of FVR approach. Previously, reading was not viewed as a social practice with academic purpose, rather it was viewed negatively. In similar vein, the assertion by **Learner AB** that, "…*some learners have approach me and asked if we could start some sort of reading club"* is an indication that EFAL learners developed more interest in reading. In this case, the increased interest is more likely to lead to more reading as evident in **Learner IJ's** words, "*I feel like I can do this everyday."*

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

The main aim of being attentive to learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD) by a skilled adult involves the provision of guidance to the learner. In this study, EFAL learners were provided with support throughout the project with the aim of assisting them to become independent readers who read with comprehension. At this point, the statement that, "*I see no reason of making noise when the teacher is not around"* demonstrates the position of power and competence from which **Learner IJ** speaks. In other words, the necessary support provided throughout the study was sufficient.

4.7.4. Evidence of improvement in vocabulary, reading skills and attitudes towards English as LoLT

Learning and reading through a foreign language (additional language) impacts on learners' attitudes and motivation to read. Reading becomes more difficult if there is a deficiency in vocabulary and limited availability of books (Bautista & Marulanda, 2018:52). However, the successful implementation of FVR approach assists in developing cognitive process associated with learning language skills. This can be achieved through improving reading skills and getting rid of challenges that may impede reading comprehension (Bautista & Marulanda, 2018:52). This is important because FVR facilitates vocabulary acquisition as learners find it difficult to read in a language they struggle to comprehend (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:61). In this regard, Hu and Nation (2000:52) distinguish between two major effects of reading comprehension and vocabulary. While vocabulary knowledge has effect on reading comprehension, the latter also has effect on the growth of the former.

Apart from reading skills and vocabulary improvement, it is important to consider the attitudes of EFAL learners towards English as language of teaching and learning. Such consideration is necessary because the negative attitude towards English often discourages learners to read and comprehend what they are reading (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009:61). However, when FVR is successfully implemented, there is a change in learners' attitudes as they engaged in co-lesson planning and exposure to a print-rich environment, which led to

improved vocabulary, reading skills and reading comprehension. The following remarks were made by the co-researchers:

Teacher QR: *Motivating learners to read has really gone a long way in helping us. What I have noticed now is their keen interest to and that was not the case before this project. As far as I can see, there is a reduction in many spelling errors, problems relating to vocabulary and negative attitudes towards reading. I think that the frequent use of dictionary as well as the application of reading skills and word-attacking skills have contributed to this improvement that we all see.*

Teacher ST: *I concur with what my colleague has just said. I am also seeing changes after addressing the issue of reading skills and attitudes towards reading.They now read more than they did before. English is no longer viewed as this difficult language with difficult words, I think they are beginning to enjoy reading more books and newspapers with understanding. And they can respond to any questions assessing their reading comprehension.*

Teacher QR: *…even the way they were involved in the activities shows that they are more confident to read and present in English.*

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

On the one hand, the statement, "*motivating learners to read has really gone a long way in helping us*" reveals that before the implementation of FVR approach, EFAL learners' reading was viewed with hostility. There may have been a number of factors which contributed to the status quo. The same statement, on the other hand, demonstrates that learners are more interested in reading for pleasure. Similarly, the phrase "*…really gone a long way in helping us*" points to the success that has been achieved by the FVR approach in improving reading comprehension of EFAL learners.

The words, "*…there is a reduction in many spelling errors, problems relating to vocabulary and negative attitudes towards reading*" as said by **Teacher QR** indicate that reading comprehension of EFAL learners was negatively affected by the inadequate knowledge of grammar. This is surprising because during the discussions, it was revealed that EFAL teachers placed more emphasis on grammar and decoding skills than on anything else. This is a

confirmation that good coding skills are not panacea for poor reading comprehension (Bertram, 2006:7). Alternatively, the same assertion demonstrates the success of FVR in reducing grammatical errors and improving vocabulary. In addition to this, the application of reading skills also led to improved reading comprehension.

By stating that "*English is no longer viewed as this difficult language with difficult words*" **Teacher ST** points to a change in EFAL learners' perceptions regarding English. In other words, before the implementation of FVR, learners' negative attitude and perceived complexity of this language contributed to poor reading comprehension. However, the successful implementation of FVR exposed learners to more reading materials and interaction with the language in their own environments. As a result of this motivation to learn, there was an improvement in reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The phrase "*…I concur with what my colleague has just said. I am also seeing changes*" contains the element of intertextuality. In this case, the assertions show that he is aware of the discourses around him and he is also part of them. Moreover, he is building on the points that were raised by Teacher QR, that the successful implementation of FVR approach has led to changes and improvement in reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Analysis of discourse from the perspective of social constructivist theory

For effective and meaning construction of knowledge to occur, SCT requires that constructs be available to assist individuals to find meaning and shape their own social realities (Sandu & Unguru, 2017:53). In this study, as reflected by the statement, "*…I think that the frequent use of dictionary as well as the application of reading skills and word-attacking skills has contributed to this improvement*". The point that **Teacher QR** is making is that FVR provided EFAL learners with tools and skills necessary for the improvement of reading comprehension. It was these skills that enabled them to overcome the challenge of poor reading comprehension. In other words, after being sufficiently equipped, these learners became independent readers who engaged in reading voluntarily.

Moreover, the success of FVR approach is evident in addressing the cognitive demands of reading comprehension. It empowered them with necessary skills to read and respond to questions that evaluate their reading comprehension.

4.7. SYNTHESIS

The adoption of and implementation of the principles of social constructivist theory in this study were aimed at challenging the top-down approach applied in EFAL classrooms. To achieve this, the study created a platform in which EFAL teachers and learners identified the commonly shared problem of poor reading comprehension. It was also in these meetings and workshops that we were able to generate solutions for this challenge. In contrast to relying on other educational officials and other experts to find these solutions, the study created the opportunity for learners to influence decisions about their own teaching and learning. Their participation, in this regard, shifted from being mere recipients of knowledge to being active co-constructors of this knowledge.

As a common practice, EFAL teachers enjoyed the sole responsibility of deciding on the material to be read for reading comprehension, as well as the instructional strategies that would be used. This practice left learners' motivation to read and their performance in reading comprehension activities negatively affected. Due to this top-down approach of teaching, the voices of learners remained silent because they were not empowered to challenge the status quo. Through participation in this study, these polarised power relations in EFAL classroom were challenged. In this case, EFAL learners engaged in co-lesson planning with their educators and took part in influencing decisions around the content of the text that would be read in class. Furthermore, they also challenged their educators' methods of teaching and cautioned them about their over-emphasis of coding skills and pronunciation at the expense of reading comprehension.

4.8. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter mainly provided analysis, presentation and interpretation of data generated about improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners through the use of FVR approach.

The chapter began by identifying the key challenges that justify the need for FVR approach. This was followed by the identification of components and aspects which were necessary for the success of FVR approach. The focus then shifted to the school conditions under which FVR approach would succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This aspect was then followed by the identification of possible threats that may thwart the successful implementation of FVR approach and then the strategies to circumvent such threats were also discussed. This chapter concluded by examining the indicators of successful use of FVR in improving reading comprehension for EFAL classrooms.

The next chapter reports on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS ON IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR EFAL LEARNERS: A FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of the previous chapter was on the generation, analysis and presentation of data on improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners: A free voluntary approach. In this chapter, however, the focus is on the presentation of findings, recommendations and conclusions. In addition, it highlights the contributions and limitations of the study.

This study sought to respond to the question:

How can we use Free Voluntary Reading approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners?

The following objectives provided guidance in answering this question:

- To establish the need for the use of Free Voluntary Reading approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

- Identify the components and aspects necessary for free voluntary reading approach to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

- To determine the conditions suitable for the use of Free Voluntary Reading approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

- To identify the possible threats to the use of Free Voluntary Reading approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners and the possible remedies to circumvent these challenges.

- To demonstrate how Free Voluntary Reading can be used as an approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

5.1.1. ALIGNMENT OF FINDINGS WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This sub-section is reporting on the findings aligned to the five objectives of the study.

5.2. THE NEED FOR THE USE OF FVR APPROACH IN IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION FOR EFAL LEARNERS MAY BE JUSTIFIED ON THE FOLLOWING GROUNDS:

5.2.1. Persistent poor reading comprehension

This study found that the first key challenge justifying the need for FVR approach involved the persistent poor performance in reading comprehension. According to the Teacher-co-researchers, this problem of poor reading comprehension seemed to have begun at primary school level. In other words, EFAL learners had been carrying the same problem through the grades (Zimmerman & Smith, 2014:3). In this case, the co-researchers indicated that the problem was in the actual teaching of reading comprehension in the EFAL classrooms. When teaching reading comprehension, EFAL teachers in this study focused on pronunciation of words and fluency in reading. Under such circumstances, a few components of reading improved at the expense of reading for comprehension (Rule & Land, 2017:3).

In other cases, however, the poor reading comprehension resulted from the fact that many EFAL learners cannot read. During the workshops and oral reflections, Teacher-co-researchers revealed that another contributory factor to poor reading comprehension was that EFAL learners lacked the basic reading skills. Similar findings were confirmed in a number of South African studies (Van Wyk & Louw, 2008:346; Makiwane-Mazinyo & Pillay, 2017:10453). As a result, it became difficult for them to analyse, interpret or make inferences in the text or make meaning of the text to demonstrate understanding (Foncha *et al*., (2017:8762). This failure to analyse and understand in reading comprehension was also reported among EFL learners in Thailand (Ninsuwan, n.d.:1836).

The Learner-co-researchers revealed that the texts that they read were too long for them. This happened regardless of the fact that most of the text complied with the standards set out in the CAPS policy document. In some cases, they also stated that the content of many texts read in EFAL classrooms was either boring or too difficult to understand. In other cases, during the oral reflections, it was revealed that the content of some of these texts was irrelevant to the EFAL learners. In other words, it was difficult for them to establish a link between the text and their prior knowledge. The failure by the EFAL teachers to recognise the significant role played by social, political and historical context in meaning-making (Granville,

2001:17) exacerbated the situation. Consequently, they got bored and struggled with concentration while reading. Similarly, the study by Velluto and Barbousas (2017:2) reported a lack of concentration on reading among Australian boys during FVR sessions. In response, some resorted to technical strategies such as word-attack and decoding of the text, rather than attempting to comprehend it. Similar observation was made by Zimmerman and Smith (2014:3) where decoding of text was interpreted as comprehension.

Therefore, with the information generated through workshops and oral reflections in relation to the above challenges and the evidence from the literature, it became clear that there was a need for the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

5.2.2. Continuous dependency on traditional pedagogic practices

Following the introduction of CAPS in South African schools and with emphasis on constructivist approach to learning and teaching, it would be an obvious expectation that more inclusive and learner-centred pedagogic practices were applied in EFAL classrooms. In contrast, this study found that EFAL classrooms were still dominated by the use of traditional instructional strategies. In other words, the teaching of reading comprehension remained a teacher-centred activity. For instance, through the oral reflections and discussions in this study, it was revealed that teachers' dominance began at the stage of lesson planning and extended to the actual execution of the lesson.

The study also found that EFAL learners had a limited interaction with the texts that were read in class. In this case, one learner would be selected to read a portion of the text or the entire text, while others would become mere listeners. This would then be followed by either oral or written questions assessing their understanding of the text. Throughout this process, a little scaffolding was given to the reader. In most cases, the focus would be on speed reading, pronunciation and punctuation. In this regard, this approach failed to accommodate differing learning styles and develop necessary reading skills, but encouraged rote learning and decoding skills. On the contrary, reading was engaged in at a superficial and decontextualised manner (Granville, 2001:15; Zimmerman & Smith, 2014:1). This happened against the background that a variety of knowledge, skills, cognitive and meta-cognitive

strategies (Van Staden & Bosker, 2014:2; McMaster et al., 2015:29) is needed for reading comprehension.

The study also noted that Learner-co-researchers identified the selection of texts as another challenge brought by teacher-dominance in the teaching of reading comprehension. According to these co-researchers, the selected texts failed to appeal to their interest for two reasons. First, they did not match their levels of linguistic competence. Here, the texts were either too complex or too long. This was particularly true because reading was taught as an oratorical activity with less focus on comprehension and the skills to become competent in this regard. Second, the subject-matter in these selected texts appeared foreign to them. In this case, the texts made it difficult for them to relate the contents of the texts to their lived experiences, contexts and background knowledge. In this case, Fields (2017:198) made an observation that learners tend to resort to deciphering and decoding the texts if they appeared difficult to them. This was in contrast to the fact that learners' prior knowledge, lived experiences and interaction are necessary in enhancing reading comprehension (Yamashita, 2015:173; Pardo, 2004 cited in Coetzee *et al.*, 2016:307).

Some of the findings discussed above were also confirmed by a number of national and international studies. For example, in their study in the South African context, Machet and Olen (1996:2) found that teacher-centred approaches were not effective in teaching reading comprehension. In another study, Makiwane-Mazinyo and Pillay (2017:10453) reported on the significance of providing learners with interesting reading material. With regard to the findings about turning reading comprehension into a question-answer activity in EFAL classrooms, similar findings were reported in Norwegian classrooms (Andreassen & Brate, 2011:520). On the issue of selection of reading materials, the study by Williams (2007:73) found that teachers were reluctant to address the challenge of poor reading comprehension in Malawi.

In short, this traditional way of teaching relegated learners into the periphery. In other words, they became passive recipients of knowledge, rather than being active co-constructors of such knowledge. The co-researchers pointed to this teacher-dominated approach of teaching as a contributory factor to poor reading comprehension. With this mind, therefore, it became clear that there was a need to use FVR approach as a shift from the generic and teacher-

centred approaches (Andreassen & Brate, 2011:52; Mathieson, 2012:549) in order to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

5.2.3. A weak culture of reading

Access to reading material and resources is central to the development of the culture of reading. However, rural setting, poor family background and a failure to garner sufficient resources have negative effect on reading culture and reading habits (Hart, 2010: 81; Yaji *et al.,* 2017:30). For instance, the study by Mugambi (2015:544) in Kenya found that rural people had a limited access to reading materials. Within the South African context, Rasan (2006) reported that learners' reading culture was weakened by limited resources. Similar findings were reported in American rural schools (Krashen, 2016:2). The common thread in all these studies is that limited reading material impacts negatively on reading culture. Some of these findings were confirmed in this study.

The school under study was located in a rural area. It was therefore not unexpected that the challenge of limited resources would feature in our discussions. This study found that the school was plagued by insufficient resources such as libraries, magazines, newspapers and books. For co-researchers, this limited availability of resources needed to be understood both at macro and micro levels. With regards to the former, the limited access to reading materials such as newspapers and magazines reflected the community's negative attitude towards reading in general and free voluntary reading in particular. There may be a number of reasons for this situation. Similar to other rural communities, the community in which the school was situated was plagued by poverty. It has been established that in addition to higher rates of illiteracy, these communities lacked the means to buy reading materials. As a result, learners in these areas often struggled to find any reading material in their homes (Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2014:98). Another reason may be due to the fact that these communities struggled to access library services (Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2014:96). No matter the reason, according to Teacher-researchers, the community failed to create reading opportunities and inculcate the culture of reading among the EFAL learners. Instead, they argued, it contributed to

weakening of reading culture, while it promoted anti-social behaviour and poor attitude towards reading and school.

At the micro level, the Learner-co-researchers revealed that the school failed to provide a supportive literacy environment for effective reading. This result contributed to the weak culture of reading among EFAL learners. In this case, the non-existence of a functional library and the unavailability of suitable reading materials also contributed to the weak culture of reading and ultimately, necessitating the need for FVR approach. The study by Paton-Ash and Wilmont (2015) in South Africa also made similar findings. Moreover, they pointed to the lack of role models at their school. In this regard, they revealed that it was difficult for them to find role models whom they could emulate because teachers did not engage in free voluntary reading.

In summary, rural setting and a limited access to reading materials contributed negatively to the culture of reading. Failure by the community to inculcate the culture of reading and to create reading spaces for EFAL learners contributed to a weak culture of reading. Additionally, this study established that the lack of interest and motivation towards reading contributed to the EFAL learners' weak culture of reading. Moreover, the school's failure to create environment conducive for the development of reading habits and culture led to the weakening of the culture of reading. While all the above affected the culture of reading, this lack of culture of reading proved to be a key challenge facing reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Considering this, there was, therefore, a need for the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

5.2.4. The use of English language as a challenge

During the discussions, FAI and oral reflections, it became apparent that the issue of English as a language of learning and teaching was regarded as a challenge to reading comprehension. Specifically, this study found that EFAL learners had limited vocabulary, which impeded them from reading with comprehension and engaging in voluntary reading. This problem was exacerbated by a number of factors. The lack of exposure to English dictionaries, as well as the lack of knowledge regarding their use resulted in EFAL learners developing limited vocabulary. The use of difficult words in EFAL texts was another factor that worsened the

problem of poor reading comprehension. Here, it emerged that many EFAL learners failed to interact effectively with texts due to technical language used in these texts. Undoubtedly, not only did they find it difficult to understand these texts, but many EFAL learners reported the feelings of despair to continue reading both for academic and leisure purposes. In response, they preferred interacting with this reading material at a superficial level. This study established that in addition to poor habit of dictionary use, EFAL learners lacked word-attacking skills, which were necessary for reading comprehension and contextualisation.

This study also found that EFAL learners had developed a negative attitude towards reading in English. This could be attributed to the challenges that they came across when reading English texts. One of these challenges included the poorly developed reading strategies such as scanning, skimming and rauding (Yamashita, 2015:170), which are necessary for reading comprehension. Another challenge involved the failure to establish the connection between the information from the text and prior knowledge. According to the co-researchers in this study, much of the information contained in many texts of EFAL appeared foreign to them and their experiences. In other instances, the contents of these texts fail to persuade them to read with comprehension. Apart from this, the negative attitude was aggravated by the lack of self-efficacy amongst EFAL learners. In this case, many Learner-co-researchers regarded themselves as incapable of reading EFAL texts with complete comprehension. Moreover, the limited availability of English reading material contributed to the negative attitude and poor self-efficacy towards reading in English.

Lastly, this study found that despite being aware of the importance of English as the language of learning and teaching, EFAL teachers continued to dominate in EFAL classrooms. In this case, the use of traditional instructional strategies was found to be the preferred way of teaching. While teachers held central position in teaching reading comprehension, learners remained passive observers who did not interact with the language. In this instance, EFAL teachers continued to select reading materials, ask questions and taught. Not only did this situation render learners passive, but it also denied them the opportunity to be in control of their learning by influencing decisions regarding teaching strategies and learning styles. In addition, these methods placed emphasis on grammar and decoding skills, rather than on comprehension and skills related to it. This practice is refuted by the SCT anchoring this study.

On the contrary, SCT views teaching and learning as a means of actively constructing knowledge in social contexts (Molotja & Maruma, 2018:463).

Some of the above findings were confirmed by international and national studies. For example, similarly to this study, Pretorius (2002) found that many EFAL learners lacked necessary reading skills. According to this author, teachers' over-emphasis on rote learning and recall of information contributed to this problem. This was also confirmed in another South African study (Pretorius & Currin, 2010 as cited in Zimmerman & Smit, 2014).

As stated above, this study found that EFAL teachers were reluctant to abandon the traditional teaching approaches. Hence, in their case study within the South African context, Coetzee *et al.*, (2016: 307) found that there was a need for EFAL teachers to consider the use of more inclusive and learner-centred approaches in order to address the problem of poor reading comprehension in EFAL classrooms. Similar findings were made in the study conducted in Kenya by Piper and Zuilkowski (2015).

As it was established in this study, Ferede and Nchindila (2017) found that EFL learners in Ethiopian public schools lacked both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to read in English. As argued in this study, a study in the USA also found that the lack of motivation to read could be attributed to limited access to reading materials (Mcquillan & Au, 2001). The findings of this study regarding the EFAL learners' struggle to read coincided with what was reported in both South Africa and Tanzania (Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004).

The evidence from both the literature and the empirical data from this study indicated a number of challenges around reading comprehension. These included persistently poor reading comprehension, teacher-centred pedagogical practices as well as poorly developed reading culture.

The focus of this sub-section of the study was on addressing the first objective (see 5.1) and confirmed that there were challenges facing reading comprehension for EFAL learners. The findings highlighted the need to use FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

5.3. FINDINGS ON THE COMPONENTS AND ASPECTS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF FVR

This sub-section focuses on some components of FVR approach that were used in addressing the above challenges.

5.3.1. Promoting self-selected reading material and re-teaching reading skills

During the discussions, it emerged that the solution for poor persistent reading comprehension lied in the promotion of self-selected reading materials. In this regard, it emerged earlier in the study that EFAL learners found the reading materials that were selected by their teachers to be difficult for them. This difficulty was worsened by the texts' failure to resonate with learners' experiences, realities and backgrounds. Consequently, learners were allowed to choose their own reading materials and read them for both pleasure and comprehension. The general feeling was that this situation would also enable EFAL learners to engage and interact with these texts in meaningful ways, instead of the decontextualised and superficial one. To achieve this, it was necessary to address the challenge of insufficient reading materials such as books, newspapers and magazines.

Moreover, the oral reflections revealed that there was a need to re-teach reading skills to EFAL learners. In this case, both EFAL teachers and learners felt that being able to decode reading materials was not enough. In other words, they realised the necessity of learning and applying a repertoire of reading skills in order to improve reading comprehension.

Furthermore, it was established in this study that learners showed improved performance when reading shorter texts rather than lengthy ones. Also, these findings indicated that EFAL learners understood better when the texts were about the matter that they were passionate about.

The findings from the literature indicate the benefits of promoting self-text selection. The benefits include encouraging learners to become lifelong readers with improved reading competence (Astuti, 2014:43), succeeding in using FVR approach (Bautista and Marulanda, 2018:53) and improving reading frequency (Mcquillan and Au, 2001:225).

The literature cautions against neglecting the teaching of reading skills when addressing the challenge of poor reading comprehension. Failure to do this may have negative consequences for EFAL learners. These include, hampering learners' ability to master the three levels of comprehension. Also, learners' inability to make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, as well as examining and evaluating content using the language of learning and teaching (Foncha, Mafumo&Abongdia, 2017:8763).

5.3.2. Promoting inclusive and learner-centred instructional strategies in EFAL classrooms

The CDA analysis of this study revealed that EFAL learners preferred the use of a variety of inclusive and learner-centred methodologies in the teaching of reading comprehension in the EFAL classrooms. In this case, it was found that the use of these approaches improves learners' reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This improvement was brought about, promoting learner participation and interactions with the text, as opposed to placing teachers on the centre of the teaching process. These interactions moved beyond reading and answering questions from the teacher as it was the case before the intervention of this study. As it was established in this study, the focus shifted from the promotion of pronunciation and reading fluency, to the need to enhance reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

Another finding pertained to the different learning styles that EFAL learners brought to EFAL classroom. In this case, it emerged that EFAL learners preferred the methodologies that accommodated their diverse learning styles and preferences. According to the co-researchers, this put them in control of the learning process as active participants in the same process. The part of being in control involved engaging in cooperative learning activities, as well as learning from peers.

It further emerged that EFAL learners preferred some scaffolding as opposed to complete dominance by the teacher. They argued that this would help reduce dependency on the teacher as some of them found it difficult to comprehend texts when reading alone.

The empirical data generated in this study concurs with data from the literature concerning the use of inclusive and learner-centred approaches in EFAL classrooms. The use of different strategies improves the reading comprehension (Andreassen & Brate, 2011:520). When self-

regulated learning strategies are used, they enhance reading comprehension (Denton et al., 2015:82).

5.3.3. Easy access to reading material

This study found that the solution for weak reading culture was twofold. In this regard, the issue of the dysfunctional school library featured predominantly during our discussions and FAI. As a result, it emerged that for FVR approach to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners, a functional school library was the necessary component. As a team, we felt that this would help in addressing the problem of poor reading culture that characterised the EFAL classrooms. In our discussions, we agreed that for it to be functional, the school library needed to promote access to reading materials at all times. On the one hand, the findings of the study indicated that learners' lack of motivation to read was due to the non-existence of a functional library. On the other hand, these findings also indicated that exposing EFAL learners to a variety of reading material enabled them to interact with the language of teaching and learning. It was through this interaction that they would be able to develop and expand their vocabulary, reading skills and reading comprehension.

In addition to making the library functional, it emerged that the 'Reading boxes' that were created in EFAL classrooms had positive impact both on EFAL learners' attitude towards reading and their frequency of reading. This improvement could be attributed to the ease with which EFAL learners accessed reading materials. As it emerged during the discussions, the co-researchers were motivated to read as opposed to making noise and spending their time unproductively. As a way of ensuring easy access to reading materials, our team and other learners collected the old newspapers, books and magazines in the community and from business around the community. This continuous exposure and interaction with material enabled them to learn new words and build the vocabulary which proved necessary for reading comprehension.

The empirical data generated in this study concerning the benefits of ease access to reading material such as books, newspapers and magazines was also corroborated by the findings from the literature. Both the international and national studies indicate that access to reading material inculcates the culture of reading (Machet &Tiemensma, 2009:63; Yaji, Dala & Danburam, 2017:30). Access to reading materials also impacts positively on reading achievement of learners (Yaji *et al.,* 2017:30). When a functional school library exists, it caters

for different learners by providing diverse subject matter (Paton-Ash &Wilmont, 2015:2). With a variety of interesting books to choose from in the school library, learners and teachers are more likely to engage in FVR (Da Souza, 2010:37; Krashen, 2016:2).

5.3.4. Encouraging positive attitude, motivation and proficiency building in the use of English language

As indicated in the previous sub-section, the use of English language was found to be a challenge for EFAL learners. In this regard, negative attitudes and the lack of proficiency in English exacerbated the situation. The findings of this study revealed that the solution for this problem involved encouraging positive attitude towards the use of English. The discussions and oral reflections revealed the significance of encouraging EFAL learners to view English as a language that facilitates learning, rather than a barrier. Such a view, according to the co-researchers, would increase their interaction with this language. In turn, they would benefit from such interactions. The frequent interactions with the language would contribute to changing the perceptions teachers held about EFAL learners. In other words, teachers would begin to view them as competent learners with the potential to read for comprehension. This view corroborates the attempt by this study to place teachers and learners on equal positions of power. In this regard, they were both able to influence decisions about how reading comprehension could be taught in the EFAL classrooms. In addition, they were able to participate actively in the creation of new knowledge, as opposed to being its passive recipients.

Another component that was found to be necessary involved building the proficiency of EFAL learners in the use of English language. In this case, the study found that one way of improving proficiency was through incorporating dictionary use in the EFAL classrooms. This proved successful in building and developing the vocabulary necessary for reading comprehension. It further emerged that exposing learners to the vocabulary used in EFAL classrooms and assessment activities helped in building their proficiency in the use of English. As opposed to just explaining this vocabulary, EFAL learners gained more when teachers demonstrated how such words were understood and used in different contexts.

Furthermore, encouraging learners to ask themselves or each other questions after an FVR activity proved to be successful in building their proficiency in the use of English. Most importantly, these questions should not be different from the type of questions asked during the examinations and other assessment related activities. By being accustomed to the questions of that nature assists them to comprehend better and respond to questions more accurately.

The emphasis on reading skills was found to be important in building the proficiency to read in English and for comprehension .For these skills to improve, this study found that there should be increased exposure and frequency of reading English texts. Where possible, these texts should match EFAL learners' levels of proficiency. With such frequent exposure, they gain knowledge and understanding of different words and the contexts in which such words could be used. In turn, this improves their levels of reading comprehension.

In order to prevent them from losing focus and becoming confused, the breaking down and shortening of pieces of EFAL texts was seen as another tool for building the proficiency of EFAL learners to understand English texts. By breaking them into smaller sentences and "chunks," it becomes easier for EFAL learners to apply the word-attacking skills and clarify meanings of some words in the texts. This is particularly important for assessment and examination purposes. To have EFAL teachers reading English texts in class and demonstrating how questions could be answered, as well as how certain words could be understood and contextualised was identified as another way of motivating learners to read in English. By doing this, learners are more likely to emulate the behaviour of their teachers.

The benefits of positive attitude are documented in the literature. With EFAL learners adopting a positive attitude, FVR assists in the improvement of reading comprehension (Goctu, 2016:74). According to Liem (2005), the success of the six computer science students in Vietnam could be attributed to the positive attitudes these learners had towards the additional language administered during the FVR sessions. Similarly, Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009:383) conducted a comparative study in Saudi Arabia and the results indicated that the success of FVR could be attributed to the participants' "…more positive attitudes toward reading." The literature is also not silent on the benefits of motivation. There is a strong

relationship between reading attitude and intrinsic motivation (Antigua et al., 2014). Moreover, in a study in Australia, it was reported that there was an increase in the learner motivation towards reading as a result of engaging in FVR activities (Barry, Huebsch & Burhop (2008) cited in Velluto & Barbousas, 2017:3). Also, reporting on the results of the study conducted in Korea, Cho, Choi and Krashen (2008:70), they revealed that learners in the FVR class showed more confidence and less anxiety towards reading in English.

5.4. CREATING CONDITIONS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL UTILISATION OF FVR APPROACH

This sub-section of the study reports on the findings concerning the conditions which are necessary for the successful implementation of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners

5.4.1. Conditions that made the school library functional

The discussions and FAI interviews revealed that co-researchers preferred to choose and decide their own reading materials in the EFAL classrooms. For this to happen, it became apparent that there was a need for the provision and creation of a print-rich environment. In this case, the first step involved making the school library functional. In this regard, the collection of old books, newspapers and magazines was found to be necessary for providing EFAL learners with a variety of materials to select and read. The revival of the school library committee proved to be effective in making the library functional. In spite of not receiving any formal training in library services and administration, the committee members agreed to take charge of the management and administration of the school library.

5.4.2. Factors that contributed to making EFAL classrooms print-rich

The establishment of drop-in boxes was found to be another condition necessary for learners to select reading materials. In this case, teachers and learners at this school collected and brought old newspapers and magazines. This was further extended to local businesses and the local library. Placing these drop-in boxes in various places across the school yard proved useful as it increased access to the reading materials.

For a print-rich environment to be successfully realised, it is required that the classroom stimulates EFAL learners to read. In this case, we asked learners to bring and paste posters and big pictures in the classroom. Following the advice of Learner-co-researchers, we pasted the pictures depicting celebrities reading. They had earlier stated that they were more likely to be motivated and inspired to read if they saw one of the celebrities do it. All this resulted in EFAL learners spending time reading for pleasure, instead of waiting for the teacher to bring something that needed to be read.

5.4.3. Conditions that led to effective teacher modelling

The sudden interest by learners to see what their teachers were reading seemed to have contributed in making learners engage in FVR. In other words, teachers became keener in modelling reading to EFAL learners. Furthermore, the "Reading Thursday" provided the space and time for teachers to model reading in their EFAL classrooms and across the school. In this case, learners watched when the teacher scanned and skimmed the text for information. It was also found that by demonstrating how to use word-attacking skills and being in possession of a dictionary, teachers' modelling became more effective. This gave learners the opportunity to understand the different context in which words could be used. In all these, learners were asked to make inputs.

5.4.4. Factors that made scaffolding effective

It had emerged earlier in the study that co-researchers felt that they were not provided sufficient support by their teachers. According to their views, teachers were selective in their approach. As a response, the changing of the classroom setting was effective in allowing teachers to provide necessary assistance to EFAL learners. This situation enabled teachers to address questions from the struggling students speedily. In addition, it was also found that the readily available teaching aids such as dictionaries made EFAL educators swift and effective in providing support.

The positive attitudes of both teachers and learners proved significant in ensuring effective scaffolding. In this regard, learners were enthusiastic to engage in FVR and to receive assistance from the educators. Unlike in the beginning, where Learner-co-researchers were

viewed as being lazy to study, the Teacher-co-researchers recognised the change in the attitude learners displayed towards reading in general, and FVR in particular. Another contributory factor to the effective scaffolding involved the co-lesson planning and selection of reading materials.

This sub-section of the study focused on the conditions considered necessary for the success of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. It was responding to the third objective of this research. In this regard, it focused on the conditions that made the school library functional, factors that contributed to making EFAL classroom print-rich, conditions that led to effective modelling by teachers and factors that made scaffolding effective.

5.6. THE BARRIERS TO THE SUCCESSFUL USE OF FVR APPROACH

Through discussions, FAI and reflections, this study found that various challenges needed to be overcome for FVR approach to be used for improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Furthermore, the study also found that some remedies were successful in addressing the above challenges.

5.6.1. A dysfunctional school library

Despite the calls for every school to have a functional library, the school under study still faced the challenge of a dysfunctional library. In this case, the school library was just a mere building that served other purposes other than its primary ones. In some instances, it was used as a storeroom, while in others it was used as a bedroom for the grade 12 learners.

Apart from this, it also emerged that the library did not have a qualified librarian responsible for effective management and administration. As a result, there was not enough stock of reading materials and the books were not properly arranged. This situation was worsened by the limited and the lack of furniture for learners to be used for reading. This challenge had two implications for EFAL learners. It could not provide these learners with access to diverse reading materials because the co-researchers were cited as saying that many books contained all information which was no longer appealing to them. Another implication for EFAL learners

was that this situation demoralised them and affected their attitudes towards reading negatively.

As the response to this challenge, the study found that the establishment of a library committee was necessary for making the school library functional. The study also established that although the members of this committee had not received formal training or formal qualification in library management and administration, the partnership between the school and local library proved successful in providing necessary skills and knowledge in library administration and management.

The findings from the literature continued to demonstrate how a dysfunctional library may impact on the success of FVR. In their recent study in Gauteng Province, Paton-Ash and Wilmont (2015) observed that some school libraries lacked books, while others had books which were either old or unappealing to learners' interests. In Nigeria, the study by Yaji et al., (2017:30) reported on the lack of functional school libraries. These authors also noted the wide-spread lack of equipment and information resources throughout the country's school libraries. Similarly, in their study, scrutinising the status of school libraries in Kenya, Mutungi *et al*., (2014:150) found that school libraries were under-resourced. The results of the study by Ash-Argyle and Shoham (2012) in Israel indicated that the inadequately qualified librarians were perceived to have low levels of advanced cooperation.

As evidenced in the empirical data and the literature, it becomes difficult for FVR approach to succeed under such circumstances as dysfunctional school libraries.

5.6.2. Reading as an oratory activity

Another major challenge that could impede the successful use of FVR approach was around the teaching of reading comprehension in the EFAL classrooms. The study found that reading was regarded as an oratory activity where emphasis was put on pronunciation and fluency. This emphasis, however, paid little attention to comprehension of what was read. Moreover, the teaching of reading skills and necessary aspects of reading were neglected.

It also emerged through discussions with teachers that they felt that they were not properly trained to teach reading and reading comprehension. As a result, they resorted to teaching EFAL learners the decoding skills and engaging in question-answer method of teaching.

When addressing this barrier, the study found that making reading more enjoyable and interesting made a significant contribution to changing EFAL learners' perception of reading. Before the intervention by this study, reading was taught and administered in a rigid and non-interactive manner in EFAL classrooms. In some cases, learners' interaction with these texts was superficial, limited and decontextualised. In other cases, this interaction was hampered by a lack of participation and individualised settings in the EFAL classrooms.

Some of these findings were corroborated by the literature. In this case, the Norwegian schools still limit the teaching of reading comprehension to asking learners about text content after reading. In America and Europe, teachers resort to asking learners about the contents of the text they have read (Andreassen & Brate, 2011:520).

5.6.3. Continuous use of teacher-centred methods in EFAL classrooms

The empirical findings in this study indicated that the setting of EFAL classrooms continued to encourage teacher dominance. In this regard, it was found that such dominance ranges from lesson planning to the actual execution of the plan in the classroom. This unequal power situation placed teachers at the control of learning, while learners were relegated to the periphery. In other words, EFAL learners did not have a voice in how reading was taught and which materials would be used. The study also found that due to limited role given to EFAL learners, it was challenging for them to work independently and to select books that they wanted to read.

The issue of irrelevant and uninteresting reading texts was also attributed to teachers' reluctance to allow active participation of EFAL learners in influencing decision about the teaching of reading comprehension. Another finding was that the use of these traditional instructional strategies failed to accommodate diverse learning styles of many EFAL learners. In fact, EFAL classrooms were dominated by the question-answer approach when reading was taught. This resulted in the failure by learners to engage properly and meaningfully with the given texts. Instead, they were seen to be observing these texts at a superficial level.

This study found co-lesson planning and presentation effective in addressing the above challenges. This approach to teaching reading comprehension enabled EFAL learners to have a voice in the selection of reading materials and influencing decisions around the choice of

instructional strategies that would be used. Moreover, it ensured that the different learning styles and diverse backgrounds, experiences and realities of EFAL learners were accommodated in the lesson plan and the actual execution of the lesson itself.

Some of these findings concurred with the findings of other national and international studies. In a South African study, Pretorius (2002) reported that the teaching of reading comprehension in South African classrooms still centered on the use of traditional instructional practices such as rote learning, verbatim recall and oral modes of information dissemination. In their respective studies, Machet and Olen, (1996) and Zimmerman and Smit (2014) concluded that EFAL teachers focused on teaching learners the decoding skills at the expense of reading comprehension.

5.6.4. A lack of confidence among the EFAL learners

The findings of this study indicated that EFAL learners lacked the confidence to express themselves in English. In this regard, they acknowledged that they found reading EFAL texts difficult. In some instances, poor pronunciation and failure to comply with rules of punctuation led to them being ridiculed by their classmates. In other instances, it emerged that EFAL teachers were impatient with struggling learners.

These findings do not dispute the findings of other studies. For example, the study by Zarrinabadi, Ketabi and Abdi (2014:216) reports that some learners refused to actively participate in the whole-class activities because they felt that other learners "… were linguistically superior to them." Edstrom (2013:294) also adds that proficiency levels and interactional styles of learners impact on their willingness to participate in the learning activities such as FVR. Similarly, Bautista and Marulanda (2018:52) point to the fact that learners' poor proficiency in English discourages them to engage in FVR. These findings further concur with the earlier findings of the study where Amoutenya (2002:53) indicated that proficiency in English impedes active participation because Zambian learners could not express themselves clearly in that language.

The situation described above had a negative impact on the ways EFAL learners view themselves. In this case, they view themselves as incompetent and powerless individuals. These learners seemed to have internalised their teachers' negative perceptions and beliefs.

As this study established, the EFAL learners' participation was negatively affected by these perceptions. In addition to impacting negatively on their participation in the EFAL classrooms, these negative perceptions hindered them from influencing decisions regarding the teaching of reading comprehension in the EFAL classrooms. Under these circumstances, EFAL teachers' dominance continued.

However, this study sought to challenge this status quo. Through their participation, the EFAL learners were empowered and the space was created for them to express their views. Additionally, their scope of participation was extended to include mutual and co-lesson planning, self-selection of reading material and the actual execution of the lesson plan. Furthermore, it was established by the teacher-co-researchers that it was necessary to empower learners with knowledge around dictionary use. The belief, in this regard, is that with such knowledge in hand, it would be easier for EFAL learners to develop the habit of dictionary use, improve their vocabulary and eventually, instil confidence in themselves and others.

This sub-section was responding to the fourth objective (See 5.1) of this study. On the one hand, a number of barriers that may hinder the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners were identified. These included a dysfunctional library, reading as an oratory activity, continuous use of teacher-centred methods in the EFAL classrooms, and a lack of confidence among the EFAL learners. On the other hand, the establishment of a library committee, a partnership between the school and local library, making reading more enjoyable and interesting, co-lesson planning and presentation, and empowerment of learners with knowledge around dictionary use were identified as possible remedies to these challenges.

5.7. FINDINGS ON SOME OF THE SUCCESS INDICATORS OF THE USE OF FVR APPROACH

5.7.1. There is an improvement in reading comprehension

Throughout the discussions, FAI and critical reflections, it emerged that the co-researchers noticed a positive change on the reading comprehension for EFAL learners. In this case, the

study found that the co-researchers showed a renewed interest in reading. In turn, this led to increased frequencies of reading of variety of material. In addition to the exposure to increased amount of reading material, the study also found that the correct application of reading skills and other skills related to reading played a role in improving reading comprehension. Moreover, learners' ability to interpret and interact with the text at different levels was another indicator of improved reading comprehension.

5.7.2. A shift towards learner-centred instructional strategies

Prior to the intervention by this study, it was found that reading was viewed as a one-way process dominated by EFAL teachers. Following its intervention, however, the study found that to no longer being the case. In other words, EFAL teachers were more receptive of EFAL learners' learning styles. In this regard, the use of constructivist, inclusive and learner-centred approaches was another noticeable shift. According to learner-co-researchers, the opportunity to design lessons and select reading materials with their educators proved to be effective in demonstrating this change. Not only did this provide them the opportunity to become active participants who created their own knowledge, but it also gave them the power to influence decisions about their own learning.

5.7.3. Enhanced culture of reading

This study noted the behavioural change of EFAL learners towards reading in general and FVR in particular. The study found that following the use of FVR, these learners showed interest in engaging in FVR. To demonstrate this, they became eager to spend time in both the school and local libraries. Consequently, they were exposed to a variety of reading materials which contributed to the enhancement of vocabulary, which is necessary for reading comprehension. The study also found the existence of a positive relationship between reading frequency and reading comprehension. In other words, when learners understood what they were reading, it became easier for them to increase the reading frequency. This manifested in the number of books that EFAL learners borrowed from the local library, as well as the ones from the school library. In addition, other learners who were not part of the study suggested the formation of a study club at the school as a way of indicating a renewed culture of reading

at the school. Learner-co-researchers reported decreased levels of disruptions in EFAL classrooms as they engaged in FVR during their free time at school. Moreover, by taking books to their homes, EFAL learners contributed to strengthening the culture of reading in the community.

5.7.4. Improved vocabulary, reading skills and positive attitude towards EFAL

When asked to reflect critically on their thoughts and feelings towards the use of EFAL as medium of instruction, Learner-co-researchers pointed to numerous challenges. However, after the intervention by this study, a positive change was noticed among Learner-co-researchers. In this regard, it emerged that EFAL was viewed as a necessary tool for learning in South Africa and globally. This resulted in EFAL learners opting to read English texts more often as compared to those written in vernacular, despite their limited availability. Additionally, they began to prefer some authors to others. These findings contradict the findings of a study in Limpopo where learners preferred texts written in vernacular.

In our discussions, Teacher-co-researchers reported improvement in EFAL learners' vocabulary. In their view, this improvement was evident in the manner in which they summarised or explained some texts to other learners when asked to do so. They attributed this change to the newly acquired behaviour of dictionary use, which was part of using FVR approach.

Finally, another improvement was noticed with regard to the use of reading skills by the EFAL learners. The study found that EFAL learners made attempts to incorporate a variety of reading skills during reading. When doing this, they engaged in the bottom-up approaches to reading, which were of constructivist nature. According to co-researchers, the effective modelling and scaffolding that was part of using the FVR approach played a significant part in this regard.

5.8. SUMMARY

This study revealed that learners' voices were excluded in the teaching of reading comprehension in EFAL classrooms. Adding to this, it was also found that many EFAL learners

continue to struggle with reading comprehension. This situation calls for change in the teaching of reading comprehension and provision of adequate support to both EFAL teachers and learners. That is, the use of other participatory, constructivist and learner-centred approaches such as FVR in EFAL classrooms. While there was a problem in the actual teaching of reading comprehension, the challenge of dysfunctional school libraries and limited access to reading materials remained problematic for reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Additionally, the use of English as a medium of instruction exacerbates the problem of poor reading comprehension.

In conjunction with the empirical data generated in this study and data from the literature, this section focused on the findings around the following: key challenges facing reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Here, the focus was on justifying the need for the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. This was followed by the findings regarding the components and aspects necessary for FVR approach to succeed in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Then, the section highlighted findings regarding the conditions under which FVR approach could be successfully implemented. Next, this section highlighted the findings pertaining to the barriers that could impede the success of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Finally, the indicators of the successful use of FVR approach were also highlighted. Overall, this section confirms that the objectives of this study were realised.

5.9. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study has a number of limitations. First, it was undertaken in one rural high school with a small number of co-researchers. This fact makes it impossible to generalise the findings of the study to all high schools. Despite this, some of these findings may be applicable to some schools in similar rural context.

Second, although this study sought to demonstrate how FVR approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners, this demonstration was carried over a short period of time (3 months). It remains, therefore, a challenge to determine whether such improvement is sustainable or not. This serves as an implication for further research.

5.10. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study contributes to scientific knowledge and free voluntary reading approach.

5.10.1. Contributions to free voluntary reading approach

Numerous studies in South Africa have focused on reading, reading skills and reading comprehension. These include the works of Granville (2001); Bertram (2006); Van Wyk and Louw, (2008); Zimmerman and Smit (2014); Zimmerman and Smit (2016); Coetzee *et al.*, (2016); Mensah *et al.,* (2017); Makiwane-Mazinyo and Pillay (2017). However, there is a limited number of studies which examined free voluntary reading in South Africa in general and rural contexts in particular. These include studies by Machet and Olen (1996:2); Rasana (2006), Machet and Tiemensma (2009), Nassimbeni and Desmond (2011). After a careful review of these studies, none of them investigated the use of FVR approach to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners in a rural high school. This study makes a contribution in this regard.

While some of these studies (Machet & Tiemensma, 2009) have reported on suitable school environment in which this approach could be used, their findings were only limited to primary schools. By identifying the conditions under which this approach may work, as well as the threats brought by the high school enivironment, this study makes another contribution. In this regard, this study argues that the provision and creation of a print-rich environment, the establishment of drop-in boxes, effective scaffolding, and effective modelling are some of the conditions suitable for the use of FVR approach in high schools. Additionally, with regards to threats that could impede the successful use of this approach in rural high school context, the study cautions that dysfunctional school library, reading as an oratory activity, continuous use of teacher-centred approaches, and a lack of confidence among EFAL learners, are some of the threats to guard against when using this approach in a rural high school.

While FVR is a fully developed approach on its own, this study brings the unique element in the utilization of this approach. In this regard, it addresses the power dynamics between the teacher and the learner in the classroom. While in its traditional nature, FVR places the teacher as the authority who manages all aspects of the approach, but this study places both the educator and the learners on an equal footing. For instance, it is argued that co-lesson preparation is important in the success of this approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. It is further argued that through the incorporation of co-lesson preparation,

word-attacking skills, and dictionary, the study contributes to the discourses around the improvement of reading comprehension for additional language learners.

In the EFAL classroom, this approach assists teachers to become aware of learners' needs and learning preferences, while at the same time these learners take control of their own learning. In contrast to relying on other educational officials and other experts to find these solutions, the study created the opportunity for learners to influence decisions about their own teaching and learning. Their participation, in this regard, shifted from being mere recipients of knowledge to being active co-constructors of this knowledge.

5.10.2. Methodological contributions

Contrary to the South African studies highlighted above, this study adopted the principles of participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). Adhering to these principles, the study engaged in Free Attitude Interviews (FAI), oral reflections and group discussions (workshops) to generate data. In addition to generating data, PALAR enabled active participation of co-researchers. In this regard, the power dynamics between the researcher and the participants that often characterise the conventional methods of doing research were addressed. By placing both the researcher (myself) and the co-researchers on an equal power relations, this study made another contribution. Through this, it facilitated a change in the way people in rural communities were viewed. In this case, the methodology used in this study empowered and emancipated the rural people from the perception that they are unable to solve their own problems or create their own knowledge.

Unlike the conventional way of doing research, which emphasises the distance between the researcher and the participants, the participatory methodologies used in this study were in direct contradiction with this practice. In this regard, the co-researchers interacted with data beyond the interpretive levels. In addition to having data presented in their own languages, the participatory nature of this study allowed them to verify and interact with it during and at the end of the research process. In so doing, they become part of the research process and its findings.

5.11. IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

With regard to the first limitation above, there still remains the need for further research which involves more than one high school and large population of participants. Apart from the number of co-researchers, other research considerations may include testing the effectiveness of this approach in township schools. This will provide the opportunity to assess the success of this approach with large populations and in different contexts. Furthermore, this will highlight the aspects of the approach that need to be enhanced or adjusted.

The second limitation of this study calls for further research that is carried over a long period of time. This will help in determining the sustainability of the approach and its results in the long run. It will also shed light on the conditions that may lead to such sustainability or even the challenges that may hamper this sustainability.

CHAPTER SIX

PROPOSED FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH TO IMPROVE READING COMPREHENSION FOR EFAL LEARNERS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This section of the study aims to explain in detail how the proposed free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. The approach is divided into two parts, namely: macro level (outside the classroom) and micro level (inside the classroom).

6.2. UNDERSTANDING AND UTILIZING FREE VOLUNTARY READING APPROACH

In this sub-section the focus is on demonstrating how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. Due to the participatory nature of this study, the demonstration and explanations that follow were co-jointly proposed and developed by myself and co-researchers. Their contribution to the making and functioning of this approach signals the powerful voice that they possess and can utilise to address other social ills.

Macro level (Outside the classroom)

The proposed approach begins with **needs identification process.** EFAL teachers and learners are its main components. These stakeholders are tasked with mutually identifying the challenges that EFAL learners face pertaining to reading comprehension. In other words, their main focus is on identifying challenges which need to be resolved through the use of this approach. This identification can be done through various means. The EFAL teachers may begin the process by assessing and evaluating the performance of EFAL learners in reading comprehension. In this study, the informal conversations about the challenge of poor reading comprehension led to inclusive discussions about this issue. The inclusion of other stakeholders such as learners in the discussion ensured that this challenge was identified and remedied by the people directly affected by the problem. This was in contrast to shifting the responsibility to other education officials from the periphery.

Alternatively, EFAL learners themselves may initiate the process by engaging their educators in the discourse around the different ways they can use to improve their performance in reading comprehension activities. As evidenced in this study, while the initial reaction involved EFAL teachers blaming learners for poor reading comprehension, further engagements proved otherwise. In fact, the challenges were both at macro and micro levels.

Drawing from the asset-based approach, Myende (2014:161) argues that the following questions are central to the need identification process:

- Who is affected by this problem?

- How they can be part of the solution?

- What skills, capacities and strengths do they have?

By asking these questions at this stage, the aim is to tailor the co-researchers' skills and strengths with the roles that they have to play in achieving the intended outcome. In this study, we matched our skills with the roles that we assumed in this study in order to ensure the success of the FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. For instance, some assumed the roles of librarians, while others were responsible for administrative duties.

This process is followed by **context analysis.** In this phase of the approach the main focus is on what should be done to create the conditions conducive for it to work. It is at this stage that SWOT analysis is performed and the strength and weakness are identified. In this study, our team identified various challenges that had the potential to threaten the success of this approach. A dysfunctional school library and poor culture of reading were identified as challenges at the macro level that contributed to poor reading comprehension. The challenges identified at the micro level included reading as an oratory activity, continuous use of teacher-centred methods in the EFAL classrooms, and a lack of confidence among EFAL learners. In short, when using this approach, it is advisable that at this stage the focus is on identifying the threats and devising ways of overcoming them at both levels.

Once this has been done, it is time for the team to **create vision** and set out the road map to address the challenges at the macro level. In this study, after identifying the school library as a challenge, we set out to make the school library functional. In addition to making the library

habitable, we re-arranged and packed the books, magazines and newspapers in an orderly manner. This was then followed by the **revival and selection of the library committee** which was responsible for administrative and management of the library on rotational basis. With regards to reviving the culture of reading, it is important for the people using this approach to close the gap between the community and the school. In other words, it is important to ensure that reading for pleasure is not regarded as something that occurs only at school. Using this approach, some co-researchers in this study brought reading materials such as old newspapers, magazines and books from home. Others took books from both the public and school libraries to their homes to read with their family members. In addition to this, our team established partnership between the public library and our school. It was this partnership that enabled majority of our learners to have library-access cards, which allowed them to access the library services. As a result of having increased access to reading material both at home and school, co-researchers engaged in more reading, which in turn led to improvement in vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Moreover, by having such partnership in place, the people using this approach will receive guidance from a trained librarian about the administration and management of their school library. This study has shown the importance of the functional school library for the success of FVR approach in improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

The FVR approach described above can be summarised as follows:
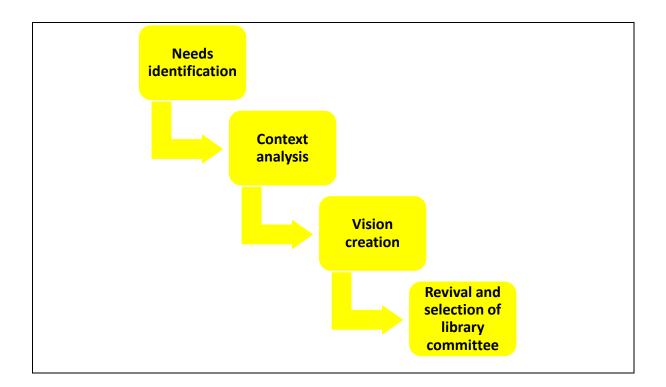
Figure: 6.1. FVR approach at macro level

Micro level (inside the classroom)

Once this has been attended to, the focus must be on the micro level. Unlike in the previous level, this level begins with context evaluation. Here the focus is on assessing the EFAL classroom with the intention of **creating a print-rich environment.** In order to achieve this, our team collected a number of posters and pictures which were then pasted on the walls around the class. These were posters of celebrities and inspiring messages about reading. The intention here was to motivate EFAL learners to view reading as an enjoyable exercise. Apart from the pictures and inspirational messages, we pasted posters depicting words and phrases that are often used in reading comprehension question papers. Other posters had words such as 'skimming' 'scanning' etc. and their definitions. In addition, we ensured that there were adequate dictionaries available to assist in building vocabulary, which is necessary for reading comprehension.

For people using this approach, it is important to ensure that each EFAL classroom has instant access to reading materials. While acknowledging the impact of poverty and the rural location of the school under study, we ensured that there was instant access to reading material. As co-researchers, we created what we termed "drop-in boxes" or mini libraries in EFAL

classrooms. These boxes were then filled with all sorts of reading materials, which learners had brought from their homes and across the community. Not only did these boxes provide EFAL learners with reading materials, but they also allowed them to select books that they were interested in reading.

Once this has been completed, it is important to consider the actual teaching of reading comprehension in the EFAL classroom. In this regard, the first focus is on lesson preparation. This approach requires **co-lesson preparation.** In other words, both EFAL teachers and learners are required to make inputs into the preparation. The EFAL learners' role in the lesson preparation involves the selection of the text to be read from the 'drop-in box'. This role, however, is limited to deciding on the topic of interest or issue discussed in the text. In this study, the headings of the three different texts were read by the teacher to the learners. Having gone through some brainstorming around what may be expected in each of these texts; eventually one text was chosen by the learners themselves.

The educator plays a number of roles. The EFAL educator must:

- Ensure that the reading activity falls within the prescripts of the CAPS policy document.
- Ensure that the text complies with requirements set out in the CAPS policy document regarding the length and difficulty.

When using this approach, it is also important for both parties to agree on the teaching methodology to be used. In this regard, the following questions are critical:

- Who is going to read the text?
- Will the text be read collectively or individually?
- Will the text be read silently or out loud?
- What other teaching aids needed?

In this study, co-researchers were given copies of the text that they had not chosen. The decision was that the EFAL educator would start by modelling reading using a different text. However, before he could begin to read, the educator revised with learners what skimming and scanning of a text was all about. These were reflected on the posters pasted on the

classroom walls. While re-explaining these, the EFAL teacher also demonstrated how these reading skills could be applied in a text. This was followed by the educator identifying difficult words in the text. In order to address this challenge, the learners were reminded of the word-attacking skills and how to apply them in the text. In addition to word-attacking skills, the educator demonstrated to learners how a word could be used in different contexts. After all this, the educator began reading the text slowly three times. In each of these times, pronunciation of words was stressed, and reading fluency maintained. Finally, in order to demonstrate reading comprehension, the educator highlighted the most important aspects that were discussed in the text.

Following the co-lesson planning, this approach requires that teachers and learners engage in the following:

- **Scaffolding**
- **Peer-scaffolding**

With regards to scaffolding, EFAL teachers must provide assistance to learners when they interact with the text. This assistance is not only limited to reading out difficult words to a learner, but it also involves assisting a learner on how to apply different reading skills. In addition, the learner is allowed multiple opportunities to read and interact with diverse reading material of different cognitive demands on the students. Such assistance is gradually withdrawn in order for a learner to become an independent reader with improved reading comprehension. In this study, EFAL learners were exposed to different reading texts and they were allowed to choose themselves.

The constructivist nature of this approach requires that learners direct their own learning. In this regard, peer-scaffolding features predominantly in this approach. To ensure this, EFAL teachers must:

- Re-arrange the sitting arrangement in the classroom to allow for interaction and discussions
- Emphasise the importance of co-operative learning as opposed to competition amongst EFAL learners.
- Ensure that learners model reading to each other

- The formation of study groups with focus on reading
- Allow learners to summarise their texts and present such summaries in class in order to receive feedback from both the teacher and other learners. This creates the opportunity for further scaffolding and model if necessary.

The steps described above are summarised below:

CREATION OF A PRINT-RICH ENVIROMENT

- Instant access to readinng material
- Drop ins boxes

CO-LESSON PLANNING
- Selection of CAPS compliant texts.
- Who is going to read the text?
- Will the text be read collectively or individually?
- Will the text be read silently or out loud?
- What other teaching aids are needed?

SCAFFOLDING
- Application of different reading skills
- multiple opportunities to read and interact with diverse reading material

PEER-SCAFOLDING
- The formation of study groups with focus on reading
- Re-arrange the sitting arrangement in the classroom to allow for interaction and discussions
- Emphasise the importance of co-operative learning as opposed to competition amongst EFAL learners.
- Learners model reading to each other

FIGURE: 6.2. FVR approach at micro level

6.3. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter addressed the main aim of this study which was to demonstrate how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for English first additional language learners. For effective use, the approach must focus on both the macro level (outside the classroom) and micro level (inside the classroom). At the macro level the focus is on needs identification process, context analysis, creation of vision and a road-map to overcome the challenges. At the micro level emphasis is on context evaluation, co-lesson preparation, teacher-scaffolding, and peer scaffolding.

The study found that mutual identification of the challenges that EFAL learners face pertaining to reading comprehension, creation of vision and setting out the road map to address the challenges, creation of a print-rich environment, instant access to reading materials, and co-lesson preparation are important in demonstrating how free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners.

_____

7. REFERENCES
_____

Allas, R., Leijen, A. & Toom, A. 2017. Supporting the construction of teachers' practical knowledge through different interactive formats of oral reflection and written reflection. *Scandinavian Journal of Education Research, 61(5): 600-615.*

Al-Homoud, F. & Schmitt, N., 2009. Extensive reading in a challenging environment: A comparison of extensive and intensive reading approaches in Saudi Arabia. *Language Teaching Research, 13(4):383-401.*

Amankwaa, L. 2016. Creating protocol for trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 23(3):121-127*.

Andreassen, R. & Brate, I. 2011. Implementation and effects of explicit reading comprehension instruction in fifth-grade classroom. *Learning and Instruction*, (21):520-537.

Ann Liao, H. 2006. Toward an epistemology of participatory communication: A feminist perspective. *The Howard Journal of Communications, (17): 101-108.*

AnMarkrud, O. & Braten, I. 2009. Motivation for reading comprehension. *Learning and Individual Differences,* (19):252-256.

Ash-Argyle, R. & Shoham, S. 2012. Librarian's leadership efficacy, training and school involvement: Collaboration between teachers and school librarians in Israel. *School Libraries Worldwide, 18(1):1-17.*

Astuti, U.P. 2014. Developing English supplementary reading cards (ESRCs) for young learners to promote free voluntary reading program. *Jurnal Pendidikan Humaniora*, *2(2):41-53.*

Avdi, E. & Georgaca, E. 2007. Discourse Analysis and Psychotherapy: A critical review. *European Journal Psychotherapy and Counselling*, 9 (2): 157-176.

Bautista, D.C.D. & Marulanda, M.A.R. 2018. Free voluntary reading: Promoting vocabulary learning and self-directedness. *English Language Teaching, 11(8):51-64.*

Barranquero, A. 2011. Rediscovering the Latin American roots of participatory communication for social change. *Westminister Paperd in Communication and Culture, 8(1): 154-177.*

Beaumount-Bates, J.R. 2017. E- portfolios: Supporting collaborative partnerships in an early childhood centre in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *NZ J Educ Stud, (52): 347-362.*

Beglar, D. & Hunt, A. 2014. Pleasure reading and reading rate gain. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 26(1):29-48.*

Bertram. C. 2006. Exploring teachers' reading competences: A South African case study. *Open Learning, 21(1):5-18.*

Boelens, H. & Van Dam, H. 2012. School library education in thirteen countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. *School Libraries Worldwide, 18(2):82-94.*

Boerma, I.E., Mol, S.E. & Jolles, J. 2015. Teacher perceptions affect boy's and girls' reading motivation differently. *Reading Psychology, (37):547-569.*

Bozkurt, G. 2017. Social constructivism: Does it succeed in reconciling individual cognition with social teaching and learning practices in Mathematics? *Journal of Education and Practice, 8(3): 210-218.*

Brock-Utne, B. & Holmarsdottir, H.B. 2004. Language policies and practices in Tanzania and South Africa: Problems and challenges. *International Journal of Educational Development*, (24):67-83.

Buenner, P.S. 2013. Do scaffolding interactions exist in the Thai classroom? *Journal of Language Studies, 13(3):17-30.*

Burger, M. 2017. Participants: Rethinking South African universities' development-oriented community engagement. *Communicare, 36(2):1-24.*

Burns, E. 2018. School librarian as inquisitor of practice: Reimagine, reflect and react with the new standards. *Knowledge Quest, 46(4):54-58.*

Burns, E.A., Howard, J.K. & Kimmel, S.C. 2016. Development of communities of practice in school library education. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, 57(2): 101-111.*

Cameron, L. & Allen, B. 2013. Achieving educational sustainability: A PALAR reflection of success. *ALARJ, 19(1): 135-162.*

Cameron, L. 2015. Peer assisted teaching scheme and participatory action learning and action research: A winning combination. *ALARj, 21(2):122-149.*

Chaka, C. 2015. An investigation into the English reading comprehension of Grade 10 English first additional language learners at a senior secondary school. *Reading & Writing, 6(1):1-8.*

Chiou, W.B. & Yang, C.C. 2006. Teachers' modeling advantage and their modeling effects on college students' learning styles and occupational stereotypes: A case of collaborative teaching in technical courses. *Adolescence, 164(41):723-737.*

Cho, K.S., Choi, D.S. & Krashen, S. 2008. Are read-alouds and free reading "natural partners"?: An experimental study. *Home Run Research*, *36(5):69-73.*

Coetzee, S.A., Van Rensburg, C.J. & Schmulian, A. 2016. Differences in students' reading comprehension of international financial reporting standards: A South African case. *Accounting Education*, 25(4):306-326.

Cope, D.G. 2014. Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41(1): 89-91.*

Clark, C. 2010. Linking school libraries and literacy: Young people's reading habits and attitudes to their school library, and an exploration of the relationship between school library use and school attainment. National Literacy Trust Linking Libraries.

Cloete, E. & Delport, A. 2015. Music education in the Grade R classroom: How three teachers learned in a participatory action inquiry. *South African Journal of Childhood Education,(1):85-105.*

Cottone, R.R.2007. Paradigms of Couseling and Psychotherapy, revisited: Is social constructivism a paradigm? *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, *29 (8): 189-203*.

Cummins, J., Brown, K. & Sayer, D. 2007. *Literacy, technology, and diversity: teaching for success in changing times.* Boston: Pearson.

Cruickshank, K. 2006. Teenagers, literacy and school: Researching in multicultural contexts. London: R

Denton, C.A., Wolters, C.A, York, M.J., Swanson, E., Kulesz, P.A., & Francis, D.J. 2015. Adolescents' use of reading comprehension strategies: Differences related to reading proficiency, grade level, and gender. *Learning and Individual Differences, (37):81-95.*

Department of Education (DoE) 2008b. National Reading Strategy. *Government Gazette no. 75.* Pretoria: Government Printers

De Souza, M. 2010. Examining the role of the library in promoting the academic achievement of English learners. *The CATESOL Journal, 21(1):29-44.*

Draper, K. & Spaull, N. 2015. Examining oral reading fluency among rural Grade 5 English second language (ESL) learners in South Africa: An analysis of NEEDU 2013. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 5(2): 44-77.*

Evans, N.D. 2014. Training teacher-librarians to establish and manage school libraries in Kwazulu Natal: An empirical study. *Mousaion, 32(2):106-123.*

Fairclough, N. 2013. Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Policy Studies. *Critical Policy Studies,* 7 (2): 177-197.

Ferede, T. & Nchindila, B.M. 2017. EFL reading goals for grade 11 students across public and non- public schools in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *Heliyon, (e000396):1-17.*

Fields, M. 2017. Extended reading: A teacher-directed alternative to extensive reading. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 14(1):197-204.*

Fisher, D. & Frey, N. 2015. Teacher modeling using complex informational texts. *The Reading Teacher, 69(1): 63-69.*

Foncha, J.W., Mafuma, T. & Abongdia, J.F.A. 2017. Reading and response as facilitation to the teaching and learning of second/ foreign language. *Gender & Behaviour, 8762-8772.*

Gagne, N. & Parks, 2013. Cooperative learning tasks in a Grade 6 intensive ESL class: Role of scaffolding. *Language Teaching Research, 17(2):188-209.*

Glassman, M. & Erdem, G. 2014. Participatory Action Research and Its Meanings: Vivencia, Praxis, Conscientization. *Adult Education Quartely*, 64(3): 206-221.

Goctu, R. 2016. The impact of reading for pleasure on Georgian University EFL students' reading comprehension (IBU case). *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region, 2(1):73-81.*

Gomez-Lanier, L. 2018. Building collaboration in the flipped classroom: A case study. *IJ-SoTL, 12(2):1-9.*

Grabe, W., & Stoller, F.L. 2011. *Teaching and researching reading* (2nd ed.). England: Pearson Education.

Granville, S. 2001. Comprehension or comprehending? Using Critical Awareness and interactive reading theory to teach learners to interact with texts. *South African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, *(19):13-21.*

Green, A. & Kearney, J. 2011. Participatory action learning and action research for self-sustaining community development: Engaging Pacific Islanders in Southeast Queenland. The Australian Journal of University-Community Engagement. http://hdl.handle.net/10072/41824;: Accessed: 25 March 2019.

Gugglberger, L., Adamowitsch, M., Teutsch, F., Felder-Puiga. R. & Dur, W. 2015. The use of group discussions: A case study of learning about organisational characteristics of schools. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 18(2):127-143.*

Hart, G. 2010. New vision, new goals, new markets? Reflections on a South African case study of community library services. *South African Journal of Libraries & Information Science, 76(2):81-90.*

Hart, G. 2013. How school libraries improve literacy: Some evidence from the trenches. *Mousaion, 31(1):47-60.*

Hartman, S.L. 2017. Academic coach and classroom teacher: A look inside a rural school collaborative partnerships. *Rural Educator, 16-29.*

Hlalele, D. 2013. Sustainable learning ecologies- a prolegomenon traversing transcendence of discursive notions of sustainability, social justice, development and food sovereignty. *TD The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 9 (3): 561-580.

Hlalele, D. 2014. Creating Sustainable Rural Learning Ecologies in South Africa: Realities, Lessons and Prospects. *J Hum Ecol, 45(2): 107-110.*

Houh, E.M.S. & Kalsem, K. 2015. Theorizing Legal Participatory Action Research: Critical Race/ Feminism and Participatory Action Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(3): 262-276.

Hu, M. & Nation, I.S.P. 2000. Unknown vocabulary density and reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, (13): 403-430.

Huang, L.S. 2012. Use of oral reflection in facilitating graduate EAL students' oral- language production and strategy use: An empirical action resarch study. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 6(2): 1-22.*

Ilac, E.J.D. 2018. A social constructivist theory of Batad leadership in Ifugao Philipines using the Grounded Theory Approach. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research, (13):1-7.*

Iwasaki, Y., Hopper, T. & Whelan, P. 2017. Insights on inspirational education for 'high-risk' youth informed by participatory action research (PAR) on youth engagement: Short communication. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 5(1): 152-158.*

Jere-Folotiya, J., Chansa-Kabali, T., Munachaka, J.C., Sampa, F., Yalukanda, C., Westerholm, J., Richardson, U., Serpell, R & Lyytenen, H. 2014. The effects of using a mobile literacy game to improve literacy levels in grade one students in Zambian schools. *Education Tech Research Dev, (62):417-436.*

Kachel, D.E. 2018. The revolving door: Another new principal? *Teacher Librarian, 45(5):48-52.*

Kearney, J. & Zuber-Skerritt, O. 2012. From learning organisation to learning community: Sustainability through lifelong learning. *The Learning Organisation, 19(5):400-413.*

Kearney, J., Wood, L. & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013. Community-University partnerships: Using participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). *International Journal of Community Research and Engagement, (6): 113-130.*

Kim, H. & Krashen, S. 1998. The author recognition and magazine recognition tests and free voluntary reading as predicators of vocabulary development in English as a foreign language for Korean high school students. *Systems*, *(26):515-523.*

Kitching, A.E. [n.d]. Mind-shifts for enhancing the engagemement of educational psychologists in the promotion of holistic school wellbeing. *Educational & Child Psychologist, 35(3): 8-19.*

Kornbluh, M. 2015. Combatting challenges to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, (12):397-414.*

Krashen, S.D. 2004. *The power of reading: Insights from the research*. ABC-CLIO.

Krashen, S. 2006. Free reading: Is it the only way to make kids more literate? *School Library Journal, 42-45.*

Krashen, S., Lee, S. & Mcquillan, J. 2012. Is the library important? Multivariate studies at the national and international level. *Journal of Language and Literacy, 8(1):26-38.*

Krashen, S. 2016. The researcher's perspective: The purpose of education, free voluntary reading, and dealing with the impact of poverty. *School Libraries Worldwide, 22(1):1-7.*

Langhout, R.D. & Thomas, E. 2010. Imagining participatory action research in collaboration with children: An introduction. *Am J Community Psychol, (46):60-66.*

Liasidou, A. 2008. Critical discourse analysis and inclusive educational policies: The power to exclude. Journal of Education Policy, 23 (5): 483-500.

Lo, P. & Tsang, R. 2009. Reading connects: The interrelationships between school libraries, ICT, multimodality and their impacts on reading motivation and the multiliteracy development. *The International Journal of the Book, 6(1):17-33.*

Loh, J.K.K. 2009. Teacher modeling: Its impact on an extensive reading program. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 21(2):93-118.*

Loughran, H. & McCann, M.E. 2015. Employing Community Participative Research Methods to Advance Service User. *Collaboration in Social Work Research*, (45):705-723.

Machet, M. & Olen, S. 1996. *Determining the effect of free voluntary reading on English second language readers in South Africa: Report on research conducted in primary schools.* Paper presented at 25th IASL Conference.

Machet, M.P. & Tiemensma, L. 2009. Literacy environment in support of the development of literacy skills and voluntary reading. *Mousaion, 27(2):58-76.*

Mackey, B., Pitcher, S. & Decman, J. [n.d]. The influence of four elementary principals upon their schools' reading programs and students' reading scores. *Education, 127(1):39-55.*

Makiwane-Mazinyo, N. & Pillay, 2017. Challenges teachers encounter in teaching English reading to the intermediate phase learners in the Uthungulu District schools in Kwazulu Natal. *Gender & Behaviour, 15(4):10453-10475.*

Malda, M., Nel, C. & Van de Vijver, F.R.J. 2014. The road to reading for South African learners: The role of orthographic depth. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *(30):34-45.*

Malebese, M.L. 2017. A socially inclusive teaching strategy for transforming the teaching of English first additional language. *Perspectives in Education, 35(2):16-29.*

Mathieson, S. 2012. Disciplinary cultures of teaching and learning as socially situated practice: Rethinking the space between social constructivism and epistemological essentialism from South African experience. *High Educ, (63):549-564*.

Mathobela, V.M. 2015. *Enhancing English academic literacy programmes for first year students.* Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. University of the Free State. South Africa: Bloemfontein.

Matier Moore, J. & Hart, M. 2007. Access to literacy: Scaffolded reading strategies in the South African context. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 41(1):15-30.

Maxey, D. 2000. Learning through dignity: Participatory communication theory. *Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference, 3(1): 790-794.*

McMaster, K.L., Van den Broek, P., Espin, C.A., Pinto, V., Janda, B., Lam, E., Hsu, H.C., Jung, P.G., Leinen, A.B. & Van Boekel, E. 2015. Developing a reading comprehension intervention: Translating cognitive to education practice. Contemporary Educational Psychology, (40):28-40.

Mcquillan, J. & Au, J. 2001. The effects of print access on reading frequency. *Reading Psychology,* (22):225-248.

Memduhglu, H.B., Kotluk, N. & Yayla, A. 2017. The effect of focus group discussions on pre-service teachers' teaching experiences and practices: A mixed methods study. *International Journal of Instruction, 10(4): 273-292.*

Mensah, F.J., Pillay, P. & Sibiya, P.T. 2017. The experiences of primary school educators with the national reading strategy (NRS) in Mbabane Circuit, Ingwavuma. *Gender & Behaviour,*: *8749-8760.*

Methe, S.A. & Hintze, J.M. 2003. Evaluating teacher modeling as a strategy to increase student reading behaviour. *School Psychology Review, 32(4):617-623.*

Milin, T. 2015. Reading to learn: A literature review within a South African context. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics, (44):105-124.*

Mojapelo, M.S. & Fourie, J.A. 2014. Library and information resources in rural schools of Limpopo Province: A small study. *Mousaion, 32(2):124-149.*

Mojapelo, M.S. & Dube, L. 2014. Information access in high school libraries in Limpopo Province, South Africa. *South African Journal of Libraries & Information Science, 80(2):8-16.*

Mojapelo, M.S. 2015. A legislated school library policy: can functional school libraries be envisioned without one? *Mousaion, 33(2):36-55.*

Mojapelo, M.S. 2016. (Re)thinking and (re)positioning library programmes and services in public high schools in Limpopo province, South African. *Mousaion, 34(3): 60-88.*

Mokoena, M.S. 2017. *Enhancing a school enrichment programme for sustainable learning at a rural high school.* Unpublished Master's Dissertation. University of the Free State: Bloemfontein.

Molotja, T.W. & Maruma, M. 2018. Challenges reflected on by student teachers of English during teaching practice. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 32(6): 460-468.*

Mpofu, N. & Maphalala, M.C. 2017. Fostering critical thinking in initial teacher education curriculums: A comprehensive literature. *Gender & Behaviour, 9256-9266.*

Mucherah, W. & Herendeen, A. 2013. Motivation of reading and upper primary school students' academic achievement in reading in Kenya. *Reading Psychology, (34):569-598.*

Mugambi, F.N. 2015. Exploring reading habits and academic success in rural Kenya. *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 41(4):353-363.*

Mulaudzi, L.M.P. 2017. Dictionary use, beliefs and students' preferences: The case of ECS students at the University of Venda, South Africa. *Gender & Behaviour, 8843-8847.*

Mutungi, B., Minish-Majanja, M. & Mnkeni-Saurombe, N. 2014. The status of school libraries in Kenya: The case of public secondary schools in Nairobi County. *Mousaion, 32(2):150-172.*

Myende, P.E. 2014. *Improving academic performance in a rural school through the use of an asset-based approach as a management strategy.* Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. University of the Free State. South Africa: Bloemfontein

Nassimbeni, M. & Desmond, S. 2011. Availability of books as a factor in reading, teaching and learning behaviour in twenty disadvantaged primary schools in South Africa. *SAJnlLibs & Info Sci, 77(2): 95-103.*

Neuman, S.B. 2004. The effects of print-rich classroom environments on early literacy growth. *The Reading Teacher, 58(1):89-91.*

Ninsuwan, P.[n.d]. The effectiveness of teaching English by using reading aloud technique towards EFL beginners. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*, (197):*1835-1840.*

Parker, M & Hurry, J. 2007. Teachers' use of questioning and modelling comprehension skills in primary classrooms. *Educational Review, 59(3):299-314.*

Paton-Ash, M. & Wilmont, D. 2015. Issues and challenges facing school libraries in selected primary schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa. *South African Journal of Education, 35(1):1-10.*

Phan, N.T.T. 2018. Effective EFL instruction in the Vietnamese context: From beliefs to actual classroom practices. *International Journal of Instruction, 11(3): 403-418.*

Piper, B., Zuilkowski, S.S. & Mugenda, A. 2014. Improving reading outcomes in Kenya: First-year effects of the PRIMR Initiative. *International Journal of Educational Development*, (37): 11-21.

Piper, B & Zuilkowski, S.S. 2015. The role of timing in assessing oral reading fluency and comprehension in Kenya. *Language Testing, 33(1):75-98.*

Pishghadam, R. & Ghardiri, S. 2011. Symmetical or asymmetrical scaffolding: Piagetian vs. Vygotskyan views to reading comprehension. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education, 7(1):49-64.*

Powell, K.C. [n.d.]. Cognitive and social constructivism: Developing tools for an effective classroom. *Education*, *130(2):241-250.*

Prasojo, L.D., Mukminin, A., Habibi, A., Marzulina, L., Sirozi, M. & Harto, K. 2018. Learning to teach in a digital age: ICT integration and EFL student teachers' teaching practices. *Teaching English with Technology, 18(3): 18-32.*

Pretorius, E.J. 2002. Reading ability and academic performance in South Africa: Are we fiddling while Rome is burning? *Language Matters,* (33), 169-196.

Rahimi, A. & Ghanbari, N. 2011. The impact of teacher's scaffolding on Iranian high school students' reading comprehension. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences, (28):1072-1075.*

Rasana, N.H. 2006. The reading preferences of Grade 11 ESL learners in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 24(2):175-190.*

Republic of South Africa, Department of Education. (2008). *National Reading Strategy*. Pretoria: Government Printing.

Renandya, W.A. 2007. The power of extensive reading. *Regional Language Centre Journal, 38(2):133-149.*

Ro, E. & Chen, C.L.A. 2014. Pleasure reading behaviour and attitude of non-academic students: A replication study. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 26(1):49-72.*

Robson, C., Blampied, N & Walker, L. 2015. Effects of freedfoward video self-modelling on reading fluency and comprehension. *Behaviour Change, 32(1):46-48.*

Rogers. R., Malancharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosely, M., Hui, D. & Joseph, G.O. 2005. Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 75 (3): 365-416.

Rosetti, Z., Saver, J.S., Bui, O. & Ou, S. 2017. Developing collaborative partnership with culturally and linguistically diverse families during the IEP process. *Teaching Exceptional Children, (49): 328-338.*

Rule, P. & Land, S. 2017. Finding the plot in South African reading education. *Reading & Writing, 8(1): 1-8.*

Sackey, E., Clark, K.D. & Lin, Y. 2017. Participatory communication versus strategies of transnational NGO: Implementing the indoor residual spraying programmes in the Northern Region, Ghana. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 46(3):227-246.*

Salem, A.A.M.S. 2016. Scafolding reading comprehension skills. *English Language Teaching, 10(1):97-111.*

Saltiel, I.M. 1998. Defining collaborative partnerships. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, (79):5-11.*

Samana, W. 2013. Teacher's and students' scaffolding in an EFL classroom. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary studies, 8(2):338-343.*

San Antonio, D.M. 2018. Collabirative action research to implement social-emotional learning in a rural elementary school: Helping students become "little kids with big words." *Canadian Journal of Action Research, 19(2): 26-47.*

Sandu, A. & Unguru, E. 2017. Seveal conceptual clarifications on the distinction between constructivism and social constructivism. *Postmodern Openings*, *8 (2): 51-61.*

Scharlach, T.D. 2008. START Comprehension: Students and teachers actively reading text. *The Reading Teacher, 62(1):20-31.*

Schiller, U., Jaffray, P., Ridley, T. & Du Plessis, C. 2018. Facilitating a participatory action learning and action research process in a higher educational context. *Action Research, 0(0): 1-7.*

Setlhare, R., Wood, L. & Meyer, L. 2017. Exploring group life design with teachers in the context of poverty related to psychosicial challenges. *South African Journal of Education, 37(4I):1-8.*

Shandu, L., Evans, N. & Mostert, J. 2014. Challenges in the provision of school library services in Katlehong secondary schools. *Mousaion, 32(2):13-28.*

Sheldon, S.B. & Davis, M.H. 2015. "I wish everyone had a library like this" The Baltimore elementary and middle school library project year2 report. *Baltimore Educational Research Consortium, 1-79.*

Shenton, A.K. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, (22):63-75.*

Sherman, R.R. & Webb, R.B.1998. *Qualitative Research in Education: Focus and Methods.* Milton Park: Falmer Press.

Simandan,M. [n.d.] Interpretative methodology and social constructivism. *Social and Educational Studies.*145-158.

Sivan, E. 1986. Motivation in social constructivist theory. *Educational Psychology*, *21(3):209-233.*

Small, R.V. 2018. Young innovators and their mentors: School libraries. *Teacher Librarian, 45(5):8-12.*

Smith, D.; Baum, F. & MacDougall, P. 2006. Participatory Action Research.*J Epidemiol Health*, (60): 854-857.

Smith, A. & Lennon, S. 2011. Problem solving and critical inquiry in the written and oral reflections of middle school preservice teachers' classroom experiences. *RMLE Online, 35(1): 1-11.*

Stein, N.A. & Edwards, V.M. 1999. Collective action in common-pool resource management: The contribution of a social constructivist perspective to existing theory. *Society & Natural Resources*, *12(6):539-557.*

Soulen, R.R. & Wine, L.D. 2018. Building resilience in new and beginning teachers: Contributions of school librarians. *School Libraries Worldwide, 24(2):80-91.*

Su, C. 2008. The teaching of reading in English in Taiwan: A case study involving sustained silent reading. *Journal of Maori and Pacific Development, 9(1):75-96.*

Sullivan, A. & Brown, M. 2015. Reading for pleasure and progress in vocabulary and mathematics. *British Educational Research Journal, 41(6):971-991.*

Tanga, M. & Maphosa, C. 2018. Academic hurdles facing undergraduate students at one South African University. *Research in Higher Education, (35):1-15.*

Tanil, G. 2014. The social constructivist fusion perspective: A theory for Europeanization. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society, 15(4):483-499.*

Thomas, M. & Narayan, P. 2016. The role of participatory communication in tracking unreported reproductive tract issues in marginalised communities. *Information Technology for Development, 22(1): 117-133.*

Tsotetsi, C.T. 2013. *The implementation of professional teacher development policies: a continuing education perspective.* Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. University of the Free State. Bloemfontein.

Van der Mescht, C. 2015. "One day will pick up a snake, wanting to read it.": Becoming a successful reader in a rural environment. *Reading & Writing, 6(1): 1-7.*

Van Kraayenoord, C.E., Honan, E. & Moni, K.B. 2011. Negotiating knowledge in a researcher and teacher collaborative partnership. *Teacher Development, 15(4): 403-420.*

Van Staden, A. 2011. Put reading first: Positive effects of direct instruction and scaffolding for EFL learners struggling with reading. *Perspectives in Education, 29(4): 10-21.*

Van Staden, S. & Bosker, R. 2014. Factors that affect South African Reading Literacy achievement: Evidence from the prePIRLS 2011. *South African Journal of Education*, *34(3):1-9.*

Van Wyk, G. & Louw, 2008. Technology-assisted reading for improving reading skills for young South African learners. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 6(3):245-254.*

Vardell, S.M., Hadaway, N.L. & Young, T.A. 2006. Matching books and readers: Selecting literature for English learners. *The Reading Teacher, 59(8):734-741.*

Velluto, R. & Barbousas, J. 2017. Silencing reading, silencing the boys: Using action research to investigate silent reading programs and its effects on boys' literacy skills. *Networks: An online Journal for Teacher Research, 15(1):1-8.*

Warner, G., Fay, D. & Sporer, N. 2017. Relations among personal initiative and the development of reading strategy knowledge and reading comprehension. *Frontline Learning Research, 5(2): 1-23.*

Warrington, M.J. & George, P. 2014. Reading for pleasure in paradise: Paired reading in Antigua and Barbuda. *Literacy, 48(2):66-71.*

Wang, Y.C. 2014. Using wikis to facilitate interaction and collaboration among EFL learners: A social constructivist approach to language teaching. *System*, *(42): 383-390.*

Wessels, M. 2014. *Practical Guide facilitating language learning*. 4th Ed. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Wessels, E. & Wood, L. 2019. Fostering teachers' experiences of well-being: A participatory action learning and action research approach. *South African Journal of Education, 39(1):1-10.*

White, T.G., Kim, J.S., Kingston, H.C. & Foster, L. 2013. Replicating the effects of a teacher-scaffolded voluntary summer reading programme: The role of poverty. *Reading Research Quartely, 49(1):5-30.*

Wickam, M.J. 2018. How written and oral reflections in MBA capstones enhance the ability to complete a service-learning project. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 18(4):43-54.*

Williams, E. 2007. Extensive reading in Malawi: Inadequate implementation or inappropriate innovation? *Journal of Research in Reading, 30(1):59-79.*

Wood, L. & Zuber-Skerritt, O. 2013. PALAR as a methodology by faculties of education. *South African Journal of Education, 33(4):1-15.*

Wood, L., Louw.,I. & Zuber-Skerritt, O. 2017. Enhancing postgraduate learning and development: A participatory action learning and action research approach through conferences. Action Learning: *Research and Practice, 14(2): 120-135.*

Wood, L. & Louw, I. 2018. Reconsidering postgraduate 'supervision' from a participatory action learning and action research. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 32(4):284-297.*

Yaji, G., Dala, H.S. & Danburam, E. 2017. Inculcating reading habits among Nigerian secondary school students: *The role of libraries. Journal of Information and Knowledge Management, 8(1):30-37.*

Yamashita, J. 2007. The relationship of reading attitudes between L1 and L2: An investigation of adult EFL learners in Japan. *TESOL Quartely,* (41):81-105

Yamashita, J. 2015. In search of nature f extensive reading in L2: Cognitive, affective and pedagogical perspectives. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 27(1):168-181.*

Ying Lee, S. & Krashen, S. 1996. Free voluntary reading and writing competence in Taiwanese high school students. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, (83):687-690*.

Zimmerman, L. & Smit, B. 2014. Profiling classroom reading comprehension development practices from the PIRLS 2006 in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education, 34(3): 1-9.*

Zimmerman, L. & Smit, B. 2016. Comprehending the macro through the lens of the micro: The use of PIRLS 2006 findings to inform comparative case studies across the South African achievement scale. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1-2.*

Zuber-Skerritt, O., Wood, L. & Dick, B. 2013. Action research for sustainable development in a turbulent world: Reflections and future perspectives. *ALARJournal, 18(2):184-203.*

Zuber-Skerritt, O. 2015. Participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) for community engagement: A theoretical framework. *Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC), 4(1):5-25.*

Zuber-Skerritt, O. 2018. An educational framework for participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). *Educational Action Research, 26(4): 513-532*.

_____

8. APPENDICES

_____

APPENDIX A: LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

<div align="right">

488 Tshiame A

Harrismith

9880

05 November 2018

</div>

The District Director
Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District
Private Bag X817
Witsieshoek
9870

Dear Sir/Madam

<div align="center">

A REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE A RESEARCH PROJECT

</div>

I am currently registered for a PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) degree at the University of the Free State. For a successful completion of this thesis, it is required of me to conduct a research project at a rural high school about the improvement of reading comprehension for English first additional language learners through the use of free voluntary reading approach. The ethical clearance number: UFS-HSD2018/1565

The intended research is titled: **improving reading comprehension for English additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach.** The aim central to this study is to demonstrate how FVR can be used as an approach to improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. In other words, this study is aimed at investigating ways in which reading comprehension may be improved using FVR approach.

To achieve this aim, a total of eight (8) rural high school learners and two rural high school teachers in a school will be asked to volunteer to participate in discussion-sessions (workshops) and

observations guided by the Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) to generate data. These discussion-sessions and observations will take place during the Easter, winter and spring. During this process, the researcher shall make use of an audio-tape device to record the responses of the participants. It should be emphasised though, that all data collected and the participants shall be treated with utmost confidentiality. Also, this information shall be used solemnly for the purposes of this research. The findings of this study will be shared with the participants and other interested parties such as academic journals, conferences etc.

Hopefully, this request will reach your utmost understanding.

Yours faithfully

Mr. M.S Mokoena

Contact information:

e-mail address: m.rmokoenams@gmail.com

Tel. (work): 058 924 1031

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

<div align="right">

488Tshiame A

Harrismith

9880

17 April 2019

</div>

The Principal

Madam

A REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE A RESEARCH PROJECT AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am currently registered for a PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) degree at the University of the Free State (Refer to the attached documents). For a successful completion of this thesis, it is required of me to conduct a research project at a rural high school about the improvement of reading comprehension for English first additional language learners through the use of free voluntary reading approach. The ethical clearance number: UFS-HSD2018/1565

The intended research is titled: **improving reading comprehension for English additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach.** The aim central to this study is to demonstrate how FVR can be used as an approach to improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. In other words, this study is aimed at investigating ways in which reading comprehension may be improved using FVR approach.

To achieve this aim, a total of eight (8) rural high school learners and two (2) rural high school teachers in your school will be asked to volunteer to participate in discussion-sessions (workshops) and the oral reflections guided by the Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) to generate data. During this process, the researcher shall make use of an audio-tape device to record the responses of the participants. It should be emphasised though, that all data collected and the participants shall be treated with utmost confidentiality. Also, this information shall be used solemnly for the purposes of this research. The findings of this study will be shared with the participants and other interested parties such as academic journals, conferences etc.

Hopefully, this request will reach your utmost understanding.

Yours faithfully

Mr. M.S Mokoena

Contact information:

e-mail address: m.rmokoenams@gmail.com

Tel. (work): 058 924 1031

APPENDIX C: LETTER FROM THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

P.O. Box 7

Memel 2970

536 Mgwaqomkhulu street

Dear Mr. Mokoena M.S

RE: Permission to conduct a research project

This letter serves to inform you that your request to conduct the research process at this school has been granted. Please, you are at liberty to use school facilities for your meetings and workshops as stated in your application letter.

We wish you all the best!

Yours faithfully

<u>**PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**</u>

TITLE: *Improving reading comprehension for English first additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach*

Principal researcher: Mosebetsi Mokoena
Contact details: 058 924 1031

Study leader (Supervisor): Dr Tsotetsi CT
Contact details: 058 718 5003

Date: 05 November 2018

<u>**About the researcher**</u>

I am working as teacher at the school under study. Based on my experience of teaching English at this school, it has come to my attention that EFAL learners struggle with reading comprehension. While I am doing this study for academic purposes, I also want to make a contribution in improving the academic performance of learners at this school.

<u>**Why should your child participate?**</u>

A total number of ten (10) participants are set to participate in this study. This group consists of two teachers of English first additional language and eight learners of English first additional language. The EFAL learners are selected simply because they are the ones directly affected by the challenge of poor reading comprehension. The participation of learners in this study may not only afford learners the opportunity to add their voices to their own education, but also it may enhance the teachers' understanding and appreciation of new approaches that exist in the teaching of reading comprehension. It is on the basis of the above mentioned reasons that your child is invited to take part in this study.

<u>**About the intended study and its aim:**</u>

The intended research is titled: **improving reading comprehension for English first additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach.** The aim central to this study is to demonstrate how FVR can be used as an approach to improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. In other words, this study is aimed at investigating ways in which reading comprehension may be improved using FVR approach.

<u>**Your child's role (s) in this study**</u>

To achieve this aim, your child is requested to participate voluntarily in the discussion-sessions (workshops) and observations (held at one high school) guided by the Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) to generate data. These discussion-sessions and observations will take place over a period of three months. Your child will be expected to make contributions to the discussions and also observe or be observed in the classroom. Each meeting will be held once a week and it will last for two hours. As a way of mitigating the risks of lost of time for your child, these discussion-sessions will take place during after school hours.

Data collection and confidentiality of your child

During this process, the researcher shall make use of an audio-tape device to record the responses of all participants. It should be emphasised though, that all data collected and the participants shall be treated with utmost confidentiality. To ensure this confidentiality your child shall all be given a pseudonym. The same shall be done to the school as well. The information provided shall be stored in a place deemed safe by the researcher. This information shall be used solemnly for the purpose of this research. In the cases, where the findings of this research are shared with other interested parties such as academic journals, conference presentations etc. the same pseudonyms shall be used hide the identity of your child.

Any physical or emotional distress your child may suffer

Please, be informed that there is no physical or emotional distress that your child may suffer. In an event such distress occurs, the researcher will take full responsibility. However, your child is more likely to benefit from participating in this study. His or her knowledge of reading approaches is likely to improve. There is an expectation of improved reading comprehension and improved academic performance as a result of participating in this study. Moreover, your child's reading and writing skills are more likely to improve. All these will impact positively on your child's performance at school and beyond.

Declaration

I, the undersigned give an informed consent for my child to participate voluntarily in this research project. I understand the aims of this research study. I also understand that my child is at liberty to withdraw from the research process at any time he/she so wishes. In addition, I understand that the personal information we provide in this form and that which my child shall provide later during the research process will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Enquiries and comments

Should you have any questions or concerns pertaining to your child's participation in the study, please feel free to contact me (Mr. Mokoena MS):

E-mail address:m.rmokoenams@gmail.com
Tel: 058 924 1031

In cases where you are not satisfied with the way this research is being conducted or any discomfort, please feel free to contact the study leader: Dr. Tsotetsi C.T

Tel: 058 718 5003

E-mail: TsotetsiCT@ufs.ac.za

PLEASE RETURN

Name of child:_____

Name of Parent: _____

- Do you understand this research study and are you willing
  to let your child take part in it?   Yes ☐   No ☐
- Has the researcher answered all your questions?   Yes ☐   No ☐
- Do you understand that you can withdraw from the study at any time?   Yes ☐ No ☐
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from
  my child's participation   Yes ☐ No ☐

_____   _____

Signature of Parent   *Date*

CONSENT FORM (PARTICIPANTS)

TITLE: Improving reading comprehension for English first additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach

Principal researcher: Mosebetsi Mokoena
Contact details: 058 924 1031

Study leader (Supervisor): Dr Tsotetsi CT
Contact details: 058 718 5003

Date: 05 November 2018

About the researcher:

I am working as a teacher at the school under study. Based on my experience of teaching English at this school, it has come to my attention that EFAL learners struggle with reading comprehension. While I am doing this study for academic purposes, I also want to make a contribution in improving the academic performance of learners at this school.

Why are you invited to participate in this study?

A total number of ten (10) participants are set to participate in this study. This group consists of two teachers of English first additional language and eight learners of English first additional language. The selection of these participants is appropriate for two reasons: One, EFAL teachers are responsible for teaching of EFAL as well as reading comprehension. They are also familiar with the challenges that their students face. Two, EFAL learners are selected simply because they are the ones directly affected by the challenge of poor reading comprehension. The participation of learners in this study may not only afford learners the opportunity to add their voices to their own education, but also it may enhance the teachers' understanding and appreciation of new approaches that exist in the teaching of reading comprehension. It is on the basis of the above mentioned reasons that you (teachers and learners) are invited to take part in this study.

About the intended study and its aim:

The intended research is titled: **improving reading comprehension for English first additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach.** The aim central to this study is to demonstrate how FVR can be used as an approach to improving reading comprehension for EFAL learners. In other words, this study is aimed at investigating ways in which reading comprehension may be improved using FVR approach.

Your role (s) as a participant

To achieve this aim, you are requested to participate voluntarily in the discussion-sessions (workshops) and observations (held at one high school) guided by the Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) to generate data. These discussion-sessions and observations will take place over a period of three months. You will be expected to make contributions to the discussions and also observe or be observed when you are in the classroom. Each meeting will be held once a week and it will last for two hours. As a way of mitigating the risks of lost of time for both teachers and learners, these discussion-sessions will take place during after school hours.

Data collection and confidentiality

During this process, the researcher shall make use of an audio-tape device to record the responses of the participants. It should be emphasised though, that all data collected and the participants shall be treated with utmost confidentiality. To ensure this confidentiality you shall all be given pseudonyms. The same shall be done to the school as well. The information provided shall be stored in a place deemed safe by the researcher. This information shall be used solemnly for the purpose of this research. In the cases, where the findings of this research are shared with other interested parties such as academic journals, conference presentations etc. the same pseudonyms shall be used to hide your identity.

Declaration

I, the undersigned give an informed consent to participate voluntarily and without expectation of any reward in this research project. I understand the aims of this research study. I also understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from this research process at any time I so wish. In addition, I understand that the personal information I provide in this form and that which I shall provide later during the research process will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Enquires and comments

Should you be interested in accessing the final research findings, please feel free to contact me (Mr. Mokoena MS):

E-mail address:m.rmokoenams@gmail.com
Tel: 058 924 1031

In cases where you are not satisfied with the way this research is being conducted or any discomfort, please feel free to contact the study leader: Dr. Tsotetsi C.T

Tel: 058 718 5003
E-mail: TsotetsiCT@ufs.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study

APPENDIX F: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the interviews.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX G: TRANSCRIPTS

The first meeting: Orientation

Facilitator: *Thank you all for showing interest in this research project. More especially I want to thank you for seeing fit that it is important to for you to take part in changing and becoming participants in the in this study. It is through your participation in this study we will work together in solving some of the challenges facing us, both teachers and learners alike. For you colleagies, I want to tell you that the face of research has changed from the way we understood it when we were still students. Unlike in the past where the researcher would come, conduct a few interviews and then disappear, modern research requires that there must be partnership between the researchers and the so-called participants.*

With this in mind, the research that we are going to undertake here adopts this new way of doing research. What does this mean? This means that you learners and my colleagues we are going to work as partners rather than as learners and teachers or the researcher and the participants. The correct word that is used in modern research is co-researchers as opposed to participants. We are referred to in this way because we work together or we become partners in research with equal power to be involved in every stage and part of the research process. My colleagues would know that in the past someone would come, give you questionnaires to respond and that would be the last time you see him or her. And in most cases, we were never told about the findings of the study.

In the study that we are about to emabark on falls under what is broadly known as action research. This a type of research in which everyone has equal power and status. In addition to this, we are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity while participating in every step or stage of this research. In other words, as co-researchers you have equal ownership of the research and its findings. These will be your findings and you are going to own them. Yes, is that a question?

Teacher QR: *I am sorry to interrupt Mr Mokoena, it is so interesting the way you have explained the changes in the way research is done and how we become partners. But my question is: How do we become owners of the findings?*

Facilitator: Thank you for the question. As I said before we are going to work together throughout this project. When the research is complete we are going to have access to the findings for you to verify whether you have been misrepresented or not. Unlike the traditional researchers I referred to earlier, here we all work together and in that way we become away of what are study has managed to establish.

Learner AB: *What will our research talk about?*

Facilitator: *Thank you. Our study is titled "Improving reading comprehension for English first additional language learners: A free voluntary reading approach." Let me give a little background to this study. I think everyone here has noticed how poorly our students perform on paper 1 of English and how many of them struggle to read with comprehension. Among us here, there are some of us who really struggle with reading comprehension. Remember that reading with comprehension does not only apply to EFAL only, in every subject we are expected to demonstrate understanding of what we read. My colleagues would agree with me that this problem is experienced across the all grades. It is unfortunate really that we don't have any grade 12 learners in our team. And let me tell you that this problem of poor reading comprehension extends beyong grade 12. In fact, the other day we were having an informal conversation with my colleagues about this problem. You may remember Mr QR that earlier this year our LF (Learning facilitator) highlighted this issue and she indicated the negative impact it has on learner performance in English first additional language.*

If you can have look at the invitation letters that you got, the aim of this research is indicated. Basically, this research study seeks to demonstrate how free voluntary reading approach can be used in order to improve reading comprehension for EFAL learners. As I said, this is our project and we are going to work together to achieve this goal. In this study you are not participants, you are co-researchers as I said before. In addition to the main aim of the study, other four abjectives of this study are listed there. In order for us to respond to each of these objectives were are going to generate data. This study will adopt what is known as Participatory action learning and action research or PALAR as it is also known. As the name suggests, we are all going to participate, learn from each other and put our learning into action in order to demonstrate how the free voluntary reading approach can be used to improve reading comprehension for EFAl learners.

How are we going to collect data? This is very important question that we need to understand. Although this is mentioned in your invitation letters, I think I need to explain it again. In our regular meetings we will be discussing as a group. These discussions will be coupled with free attitude interviews or FAI. These are not one on one interviews but a sort of group interviews. Again, there are no specifica questions that we will respond to. Rather, we will use prompts and build the conversations on them. Another tool involves oral reflections where we will be reflecting or expressing our thoughts and opinions on a particular issue raised during or after our discussions. After generating this data, we are going to transcribe it word by word and analyse it using what is known as Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). When we are all done we are going to discuss the findings and share them with everyone who may be interested especially our colleagues and learners. Are there any questions?

Teacher ST: *How and when are going to meet?*

Facilitator: *I think we need to use this very same venue because it is far from distractions. About the dates and times, I think we need to have discussions and see whether we all agree.*

Teacher QR: *May I suggest that we hold our meetings after school because really some of us still have lot of work to cover. You know the marking, teaching and all that.*

Learners EF: *After school? Some of us stay from school, Sir. How long are we going to hold the meetings for?*

Facilitator: *I do believe that you are raising a very important issue. As a team, I think we need to discuss the issue of time and dates for our meetings. We can have discusions. Any suggestions?*

Teacher ST: *My suggestion is that we meet at half past four on Thursdays. This is in light with the workload that we have…you…know a lot of activities we should this term.*

Learner GI: *I agree with Sir. I thank we all agree. Kanjani guys?*

Facilitator: *Thank you. Just to make sure. We are meeting here every Thursday starting this coming Thursday, right? Same place but at 4h30. Thank you once again.*

TRANSCRIPTS

Facilitator: *As we are all familiar with the problem of poor reading comprehension here at school. Can we start with you teacher-colleagues? In your views, why do we need this kind of approach to address this problem? In other words, what challeges necessitate this kind of intervention that we are embarking on today?*

Teacher QR: *As you know Mr Mokoena, one of the challenges that our learners face is that of reading with understand. They just lack the skill to do it. As a result, their performance is affected badly. For instance, in my class, the highest learner obtained around 28 out of 80 in paper 1.*

Teacher ST: *Yes…. That's true what ntate [name omitted] is saying paper 1 is problematic for these learners. They are struggling with section A and that section carries lot of marks. Their performance in this section really gives them problems. This needs to be addressed speedily.*

Facilitator: *Thank you colleagues for your contributions. I think this should not be interpreted as teachers attacking you guys, our learners. Remember that we are a team with the same vision of finding a solution to the problem of poor reading comprehesion. At this point, I believe it's time for us to hear the side of our learners. But I am not stopping our teachers or anyone to speak, ask a question or make a follow up. This is a discussion. Guys, in your view what can you say are the challenges that you face with regard to reading comprehension?*

Learner AB: *Yoooh (surprised)…paper 1 is my weakest problem. For me I find text too long and sometimes they write difficult words that we don't know or understand. I just read and read and still ha ke [I can't] understand, Sir.*

Teacher QR: *The problem is not only here in grade 10 and 11. Since I started teaching grade 8 last year, I have noticed that they also have the same problem like their sisters in grade 10 and 11. The problem I think is a lack of vocabulary and reading skills as it has already been mentioned.*

Teacher QR: *They just lack the skill to do it*

Learner AB: *For me I find text too long and sometimes they write difficult words that we don't know or understand. I just read and read and still ha ke understand, Sir.*

Teacher ST: *The problem I think is a lack of vocabulary and reading skills*

Facilitator: *Apart from these challenges that we have talked about. Can we discuss the way we teach reading comprehension in class?*

Learners EF: *Thank you for that question Sir, because from what our teachers have said so far it seems like they are blaming us.*

Facilitator: *Please remember that we are a team…we are not attacking one another. We are trying to look at different sides of this issue. Yes, Teacher, you can start.*

Teacher ST: *"I normally prepare a small text for them to read. They read individually. Yes…I want them to read aloud so that I can hear how he/she pronounces words."*

Teacher QR: *Just to add on what Mr ST is saying I also interject sometimes when I hear that the learner is struggling with pronunciation or he simply can't read a word. I think this gives a chance not only to learn how to pronounce that word, but also its spelling. Again, I do pause and explain meanings of some words where I feel that there is a need for such intervention. This is because I know that these learners have limited vocabulary. It seems like they were never taught word-attacking skills in lower grades. This is a serious problem, really. Before I start asking them questions, I usually summarise the text or ask one my learners to give a brief overview of the text. By doing this I am trying to see if they have understood and they have been part of the reading process.*

Learner EF*: In class, we are being used these simple questions, but in the actual test or exam they ask us difficult questions and words.*

Learner GH*: For nna neh [For me]…when I understand when meener[teacher] is teaching but masengione[but when I am working alone]* *it becomes difficult because some words wedon't know them. Sometimes you find that the passage is talking about something you don't*

understand and it mean the whole passage will be hard to understand and write correct answers.

Teacher QR: *Before I start asking them questions, I usually summarise the text or ask one my learners to give a brief overview of the text. By doing this I am trying to see if they have understood and they have been part of the reading process.*

Learner EF*: In class, we are being used these simple questions, but in the actual test or exam they ask us difficult questions and words.*

Learners GH: *For me …when I understand when meener is teaching but masengione [For me, I do understand when the teacher is teaching, but problems begin when I have to read and questions alone] it becomes difficult because some words when do know them. Sometimes you find that the passage is talking about something you don't understand and it mean the whole passage will be hard to understand and write correct answers.*

Facilitator: Do you guys think the location or the fact that this school is a rural area has any impact on learners' attitude towards voluntary reading and their reading comprehension?

Teacher ST: *As you are aware Koena,[researcher's surname] these children come from community that does not really value education so much. You can see by the way these children behave here in the location. Studying is not one of the things they enjoy doing. Most prefer to be in taverns rather than reading their books. You give a learner a school activity to do at home; I tell you she will come back to school without having that activity.*

Teacher QR: *As my colleague is saying, it seems like the problem is the in the community. These learners don't receive support and they also lack roles models. If you ask them a simple question about any issue that happens in the current newspapers, they do not know. You see the other day I was speaking with the Economics teacher [name omitted] and he told me that his learners are not aware of current news. He said the problem was that learners do not have*

access to newspapers. I think you are also aware that there is no shop that sells newspapers around here.

Teacher ST: *Again, in English classes we face similar problem. When it's time for oral presentations learners struggle to bring newspapers and magazines to read or to use in preparation for presentations. In most cases you find three or more learners sharing one paper from a newspaper. In other cases, one learner in a particular class, let's say 11 B and the other in maybe 11C will be using the same newspaper article.*

Teacher ST: *The way or manner in which they struggle with reading shows that they have limited exposure to reading materials at home. Of course there is a local library but they seldom borrow books from it...our school library is in shambles as you know.*

Learner AB: *But kodwa Meneer nawe uyazi ukuthi ukufunda kuyakhathaza [But Sir, you know that reading is tiresome]. So when I get home I do my homeworks, do my home chores and watch tv or chat on my phone.*

Learner IJ: *Yes…that's true we need some time to relax cause [because] we spend much time at school. So at home you can't get enough time because the parents will be calling you all around and sending you all over. Even when you try to tell them that you are reading, they are not going to listen to you. They tell you that you have enough time to study at school.*

Learner OP: *Hayi!... [Exclaimed]I do have magazines at home but hayi yoo ayabora shame. The problem is that they are old and out-dated even the newspaper amadala nawo.* [I do have magazines and old newspapers at home, but they are boring]

Learner KL: *Eish …that's another problem cause [because] you see English is not our mother's tongue or a home language. So when you read a book and there is something that are you not understanding maybe a bombastic word, you become confused and you end up not understanding anything.*

Learner OP*: Vele*[For real] *this thing make things difficult for us menner*[teacher] *cause*[because] *sometimes you want to read a book, like a story but at the end you fail because of this language.*

Learner KL: *Like le nou menner* [Like now, Sir] *it is difficult for other learners to join us here because maybe they think that we will be speaking English or reading those difficult words. Even in class I think we are struggling because we don't have enough dictionaries that we can use and this is affecting our self-esteem.*

Learner OP: *As for me I find it difficult to read in class because when you don't know how to pronounce a word, other learners start to laugh at you. I think if was in our home language I was going to read very much. Like for example, now I finished reading all my Zulu story books because I understand easy.*

Learner MN: *My problem is the same to that of* **Learner KL** *because I don't know many English words and it become difficult for me to answer questions correctly. Also, it is not easy to continue reading something that you don't understand. Some times when the teacher is doing it in class I understand but when it is time for me to read it become worse.*

Facilitator: ***All of us in here English is not our mother-tongue. Can we talk about the impact this has on reading comprehension? I mean almost all subjects are taught in English. This means if we struggle with English as an additional language, we find it difficult to understand other subjects. Let's talk about this…***

Teacher QR: *I do believe that the use of English for learning and teaching purpose is important because it exposes learners to the real world of work and information. Almost every piece of information available in the world today is in English. Also, the expectation and reality out there is that English has become the main language of communication throughout the world.*

Facilitator: *Your views Sir?*

Teacher ST: *Just to add on what my colleague is saying, some of the learners here are going to the institutions of higher learning after completing grade 12 where they will be expected to communicate and write in English. Therefore the use English as LoLT is crucial.*

Facilitator: *What is the cause of this?*

Teacher ST: *The main reason why children struggle with reading comprehension is that many of them lack necessary reading skills and vocabulary that are needed to read English texts with understanding…in some cases they can't even write or read a single sentence.*

Teacher QR: *I think again the problem becomes worse because our learners are lazy to read. Most of them do not give themselves enough time study. They also lack the desire and motivation to use dictionaries. As a result, they have a very limited vocabulary. I do think that the problem begins at primary schools where these learners are not taught how to read. They lack basic rules of grammar.*

Teacher ST: *I wish you could see the struggle that these learners go through when it's time for oral presentation where they have to do the prepared reading activity. You will find them struggling to find reading materials such as newspapers and magazines. This shows that they are not used to reading English in their homes.*

Hey! These learners meneer [Sir], let's say you give this one a text to read, as soon as he comes across a word he can't understand, the problem begins. What I have also noticed is that they lack confidence to express themselves in the language. So under such circumstances, this approach may fail to achieve the intended outcomes.

Facilitator: *A few weeks ago we raised the issue of how the community fails to inspire our learners to read. Today, our focus is on the assets that we have as a school. Let's talk about our school library.*

Teacher QR: *The issue of a library needs to be addressed immediately. I do think that if the library is well-equipped it is possible for us to work. I mean, we cannot use the school library in its current form. It really needs some serious attention.*

Learner OP: *Yes…library e important because re thola chance ya ho bala and hape ho quite.[*Library is important because it offers a peaceful place to study*]. There are some books maybe that we may find and read.*

Learner KL: *Hape don't forget the issue of furniture, coz mona sekolong we don't have enough chairs and tables.* [Again, do not forget the issue of furniture because we don't have enough chairs and tables]. *I think we should organise it first.*

Learner MN: *That library, if you want to use it we need to ask laboMama baseSeriti to clean it first. [If you want to use that library, we nee*d to ask for help from the cleaning team] *And then we ask them or we go there and arrange and pack all the books.Yah! angithi guys you remember ukuthi labantwana bakamatric bebalala lapho during the camps.*[Yes, you guys can still remember that matric learners used the library as their sleeping space*]. So we need to clean the place first and then we must find the key to keep it clean. For now we cannot read in there.*

Facilitator: *We cannot speak about the library without our nearest environment. The classroom. Does it in anyway affect how we feel about free voluntary reading?*

Learner AB:

Yes, Meneer [Sir] for example the classroom does not motivate us to study because it's dirty and the walls are all empty. There is nothing that encourages you to read or anything about reading for that matter.

Learner EF:

I think that having pictures on walls like it used to be when we were in lower grades. Back then the walls would be decorated with pictures and drawing us and some difficult words. That used to help me a lot especially with spelling.

I would also suggest that if we paste pictures and rules about grammar, spelling and reading skills will help a lot. Yabona [You see] Sir like maybe some notes on how to read for comprehension will help us understand better cause will be applying them in class

Learner KL:

I think the problem is that our classes are not locked and the pictures will not be safe. Other learners bazozalana[will come here] *and they will tear everything apart.*

Learner GH: *Mina [me] I would suggest that we keep a box for each class. In this box we keep old newspapers and magazines and other books that we may find interesting. This will help us to read while others are making noise when there is no teacher in class.*

Learner CD: *Ngiyayisupporta le idea ya pictures on the wall cause it is gonna help motivate some of us to become like the person who is reading on there*[I do support the idea of pasting pictures on the wall]. *I would also suggest that may be if paste pictures of celebrities who are reading will also motivate us kakhulu [a lot], Sir.*

Teacher ST:

I also concur with what other co-researchers are saying. Perhaps I may add that we can also exhibit some of your works (learners). Some of you here are poets while others write wonderful essay and stories. I do believe that if we do that it will go a long way in motivating learners and encourage them to read voluntary.

Facilitator: ***Thank you for raising the issue of motivation to read. You said that the conditions our classrooms fail to motivate you to read. Except for classroom, what else would you say contributes to this lack of interest and motivation to read?***

Learner AB: *Our teachers do not motivate us to read. I mean you hardly see a teacher reading a newspaper here at school.*

Learners CD: *Yebo mngani* [Yes my friend*] it's true vele. You can see how we struggle to get newspapers here at school. It shows ukuthi abothisha bethu do not read. They only know the textbooks not even a simple magazine. This thing is affecting us too as learners.*

Learner MN*: Uyazi if ubona omunye unmuntu reading a book, you also develop the interest to read. [You know, if you see another person reading a book, you also develop the interest to read]. And again abothisha [teachers] are our role models we should see them read. It does not help ukuthi yithisodwa who read in class. Abothisha nabo they must read [Teachers must read too].*

" ...Oh wait! Do you really call this a library? There is no library here at school. In fact, we only know the place as a library but the reality is there is no library there."

"To add to what he has just said, I think our library needs a serious upgrade. There are no books in there. No chairs, no table. Everything *is just a mess there"*.

"A school is a place for learning and studying, right? But then what happen if the same school fail to give us, learners a space to read and do our homeworks? Some of us we come from amakhaya [homes] where we don't get time and space to study quietly"

Teacher ST: *" Eh…you see eh wena [you] Meneer [Sir], I can really say that I am aware of what other co-researchers are saying. All they have said so far is the truth. Our library does really affect the moral and motivation of learners to engage in reading and most importantly writing their school work negatively"*

Teacher QR: *Ja, [Yes,] Chair [Chairperson] this dysfunctionality manifests in different ways. For example, lack of furniture in the library and the school in general makes engaging learners in reading even more difficult. Another issue is that of old and redundant books. Again these books are not well kept because there are shelves where they can be arranged and packaged."*

Facilitator: Is there anything else that we would like to add about the state of our library?

Teacher QR*: When it comes library management, I am totally glue-less. Is that not supposed be the responsibility of the School Management Team? Even in that regard no training has been offered to us the newly qualified teachers. This simply means, if we as teachers do not know how to run and use a library there is no way our learners will know and spend time there.*

Teacher ST: *That is why…as you know Mr Mokoena… that our school library is used as a place for storing food of feeding scheme during the year and it is also used as bedroom… (laughs)… during winter classes and during the final examinations in December.*

Facilitator: Still on the challenges that we have just identified and discussed, apart from the challenges we experience at school, is there any way in which the community may impact on these challenges? What solutions can we suggest for FVR to succeed?

Teacher QR: *Supporting weak learners in the FVR is one of the most important things to do. I do think that most learners need support with pronunciation while others can't read with understanding. So, as a teacher my work involves bringing the best out of every learner.*

Teacher ST: *We have most weak learners coming through the system. They really need support in almost everything they do. Giving them continuous support allows you as an educator to identify those who have challenges with regards to reading comprehension. I would suggest that we provide them with necessary reading materials, and form reading clubs so that they can support each other too.*

Teacher QR: Unlike their counterparts in the former model c schools, our learners lack a strong support system in their homes. They don't have parents who can monitor them or even read with them after school.

Facilitator: For this session I believe that we need to discuss the way reading comprehension is taught in the EFAL classroom.

Learner EF: "*I am sorry to say this…(laughter)…but our teachers are not really flexible. Uhmm…I mean like you will find a teacher just giving you a text and says that someone must read. For me, that makes the entire activity boring and difficult*"

Yes, that's true. Most times you will be reading something that you have never read before. I wish that our teachers could do things differently instead of having one learner reading the entire passage and then expect us to answer questions assessing our understanding. That is not fair, really.

Teacher ST: *I think the problem goes back to our training as language teachers in different universities. Although I have recently qualified as a teacher, I cannot remember a course which dealt with how to teach learners to read for and with understanding. Instead, the emphasis was on learning theories and teaching methods.*

Teacher QR: *Adding to what **Mr ST** has just said, I had the same problem. So when I started teaching here I just did the way my teachers taught me. You know our teachers would simply have each learner reading a paragraph and then questions would follow. Basically, that's what I have been doing. I really never had a time to think of any alternative way of doing it. Or have*

I ever thought of how the way I treat this concept plays a role in hindering my learners' performance and comprehension.

Facilitator: Still on the same issues, colleagues what are your views about the role of the department [of education] in attempting to address this situation?

Teacher QR: *I am glad that we are here today participating in this study trying to deal with this problem. I really would want to contribute and see the framework working.*

Teacher ST: *Unlike my colleague here, I have been struggling with this issue for quite a long time. When I started attending workshops organised by the department, I was under the impression that such issues would be addressed. For instance, I was at a particular workshop late last year (2018) and my Learning Facilitator also alluded to this fact. So if LFs have the same problem as us, then who do we turn to as teachers of English?*

Facilitator: I hope that our learners have something to say about the teaching of reading comprehension. I am also hopeful that they will suggest possible solutions.

Learner EF: *Our teachers would simply have each learner reading a paragraph and then questions would follow.*

Learner AB: *You know at times you feel like you are not part of the lesson cause [because] you will be listening to someone reading a text without really interacting with it.*

Learner CD: *Eish…sometimes it becomes boring especially when the text is difficult and the teacher chooses someone who reads so badly. Yoo you would feel like walking out because the text becomes even more difficult.*

Learner AB: *I think if maybe we would be allowed to choose our own texts that we can read. Ya bona…I mean the one that maybe a person would understand and not struggle to get through it.*

Learner EF: *Sometimes Nna [me] I wish hore we would just read without the need to answer questions thereafter. I mean these questions become difficult that's why most of the time I struggle to get correct answers.*

Teacher QR: *As I said before, we know of these methods but when it comes to putting them into practice, that's where real problems begin. I mean in every diagnostic report learner performance in section A of the exam paper 1 is always not good.*

Learner EF: *Sometimes Nna [me] I wish hore [that] we would just read without the need to answer questions thereafter. I mean these questions become difficult that's why most of the time I struggle to get correct answers."*

Teacher QR: *As I said before, we know of these methods but when it comes to putting them into practice, that's where real problems begin. I mean in every diagnostic report learner performance in section A of the exam paper 1 is always not good."*

Teacher ST: *As a teacher, your primary role is to teach and guide to discover new information in the process of learning.*

Teacher QR: *But with the kind of learners we have these days, one is never sure of what to expect really. First, they are quite different from us. These days they have all the resources at their disposal but they are lazy to make use of them. No matter how hard you may make your learners to understand something, if they are not prepared to do it, there is nothing one can do.*

Teacher ST: *With these learners everything should be prolonged. For instance, here at school we have weekend classes, holiday classes and afternoon classes. We sacrifice our time to make them understand what we teach them.*

Teacher QR: *In my class I normally teach my learners about the skimming and scanning. I also try to encourage the use of dictionaries. In fact, I do allow them to use their cellphones to look words which are difficult for them. Despite these efforts, they still struggle to read with comprehension.*

Facilitator: Another issue that is closely related to what we have just discussed is that of self-perception. In other words, do you see yourselves, learners to be competent to improve reading comprehension?

Learner EF: *Ke nahana hore [I think that] what we are trying to do can succeed only if we as learners we start believing in ourselves and take our work seriously. I mean as you can see now other learners did not want to come here because banemahloni [they are shy] and the some lack motivation.*

Learner GH: *Honestly speaking our teachers are making sacrifices for us to perform well but sometimes they do not we lack confidence to stand up to read and ask questions when we do not understand.*

Facilitator: As reflection about the whole research process, what impact has the FVR approach that we have developed had on your reading comprehension? What has changed as a result of your participation in this study?

Learner AB: *"I am now able to understand what I read better than before. I am no longer struggling if I don't understand a word or a sentence as I used to before coming here."*

Learner CD: *"Nami tisha [Even me too, Sir] it's no longer difficult to answer questions. I also answer questions in the test that we wrote. It's easy now for me to summarise the story or the text that I just read now because I understand. This is because you gave us tips like we have to look at the situation that they talk about in the paper and then match it with what we already know. This is helping us a lot."*

Teacher QR: *"On that point I think that by always encouraging dictionary use has really helped a lot. I can also say that we did the great job by revisiting and re-teaching word –attacking skills. This becomes more helpful during the exams and test where dictionaries are inaccessible."*

Learner GH: *"For me I would say that the improvement in my comprehension of what I am reading e tlisitwe ke taba ya tsheba* [has been brought by knowing] *how to interpret questions and words, and to be honest, that used to give me problems."*

Learner GH: *"I think what helped us the most ilendaba yokuthi othisha did not only ask anyone of us to read and then answer questions [I think what helped us the most is that teachers did not only ask anyone of us to read and then answer questions]. Bayenze izinto ngedlelaehlukile this time. We selected the books ourselves and they were very interesting to us and we were*

able to understand them better unlike in the past when you will be reading something that you don't even understand.

Learner EF: *"For nna I can say that working in pairs or groups help us to discuss our answers and share information about the text. We were also allowed to use our dictionaries which helped us when there are words which we don't understand"*

Learner KL: *"This time atleast we taught our teachers something…I mean like the way we learn and what kind of stuff we enjoy reading."*

Learner OP: *"I can say that being able to share information with other learners and for us being the ones who are in control of everything. The presentations …yes the reflections also help us a lot because we could see our mistakes. Teachers were ready to help and they way were studying was not the same."*

With the two realities juxtaposed in the literature, it became apparent in this study that there had been a successful implementation of FVR approach. The following remarks were noteworthy:

Learner CD*: "I'm very happy that we were able to make student cards that they need before they can allow you to borrow books from the library etown."*

Learner MN: *Since we started here I'm no longer shy to borrow a book from the library or from the boxes and just read.*

Learner AB: *Some learners have approached me and asked if we could start some sort of reading club here at school. Even if we have competitions I think am ready.*

Learner IJ: *"I see no reason of making noise when the teacher is not around, I normally would prefer to read a magazine from the boxes in our class and read. I feel like I can do this everyday especially because we choose what we want to read."*

Teacher QR: *Motivating learners to read has really gone a long way in helping us. What I have noticed now is their keen interest to and that was not the case before this project. As far as I can see, there is a reduction in many spelling errors, problems relating to vocabulary and negative attitudes towards reading. I think that the frequent use of dictionary as well as the*

application of reading skills and word-attacking skills have contributed to this improvement that we all see.

Teacher ST:*I concur with what my colleague has just said. I am also seeing changes after addressing the issue of reading skills and attitudes towards reading.They now read more than they did before. English is no longer viewed as this difficult language with difficult words, I think they are beginning to enjoy reading more books and newspapers with understanding. And they can respond to any questions assessing their reading comprehension.*

Teacher QR: *…even the way they were involved in the activities shows that they are more confident to read and present in English.*

PhD (Thesis)