
DISSERTATION SUBMISSION

Title: Investigating Grade 4 Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Reading Comprehension in English Second Language at Botshabelo Schools

by

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*Inspiring
excellence,
transforming
lives through
quality,
impact, and
care.*

DECLARATION

I, Matsietsi Paulina Mohloki, (2017452984), declare that the dissertation “Investigating Grade 4 Teachers’ Experiences of Teaching Reading Comprehension in English Second Language at Botshabelo Schools” submitted for the qualification of Master’s in Education at the University of the Free State is my independent work. All the references I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work to another university or faculty for the purpose of obtaining a qualification.

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ABSTRACT

Teaching reading comprehension in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms has been a bone of contention in the English curriculum in South Africa and abroad. The study explored Grade 4 teachers' experience teaching reading comprehension to ESL learners at Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, Free South Africa. Reading comprehension, which is the ability to read a passage, process it, and understand its meaning, is a problem for primary school learners in South Africa. Moreover, reading comprehension is a vital component of a learner should read for a purpose, engage with the text, learn from it, and eventually enjoy it. Thus, learners are more prone to read texts less eloquently and need help comprehending what they read. Hence, the role of a teacher is so critical that the teacher's skills enable learners to read proficiently, learn effectively, and build problem-solving capacity and strategies. However, despite extensively studying reading comprehension, participants indicated that most learners need help reading for comprehension. The extent of the reading problem was emphasised by the dismal performance of Grade 4 learners in the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2016), where it was discovered that South African learners are the worst globally, where more than 80% of sampled learners could not read for meaning. The theoretical framework directing this qualitative research research was the schema theory. Six purposively selected participants participated in semi-structured interviews and were observed in class. Document analysis was also used to generate data. Data were analysed thematically. Consent was sought from the University of the Free State and approval from the Free State Department of Education. Findings demonstrated that teachers use various strategies to teach reading comprehension and do not rely on passively reading a text to learners. The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, and the data generation process was done through a purposive sampling of 6 ESL primary school teachers from Botshabelo. Data were generated by semi-structured face-to-face interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, English as a Second Language, Teacher's experiences, Teaching strategies, Schema, Schemata

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
ESL	English Second Language
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LiEP	Language in Education Policy
L1	First Language/ Home Language
L2	Second Language/ Additional Language
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
PSRIP	Primary School Reading Improvement Programme
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SMT	School Management Team

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CHAPTER 1 : ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter sets the tone and foregrounds the study. It gives a birds-view of the study by discussing the background and introduction, outlining the statement of the problem, the research aims and questions, a glimpse of the theoretical episteme, the research process and methods, ethical grounding, the context of the study, key concepts and concludes by outlining what each chapter entails. Eventually, it provides a synthesis of the chapter.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, learners are taught in their home language (HL) in the Foundation Phase (Grade R – 3). For many of them, English is not their HL. According to Maodi (2018), what complicates the process even further is that as they transition to Grade 4, the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) switches from HL to English as a Second Language (ESL). Grasping ESL can be an obstacle, except if the learner is given enough support to understand the medium of instruction and the home language (Liswaniso, 2023). ESL learners are susceptible to reading the text less eloquently and thus need help understanding the text they are reading. Text identification, proficiency, background information, and vocabulary are some of the aspects that impede the understanding of the text (Liswaniso, 2023).

Teaching reading comprehension skills allows learners to read proficiently, learn effectively, build problem-solving capacity and strategies, and conceptualise (Elston *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, to comprehend the text in-depth, a learner should be able to read the text continually (Brevik, 2019). Immediate attention is needed in teaching reading comprehension as learners are left behind due to COVID-19 and the need for more reading materials (Ragavan, 2022). Hence, the teacher's role is critical in motivating learners to learn (Rustiani *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, teachers must ensure that all learners enjoy reading, as Moswane (2019) argues. To find it enjoyable, learners must comprehend what is being read (Steyn, 2017). Learners' success in school and throughout life is built upon their capacity to read and read for meaning. Therefore, a country's education system is threatened by learners lacking the reading

comprehension skills expected in the foundation and intermediate classes (Rustiani *et al.*, 2022).

It is, therefore, important to discuss what reading and reading comprehension mean in this research. This research foregrounds reading as a means of language acquisition, communication, and sharing of information and ideas, which requires continuous practice, development, and refinement, as Jabamani and Senthilnathan (2021) postulate. Pradani (2021) also emphasises that interactive reading occurs when a learner reads a text, invoking understanding.

Reading comprehension is the capacity to read the passage, analyse it, and comprehend what it means. It is anchored on word recognition and language mastery as the two entwined tenets (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Once learners have made sense of the text, they need to remember the precise words or sentences they have read (Chiblow & Meighan, 2021). Furthermore, Chiblow and Meighan (2021) point out that they create a thinking pattern of what the text is about by combining the words and sentences into a composite whole. Therefore, reading comprehension skills are essential if the learner must read for purposes, engage with and learn from the text, and ultimately enjoy what they are reading (Van der Merwe, 2018).

Learners in South African schools still need help in reading comprehension despite their' reading comprehension being extensively studied (Liswaniso, 2023). To put this claim into perspective, (Mullis *et al.*, 2023) mention that the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2021) highlights learners' dwarfish extent of reading for understanding and shallow reading to non-existent levels of reading ability. Moreover, Grade 4 learners' reading abilities are two years behind those in other countries. Furthermore, this reading crisis results from several attributes, such as weak instructional methodologies in the foundation phase, a non-existent reading culture, no reading resources, socioeconomic factors, and language challenges (Liswaniso, 2023).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The catastrophe of South Africa's disaster reading was demonstrated by the dismal display of Grade 4 learners on the 2016 and 2021 PIRLS international benchmark reading comprehension test (Mullis *et al.*, 2023). About 80 per cent of Grade 4 learners

could not achieve the entry point of international reading proficiency level, meaning they are unable to read for understanding. The study sampled 12 426 learners over the whole country and contrasted the results with learners in the same age group in other countries (Mullis *et al.*, 2023). The results of this study discovered that South African learners are the worst readers worldwide, with about 81% of sampled learners being unable to read for meaning. In 2016, the PIRLS average score of South Africa was 320; in 2021, it dropped to 288, meaning South Africa fell by 32 PIRLS points.

The desperate condition of South African literacy level, demonstrated by often dismal showings in national and international studies, indicates that teachers may need to improve in teaching reading (Fesi & Mncube, 2021) and reading comprehension. Nalisa *et al.* (2019) reason that in this phase of a child's growth, the capacity to discover clear information and do straightforward reading about events and reasons for action is crucial for learning other subjects from Grade 4 onwards. The country cannot ignore that those who are doing Grade 4 today will be in matric in a few years. If the practice of reading and reading for meaning is not inculcated at a young age, it might become a persistent setback in adulthood. Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) put this on the shoulders of the teachers by arguing that they are also not avid readers; hence, they need more strategies for reading. The inability of Grade 4 learners that causes them to fall behind in reading, as discussed above, demonstrates that learners do not possess fundamental reading techniques, resulting in learners' inability to read, which prevents them from learning and leads to low marks.

The literature further proves that quality teaching or high academic performance is directly proportional to how well a teacher prepares for a lesson and superior teaching (Olawale, 2023). This researcher emphasises that placing a good teacher in each classroom is the starting point for solving our schools' reading comprehension challenge. Elston *et al.*, (2022) also reading comprehension requires well-informed, deliberate, flexible, and reflective teachers. However, teachers do not poses these qualities. Because they are given small instructions on facilitating fundamental literacy to novices and grappling readers, which results in many learners needing more basic literacy to succeed academically.

1.4 RESEARCH AIM, QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

This study explored Grade 4 teachers' experiences teaching reading comprehension in English as a Second Language in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa.

1.4.1 Research Questions

The main research question was:

What are the Grade 4 teachers' experiences teaching reading comprehension in ESL classrooms in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?

Secondary Questions

- What are Grade 4 teachers' personal and professional experiences of teaching reading comprehension to ESL learners in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?
- What strategies do Grade 4 teachers use to teach ESL learners reading comprehension in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?
- How do Grade 4 teachers teach ESL learners reading comprehension strategies in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?

1.4.2 Research Objectives

- Describe Grade 4 teachers' experiences of teaching reading comprehension to ESL learners in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa.
- Identify Grade 4 teachers' reading comprehension strategies for ESL learners in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa.
- Explore how Grade 4 teachers implement reading comprehension strategies for ESL learners in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The schema theory framed this study. Anderson (1984) indicated that schema is a theoretical, complex, and changeable knowledge structure that is kept in mind, and its function is to comprehend the external world. Brown and Yule (2000) and An (2013) regard schema as known information that could be retrieved to understand a text. There are several schema concepts, yet overall, there is only one central concept. Schema is information construction, the fundamental construction representing information (Nickerson, 2024). Hence, the research done on schema has a colossal effect on understanding reading comprehension in English first and second language (Ah *et al.*, 2020). This work made it comprehensible that the part schema plays in the reading process gives insight into why learners may need more understanding of their reading.

The pinnacle of schema theory, in the context of the study, is that a text by itself does not have meaning (Ma, 2021). A learner brings culture, emotions, knowledge, and information (schemata) to ink on a page. (Ma, 2021) opines that research proves that reading is partial to what is written down. The learner brings other aspects of the text than what is written down. Unfortunately, ESL learners come short of understanding what is penned down, which is attributed to needing relevant schemata to the text. Not having relevant schemata is either formal or content based. Jinyu (2022) mentions that these two schemata mean that content-based consists of what is known about people, the world, and culture, while formal schemata include our knowledge regarding writ construction. This schema is invoked and facilitated by the presence of the teacher, hence the relevance of this theoretical lens in this study.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Research Paradigm

George (2023) asserts that an interpretivist paradigm involves interpreting and comprehending human behaviour and is an essential branch of empirical research. He claims that it emphasises the data collection process and that human behaviour must be interpreted to be understood. Therefore, from this line of reasoning, the researcher conducted interviews to listen to teachers' experiences in teaching comprehension, observed teachers' behaviours while teaching reading comprehension, and attempted to understand teachers' experiences through their

actions. After that, the researcher drew a link between their knowledge, interaction with learners, and experience by analysing the actual teaching and learning process.

1.6.2 Research Approach

Research approaches are schemes and processes for research that stretch from comprehensive assumptions to thorough methods of data collection, analysis, and collection (Goundar, 2013). These schemes consist of a handful of decisions. The superseding decision requires considering which approach is better suited for a study (Goundar, 2013). Moreover, Gounder (2023) indicates that three approaches govern a study: quantitative, which deals with numbers; qualitative, which deals with text; and mixed methods, which bridges two methods and deals with numbers and texts. Additionally, Gounder (2013) mentions that by using interviews, observations, document analysis, and literature review, the qualitative research method comprehends participants' thoughts, concepts, or experiences. Ugwu and Eze Val (2023) and Patton (2002) agree by mentioning that the qualitative research approach delves into, narrates, and explores the sense of one's occurrences: how they become cognisant of it, memorise it, comprehend it, and discuss it with peers. In a nutshell, research collects the population's ideas and experiences. Thus, this research used a qualitative approach to effectively explore Grade 4 teachers' experiences teaching reading comprehension in ESL in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa.

1.6.3 Research Design

This study employed a case study design. This kind of design uses empirical enquiry that scrutinises modern-day occurrences in their actual context, mainly when the barriers between occurrences and actuality cannot be formulated. Chowdhury and Shil (2021) mention that a case study captures the uniqueness and intricacy of one case, striving to comprehend its role in the bigger picture. It is, therefore, evident that a case study is a procedure of looking into the research topic by following predetermined steps. The case study research design aims to expand comprehension of an individual occurrence to give significant knowledge of the topic or develop theoretical concepts (Rashid *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, this research design endorses the development of qualitative research, which deals with exploratory and descriptive approaches and

inductive and deductive interpretation. Thus, the researcher was in a real-life classroom, with actual participants in their classroom environment (Taherdoost, 2021).

1.6.4 Data Generation Methods

In qualitative research, data is generated utilising fieldwork. According to Morgan (2022), among several other fieldwork projects, it consists of document analysis, different kinds of interviews, and observations (Morgan, 2022). Naeem *et al.* (2023) agree by mentioning that data generation is the procedure that allows the researcher to gather data from the natural environment of the study. Unlike quantitative research, whose data collection techniques produce numerical data, the qualitative study uses techniques that produce verbal data. Qualitative data generation techniques are directed at gathering data from participants' experiences and perceptions and comprehending the topic (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the researcher generated data through face-to-face interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Interviews are a prevalent qualitative research method for collecting data in an educational context (Monday, 2022). A face-to-face interview is where the participants and the researcher meet in person, most commonly in a quiet place. During the interview, the researcher asks participants questions to explore their background and insight on the topic of interest (Dunwoodie *et al.*, 2022). Observations also have a rich history in social science research (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). Junjie and Yingxin (2022) mention that they effectively produce data from human behaviour and interactions besides relaying communicated experiences from participants' experiences on the topic of interest. In education, they are paramount in comprehending the interactions and context of the study. Lastly, document analysis is a structural method of reviewing inked and digital material. Data should be scrutinised and explained to generate effect, obtain comprehension, and produce first-hand information from document analysis (Cardno, 2018). Morgan (2022) states that the researcher did not have a hand in the text that is contained in the documents.

1.6.5 Selection of participants

The six purposively selected participants were part of the face-to-face semi-structured interviews and were served teaching during class. The participants were from four schools in Botshabelo township. The participants were distributed in the following manner: in two schools, one teacher per school participated, and then in two schools,

two teachers participated per school. The schools are no-fee schools between Quintile 1 and 3. The participants were Sesotho speakers teaching ESL in Grade 4 classrooms. The research was conducted in a factual setting, and data were generated in a non-invasive way (Nieuwenshuis, 2022).

1.6.6 Data Analysis

The research employed a thematic data analysis method mainly used in texts, observations, and interviews (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). In this method, the researcher scrutinises the data to pinpoint the familiar themes, patterns, ideas, and topics that come up several times in the generated data. Thematic Analysis further guided the interpretation of data. The semi-structured interviews are transcribed verbatim, coded, and grouped according to themes and subthemes. The observations were also coded and thematically grouped. The data analysis included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documents. All these answered the three secondary research questions. Furthermore, the thematic analysis enabled the researcher to place it against the literature to develop a sound interpretation.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Bos (2020) claims that “ethics” are entwined with morality. Furthermore, Bos (2020) explains that “ethical guidelines are standards essential to decoding and understanding” while collecting participant data. Taking that into consideration, ethical requirements were considered for this research. Before the study began, a request for ethics clearance was handed to the University of the Free State Research Ethics Committee. A request was made to the Department of Education (DoE) for consent to research designated Botshabelo schools. A letter from the researcher asking for approval to perform the research and the purpose and producers of the research was sent to the principals. The letters were written to the prospective participants, explaining the study and requesting them to sign agreement forms to consent to participate.

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

(i) Teacher

According to the description of South African School Act No. 84 of 1996, A teacher is an individual who is taught to educate or an expert in knowledge and practices of education. Additionally, a teacher is an individual who methodologically strives to develop other people's understanding of a given topic.

(ii) Teaching

According to Munna and Kalam (2021), teaching is an activity of instruction that transfers information and skills. It involves the strategies, methodology, and procedures utilised when conveying knowledge to the learners. In addition, Rajagopalan (2019) revealed that teaching is an ability to incorporate different teaching methodologies when teachers plan their lessons. Moreover, teachers are also learning learners, and they teach because each learner is unique and experiences learning differently, and those experiences influence the way they teach.

(iii) Teacher's Experiences

Irvine (2019) points out that years of teaching are a critical aspect of the workplace and are directly linked to the teacher's productivity. Nevertheless, experiences include all the difficulties and benefits the teacher might have experienced throughout their career. Thus, for them to be all-rounded teacher, they need to have the skill of turning challenges into opportunities. Among all critical teaching aids a teacher can use, experience is by far the most imperative. Kolawole *et al.* (2020) outlined that when teaching and learning to read, making sense of your reading text is assisted by experiences. Thus, teachers' experiences are essential when they teach learners to read.

(iv) Reading comprehension

Reading is a necessary procedure involving insightful, emotional, and social issues that comprise minds, senses, and the sense of awareness that a learner is developing. Olifant and Cekiso (2020) supported the involvement of critical thinking when the learner strives to understand the whole text from written words and sentences and

conceptions, recollections, and understanding brought forth by the exact words and sentences. They also stated that it involves the text and the education of the language one reads.

(v) English Second Language Learner

The meaning of English as a second language learner is a term used in the English language by non-native speakers in an English-speaking environment (Nuriska, 2021). It is also referred to as a specialised approach to language teaching designed for those whose primary language is not English.

(vi) Grade 4

Learners are marking their fourth year in the formal education system. In this Grade, learners are about nine or ten years old. This Grade is crucial, as it is the first year of transition from the Foundation Phase (Grades 1 to 3), where the learner mainly learns in their home language. The transition stage is the first of the three years of the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6).

1.9 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 outlines the study rationale and process, the problem statement and research questions, research aims and objectives, research design and methodology, and ethical considerations. It concludes with defining terms used in the study.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework and relevant literature. It further outlines what is essential to teaching reading comprehension to ESL learners. The literature examines the extent and attributes of influential reading, techniques and compelling reading, and difficulties experienced by Grade 4 teachers in facilitating reading comprehension to ESL learners. It explores the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), Language in Education Policy (LiEP), and School Language Policy (SLP) as essential policies governing the facilitation of ESL classrooms.

Chapter 3 accounts for the empirical research methodology and clarifies the research, the study, and how it was sampled. The research questions for the study are presented in this chapter. A detailed discussion of the paradigm and research design for the study is also outlined. The chapter also details the research methods for the data generation

and the justification for the inclusion. Furthermore, ethical considerations, sampling, and study limitations are outlined.

Chapter 4 presents an in-depth analysis of the participants' interview data, observations, and relevant documents. The research's findings revolve around teachers' experiences teaching reading comprehension in ESL to Grade 4 learners of Botshabelo primary schools.

Chapter 5 concludes the study and presents the overview, a synopsis of the analysis of findings, the value of the study, limitations, and the researcher's recommendations for future research.

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the orientation to the study, focusing on the overview and the whole study process. This chapter presented a helicopter view of the study, looking at the fundamental tenets that conceptualised and grounded this study. The next chapter examines the theoretical stance and the related literature.

CHAPTER 2 : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter presented an outline and oriented the researcher on the research. This chapter introduces the relevant literature and discusses the essence of facilitating reading comprehension for ESL learners. It begins with deliberating the theoretical framework and putting the research into perspective, including the extent and attributes of influential reading, techniques for compelling reading, and challenges experienced by Grade-4 teachers in teaching reading comprehension to ESL learners. The chapter also outlines the policies governing language teaching in South Africa. This includes the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), Language in Education Policy (LiEP), School Language Policy (SLP), and dynamics of Grade 4 as a transition. Then, the chapter is concluded.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is a foundation for reviewing current theories that are guideposts for formulating the argument the researcher uses in the study (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). Researchers develop theories to elaborate phenomena, extract conclusions, and construct predictions. Adom and Hussein (2018) assert that the theoretical framework helps the researcher to arrange research, give a clear direction in carrying out research and make its findings relevant and more acceptable. Moreover, it validates the study's results, is pleasing to theoretical constructs in the study area, and guarantees rigour (Luft *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it was paramount for this study to be grounded on a specific theory because it offered a verified clarification of phenomena for the research. A theory becomes entwined with the doctrine and adds to that field of study. When a viable theory is presented critically, it enables systematic advancement by clarifying the phenomenon in the research (Kivunja, 2018). This study employed the Schema theory as the epistemic lens.

2.2.1 Schema Theory

The word schema was proposed by Kant Immanuel in 1781, and he defined it as a frame or background knowledge (Kramsch, 1993). Schemata is the plural form of schema and was primarily used in discussions in this chapter and other chapters. Bartlett (1932) enhanced the definition of schema by referring to it as a reflecting

experience and the positive organisation of previous experience, which supposedly operates in any well-adopted organic response. Anderson (1984) further states that schemata are a theoretical information structure where readers understand a text and use prior knowledge to form new constructs. A schema enhances an active structure, providing new content learning and interpretation that experiences can improve (Ren, 2023). According to these definitions, learners can better understand and decode new information with prior information, like previous events and known concepts; this is considered schema stored in the brain.

2.2.2 Various Types of Schemata

Al-Issa (2006) describes the preceding kinds of schemata as follows:

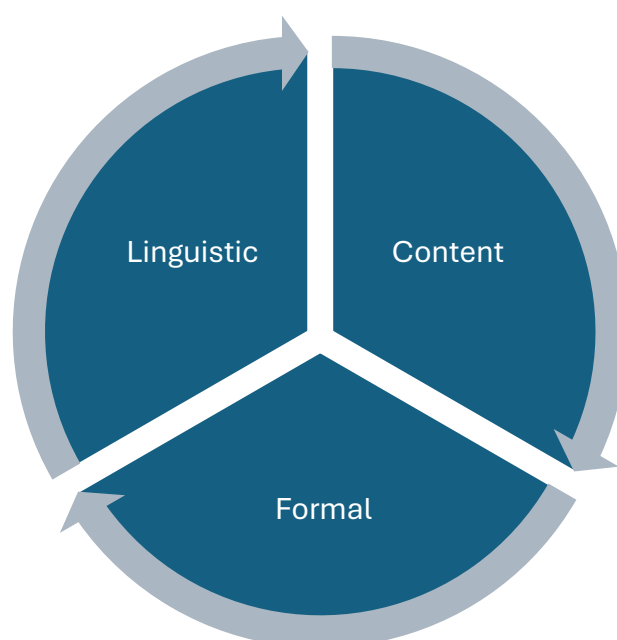


Figure 2.1 Tenets of Schema Theory

I. Linguistic Schemata

Linguistics schemata allude to the grasp of the alphabetical character and their related resonate, individually or in groups, as well as the capacity to forecast through the grasp of grammar and the arrangements of words (Ren, 2023). It is the foundation of subsequent schemata and critical to decoding and understanding while reading. Ren (2023) claims that the number of linguistic schemata in the child's mind is directly linked to the time it takes them to obtain and comprehend information. According to Ntshangase (2023), most learners experience challenges reading a text,

and the leading cause of these challenges is linguistic aspects. Some of the elements that are involved in the linguistic components are vocabulary and syntactical knowledge. For instance, not having enough vocabulary becomes a barrier, so learners get bored reading a text (Ntshangase, 2023). Santi *et al.* (2021) agree that learners are uninterested in reading a text since they find it challenging to comprehend. On the other hand, syntactical complexities filter through the need for more capacity for sentence construction and grammar. Therefore, a text that is too advanced for learners' reading abilities will confuse them, causing them to search for the meaning of every word rather than understanding the text. Thus, the intended knowledge from the text cannot be absorbed (Santi *et al.*, 2021).

II. Content Schemata

Content schemata are the learner's previous information of what is being read and acquaintance with the subject from past occurrences or if it is connected to the socio-cultural surroundings of the learner (Radzi & Aziz, 2023). They mention that it comprises topic awareness, cultural context, and background knowledge of the subject. Hence, Mokgadi and Hove (2024) emphasise that learners' prior information is directly proportional to understanding and recalling text. Most second-language and reading comprehension research highlights that background cultural experiences are paramount in understanding a text. Despite the reading resources, all learners display specific prior information. While readers can comprehend the meaning of every sentence in the entire text, they fail to precisely understand its central idea aligned with previous information (Mokgadi & Hove, 2024). Overall, when the content schema is well comprehended, learners can read faster by detecting the critical content and core sentences (opening sentence, closing sentence, middle sentence): learners must choose which part of the text they should read (Mokgadi & Hove, 2024).

The content schema is critical in comprehending the text's theme to enable learners to search for essential information, vital comments, pivotal points, and points of departure (Sibanda, 2023). This researcher further claims that learners can get answers precisely in alignment with questions in the text, discovering the words or sentences linked to what has been asked, disregarding complex and unrelated concepts, and overlooking irrelevant options. For instance, the "5w+1h" rule, when, where, what, why, and where; "1H" stands for "how." When a learner has become an

avid reader, they do not passively read anymore for theocratical meaning, but they read for meaning at a practical meaning (Prcic, 2019). Thus, reading becomes much more accessible and more understandable if learners go beyond reading for prior information and forge context between keywords and sentences.

III. Formal Schemata

Formal schemata allude to the knowledge of rhetorical patterns and the organisational forms in which the information in the text is written. Applying schema theory to English reading comprehension is essential because familiarity with text structure influences how the learner processes the text (Silva, 2019). Deriving from the standpoint of language schema, it is conducive to assisting learners in initiating two more schemata in their brains (Farid *et al.*, 2021). From the perspective of content schema, learners need to be fully aware of the composition of the text. From the standpoint of formal schema, learners should improve the efficiency of their reading comprehension (Silva, 2019).

Like other forms of schemata, the formal schema has also been extensively studied (Mokgadi & Hove, 2024). For example, Carter *et al.* (2024) researched the effects of syntactic challenges on learners' reading comprehension. Three kinds of short texts were used. The maiden one revolved around short and easy sentences. The second one revolved around complex sentences with hints of fundamental connections left unbroken. At the same time, the third one focused on complex sentences without hints. The findings demonstrated that the participants did best in answering the second set of questions, which were complex questions with hints. Carter *et al.* (2024) observed that a lack of vocabulary and language is an essential attribute of learners' low reading comprehension levels.

In conclusion, Curitiba (2019) claims that because of its level of professionalism, schema theory can be utilised to clarify the reading procedure and supplement the comprehensiveness of reading. Thus, schema theory is critical for teachers to develop and enhance effective reading comprehension teaching.

2.2.3 Studies on Schemata and reading comprehension development in the ESL classroom

Ma (2021) claims that to assist learners in extracting and remembering information in the text, reading schemata helps because learners choose and process information provided by reading material. Overall, achieving the purpose of reading comprehension schemata is incredibly beneficial because it improves the existing memory and links what learners have known and understood (Jinyu, 2022). The educational landscape continually changes (Ah et al., 2020). As a result, extensive research has been done to keep up with the times. Reading abilities are at the centre of studies that are done in the field of education (Ma, 2021) because reading abilities are the means to add and supplement knowledge and broaden learners' perspectives (Ma, 2021). Reading is a complicated procedure that demands comprehension abilities. Thus, a learner's schemata should be sufficiently developed to become proficient with a text. The learner must comprehend and seize some textual components to read well. Researchers emphasise schemata as essential to reading comprehension (Ah et al., 2020).

Several researchers have conducted studies on the connection between schemata and reading capacity. Hamid *et al.* (2020) led the most recent study on schemata. Their study focused on the semantic background effect of ESL readers' comprehension. The study results showed that grammar and vocabulary are critical factors in learners' reading comprehension ability. Hence, the importance of grammatical schemata outweighs vocabulary knowledge, demonstrating that more research is needed on this perspective. However, Ren (2023) claims that grammatical schemata and vocabulary knowledge are essential for explaining expression definition and reading text construction. Linguistic capacity creates an official schema in learners' thought architecture and dramatically impacts their capacity to read English, most especially when it is not their mother tongue. Furthermore, Hamid *et al.* (2020) researched formal schema sequel on reading comprehension. Their results concluded that formal schema is a higher-order structure that consists of information about oratorical constructs and broader information on text type properties and differentiation of gender.

The focus of the study by Ren (2023) was the incorporation of schema theory and reading comprehension, and the study made suggestions regarding facilitating reading comprehension to learners to amplify reading comprehension skills. Ren (2023) did not use either qualitative or quantitative research to measure variables but focused on literature to generate results. Another study was conducted by Zainurroziqin *et al.* (2023). They concentrate on the English teacher's understanding of content schemata. The research's results endorsed that learners' past knowledge considerably helps their capacity to read faster with a deeper understanding. Furthermore, the study holds that brainstorming is the most popular pre-reading strategy for activating learners' prior knowledge, followed by discussions of the topic and question-and-answer sessions (Zainurroziqin *et al.*, 2023).

Moreover, the study highlighted that English language teachers claim that the cause of learners to have substandard reading capacity and generally low English language proficiency coupled with a lack of teaching materials is the leading cause of the inability to activate content schemata (Zainurroziqin *et al.*, 2023). The results of Xiao (2024) share the same sentiments by mentioning that content schema plays a paramount role in reading for understanding. The study further believes that a person's schema level is directly proportional to their reading abilities. Hence, the schema theory can impact how learners and teachers experience English reading comprehension (Xiao, 2024). Additionally, the results of the study by Xiao (2024) reveal that the correct utilisation of the schema theory can change how English teachers and learners simultaneously perceive English reading comprehension, instigate creative ideas and innovative facilitation strategies, and offer teachers an abstract and practical framework on the to facilitate English reading comprehension to learners that have various capacities.

According to Mtshali and Mashiya (2022), schema theory provides a complete framework for comprehending how learners bring together and elucidate knowledge, significantly impacting how they learn, remember, and perform in their studies. Schemata are critical in moulding how learners deem, elucidate, and combine new knowledge and play a vital role in memory. Therefore, teachers must design their English reading activities through schema theory to encourage learners to take schema theory as the starting point of reading. The good thing about this theory is that it foregrounds a knowledge point to conduct appropriate reading activities.

2.3 ENGLISH AS A SUBJECT AND ENGLISH AS A LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING (LOLT)

Wasserman (2019) asserts that English as a subject means studying the English components and skills, including grammar, vocabulary, and usage. It also includes the study of English literature, which is the body of written works in the English language. English is an essential subject for learners to learn, impacting their mastery of other subjects. Firstly, it is the most widely spoken language in the world (Rao, 2019). This means that English is a valuable tool for communication, both domestically and internationally. Secondly, English is the language of Science, Technology, and Business (Al-Sharqi & Abbasi, 2020). This means that learners proficient in English will have a competitive advantage in the global space. Thirdly, English is the language of many of the world's great works of literature, philosophy, and history (Botha & Beukes, 2019). This means that studying English can help learners to develop their critical thinking skills and to understand different cultures and worldviews. Torto (2017) mentions that English is essential to the school curriculum because it helps learners develop the skills they need to succeed in school and life. It also helps them understand different cultures and appreciate language's power (Hariri, 2022).

Learning and language connection can never be over-emphasized (Kim, 2020), irrespective of whether the newly found interest in home language education is beyond the second language or LoLT (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019). When the language of teaching and learning is different from the learners' home language, this becomes a hurdle during teaching and learning (Seneka & De Witt, 2019). As of 23 July 2023, there are now twelve official languages after officially adopting sign language in South Africa. Thus, this buffet of languages has made it challenging to select one as a LoLT (Owu-Ewie & Eshum, 2015). Nevertheless, all paramount interactions occur in English, and being comfortable with it is essential (Tang, 2020), but it is not feasible in multilingual and diverse South Africa. Nonetheless, English is a language of note and critical because, for most learners, it is the LoLT from Grade 4 to higher learning institutions.

To successfully teach such a prestigious subject, English teachers must have the skills and competencies to prepare it and be eloquent in reading and writing this prestigious language. Several schools in the Southern African Development Community region

use it as a medium of instruction (Kangira, 2016; Malaba, 2016; Makalela, 2017). The National Education Policy (Act A 27 of 1996) and the South African School's Act (84 of 1996), shortly SASA, selected English as a language of teaching and learning (Tsotetsi *et al.*, 2008). In several schools in the country, English is facilitated to learners as either a first additional language or a second language (Marshall, 2014).

2.4 KEY POLICIES AND RATIONALE FOR UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE

TEACHING IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR READING COMPREHENSION

To facilitate reading among ESL learners, it is critical to understand if teachers have basic abilities to guide reading to ESL learners (Dwiningtiyas *et al.*, 2020). Research indicates that teachers should be continuously upskilled to achieve the goal of teaching English (Elston *et al.*, 2022). The urgency of acquiring reading and writing skills in ESL must be emphasised. Phala and Hugo (2022) argue that learners need assistance with reading, and teachers need to gain essential skills in teaching learners how to read with understanding. Moreover, Ngema (2021) states that the expected reading levels that learners should achieve must be communicated to teachers, and the strategies they will use to support learners have barriers to letter-sound knowledge. Thus, many learners are unable to read (Niken, 2018). This can only be achieved within the prescripts of policies that govern teaching and learning.

2.4.1 The Language in Education (LiEP)

The conclusion of apartheid ushered in democracy in 1994, causing South Africa to adopt a multilingualism policy in the education system. The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) was promulgated in 1997 and was included in the Revised National Curriculum Statements of 2002 (DOE, 2002). The LiEP is the policy that had 11 official languages, that is, nine indigenous, Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu and English and Afrikaans (Chiblow & Meighan, 2021). Lately, South Africa has a new official language. Earlier, the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces agreed to incorporate Sign Language into the constitution. On 19 July 2023, the President made sign language the 12th national language at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. South Africa is now the fourth country in Africa to recognise sign language as an official language (Patrick & Bhengu, 2023).

LiEP (DBE, 1997) aimed to guide how official languages must be taught in schools and put together to address the needs of the public in the transformation. Sapphire (2021) claims that LiEP's purpose is to provide the basis for a clear and compelling utterance to the language policy that anchors the progress of the contemporary curriculum and maintains the home language while additional language is advanced. SASA specifies that every learner at a school must be enrolled in not less than two official languages. Language number one is the first language (L1), the learner's mother tongue. Then, the subsequent language is provided as a Second Language (L2). This means that the LiEP (DBE, 1997) emphasised that learners' L2 is anticipated to be the Foundation of learning and preparing them to acquire L2.

The school's medium of instruction largely depends on what learners or, in some cases, parents choose to make when deciding on their LoLT. The LiEP and SASA agree that the school governing bodies are entrusted with stipulating a school's language policy and emphasising choice, rather than solid state intervention, to determine the policy about the school's medium of instruction (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2022). LiEP aims to enhance the utilisation of learners' mother tongue in schools and guarantees that learners learn an extra language for communication to mitigate the gap between races and motivate learners to respect other cultures and languages (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2022).

2.4.2 School Language Policy (SLP)

Language is how a person acquires knowledge to assemble experiences and ideas. Thus, language endures several cognitive connections and emotional and social attributes that mould learning (Manon, 2020). The language policy for schools is guided by principles derived from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) and the South African Schools Act (SASA) (RSA, 1996). The former Department of Education adopted the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) in 1997 and further clarified this policy in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (NCS) of 2002. Chitapi (2018) articulates that the fundamental concept of the LiEP is to maintain the utilisation of the mother tongue as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) while granting passage to extra language (s). The LiEP has the following stipulations:

Wildsmith-Cromarty and Balfour (2019) indicate that in Grades 1 and 2, the medium of instruction should also be offered as a learning area. After that, in Grades 3 and upwards, learners should be given their instruction medium and an additional language as a learning area (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019). Both these languages should be given similar time and materials. Learners should be able to select their LoLT while seeking to be admitted to a school. Suppose the school's LoLT is the language a learner has chosen as their medium of instruction, and there is also available space for that learner. In that case, the school must accept that learner (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019). Suppose that, in the entire district, no school has the anticipated language, such as LoLT. In that case, the learner is permitted to render an application requesting to be provided with instruction in their language of choice from the Head of Department (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019).

2.4.3 The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)

In 2010, the CAPS was inaugurated, and one thing that stood out regarding the research was the time allocated for language (DBE, 2011). As a result, schools were granted room and time to address all language challenges that learners might face (Barrett *et al.*, 2019). The CAPS document needs to give detailed instructions on how reading comprehension should be taught or assessed. This is so even though CAPS entails that a teacher should plan for a comprehension activity each second week (DBE, 2011). Moreover, the assessment programme indicates that all formal assessments should, in one way or another, have a reading comprehension question (DBE, 2011). The objective of CAPS for ESL is to support learners and put them where they can progress from taking instructions in their mother tongue to taking them in English. Besides the curriculum, the DoE also equips learners with prescribed workbooks that help with language skills to cater to their thoughts in all learning areas. The CAPS documents on languages made provision for facilitating reading by utilising different techniques: Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Independent Reading, Reading Aloud, and Paired Reading.

The CAPS document ensures learners are exposed to different genres and motives behind the text (DBE, 2011). Learners' reading in specific ways is contingent on the motive of reading, the learner's prior information of the topic, and the capacity to familiarise themselves with what they are reading (Ojo & Mathabathe, 2021). Thus,

this impacts the degree of commitment and comprehension required to understand the text without error. Chiblow and Meighan (2021) agree with this by mentioning that comprehension only takes place when the text fully engulfs learners. Hence, teachers should see to it that learners are continuously exposed to different texts so that they are granted a chance to work with and be experts in various genres and the meaning behind the text (Elston *et al.*, 2021). The CAPS document defines comprehension as 'reading and viewing' abilities (DBE, 2011). Furthermore, Elston *et al.* (2021) mention that it is an essential aspect in the Intermediate Phase since the syllabus shifts from a 'learning to read' perspective in Grades R to 3 to a 'reading to learn' perspective in Grades 4 to 6. The CAPS document policy emphasises that reading for meaning must be facilitated in a unified, expressive manner to ensure that every learner possesses substantive exposure to the medium of instruction and enhances their critical thinking capacities and reasoning abilities to be in a place of achieving meaningful learning from the text (Ojo & Mathabathe, 2021).

According to Chiblow and Meighan (2021), the CAPS has flaws, and it is concluded that there are discrepancies, numerous inconsistencies, and misalignment of purpose. Ojo and Mathabathe (2021) further indicate that topics in CAPS are not offered in a methodical and consecutive approach. The study observed that teachers often need clarification on different CAPS document aspects in the learning area and choose to continue with how they had been teaching from previous years (Ojo & Mathabathe, 2021). Moreover, these researchers argue that the CAPS needs to develop practical implementation methods. Chiblow and Meighan (2021) indicate that the demands aligned with CAPS are improbable in constructively improving learners' reading comprehension.

2.5 THE TRANSITION FROM GRADES 3 TO 4 AND THE READING COMPREHENSION PROBLEM IN GRADE 4

Primary school is formative in a learner's academic and social development. However, there are some significant transitions that learners must make and be ready for during these years. Most learners in South Africa transition from their home language as a medium of instruction from Grades R to 3 to English in Grade 4 (Netshipise *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, these learners are also not exposed to formal tests and examinations. Netshipise *et al.* (2022) describe a transition as a movement occurring

from one recognisable setting to another. It is defined as a process where policy and practice have been adapted to support learners in entering their new learning environment in preparation for future learning and development (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2022). In Grade 3, learners master essential concepts and skills, while in Grade 4, learners are required to think critically, problem-solve, and work independently (Maphiri, 2017).

Different changes occur in a learner's progression from Grade 3 to 4, such as environmental transition, language transition (Sesotho to English), and multiple teachers teaching a learner in different subjects. Manditereza (2021) consequently observed that learners experience various challenges when transitioning from the known to the unknown experiences, which makes them uncomfortable. Thus, because of this comfortability, learners often experience shock, fear, and loneliness. As a result, learners need to be nurtured to adjust to these transitions.

Additionally, Robertson and Graven (2020) observed that learners attending township schools need help adapting to their transition from Grade 3 to 4 because the LoLT is the home language up to Grade 3. In the Intermediate Phase, they must swiftly transition to English as a medium of instruction. Moreover, Evans and Nthulana (2018) observed that most Tshivenda-speaking teachers need help making detailed English explanations to learners in Grade 4. In most cases, they start by asking learners a question in English. Afterwards, they rephrase what they have asked in Tshivenda to ensure that their learners understand what they are referring to, resulting in much time needing to be recovered. Another transitional problem is the workload; the learning areas increased from four to six, each with its own content.

Nkomo (2021) mentions that learners advance from being taught how to read in Grades R to 3 to seeking meaning from what they read in the intermediate phase. Hence, they must be skilled in reading. Learners must master reading the expository text and analyse various texts critically. To meet the academic demands in Grade 4, learners must be proficient in reading and writing and fully comprehend their reading. For a Grade 4 learner to be considered a fluent reader, according to a set of characteristics that were put together by the DoE (2007), the learner must be in a position to employ contrasting 'cueing' systems, be capable of noticing the most similar words in a text, mastering the art of fluently reading at least 60 words in a minute,

comprehending implied meaning, reading more extended and compound sentence structures, showing the progressing knowledge of story segments and be able to use the reference resources with an instruction.

2.6 THE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN TEACHING READING

COMPREHENSION

Teachers are confronted with many difficulties when dealing with learners with reading barriers. These difficulties are problematic for teachers because reading aims to understand, and all learners need to read, irrespective of their barriers. Moreover, learners with reading barriers find it hard to read and spell, making it hard to understand what they read (Yilmaz & Melekoglu, 2022). They also need help to pen down their answers when responding to comprehension questions. Ensuring this set of learners is truly learning is difficult (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

Teachers' classroom effectiveness is rooted in content mastery and pedagogical capacities. However, teachers use the outdated teaching method, which is teacher-centred, that reduces the learner to a non-active spectator in the whole teaching procedure; thus, it is paramount for teachers to develop activities that challenge learners to improve their reading skills (Cole-Onaifo, 2022). Numerous teachers are falling short in helping learners who struggle to read. Thus, even when reading resources are abundant, the needs of learners struggling to read are not catered for, and the teacher needs to learn how to help these learners (Mohammed & Amponsah, 2018).

As a result, Sibanda (2018) argues that to teach effectively, teachers must teach learners to utilise reading methods and choose the proper one to enable them to understand the text. Similarly, Elston *et al.* (2022) agree that after teachers have taught learners, they must allow them to scrutinise the text and urge learners to use these skills individually. Olifant *et al.* (2020) also emphasise that the teacher's perspective and approach are the primary determining factors of whether effective teaching and learning will take place or not. For example, if the teaching techniques of reading are inefficient, this might unintentionally lead to learners having poor comprehension skills. Moreover, Hanaysha *et al.* (2023) argue that excellent teaching offers good learning experiences with superior exercises and an environment suited for teaching and learning. Hence, using only a teacher-centred approach might frustrate rather than

energise learners to read and learn. Therefore, Chang (2019) suggests that to facilitate reading and improve comprehension successfully, teachers must scrutinise their techniques, review, and share their ideas with other teachers.

When teachers from time to time scrutinise their techniques, it allows them to shift from theoretical perceptions to teaching practices that fit learners in their settings. Moreover, it will enable them to construct knowledge of pedagogical subject matter, which only appears to develop due to teacher education courses (Barut & Wijaya, 2020). On the other hand, it is also important to remember that teachers' working conditions are unfavourable in facilitating teaching and learning. Overcrowding, learners' high absenteeism, lack of teaching resources, and insufficient teachers are just a few factors that hinder the teaching and learning process (Sharp *et al.*, 2020). When the classroom is overcrowded, it becomes challenging for the teacher to focus on learners on all learners simultaneously, most especially those who are struggling.

2.6.1 The Challenges of teaching Reading to Second Language learners

It is vital to critically evaluate a learner's reading difficulties, which is fundamental at the core of their inability to read and write and potential challenges experienced in reading comprehension in ESL. For learners to fully develop their linguistic and academic prowess, they must be offered enough time to master English (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). So, emphasis should be placed on the structure of English as a language. English words are confusing, especially for Second Language learners (Alghamdi, 2019). Additionally, learners lack sufficient time to cognitively understand the text they are exposed to and reply with relevant responses, particularly among natives. Specific sources come from the incorrect pronunciation of words because English is not their home language; they specialise in new words and need to understand what the words mean, coupled with little to no reading habits (Mtshali & Mashiya, 2022). In these situations, learners need to take it to themselves and dedicate ample time to be able to speak and write English among their peers.

Challenges in reading and disturbances cause poor reading capacities among Intermediate Phase learners. Cicekci and Sadik (2019) indicate that a substantial attention span is needed for reading and understanding. Thus, addressing the problem of a short attention span while reading is critical because it significantly and negatively impacts literacy development, especially in learners in the Intermediate Phase (Cicekci

& Sadik, 2019). Merga (2020) mentions that most teachers say that a short attention span retard reading abilities. On top of that, it affects initial literacy and intellectual capacities, such as linguistic development, vocabulary, and short-term memory. It is therefore necessary to work on the problem of short-term memory as soon as possible to read comprehension as early as possible (Merga, 2020). Neglecting it might result in tenacious difficulties in reading that might hinder educational performance.

2.7 TEACHERS' USE OF READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

Reading requires a person to identify and understand a line of words fluidly. Its detailed process includes comprehension, word recognition, engagement, and oral fluency (Desta, 2020). Comprehension is paramount for the academic success of a learner because through reading and listening, the learner acquires knowledge, effective communication, and fictional words (Naiken, 2016). An objective of reading the whole passage is to get a comprehensive comprehension of the entire text as opposed to extracting the meaning of single words or a couple of sentences; hence, at times when a learner faces difficulties in reading comprehension, the text will not be established (Gedik & Akyol, 2022). The overall objective of reading comprehension is for learners to understand the content they are exposed to. It is not a passive procedure but requires deliberate and reflective encounters between the text and the person reading it. It requires high cognitive and problem-solving skills (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

2.7.1 Teacher Read aloud.

According to Zelaya (2022), Read-aloud is an educational practice where teachers read by introducing learners to the joy of constructing meaning from texts aloud to learners. While the teacher reads, they incorporate variations in pitch, tone, pace, volume, pauses, eye contact, questions, and comments to produce a fluent and enjoyable delivery. In addition, Mitchell (2015) says that reading aloud demonstrates the relationship between the printed word and meaning, which means that learners understand that print tells a story or conveys information and invites them into a conversation with the author and is the most crucial activity that teachers can do with learners. Paige (2020) argues that reading aloud significantly improves reading comprehension ability in ESL by building many critical foundational skills, introducing vocabulary, providing a fluent, expressive reading model, and helping learners recognise what reading for meaning is.

Venketsamy and Sibanda's (2021) study showed that all teachers were convinced that reading aloud was essential for learners to know and understand English. Moreover, reading aloud proved to be a paramount tool for enabling learners to engage in discussions of the text. Venketsamy and Sibanda (2021) further mention that all teachers mentioned the need to pair reading aloud with discussion to ensure learners expand all areas of communicative abilities. Therefore, reading aloud is considered by all teachers as an essential listening activity that gives learners a chance to listen attentively. Listening aloud allows the learner to notice the language, a foundation of language that can be incorporated into the English learning process (Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2021).

2.7.2 Shared Reading

Saarah (2017) claims that collaborative read-aloud, where learners jointly read a text while guided by a teacher, is the simplest meaning of shared reading. Sharing books and stories with learners helps their learning, development, language, and communication. Learners learn vital skills for later reading and writing; sharing books also helps with talking, listening, and communication skills. Shared reading is essential to learners' ability to read comprehension in ESL as they make connections between background knowledge and new information. It offers teachers opportunities to expand vocabulary, demonstrate decoding and reading comprehension strategies, and learn conventions of print, such as reading from left to right (Smith *et al.*, 2021).

However, Elston *et al.* (2022) indicate that teachers should refrain from reading printed words aloud so learners can mimic the teachers because it is not an effective way of learning how to read. Instead, learners should be taught how to read words to construct their understanding. She emphasises that learners must know how to read independently; even when learners mimic a teacher for a term or two, it is a futile, unproductive exercise and, most times, wastes time (Elston *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, Banditvilai (2020) claims that there is little proven evidence that shared reading can enhance reading comprehension. However, she argues that such skills can be quickly developed in preschool and the Foundation Phase. Cekiso and Olifant (2023) agree with this by mentioning that recent research has focused on how learners' attention can be productively directed on print during shared reading. For example, when a teacher is tasked with teaching learners who have not mastered reading basics, big

books and projections are helpful. To effectively do this, the teacher must demonstrate how learners must move through the text and how to use grammar (Cekiso & Olifant, 2023).

Most importantly, shared reading can be used in comprehension techniques for learners who still need to learn how to read or as a starting point for teaching comprehension-developing techniques (Cekiso & Olifant, 2023). Teachers reading aloud can be a suitable method of enabling learners to build listening comprehension methods for reading in later stages. Even though listening is not directly proportional to reading, the ability to use this during listening is arguably easier to convert to reading (Banditvilai, 2020). Listening effort gives learners the upper hand that can be used in reading. In this teaching method, the teacher reads for learners, but it should be emphasised that this replacement is short and will last until learners can read for themselves or they have achieved a certain level of proficiency (Elston *et al.*, 2022). Then, learners must take over reading themselves.

2.7.3 Group-guided Reading

Suckow (2019) maintains that teachers work with learners with the same reading capacities in group-guided reading. Barnes *et al.* (2023) outline that guided reading allows learners to learn from each other and use strategies for reading that enable successful independent reading for meaning. Each learner's role during guided reading is to implement the pivotal approach of reading the whole text, not a page. Group-guided reading is essential in ESL comprehension because learners implement familiar techniques in a new text, broadening their understanding and approach to reading (Suckow, 2019). The crucial element of all the guided reading sessions is the teacher's literacy programme and whether a teacher can create a positive environment for learners (Kitsili and Murray, 2024).

It is well documented in the literature, both in the country and abroad, that a teacher is a critical factor in the classroom (Kitsili & Murray, 2024). Besides expensive modern programmes, the teacher is always essential in stipulating whether a learner will thrive in guided reading. Moreover, researchers also discovered that many more teachers need help to address the aspects of guided reading: levelling and text option, assessment, responding to errors in decoding or comprehension, and managing

learners working away from the teacher. One may wonder why most teachers need clarification and help with guided reading (Presley, 2019).

The basic answer is that most teachers need sufficient training and continuous support to teach guided reading effectively. One of the participants in the study of Kitsili and Murray (2024) claimed that there needs to be more governmental involvement in enhancing teachers' knowledge and supporting teachers' capacity and confidence in guided reading. Moreover, due to the influence of political unions, it is challenging to give teachers training and backing, even if it means enhancing their capacity. Thus, if the system does not have sufficient teachers to teach guided reading effectively, guided reading will not be successfully implemented.

Kitsili and Murray (2024) further elucidate that teachers' efforts in guided reading are essential for learners' success. Throughout the guided reading, seasoned teachers think on their feet to address each learner's needs. These choices could be connected to helping learners choose relevant techniques to address difficult words or develop meaning. Additionally, what a teacher says and how she says it moulds the whole conversation and dialogue of the period. After that, it is up to teachers to hold tight to this power or share it with learners (Presley, 2019). However, teachers must refrain from being the only knowledge holders; they must perceive guided reading sessions as a chance to develop fresh meanings with learners instead of transferring old ones (Merchant, 2023).

Merchant (2023) mentions that the central component of guided reading is learners reading a text at a certain level while the teacher guides them through word work comprehension and meaning-developing techniques. The National Research Centre on English Learning and Achievement researched teachers in Grades 1 and 4 and discovered six specific behaviours in all the teachers (Fesi & Mncube 2021). From all these teachers, learners showed specific proficiency in reading and writing. Kitsili and Murray (2024) credited their success to emphasising that these teachers gave to the following instructional attributes: time, text, teaching, talk, tasks, and testing. Participants ensured that learners spent at least 50% of their time at school actively reading and writing (Kitsili & Murray, 2024). These participants also had a broad selection of fiction and non-fiction texts to select from. Kitsili and Murray (2024) mention that the participants also had learners reading at 97% accuracy.

2.7.4 Paired Reading

Gedik and Akyol (2022) state that paired reading is when a learner reads a text with another learner to develop their reading skills. The two learners may have the same reading ability, or one may be higher than the other, and the methodology will differ based on who the learner is being paired with. Furthermore, Almutairi (2018) mentioned that paired reading is a form of paper-to-peer learning, as learners read aloud to each other in pairs to improve their fluency and reading ability in English as a second language. Reading paired texts assists with reading comprehension, vocabulary, erudition, etc. Additionally, it consists of reading several texts highlighting the same issue, which is highly effective when analysing passages.

A quantitative study was conducted by Byer (2022) among five participants that explored the impact of paired reading with a peer; the general feeling of most participants was that paired reading did not have any significance. Four participants confirmed that paired reading improves reading accuracy, although the variable's strength differed in each case. Learners of participants who showed a higher percentage of improvement were those who received a higher number of intervention sessions (Byer, 2022). Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) stipulate that if an impact is seen in not less than three participants in a study, a conclusion can be made, which was the case with the study. Laura and Szczerbinski (2021) conducted three case studies focusing on paired reading with a peer. From the first round, 15 pairs of primary school learners used paired reading three times every week for six weeks. Teachers who observed the learners who participated in the study reported positive gains, increased confidence and interest, and improved reading skills (Laura & Szczerbinski, 2021).

Moreover, four out of five participating teachers in the study of Byer (2022) claimed that their learners did not improve reading fluency during paired reading. An observable theme was that three out of the five participants showed a higher level of variability from the fluency scores throughout the shared reading, and two of the participants demonstrated that their learner's variability was reduced when paired reading was replaced by reading aloud (Byer, 2022). Existing research that focused on fluency has different conclusions. However, a sustained conclusion is that fluency requires longer interventions before significant differences can be observable (Laura & Szczerbinski, 2021).

2.7.5 Independent Reading

Independent reading is a practice that supports learners in developing and practising how to read while reading texts that are easy to decode, are familiar, or provide high levels of engagement (Swanson, 2023). By participating in independent reading, learners can practice decoding and comprehension strategies, aspire to read more books in general, such as their books, get more interest in exercises that are in alignment with their reading, realise that they can comprehend and pen down about their reading meaningfully, and learn that literature can enrich their lives (Sanmugam & Yamat, 2022). Ithindi (2019) affirms that engaging in independent reading boosts their confidence and cultivates a positive attitude toward learning reading comprehension in ESL. Additionally, the freedom to select their books and immerse themselves in reading for extended periods empowers learners with a sense of ownership over their learning.

A study was conducted by Brannan and Giles (2017) that investigated primary school teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of independent reading on learners' reading achievement. The research narrated and examined the data collected from Likert scale questions, open-ended survey questions, interview questions from a primary school ESL teacher, and an observation of the researcher in the classroom. Analysis of the first question that focused on the teacher's perception of learners being given time to select what to read for an independent reading session demonstrated that there was asymmetry in perception from ESL teachers regarding the first question. However, the respondents agreed that poor readers often participated in reading when learners were permitted to select their reading material (Brannan & Giles, 2017). However, one of the outstanding limitations of the research was that it only concentrated on one private school and did not have a viewpoint of the public school teachers (Brannan & Giles, 2017).

2.8 THREE-PHASED PROCESS OF READING TEACHING IN CAPS

Mather and Land (2014) mention that reading instruction in CAPS involves three phases that help learners develop their reading skills and comprehend texts deeply in English. For second language learners, these phases model independent reading for decoding and understanding a text.

2.8.1 Phase 1: Pre-reading

The pre-reading phase prepares learners for the text by activating their prior knowledge and building anticipation (Mather & Land, 2014). It helps them make connections and predictions, which enhances their comprehension. During this phase, learners engage in activities such as:

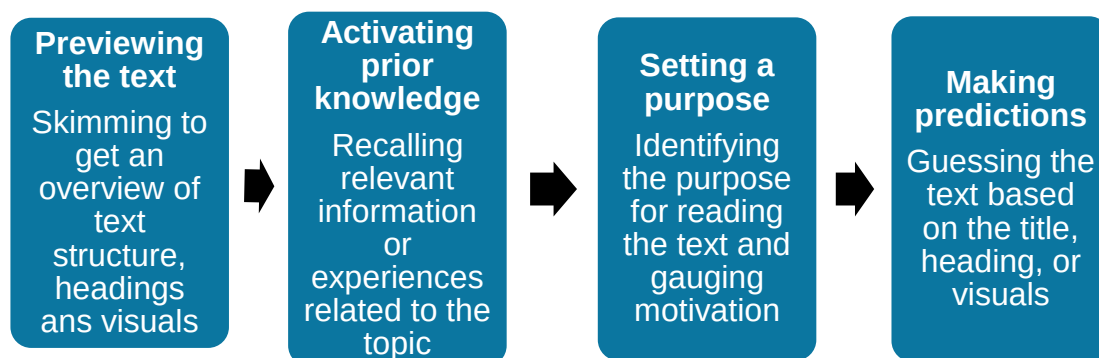


Figure 2.2. Pre-Reading: Activating Prior Knowledge

2.8.2 Phase 2: During-reading

The during-reading phase focuses on actively engaging with the text to extract meaning and monitor comprehension (Mather & Land, 2014). Learners employ various strategies to understand the text's content, structure, and language. Activities during this phase include,

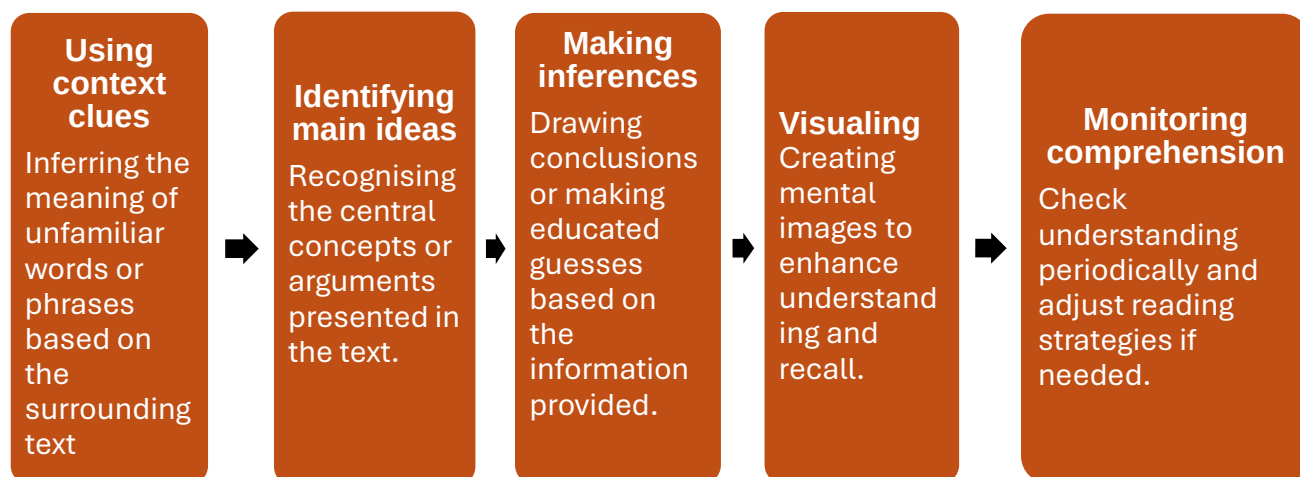


Figure 2.3 During reading: Engaging activity with text

2.8.3 Phase 3: Post-reading

The post-reading phase focuses on consolidating understanding, reflecting on the text, and extending learning beyond the text (Mather & Land, 2014). Learners engage in

activities that deepen their comprehension and encourage critical thinking. These activities include:

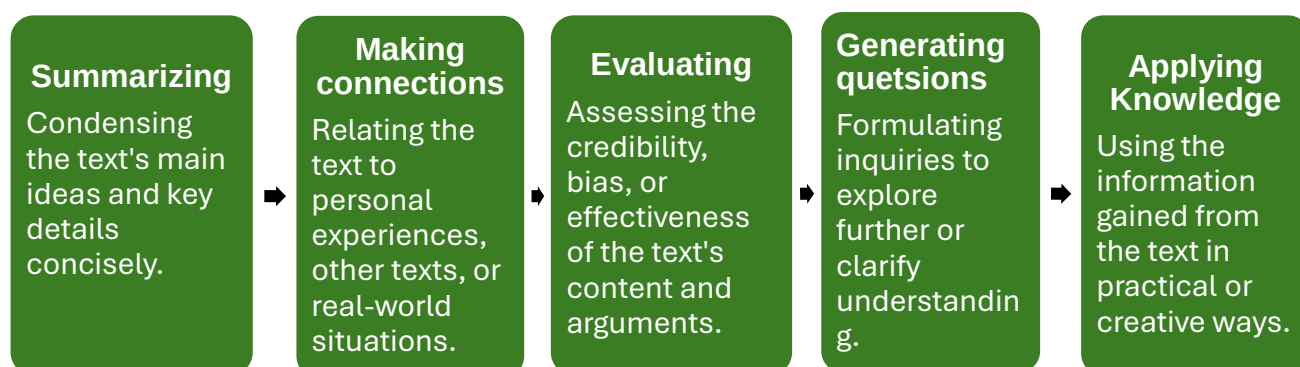


Figure 2.4 Post-reading: consolidating understanding

2.9 THE TEACHERS' TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCY

Education has been rapidly changing over time. Since then, we have been surrounded by teachers trying to provide quality education and lifelong learning. Machado and Davim (2023) argue that Present-day modernisation has dramatically influenced our curricula. Our learners' learning styles and preferences have changed with current situations, trends, and the like. Carrió-Pastor (2022) emphasised the significance of upskilling teachers to increase proficiency in instruction and training strategies and techniques, most notably in an event where the LoLT is not their mother tongue. Mandyata *et al.* (2023) revealed that training abilities are needed because teachers lack the basic skills to teach learners reading.

Rauteda (2023) agrees that teachers need to get assistance through training and direction through the DoE as learners are taught how to read by learners. Oliveira *et al.* (2019) articulate and emphasise the necessity for additional guidance in training reading teachers. The demand for effective teachers who can provide for the needs of our learners has been increasing. It is well-documented that teacher competence is central to educational reform because they are the ones that influence what transpires in the classroom (Lodge *et al.*, 2018). Hence, teachers must arm themselves with recent techniques to facilitate reading in a way that equips a learner with educational, verbal, and social needs (Coullie, 2020).

Sadly, teachers are not adequately trained in South Africa to meet these needs (Munna & Kalam, 2021). Reading is inherent in all learning areas, and sadly, it is well documented that most teachers do not have the skills to facilitate how to read. It is, therefore, important for competent and well-qualified teachers to utilise effective strategies for facilitating English reading (Moswane *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Jakobson *et al.* (2022) argue that when teachers teach FSL reading skills, adequate development and technical know-how enable learners to read, enhancing reading development. Fesi and Mcube (2021) observed that inadequate teacher training is the primary source of poor reading in learners. Steinke and Wildsmith-Cromarty (2021) also highlighted that those teachers needed more support through teacher through from the DoE.

2.10 RESOURCES THAT TEACHERS USE TO TEACH READING COMPREHENSION

Teachers have an essential role in teaching learners how to read. They are tasked with utilising various methods to enhance the reading capacity of learners whose home language differs from English in learning and teaching schools (Fawole & Pillay, 2019). While it is constitutional for all learners to receive education in the mother tongue, each school has the right to formulate its language policy. Fawole and Pillay (2019) state that many learners whose mother tongue is not English attend schools where LoLT is English. Hence, they are significantly challenged in their academics. It is, therefore, the responsibility of teachers to utilise various resources to ensure that all learners are catered for.

2.10.1 Core words in English reading comprehension

Core words have two vast definitions that are used entirely differently (Hayes, 2016). Customarily, this concept is mainly used to highlight haphazardly spelt words presumed impervious to decoding. Alternatively, sight words represent all words read spontaneously (Strauss & Bipath, 2020). Seasoned readers can master reading all words, for example, coincidental or nauseated, as a sight word, irrespective of assistance to memorisation. Bell and Wheldall (2022) indicate that effortless access to sight vocabulary makes reading much more accessible and improves reading comprehension. Words move quickly from where they are written to the memory bank,

enabling readers to pivot on understanding a text's essence (Rawlins & Invernizzi, 2019).

Knowing the high-frequency words supplies learners with an upper hand when they read a new text (Simonton, 2019). When learners realise that more than half of the words on a new page can be identified, it encourages them to continue reading (Hariffin, 2023). Even though sight words contain five words, they help learners understand the story. They grant a story its perspective. Even though most textbooks use sketches and images, the goal is for learners to understand a story by reading the texts. Simonton (2019) states that core words supply critical hints to the text's explanation, which assists learners in comprehending the story.

Ariffin's (2021) study analysed teachers' perceptions regarding core vocabulary; most participants agreed that reinforcing core vocabulary knowledge enhances English skills and proficiency. Moreover, the same study revealed that most teachers who participated in the research strongly agreed that vocabulary is the critical element of language learning because communication would be impossible without it.

Additionally, participants in the findings of the research of Budiman *et al.* (2023) believed that giving learners short and lucid activities to exercise vocabulary construction and enhance fluency in English, resorting to their home language as a material when needed to facilitate new words and be made conspicuous that is vital to grant learners absolute vocabulary instructions while teaching English. However, the same study revealed that this reasoning learning differed from what they observed in the classroom. The researcher mentioned that the traditional method of teaching English was practised in the school (Budiman *et al.*, 2023).

Moreover, a large portion of participants in the research of Bedilu and Degefu (2024) indicated that overcrowding and lack of vocabulary knowledge and how to differentiate it from core words are the main barriers, followed by the insufficient time allocated to teach English during class time.

2.10.2 The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Multilingual pedagogies

i. The Use Of Technology In Teaching Reading Comprehension

Modern learners live in the era of instant knowledge and boundless entertainment. Most of this entertainment is encapsulated by smartphones and other technological products. For example, while earlier visions of mobile phones did not go beyond making calls and sending messages, today's smartphones have ultimate possibilities, such as learning and reading materials and exciting games to captivate learners. Acuña-Torres *et al.* (2024) highlight that learning with technological devices is not like learning in a classroom; a smartphone enables learners to learn anywhere at any time. On top of that, when connected to the internet, they unlock the whole world to the learners, allowing them to get hold of reading materials that can significantly enhance their comprehension (Acuña-Torres *et al.*, 2024). With so many alternatives a learner can choose from, awareness of how learners accept and use technology is very much needed to facilitate techniques that offer beneficial strategies to learners.

An advantage of technological devices can also be a disadvantage, especially when it comes to a Grade 4 learner. Even though a smartphone is always in the hands of a learner, all its functions require little to no effort to operate and enjoy. All it ever needs is to scroll and click on desired content. Opposed to reading as a form of entertainment that requires substantial intentions, artistry, and more extended periods (Husnita *et al.*, 2023). Because of this, it is not attractive to the 'instant generation.' It will have to compete with all other smartphone features and most likely not be the first choice, which most learners do only when it is an obligation and academically compelled. Recent psychological studies also claim that too much screen time from computers, smartphones, televisions, etc., harms reading and comprehension because both are processed in different brain parts (Husnita *et al.*, 2023). Husnita *et al.* (2023) claim that watching a digital screen is processed based on universal depiction, which is more accessible than the more complicated visual and cognitive procedure used during reading.

ii. Code-switching

South Africa is a linguistically and culturally diverse country with 11 official languages (DBE, 1997), the 12th one of which is currently listed as the South African Sign Language. They consider using only English to teach ESL learners impractical and limiting. According to Zondi and Mncube (2024), code-switching must be viewed as a

manipulative in an ESL classroom, not as a threat. Assessment criteria from Grades 1 to 9 indicate that one of the criteria for facilitating learners' use of language is the skill of changing concepts from one language to another without losing their meaning (Shinga & Pillay, 2023). Thus, code-switching is allowed in the classroom. Shinga and Pillay (2023) indicate that code-switching uses multiple languages while communication code-switching is a contextualisation tool that assists in decoding the context and directing teachers to analyse sense in the discussion. Hence, code-switching may be a helpful resource for teachers to enhance Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension abilities.

iii. Translanguaging

The translanguaging technique is a method of overcoming learners' learning challenges in reading comprehension by learning to explain and read the text individually (Rahim *et al.*, 2023). Makalela (2017), Ntombela, Ngubane and Govender (2020), and Rahim *et al.*, 2023 indicate that translanguaging is a language application that employs dissimilar language attributes in a single context. It also aids in developing meaning using more than one language simultaneously. Translanguaging is correctly utilised to make deduction strategies utilising the learner's home language and English in the same encounter. It is also a strategy to endorse learners' polyglot in using all the languages they know as tools for learning, reading, and comprehending (Rahim *et al.*, 2023). Using two languages simultaneously can positively impact learners' identity while learning, increasing engagement and comprehension. It can assist learners in facing their learning barriers.

According to Omidire and Ayob (2021), learners can easily comprehend complicated text by leveraging their prior information about other languages because translanguaging enables learners to access their language bank unconsciously. Hence, when learners read without prior information, it will be difficult for them to comprehend the passage. Thus, translanguaging enhances learners' capacity to apply previous knowledge when responding to questions about the passage they have just read (Garcia & Lin, 2017). Therefore, it is aligned with the integrated skill of reading comprehension to build understanding. The capacity to deduce translanguaging assists the learner in comprehending complicated and obvious messages

encapsulated in the author's choice of vocabulary (Omidire & Ayob, 2021). Therefore, they understand the meaning of the passage, shaping their conclusion.

2.10.3 Monolingual and Bilingual Dictionaries

Both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries usually come in handy in the ESL classroom. Some researchers support that dictionaries help language learners read (Boonmoh, 2021). Most research reveals that using a dictionary may assist learners in enhancing reading comprehension, leading to word development. Learners are observed to improve post-reading comprehension after using a dictionary (Bauer, 2022). Studies also show that using a dictionary helps with vocabulary memory (Hulme & Rodd, 2021; Lopera, 2019); when learners search for a word in a dictionary, they focus on it, assisting them in memorising it. Finally, Ghalebi *et al.* (2020) report that learners demonstrate higher levels of accuracy when they are taught how to use a dictionary before using it.

Nevertheless, language teachers have different opinions on whether a dictionary helps learners (Ezeh *et al.*, 2022). Some teachers believe a dictionary can be inimical, making learners highly dependent on it and misusing it because of their lack of language understanding (Al-Harbi, 2024). Al-Harbi (2024) claims that it is not uncommon for language teachers to complain about the dependency of learners on the dictionary. Numerous studies on dictionary users demonstrated that most learners do not even know how to use a dictionary and fail at lookups during dictionary consultation (Knežević, 2021). Occasionally, learners find it challenging to find the most relevant information they are requested to see or opt for definitions that do not fit the given context. Most teachers claimed that most causes of look-up errors are caused by the fact that most learners focus more on only certain portions of the definition. In some instances, learners misidentify the grammatical categories of the word, which causes them to select the incorrect definition (Knežević 2021).

The study of Al-Harbi (2024) concluded that the errors that learners make are caused by learners' inability to use the dictionary. Most teachers in that research stressed that it is paramount to educate learners on dictionary-use skills before they can use them. It is easy to take for granted that just because learners have dictionaries, they can use them (Al-Harbi, 2024). Ezeh *et al.* (2022) mention that dictionary skills are not paid attention to among other language skills that learners should be taught. In the study

of Bauer (2022), after regular class observations, the researcher and teachers noticed that the use of a dictionary is minimal to non-existent even though complex words are placed in the text or not. Therefore, it is up to language teachers to emphasise the benefits of using a dictionary in reading for comprehension learners. Additionally, ESL teachers should also take notice of the complex nature of dictionary use and the wide selection of dictionaries available to learners (Bauer, 2022).

2.11 THE ABSENCE OF A CULTURE OF READING AS AN IMPLICATION FOR POOR READING COMPREHENSION

Molapo (2016) outlined that reading should be renowned, acknowledged, and honoured to create a thriving reading culture. The reading culture is the foundation of the curriculum and is also essential to the child's overall development (Odunayo, 2022). Moreover, Lotter (2019) says that establishing a conducive environment for reading is an incredible technique to enhance learners' learning and create a constructive bunch that shares the excitement and thrill of reading. Reading is a pivotal element of the syllabus and cuts across the entire spectrum of learning areas to strengthen the process of learners learning. At the core of improving any school, the focus should revolve around enhancing the culture of reading. An environment conducive to reading has numerous advantages, such as connecting the community and enhancing well-being. It additionally trains the brain, improves the lexicon, and builds the concentration span of learners (Mokoena, 2019). It improves linguistic prowess and creative power, equipping learners with academic success in all subjects.

It has been observed that reading for fun in lower Grades has been de-prioritized, with emphasis being placed on instructional reading and standardised literacy testing (Long & Bowels, 2024). Cremin and Scholes (2024) claim that the background and outlook of teachers in the culture of reading for pleasure at home and school are not extensively studied. Learners reading for fun culture can be influenced by their teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards reading. Therefore, teachers need to influence learners' perspectives on the value of reading for pleasure (Cremin & Scholes, 2024). Teachers rooted in the concept that 'good readers' can read fluently tend to focus on technical reading ability and neglect reading for fun (Mokoena, 2019). Mokoena's (2019) research revealed that teachers were genuinely surprised when most learners showed interest when they were asked to read by the researcher,

showing false assumptions that teachers have towards the reading attitude of learners, which then causes them to teach based on false assumptions.

Ahmad and Yamat (2021) also observed that teachers reduce reading frequency immediately after learners can read independently, which affects reading for fun pedagogy. They further claim that reading for fun is pedagogically rooted despite appearing often on the classroom timetable. Classroom teachers argue that they need more professional knowledge to implement a leisure reading culture. While these limitations can be valid, Cremin and Scholes, 2024 claim that classroom teachers are a core element in successfully implementing reading for fun. Olifant et al. (2020) mention that even teachers must classify themselves as avid readers to inculcate a love for reading. They, however, carry the responsibility of effectively implementing reading for fun pedagogy, which shows that if all primary school teachers are devoted to the course implementing reading fun, it can easily be made a culture in most schools (Olifant et al., 2020).

2.11.1 Building and Promoting a Strong Culture of Reading for Reading Comprehension

Promoting reading is every school's responsibility. With a grasp of reading and writing, learners can learn other advanced skills effortlessly. Seven (2020) states that enthusiasm for reading is transmissible and a critical force for learning. These are methods that can build and promote a culture of reading.

Implementing a regular reading schedule such as **Drop Everything And Read** (D.E.A.R.). It is a designated reading programme that allows learners to read independently without disturbances for at least fifteen minutes daily, which can, if done right, profoundly impact learners' reading culture (Miles, 2021). All school community members should also get involved in reading, from the caretaker to the principal. DEAR ensures that reading gets a persistent and entrenched culture that learners will haul through their schooling, enhancing their reading culture (Tolulope, 2021).

Since 1967, **International Literacy Day (ILD)** celebrations have taken place annually to remind the public of the significance of literacy as a matter of dignity and human rights and to advance the literacy agenda toward a more literate and sustainable society. Literacy Day should be celebrated regardless of the day it is. Days like World

Book Day, World Read Aloud Day, and National Poetry Day bring learners amusing moments and aid in creating a spirited reading culture in the school (Picton *et al.*, 2021).

The **Primary School Reading Improvement Programme** (PSRIP) was introduced in South African schools in 2016 (Mtambo & Tshuma, 2023). Mtambo and Tshuma (2023) further indicate that more than eleven thousand teachers in the Foundation Phase and 263 learning facilitators were coached on reading content and didactics for facilitating the CAPS reading guidelines. This programme aims to improve the facilitation standards in public schools. The correct execution of PSRIP could help alleviate the challenge of reading English and other home languages. The first group of learners whose teachers were trained for PSRIP for three years performed better in Grade 4 than those whose teachers only had one year (Mtambo & Tshuma, 2023). However, in all the schools with PRSIP training, their learners performed better than those whose teachers had no training (Mtambo & Tshuma, 2023).

Numerous research studies on creating a reading culture at a school have demonstrated that teachers are a critical factor in ensuring that learners become avid readers (Merga & Mason, 2019). Reading has been perceived differently by teachers, especially by learners who find it difficult to read, resulting in teachers not putting much effort into teaching learners how to read. Thus, teachers did not deem reading as crucial as other skills, such as speaking and writing skills (Phillips, 2023).

Moreover, to be interested in what they read, learners must be exposed to material they enjoy reading (Merga & Mason, 2019). Moreover, Liswaniso (2023) indicated that most teachers believe that only teachers who are skilled readers can create a reading culture at a school. He further mentions that a competent reader does not require a teacher to have in-depth knowledge of the written and spoken English structure needed to facilitate reading properly. The study revealed that most participants mentioned that they did not learn how to enable reading at university, let alone how to create a reading culture. This line of reasoning is backed by research. For instance, the results of the study of Cekiso (2017) unveiled that teaching reading successfully, especially to ESL learners, requires in-depth capacity and abilities. However, most teachers in different Grades need to prepare to stop reading problems and pick up early signs of reading difficulties from learners that might hinder them from developing

an interest in reading. These concerns are also mentioned by teachers sampled in Liswaniso's (2023) research, who noted that they should be trained to teach reading to learners from different backgrounds. Learner-centred classrooms, which arouse learner's interest, thinking and engagement, are pivotal in learning (Zondi & Mbatha, 2024).

These results are consistent with those of the study of Mpofu and Maphalala (2020), in which teachers complained that reading literacy elements need to be more strategically inserted in the curriculum but are put haphazardly within their preparation program. Moreover, the research also showed that the teachers needed to construct appropriate manipulatives, such as posters, to enable learners to read unaided. However, most teachers admitted they could not design relevant teaching manipulatives, and only a few claimed confidence in creating them (Mpofu & Maphalala, 2020).

Lastly, the research conducted by Stewart and Jansky (2022) demonstrated that teachers are convinced that novice methods of facilitating reading are needed to enhance learners' reading capacity. They claim that novice methods of facilitating reading were required to strengthen the reading capacity of learners as they are convinced that novice methods will improve their capacities as reading facilitators. Additionally, teachers were confident that modern methods of facilitating reading can help them solve challenges that learners face, which can help them effectively and, therefore, unlock a reading culture within a school (Stewart & Jansky, 2022). Figure 5 summarises possible strategies teachers use to encourage reading and facilitate comprehension. These are not exhaustive, and not all of them were discussed within the constraints of this study.

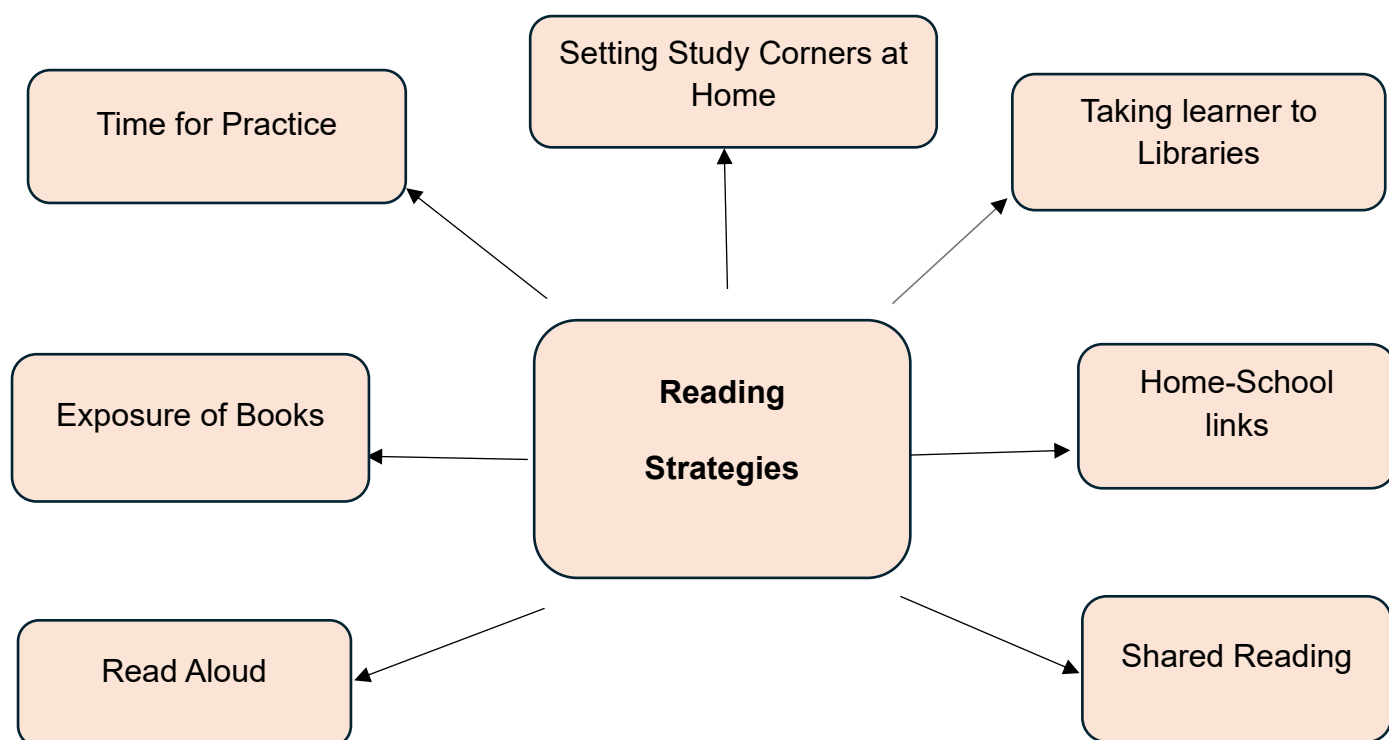


Figure 2.5 Summary of Possible Reading Strategies

2.11.2 The Combination of Intensive and Extensive Reading Activities

Extensive and intensive reading must be coupled with in-class exercises to teach ESL learners to understand the text better. For starters, extensive reading can be done before a reading exercise. Because it introduces and initiates the relevant schema and captures the learner's attention before they start reading (Young & Jee, 2020). During reading classes, coupled with guiding learners in practising comprehension of primary text through intensive reading, exercises teachers must select different passages linking to the significant sentence bid in intensive reading to have a basic explanation of prior information that makes learners initiate their preparatory information to comprehend the theme of what is read thoroughly.

Mafokwane (2017) highlights that the teacher must ask several explorative questions to pave the way for reading. The exercises can take place in a quiet learning space. Following reading texts extensively, learners must be split into smaller bunches to converse about possible teacher's questions to enhance reading comprehension skills. Alternatively, intensive reading is central to the requirements of reading comprehension abilities, mainly when scrutinising significant text. A better way for a teacher to lay out intensive reading during a lesson is by modelling strategies to

understand a story. Bertram, Johson, and Goldring (2022) suggest that reading requirements must include cautious scaffolding, in which teachers utilise different ideas to make sense of the reading tasks. Thus, clear-cut instructions are paramount in intensive reading when learners are taught reading comprehension skills directly.

Teachers are central in all practices during intensive reading activities. *Dole et al.* (1991) highlighted reciprocal teaching as a collaborative learning procedure where teachers and learners cooperatively understand a text. There are several benefits of using reciprocal teaching to facilitate comprehension (*Farris et al.*, 2004). *Farris et al.* (2004) mention that reciprocal teaching consists of prediction, questioning, and summarisation comprehension strategies. However, reciprocal teaching, scrutiny of text construction, and visual presentations can facilitate these three skills. When learners and teachers read the text, teachers should ask comprehension questions aligned with these techniques and discuss and carefully analyse the text.

2.11.3 Parental Involvement

Research has documented that parents are critical to their children's education (Okello, 2023). Overwhelming data show that a child's educational success is directly proportional to how involved their parents are in their schoolwork (Sedibe, 2012; Minilal, 2014; Ndwandwe, 2023), their attitudes and motivation toward school or lessons (Selolo, 2018; Sibanda, 2021; Adelabu & Mncube, 2023;) and desire for education (Poole, 2017; Klopper, 2021; Miller, 2021). Given that reading comprehension capacity obtained from lower Grades influences learners' schooling experiences and their lives (Kigobe, 2019), it can be deemed that parental involvement is essential in the progress of lower Grades learners' reading comprehension abilities.

Parents are responsible for ensuring learners harness their reading skills because they are the first teachers a learner encounters. Parental development has been described as a different exercise that enables parents to partake in the academic development of their learners at school and, most importantly, at home. These exercises include but are not limited to school volunteer services, information exchange, and helping learners with homework (Iroegbu & Igweike, 2020). Dick (2019) mentions that parental involvement is an activity that is shared between parents and their learners as well as between teachers and parents on the school premises in such a way that it will positively impact the learner's educational success.

One of the most popular parental involvement activities is reading short stories to learners when they are young. This positively impacts reading development, their ability to express themselves and language comprehension, and their general attitude towards reading and attention span in the classroom. On top of that, learners who have been introduced to books early by their parents have the upper hand in school over other learners who did not get the same opportunity. Early exposure to reading enables learners to have extended vocabulary and a springboard they can utilise to build imaginary sentences. Moreover, parental involvement in learners' literacy development at home is linked to increased psychological sensitivity.

The discussion of the study by Kalayci and Ergül (2020), which researched the teacher's perceptions and experiences regarding parents' involvement in their children's literacy and reading instructions, indicated that teachers that participated in the research mentioned that most parents take heed of their children's reading skills. One participant in the study of Ndwandwe (2023) stated that parents are their partners in learners' educational performance. While another participant indicated that learners are taught how to read at school, yet the passion for reading is harnessed at home. However, Schmid and Garrels (2021) claim that one of the participants in his study indicated that even if parents are interested in their children's education, they lack basic knowledge of the English language to successfully help children with reading for understanding. Thus, parents are logistically involved rather than strategically ensuring their children can read with understanding and improve their academic results (Schmid & Garrels, 2023).

However, Ahmed, Ronka and Littunen (2024), who conducted a study focusing on rural schools, indicated that most participants indicated that most parents do not make any effort toward their children's academic work. The leading causes are socioeconomic factors such as having too many children, lack of educational background, or broken family systems (Ahmed *et al.*, 2024). This reasoning is consistent with Munje and Mncube (2018), who mention that teachers argue that most learners have unsatisfactory performance in their schoolwork because parents are not involved in their children's academics.

Govender (2021) concluded that teachers outlined the following as factors preventing successful parental involvement: poverty, leading parents to continuously pursue

money, causing them to be absent at home, and being unable to help children with their schoolwork. Then, all the responsibility falls on the shoulders of teachers with little to no support from their parents (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). In certain circumstances, the school is to blame because they lack a robust connection linking the parents with the teachers, resulting in parents not feeling welcomed., especially low-income earners. This situation worsens because some parents are illiterate and can only express themselves in their home language, making it challenging for them to assist their learners with their schoolwork (Motseke, 2020).

2.12 CONCLUSION

Teaching reading and all the technicalities that come with it is challenging for teachers in Grade 4 who teach ESL. Reading comprehension contributes significantly to the progress of a learner. Hence, teachers in Grade 4 can be adequately upskilled around the facilitation of reading and technicalities of addressing reading comprehension challenges that learners might face. The next chapter presents the methodological processes employed and which framed this study.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter two highlighted the theoretical lens and a detailed assessment of global and local associated literature. In this chapter, the methodological approach and the stance of the study are discussed. A qualitative approach, case study design, interpretivist paradigm, and purposive selection of participants were employed to answer the study's research questions. Because this is a qualitative study, the researcher used interviews, classroom observations, and document scrutiny to collect data. This chapter also explains the data generation and analysis process, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Table 3.1 Summary of research design

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY		
Paradigm		Interpretivist
Research Approach		Qualitative research approach
RESEARCH DESIGN		
Case Study		
SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS		
Purposive Selection of Participants	Six Grade 4 English teachers at Four Primary schools in Botshabelo.	
DATA GENERATION		
Data generation methods	Semi-structured interviews, Classroom observations and document analysis.	
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA GENERATION METHOD	VALUE
1. What are Grade 4 teachers' experiences of teaching reading comprehension in English as a Second language at Botshabelo Schools?	Face-to-face Semi-structured interviews	To get first-hand lived experiences of participants' experiences of teaching reading comprehension in Grade 4 ESL classrooms

2. What strategies do Grade 4 teachers use to teach ESL learners reading comprehension?	Face-to-face Interviews and Documents	To understand their perspectives on strategies they use to teach reading comprehension and actual practice in the classroom.
3. How do Grade 4 teachers teach ESL learners reading comprehension strategies?	Classroom observations	To observe their practice and the effectiveness or lack thereof of the strategies they use to teach reading comprehension
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION		
Thematic analysis: transcription, coding, formation of themes and categories.		
QUALITY CRITERIA AND RIGOUR OF RESEARCH		
Trustworthiness		
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF RESEARCH		
Informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, POPI Act		

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm can be deemed an epistemological and ontological frame of the study, and it is also an exemplary lens and arrangement of how the researcher perceives the study. Put differently, it comprises thoughts, assumptions, or comprehensions rooted in workable theories and applications (Keong *et al.*, 2023). A paradigm seeks to find how information is comprehended and studied (Keong *et al.*, 2023). The research paradigm is a framework among researchers regarding how the problem must be understood and solved (Mogashoa, 2014). The commonly used paradigms are Positivism, Interpretivism, and Pragmatism (Keong *et al.*, 2023). This research was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, elaborated below.

3.2.1 Interpretivist paradigm (Interpretivism)

Interpretivism, as a befitting paradigm of this research study, emphasises that people can contribute to comprehending their surroundings by experiencing and reviewing those experiences (Adom, Ankrah & Yaboah, 2016). The interpretivist school of thought highlights that actuality is built by an individual's subjective experience of the external world (Van der Walt, 2020). Therefore, these subjects may embrace an inter-subjective epistemology and ontological belief of socially constructed reality.

Qualitative research mainly uses the interpretivism approach. This is because rather than using a single reality, it is predicated on several realities. Interpretivism is the technique of obtaining information in totality that is rooted in the understanding of the explanations that people link to their behaviours. Its guiding principle is that an investigation cannot be conducted out of context; it should be detected directly from people's experiences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

Van der Walt (2020) believes that interpretivists are not foundationalists and that different routes or methods can provide knowledge. Kivunjan and Kiyini (2017) claim that theories that fall under the interpretivist tradition cannot be classified as 'correct' or 'incorrect.' However, these theories must be decided based on how the researcher deems them and others in the same area. These theories strive to obtain meaning from the subject by examining the phenomenon of interest. According to Yuksel and Yildirim (2015), interpretivists highlight mastery and denotation as acts of interpretation. Consequently, according to this school of thought, objective knowledge does not exist independently of the thinking and reasoning of humans. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) argue that interpretivist research assumes that ingress to reality is via social norms, such as language, awareness, and apportioned explanations. The interpretivist paradigm is rooted in experiences and clarifications; hence, observations are meant to gather data from experiences, while interpretation explains data by extracting deductions or determining the link connecting the data and the literature (Frechette *et al.*, 2020).

This paradigm was central to this study as it strives to create meaningful phenomena through the explanations that people give to it (Ryan, 2018). Ponelis (2015) adds that the interpretivist paradigm relates to the perception of the individual's subjective experience of their surroundings. These individuals use definition-based methodologies like interviews and observations rooted in the subjective relationship between the researcher and the subjects. This is the interpretivist approach, which aims to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action. This is what this study seeks to explore. Consequently, the study provides a compelling and conscious composition for executing it and enhancing its mastery standard. Hence, the researcher believes that the interpretivist paradigm is relevant in this regard. To better understand the experience and perspective of participants, the researcher

utilised an interpretivism approach in the form of interviews and observations (Frechett *et al.*, 2020). Even though individual experiences and understanding may differ outright, this approach recognises that all are valid and relevant. (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022).

3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

This approach examines and supplies a deeper understanding of global phenomena (Ugwu & Eze Val, 2023). Participants' perceptions, behaviours, and experiences are generated in a qualitative study, hence it was relevant for this study. The qualitative approach uses words such as 'how' and 'why' rather than numbers to answer the research question. Qualitative research's advantage is its capacity to interpret procedures and arrangements of an individual's conduct, which might be challenging to quantify (Ugwu & Eze Val, 2023). It also enables participants to elaborate on what means, motives, reasoning, emotions, and experiences at a specific period or during an anticipated event. It was suited for a study in an educational context where teachers were interviewed and observed in a classroom.

3.4 CASE STUDY DESIGN

The case study design was used for this research because it is relevant when a researcher wants to obtain tangible, circumstantial, extensive information regarding a particular realistic subject, and it keeps the study focused and manageable (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021). A case study permitted the researcher to study the problematic relationship between the phenomenon, the classroom context, and teacher participants (Coombs, 2022; Rashid *et al.*, 2019). This design offers understanding and creates greater meaning than other available designs (Taherdoost, 2021). A case study design was instrumental in studying teachers' experiences and strategies in their usual and comfortable environment. Five schools were initially selected for this case study, but eventually, only four schools became part of the study. The teacher from the fifth school was unreachable. However, this did not disturb the researcher's plan but sought another participant in the already selected school. The ethical processes were followed with the participant's replacement.

3.5 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The sampled schools were in Botshabelo township, Free State Province, in Motheo district. These schools comprised Black African learners from formal and informal

settlements near the schools. They were all primary schools that house learners from Grades R to 7. Learners in these schools were fed breakfast and lunch daily through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) as they were no-fee paying schools. The LoLT in the Foundation Phase is Sesotho, their mother tongue, meaning they were taught all subjects in Sesotho and ESL. Then, from Grade 4 onwards, all subjects are taught in English, with Sesotho as a home language. This strategy was implemented by the Language in Education Policy, which aims to foster the mother tongue from Grade R to 3 and introduce English in other subjects from the Intermediate Phase.

3.6 PURPOSIVE SELECTION

3.6.1 Selection of participants

The study selected participants using purposive sampling to find relevant data from relevant participants. Chowdhury and Shil (2021) define purposive sampling as taking a portion of the population that embodies the larger population. Shukla (2020) adds that it is taking a specific part of the community as a representative of the whole community. Purposive sampling is conferred on the postulation that all data shall be chosen to thoroughly inspect the phenomena (Shaheen *et al.*, 2021). Participants can only be selected after a few observational site visits. These visits help determine and pinpoint the participants that are aligned with the research aims and objectives. Classifications such as age, gender, experience, functional role, or institutional culture can be head starts, allowing researchers to pinpoint the study's location (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018). Only primary schools with Grade 4 ESL classes from Circuit 6 were selected. Participants that were selected from these schools was ESL teachers in Grade 4.

3.6.2 Selection of relevant documents

The researcher selected the English First Additional Language (As referred to in South Africa) CAPS document for the Intermediate Phase- Grades 4 to 6, with lesson plans per teacher based on teaching reading comprehension, prescribed textbooks, and other resources used by selected participants. Any other document not meeting these requirements was not selected.

3.7 DATA GENERATION

Like Olifant and Cekiso (2022), the researcher generated data using face-to-face semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to ensure Triangulation and data precision. The researcher further analysed documents as mentioned in the above section. Semi-structured interviews were the primary tool for gathering data from teachers, focusing on their experiences in facilitating reading comprehension in ESL in their schools (Olifant & Cekiso, 2022). Additionally, the researcher used observations as a secondary tool to understand what is happening in the classroom. With permission from the participant's observations, it is a powerful tool that enables the researcher to take firsthand data in its natural habitat to strengthen the process of collecting data (Taherdoost, 2021). Finally, the researcher analysed documents to understand what is expected in the curriculum from teachers regarding teaching language and reading comprehension.

3.7.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are a branch of qualitative research rooted in questions and answers during data collection (Alamri, 2019). Unstructured, semi-structured, and structured are different kinds of interviews. Aspers and Corte (2019) state that interviews aim to achieve rich illustrated information to understand the problem. Interviews enable a researcher to use follow-up questions with the participants to get clarity while the questions are being answered (Asenahabi, 2019). Interviews can help the researcher get divergent responses from participants. What is exceptional about interviews is that they are inter-objective and not subjective or objective (Dunwoodie *et al.*, 2022). The researcher used semi-structured interviews because Monday (2022) argues that interviews are a predominant tool for collecting data in a qualitative study. Qualitative interviews consist of open-ended questions. The researcher used an audio recorder to record the interview and took field notes during the procedure. The teachers were alerted before the interview and agreed to record the interviews.

3.7.2 Observations

Observation in qualitative research is one of the oldest and most fundamental methods (Uwamusi & Ajisebiyawo, 2023). This approach involves collecting data using one's senses, especially looking and listening systematically and meaningfully (Balcom *et al.*, 2021). According to O'Leary (2020), classroom observation scrutinises the

essential part a seasoned or new teacher plays while teaching, assessing, and developing a lesson. Giving workable advice and in-depth clarity into the components of teaching, which is central to the anxiety of most teachers, this intellectually stimulating book critically analyses the site, part, and essence of lesson observation in the teaching profession. This was the reason for this study's choice. Observations were essential in this research, as they assisted in comparing data from interviews with the actual practice. Interviews were conducted first, followed by observations. Observations were only done weeks after the interviewing process.

Observations took place in third term and participants were observed ones for a period lasted for an hour, the researcher went to schools at different days and time. During classroom observations, the researcher was offered a chair at the back of the class, where notes were written using the observation schedule. One of the researcher's challenges regarding observation sessions was that the researcher and the participant could not promptly agree on a suitable time for the sessions. Another problem was that when the study was conducted, the schools prepared for yearly common district assessments, which consumed a large chunk of the participant's time. This forced the researcher to extend the time set aside for observations, delaying the overall data generation period.

3.7.3 Document analysis.

Document analysis is a structured technique of analysing printed and electronic documents. Because document analysis is another qualitative research method, it needs data to be inspected and made sense of to understand and acquire practical comprehension (Morgan, 2022). The document analysis was valuable and advantageous to this study, supplying supplementary data so the researcher could compare and contrast theory with practice. Documents might hold information that is impossible to observe, give specifications on past data collections, and evaluate differences and progress. It can also direct the researcher to the burning questions that need to be addressed and conditions that should be observed; thus, document analysis is beneficial because it ensures that a study is censorious and comprehensive (Cardno, 2018), hence the relevance to this study.

The analysed documents were the CAPS document, lesson preparation (on reading comprehension and during classroom observation), and Grade 4 Rainbow Workbooks

learners used by the participants (during classroom observation). The researcher requested from each teacher a file with the CAPS document, one lesson preparation, assessment activities, and memoranda. Triangulating the two research generation methods strengthened the study findings and analysis. The following table represents the document analyse

Table 3.2 Documents analysed.

NAME OF DOCUMENT	IMPORTANCE
CAPS (Only focusing on teaching reading: Reading and viewing section)	Current prescribed curriculum.
Lesson preparation (Taught during classroom observation)	Indication of teachers' readiness and expertise.
Grade 4 Rainbow Workbooks for learners (Only the resources or activities used during the observed lesson).	Learner's work completed in their books.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Bhatia (2017) indicates that data analysis should be arranged into groups built on themes. Additionally, Scharp and Sanders (2018) emphasise that data analysis brings order, form, and inference to generating data. The thematic data analysis technique was used to analyse the current research's raw data.

3.8.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was relevant for this study because it is a qualitative research strategy utilised to arrange and scrutinise compound data sets in an orderly manner. It seeks themes to apprehend the recounts across the generated data sets. Thematic analysis requires singling out themes between cautious scrutinising and re-scrutinising the recorded data (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). It enables the researcher to understand mutual or common explanations and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was a pliable technique that enabled the researcher to pivot on the data in several steps. The researcher could outline the evident or semantic explanations from the data or examine the inactive explanations, hypotheses, and concepts supporting

what is at hand (Nowell *et al.*, 2017 & Vears and Gillam, 2022). The researcher read the data, coded it into manageable and relatable chunks, and themed concepts as they emerged. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded and classified according to similarities and differences, named according to themes and then narrated in this report. The Observation sheet was also coded and thematically classified. The same was done for the analysed documents. The discussion in Chapter 4 presents the merged themes from different data sets to triangulate and make meaning.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher applied for approval and clearance from the University of the Free State before conducting the study or generating data. Approval from the Free State Department of Education was also sought. After the Free State DoE had permission, the researcher made an appointment with the principals. Then, the researcher met with the prospective participants of the study. Then, a briefing session was conducted with the prospective participants to explain the study's value and purpose. Consent forms were signed by teachers agreeing to take part in the study. After that, confidentiality by anonymity was emphasised to those teachers in question. Moreover, the researcher refrained from disclosing personal information about the participants or their respective places of work. All the details gathered during the interview sessions were kept strictly confidential (Kang & Hwang, 2023). Throughout the study, names of sampled schools were withheld, and fictitious names were employed for research participants. Furthermore, their answers were subject to confidentiality and anonymity, taking into consideration the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). The recorded interviews were stored in a password-protected computer and a locked university cabinet for under five years.

Below is a summary table of ethical aspects that had to be considered for the study.

Table 3.3 Ethical issues

CATEGORY	RESEARCHER'S RESPONSIBILITY
Protection from harm or deprivation	The participants were respected and sheltered from all sorts of judgment or disgrace. No payment was given for participation.

CATEGORY	RESEARCHER'S RESPONSIBILITY
Voluntary participation	Participants were advised that they could withdraw at any time despite volunteering to participate in the research.
Informed consent	The researcher thoroughly elucidated to the teachers partaking in the study what the study was for and the role and part of the overall study.
Confidentiality	It ensured that all the information (including recordings) gathered from participants throughout the research was confidential. This was further endorsed by a pact authorised by the researcher's and the participants' signatures.
Anonymity	The researcher protected participants' privacy by refraining from disclosing any form of information that relates to them personally or the school they teach in. Moreover, pseudo-names were used when a specific incidence was being referred to.

3.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Qualitative researchers ensure rigour in the study by adhering to the principles of trustworthiness. The trustworthiness used in content analysis is rooted in Weather's (2015) argument that the researcher should ensure the validity and reliability of generated data. The trustworthiness of qualitative design is when participants and the researcher are at a level at which their explanations have the same meaning (Surucu & Maslakci, 2020). To ensure trustworthiness in the research, all the questions in the interview must be relevant to answering the research questions. For trustworthiness rigour within the study context, several research techniques, interviews, observations, and documents were utilised to generate data (triangulation). Credibility, reliability, dependability, and confirmability are four trustworthiness pillars. Participants were given ample time to articulate their views and experiences about the problem statement.

3.10.1 Credibility

Data credibility is the generated data's actual value and interpretation (Haradhan, 2017). The research constructed tenable and convincing findings (McKim, 2023). The researcher ensured the study's credibility through data triangulation membership checking during different phases. Birt *et al.* (2016) suggest that a participant inspection should be conducted immediately after the findings are established to verify the credibility of the data collection method. Thus, during interviews, it was ensured that participants' responses were regularly repeated to capture their views correctly. Additionally, the researcher was always consistently veridical and sincere. Therefore, credibility was entrenched by aligning the research design, designated participants, and the study setting, as emphasised by Johnson et al. (2020).

3.10.2 Transferability

To safeguard the transferability of the research, the researcher used the thick description method, which independently allows the reader to pick up the resemblance between where the study was conducted and other township schools where they were being studied (Enworo, 2022). Moreover, the researcher ensured transferability through transparent data generation and analysis of that data so that it could be replicated successfully in similar circumstances.

3.10.3 Dependability

The dependability of the research is only established when the study is repeatable and consistent. Leung (2015) mentions that the results would be like the research if repeated similarly, using the same participants in a comparable situation. The researcher achieved dependability by using a language the interviewees know and understand, documenting all the processes. This was also useful in eliminating any bias contemplated by the researcher for the study (Taquette & Souza, 2022).

3.10.4 Conformability

Stahl and King (2020) posit that several data-generating methods will strengthen confirmability. Being guided by Haq *et al.* (2023), the researcher used different data-gathering methods to strengthen the confirmability of the results. It is regarded as the impartiality applied to the study's research procedure, data gathering, and analysis. Holmes (2020) outlines that reporting the process in detail improves objectivity, keeps researchers constantly vigilant about bias, and helps the researcher avoid them.

Hence, jotting was kept in every part of the study process, as well as transcripts and recordings to help safeguard against bias. Moreover, Bos (2020) emphasised that the more significant portion of data the researcher generates results from observations. Data verification was done repeatedly, ensuring the information received was not changing.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter laid out an overall view of the research methodology, design, data generation, and analysis of results utilised to carry out the research. The methodology and justification for use were presented. The next chapter presents the findings and the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 4 : RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the methodological processes grounding this study and the reasons for the methods chosen. The current chapter outlines the findings and analysis of the research's investigation of Grade 4 teachers' experiences teaching reading comprehension in the ESL classrooms at Botshabelo primary schools. Face-to-face interviews, semi-structured questions, classroom observations, and documents synthesised the data. The objectives of the study guided the data presented in this chapter. The following secondary research questions, which the data responded to, were:

- What are Grade 4 teachers' personal and professional experiences of teaching reading comprehension to ESL learners in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?
- What strategies do Grade 4 teachers use to teach ESL learners reading comprehension in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?
- How do Grade 4 teachers teach ESL learners reading comprehension strategies in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?

The interviews and document analysis answered the first and second questions and data. Lesson observations answered the last question.

4.2 THE BIODATA OF EACH PARTICIPANT.

This section outlines data gathered utilising one-on-one interviews. Six Grade 4 teachers from four Botshabelo Free State province schools were interviewed. Data analyses were done using a thematic data analysis method. The participants' names appearing in this chapter were pseudonyms, following the anonymity clause the participants signed in their consent. The participants were Mr Molemo from school A, Ms Matla from school A, Ms Mololo from school B, Ms Nolo from school C, Mr Bonolo from school C, and Ms Mokole from school D. Pseudonyms were employed in place of participants and schools' names.

Table 4.1 Participant Background Details

Participants	School	Grades Taught	Teaching experiences in years	Qualifications
Mr Molemo	A	4, 7	6	Bachelor of Education
Ms. Matla	A	4, 7	8	Bachelor of Education
Ms. Mololo	B	4, 6, 7	19	Bachelor of Education
Ms. Nolo	C	4	10 months	Bachelor of Education
Mr. Bonolo	C	4	1	Bachelor of Education
Ms. Mokole	D	4	6	Bachelor of Education

4.3 THEMES EMERGING FROM THE DATA

4.3.1 Theme 1: Teaching learners who lack phonological and morphological awareness

The ability to perceive and manipulate words and parts of words (morphological awareness) and the ability to identify and manipulate parts of speech (phonological awareness) to make meaning (Anthony & Francis, 2005) is central to reading comprehension. These are the skills that are taught from Grades R to 3. The findings highlighted participants' frustrations when they receive learners who lack the basics that propel them to read for meaning. When asked if they enjoy teaching reading comprehension, what were their experiences teaching it? Mixed responses emerged:

Mr Matla: I enjoy teaching it, but there are challenges, especially because I did not train to teach in Grade 4 but in high school. I try my best under the circumstances, but the learners I teach struggle with reading English, affecting even the other subjects.

Ms Mokole: I enjoy teaching it, but over the past few years, the learners that come to the Intermediate from Foundation Phase are worse every year. However, what we are doing here at school is we make intervention classes,

whereby we help them maybe by doing the vowels, and the vowels sound the phonics and those things with only those learners.

Ms Nolo: *I think, uhm, it depends on the type of learners and methods one uses, as well as their second language ability and phonological abilities. Unfortunately, these learners get to Grade 4 clueless about the content they should have mastered in Grades 2 or 3. Training on effective reading and instruction strategies, including phonic comprehension techniques, is necessary for us as teachers.*

When asked what the reason for this lack of reading abilities and identification of words could be, Ms Mokole said:

Eish, this progression policy pushes them to the next grade without the necessary skills.

The above narratives by the participants present a complicated and systemic challenge that teachers in Grade 4 face in their ESL classrooms. The teachers expressed frustration in teaching reading comprehension to learners ill-equipped to read for meaning. Teachers felt compelled to have extra lessons to guarantee that learners acquire their reading abilities eventually. The DoE is also at fault for progressing learners who are not fit to progress to the next grade; hence, the challenge that PIRLS of 2021 presents is that most Grade 4 learners cannot read with understanding. Kitsili and Murray (2024) argue that English is built on the alphabet and the phonemic system. Moreover, they further emphasise that if phonemic teaching is neglected, learners will be confronted with the permanent challenge of reading, let alone reading comprehension. In analysing Weeks 1 to 2 of the CAPS document under the Reading and Viewing skill, there is no attempt to allow teachers to revise or test the phonological and morphological awareness. However, it is assumed that these learners already have the skills.

The findings from the interviews also imply that there were many factors that these participants were unaware of or did not want to point out; also, they were skeptical about blaming Foundation Phase teachers. What was worrisome about these findings is that the teachers complain of morphological and phonemic awareness, meaning most learners cannot even read the given texts. This is an issue as Meschat's (2023)

findings show that learners who read well are the ones who have mastered phonics, and those who need support do not learn much when phonics are overemphasised. In these narratives, there was also a salient notion that learners find it difficult to read for comprehension because they are not English home-language speakers, and at this stage, they have not been well exposed to it. Moreover, teachers who specialise in high school methodologies and teaching in primary school may find it challenging to teach at that level. Mr Matla alluded to this and emphasised that it also harms how these learners learn other subjects, which are also taught in English as LoLT (DBE, 1997)

4.3.2 CAPS's failure to facilitate transition

In analysing the CAPS document, it was noted that it jumps straight to Grade 4 content without facilitating the transition and revision of skills and content learnt from the previous grades.

CAPS:47: Choose from contemporary realistic fiction/traditional stories/personal accounts/ adventure/funny/fantasy/real life stories/ Text from the textbook or Teacher's Resource File (TRF) Pre-reading predicts from the title and pictures • Uses reading strategies, e.g. predicting what will happen next.

The learner must engage in these activities in the first week of Grade 4. If teachers were expected to teach these skills, the assumption is that learners already know how to read, understand and analyse stories. This is perceived as unrealistic and impacts the smooth transition into Grade 4, an entry-level, which is the Intermediate Phase.

This is one of the challenges that Ms Nolo noted about the CAPS reading and expectations:

Ms Nolo: I am new in the education fraternity and still passionate about teaching and ensuring learners can read and succeed. CAPS is my bible, but it is unrealistic because it does not allow me to evaluate the skills learners have mastered in the previous grades. I must jump into content, which disadvantages my learners, who are normally struggling and scared as they are in a new phase.

Most participants spoke of CAPS as a guiding document when asked what factors mainly affect their reading comprehension teaching. The teachers noted that the CAPS provides them with guidance but also has limitations. Mr Bonolo, who seemed to be a CAPS enthusiast, believes in it as policy but also noted that it is insufficient.

Mr Bonolo: I also facilitate these types of reading by following CAPS document reading skills, which I also use eh" CAPS document we have eh, the process of reading is only facilitated in three steps, which are before reading, during reading and post-reading whereby learners will be answering questions the methods work. However, they can be an intervention or ways of teaching reading besides following these three steps.

Ms Mokole: CAPS influences my teaching of reading comprehension. We are also following PSRIP, which has been around for 2 years. So, it helps us with reading and writing but, uhm, mostly with reading. Yes, we read a lot on PSRIP. It gives us much time because it has a management plan, whereby on Tuesday, maybe we read a story, on Wednesday, we sing a song, we give them the lyrics, and then they try to make a song. So, it gives them more time, or at least they can read using those lyrics.

For these teachers, CAPS played a central role in their teaching with the newly introduced Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP). As much as CAPS is a policy and guideline, teachers felt they needed more improvisation and resources to address reading challenges in the ESL classroom. Ms Mokole added:

There was an Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) before the COVID-19 pandemic. After COVID-19, the Department has introduced the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP).

This also helps guide them on par with teaching. What was left lingering from the teacher's experiences was how much the introduction of the PSRIP improved the reading—considering that CAPS seems to be lacking in capacitating teachers in facilitating the transition from the Foundation to the Intermediate Phase. This is in line with Mtshali and Mashiya's (2022) argument that the responsible teacher would ensure that learners reach Grade 4 have a robust foundation on phonics and can easily comprehend the connection linking pronunciation and spelling, a prerequisite

for reading. Furthering their argument, they indicate that teachers could mitigate the learners' memory challenges and improve precision reading comprehension by activating phonemic schema and mastering vocabulary due to the link between pronunciation and formation. Single-tone teaching should be emphasised to ensure learners develop quick spelling ability and grasp correct phonemic schema in the brain.

4.3.3 Problematic Transition from Foundation phase to intermediate phase and progression rules/policy

As indicated earlier, the transition and progression rules or policy are also believed to contribute to the challenge for teachers in Grade 4 ESL classrooms. All participants indicated that most learners struggled to read in English in Grade 4 because the LoLT from Grade R to 3 was Sesotho, and they only studied English as a subject. This then shows the transition from Sesotho to English as a LoLT. This line of reasoning is also supported by Robertson and Graven (2020), which is captured in the literature review when they mentioned that learners in townships find it challenging to transition from Sesotho to English. Sibanda (2017) also pointed out that sudden language changes from mother tongue to English set learners up for failure. It has also not yet been proven that the starting point of learners attaining reading achievement in English is mastering their home language. Moreover, the study by Steyn (2017) indicated that learners should start their foundation phase in English to get exposure and acquire more vocabulary, helping them master reading comprehension in Grade 4 (Manditereza, 2021). Below is the response of Mr. Molemo from the interview:

I think the problem is uhm; they do their foundation uhm, phase in Sesotho that is their home language so by the time they get to Grade 4 uhm, I think they are still used to uhm, the mother tongue teaching so they take time to grasp to understand, to read for understanding.

Ms Mokole added, *"I think the problem starts at the foundation phase."*

Bonolo concurred and said:

Another factor is reading skills. Learners did not have English reading capabilities from the Foundation Phase, so it becomes difficult for a teacher to

start by teaching learners how to read before equipping learners with reading skills. Furthermore,

Ms Matla indicated,

Most are from families with limited or lacking English literacy skills. Also, in the Foundation Phase, the language of teaching and learning is Sesotho, their home language.”

The challenges indicated by these participants point to the need for a smoother transition and the building on and scaffolding using previous knowledge learnt from the earlier grades. This problem is consistent with the need for teachers to be mindful of learners' content and linguistic schema. Ren (2023) postulates that content schema theory indicates how learners utilise the preceding background to comprehend and capture recent knowledge while reading. He further establishes that the content schema maintains that what a learner reads is deprived of meaning if it is not linked to a reader's prior language skills and inspires them to grasp the content they are reading (Ren, 2023). Thus, content schema theory enables learners to develop meaning from the information stored in their minds (Sibanda *et al.*, 2024). This indicates that if learners were exposed to English as a LoLT in Grade R, the movement from the foundation to the intermediate phase would have been smooth because their content schema would have been enhanced. On top of that, Sibanda *et al.* (2024) indicates that linguistic schema links knowledge and sound resemblance. Additionally, Ntshangase (2023) claims that learners yield to reading to acquire information by suggesting that the text explanation implies that the schema theory is a cognitive exercise that works with indicators, experiences, and abilities. This means that linguistic schema is a school of thought aligned with the cognitive structure, which could be used to explain intellectual progression. Simply put, schema theory explains a learner's information structure.

In this study, schema theory is critical because it clarifies why learners who were not sufficiently exposed to English and did not have sufficient schemata struggle to read and understand. Huang (2023) mentions that the possible reason is that such learners lack comprehension of words and linking these words to objects. Additionally, drawing from schema grants the learner textual direction when recalling explanations from

previously obtained information. This is because reading for comprehension is rooted in the ability of a learner to apply what they know in acquiring what they are reading at a point in time (Huang, 2023).

The CAPS document analysis indicates that the Progression policy suggests that implementation is to stop learners from remaining in the same phase for more than four years. It also outlined that in the case of learners underperforming from the previous phase, those learning challenges should be dressed in the grade a learner has progressed to. Thus, the emphasis of penological education is robustly needed to be targeted to learners in Grade 4 who experience reading difficulties.

4.3.4 Lack of educational resources and parental support

Five out of six participants indicated that the lack of resources harms reading comprehension. When the researcher observed Mr. Bonolo, she noticed that most learners did not have textbooks, and the ones they had were damaged. Moreover, an observation by the researcher was made that of all the schools, one had reading posters on the walls of its classrooms. As a result, a scarcity of reading materials, like textbooks, makes it challenging to implement reading strategies and build a reading culture meaningfully. The reason is that learners are unable to enliven a reading culture. On top of that, when learners have nothing to lose, it is challenging to keep them engaged, and they tend to lose concentration. Mr Bonolo also mentioned that insufficient backing from parents could be a factor in Grade 4 learners' inability to read:

There are limited resources like reading books they can use occasionally at home and school.” Ms Mololo concurred, “The second part is limited; they have limited book experience.

Ms. Nolo also said, I think it is due to the limited experience of books they are too exposed to read daily, which gives them a problem.

The above statement shows that most classrooms do not have reading resources, which hinders learners' reading abilities. A significant advantage in reading comprehension is lost because if all learners had reading resources, they could learn to read anywhere in the presence and absence of the teacher. Moreover, a material shortage could negatively impact learners' reading comprehension and teachers'

morale as they find it boring and difficult to teach with fewer or no reading resources (Sakusita, 2021). Fesi and Mncube (2021) also articulated that lacking resources delays learners' reading skills development. Moreover, Skhephe and Mantlana (2020) state that insufficient reading resources can affect the quality of education teachers supply. At the same time, Adao *et al.* (2023) argue that when learners are not exposed to more reading materials, they build less or no prior knowledge that helps with reading comprehension.

It was also highlighted from the literature that teachers struggle to teach learners reading comprehension without the support and motivation of their parents (Gay *et al.*, 2021). Graham and Mtsweni (2023) indicated that learners could improve their reading skills significantly and become proficient readers with sufficient parental support in education as early as possible in their schooling years. Similarly, Redeja *et al.* (2024) encouraged parental engagement to improve learners' reading comprehension, particularly in school communication and collaboration. Caliskan and Ulas (2022) stated that education conferences must be conducted for parents to elaborate on how they can support their children with reading comprehension skills. For example,

Ms. Mokole mentioned: *Dealing with these kinds of learners whose parents do not support them is tough.*

Ms Matla: *In most cases, learners who do not have support from home.*

Ms Mokole: *If the parents can be severe, you know the problem, they do not even have time to check their work, so it is a very struggle for most of the children I am teaching here.*

Masudi and Silaji (2024) argue that parental involvement in the academics of learners is a crucial factor at the primary level capable of impacting Grade 4 learners' reading comprehension ability. Hence, for the reading capacity of learners to improve, all stakeholders surrounding a learner should be involved. For example, parents can practice programmes such as pared reading (where they read with their children), reading aloud (where their children read to them), and independent reading, just to name a few at home. This can motivate learners to read at home daily and improve their confidence. However, parents' unavailability in their children's lives and illiteracy hinder them from supporting their children with schoolwork. Okello (2023) claims

parental involvement affects the learner's reading ability and understanding. Despite its benefits, all sampled teachers mentioned that parents were uninterested in ensuring learners read at home. Furthermore, parental illiterate is another factor that contributes to learners not being able to read, as Mr Molemo had indicated:

The problem with other children is that they live with grandparents who cannot read at all, so it becomes tough for Some learners to read at home.

Supported by Ms. Mokole: *Our children do not live with their parents. They live with their grandparents and do not even know English.*

Additionally, Mr Bonolo said: *Some learners live with their grandparents, who are not educated, so that is also a challenge.*

Furthermore, Ms Matla agreed: *Some of my learners do not live with their parents. They are left with their grandparents, who cannot read and write.*

Ms. Matla experienced this during observations. At first, her lesson started as independent reading. Learners were given copies the previous day to read at home with guidance from their parents and come prepared for the lesson the next day. Most learners did not read the text and gave different reasoning. Among these reasons was living with their grandparents, who cannot read; others said their parents came home late from work. Learners who can read came prepared even though they struggled with some words; those who cannot read came unprepared for the lesson. These situations forced the teacher to change the lesson strategy from independent reading to shared reading. It was done to make all learners participate in the lesson.

Iroegbu and Igweike (2020) state that developments that parents have an impact on learners' academic performance, particularly at home when helping with homework. Similarly, Geske and Ozola (2020) elaborated that parents' education is one of the critical issues affecting learners' reading literacy and academic achievement. Correspondingly, illiterate parents cannot engage their children with reading methods, books at home, and communication about books (Tapadera, 2024). Findings indicated that these factors influence teaching reading comprehension in English and are interrelated with complex environmental issues such as socio-economic issues

leading to learners not being motivated to read because of their parental lack of education. Based on the literature, the theory of schema is the mental frameworks that assist children in making sense of information. It is vital to their cognitive development (Hamid *et al.*, 2020). Henceforward, teachers need to work closely with parents in developing knowledge structures that permit the learners' brains to more easily understand the world and how they should act (Lui *et al.*, 2024). teachers should provide parents with readable concepts to help their children develop prior knowledge that will be implemented in comprehending and acquiring new vocabulary.

4.3.5 Support from Subject advisors and the SMT

Participants indicated that literacy coaches support them through class visitations, regular workshops, and the provision of reading resources.

Ms. Nolo said: *Literacy coaches often observe classroom practice and offer constructive feedback to help with the improvement.* Similarly, Ms. Nolo said: *“The literacy coaches often observe classroom practice and provide constructive feedback to help improve.*

From the perspective of Reños and Pontillas (2024), classroom observations are agreements for the teacher career that monitor and enhance practices and capabilities. Windsor *et al.* (2020) outline that classroom observations encourage teachers to apply new teaching strategies they might not have been exposed to. Maharma and Abusa’aleek (2022) agree that feedback received after classroom observation helps teachers recognise their strengths and weaknesses and improve their ways of doing things in the classroom. Classroom observations serve as an opportunity to help improve education and the necessity for teacher development (Suddiqua, 2019).

Mr. Molemo specified that subjects' advisers support them by conducting regular workshops; *then, we get support from the subject advisor during regular workshops.*

Similarly, Ms Mololo agreed by saying: *We attend the regular workshops yearly, and then there is a developmental learning area meeting at school.*

Also, Ms Mokele indicated: *We have workshops where they elaborate and tell us how to use this PSRIP.*

Moreover, Ms Matla said: *they provide workshops to teach us updated or effective teaching strategies.*

Because of curriculum changes, increase in proficiency and teacher competencies, it is emphasised that teachers' development plays a vital role in ensuring quality teaching delivery and teaching strategies, mainly where LoLT is English (Carrió-Pastor, 2022; Mandyata *et al.*, 2023; Rauteda, 2023; Oliveira *et al.*, 2019). The study of Tiba (2023) affirms that teachers value the essence of workshops as they gain skills and knowledge regarding pedagogical practices of reading comprehension strategies. Moreover, he encouraged the DoE to provide for teacher upskilling because effective teaching cannot be achieved. Professional development should target specific interests and needs to ensure commitment to lifelong learning and growth of teachers (Abbas, 2024). Lastly, Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2019) asserted that workshops produce knowledgeable teachers who are motivated to promote teaching and learning.

Ms Mololo also shared that they were provided reading resources during workshops: *We are being given documents from the Department of Education that include short stories, books reading for enjoyment books, and pamphlets for learners to read.*

Ms. Nolo concurred: *...and another, they share resources like lesson plans, activities and projects.*

Ms. Matla said: *They provide additional recourses such as readers and notes to enhance our teaching and learning.*

Fawole and Pillay (2019) emphasised the importance of the availability and usage of reading resources, ensuring that English second language learners are included. Similarly, Pradani (2021) says that when a learner reads various books, being a regular reader can be beneficial and stipulates the following benefits: reading can stimulate mentally, increase vocabulary, increase insight and knowledge, improve focus and concentration, and expand one's thinking. Kapur (2021) emphasised the importance

of reading books daily, considered reading art that needs to be taken seriously, and encouraged learners to read early in their lives to attain information.

The findings indicated that the interrelation of teachers, SMT, and the Department of Education could benefit learners in identifying problems and implementing solutions. Providing reading materials from the DoE can make the work of teachers simple in building learners' content schema (Meiklejohn *et al.*, 2021). Zano (2021) articulated that a language barrier is encountered when learners have less background knowledge that can be applied to comprehend a text. However, Aina and Abdulwasiiu (2023) stipulated that when learners read multiple resources with the help of a teacher and are exposed to English, they can apply previous knowledge when their schema is actively activated to new text. In this way, teachers can help by asking questions about the topic.

The participants reasoned that learners could not read because they used their home language in their foundation phase and at home. For other reasons, they argued that lack of reading resources and parental support for their children plays a vital role. According to the findings, learners need as much support as possible regarding reading in English from school and home. Collaboration of teachers, parents, and reading resources can be beneficial, ensuring learners become proficient readers and are often exposed to the language. The schema theory underpins the study and has identified three types, namely, content, linguistic, and formal schema.

For the above reasons, teachers must apply content schema in teaching and learning. Content schema encourages the utilisation of prior information linked to the content of the reading text to enhance reading comprehension (Radzi & Aziz, 2023). Therefore, teachers must expose Grade 4 second language learners to more English content to accumulate more knowledge. Smith *et al.* (2021) state that teacher can help their learners by exposing them to various reading materials in building content schema as it has different effects on different text types, which will help in reading comprehension related to language proficiency, helping the background knowledge.

4.4 THE TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING GRADE 4 LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION IN ESL CLASSROOM

This question was asked to establish teachers' teaching strategies for reading comprehension in their ESL classrooms. During thematic data analysis, these themes emerged. Other participants may have yet to be aware of the actual terminology of the strategy. Still, the activities are done in the classroom, and the description directs the researcher to analyse and name the strategy.

4.4.1 Shared reading

Most participants identified Shared reading as a strategy to enhance reading for comprehension. For instance,

Ms Mololo indicated: *Shared reading is one of the most important things, giving learners a chance to retell the story and, after that, oral questions whereby I will ask them to answer the questions to see whether they understand or what their progress is.*

Mr Bonolo stated: *I read, and then learners read after me.*

This is also aligned with CAPS as it emphasises that a teacher should have, among others, texts that could be used for shared reading (DBE, 2011: 14). Drawing from literature, Tata (2020) stated that teachers must apply shared reading effectively because it benefits learning a home language and a second language and enriches learners with grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. Shared reading is a reading from a text led by a teacher for learners in a class and a well-balanced method for interaction (Altamimi & Ogdol, 2023). This is also in line with the arguments by Ramsa and Rawain (2021), which indicate that using shared reading will assist learners in moulding active participation. Moreover, Rosalia and Candraloka (2023) argue that implementing shared reading creates reading skills on concepts concerning print and fluency, which develop a learner into an independent reader. They furthermore indicated that shared reading establishes fun and joy in reading, creating a lifelong love for literature.

This was evident from the participants' interview data; they highlighted the use of shared reading during their reading sessions. They also indicated that it assists learners who struggle to read because they can listen to what advanced learners are

saying and imitate them. Tata (2020) even praised it and stated that it can also be used to motivate learners with challenges. Not only that, but she also indicated that shared reading enhances learners reading abilities and it also improves their vocabulary. This school of thought is consistent with Rosalia and Candraloka (2023), which mentions that through shared reading, learners not only participate in reading but also learn essential concepts, engage in learning, and see themselves as readers.

From the observations, out of 6 participants, 2 taught learners using shared reading. It was from Ms Mololo and Ms Matla's classes. In both classes, the teachers taught confidently and seemed to enjoy it because the class was for all learners and their different levels of learning. The teachers engaged learners by reading and explaining using their home language (Sesotho) to enhance comprehension and participation. Moreover, during observations, the researcher concluded that shared reading significantly impacts learner's reading comprehension. All learners, irrespective of their level of proficiency, were affected in a certain way or the other. However, indicating that none of those learners were impacted negatively is paramount. With or without the teacher's assistance, learners of different proficiencies could explain and elucidate how pictures contribute to the text, enquire and reply to questions from the text, pinpoint central ideas and additional details, and retell the stories they have just read. Moreover, when the researcher analysed the CAPS document, shared reading was emphasised, and it was learned that it should be used from the start of Grade 4 to usher learners into the new phase. Suggested resources that could be used for shared reading are Big Books and storytelling books. However, textbooks and reader books were not left out if the school lacked resources.

4.4.2 Activation of Prior Learning

CAPS tables the process approach to teaching reading, and on top of the list is Pre-reading, and the first subtopic is prior learning (DBE, 2011: 10). This shows that CAPS tries to lead teachers to use learners' schema. Still, it is not explicit enough to give a specific time for such an activity.

The activation of prior knowledge is also emphasised by Carell (1988), who establishes that schema involves schemata from culture, emotions, knowledge, and information to the class, which is essential in learning. Anderson (1984) pointed out

earlier those schemata, the information structure where readers understand a text and use prior knowledge to form new constructs, is central to learner understanding and learning. As CAPS emphasises that reading various literary texts should be done as early as the first week of Grade 4, the teacher has a responsibility to start by activating prior knowledge to scaffold learning. This is also emphasised by Ren (2023) in saying that learners might possess enough schema yet can only understand the story if such schema is activated correctly by the teacher. Furthermore, that schema encourages teachers to be predictive and interested in what is about to be read, understanding and decoding new information to be used in the current text through continuous engagement.

Ms Matla indicated: *I activate prior knowledge by using what they know to make sense of what the text that follows will be talking about. It usually works out, and learners get interested in the text. This typically motivates them to read even further outside the classroom.*

Supported by Ms. Mololo: Let me say the *prior knowledge to make a connection or link about the things that they know at home that they were taught at home and what I am about to teach now.*

Activating prior learning seemed a common practice for reading comprehension in these teachers' reading comprehension lessons. All the reviewed lesson plans started by indicating this strategy and aligned with the first lesson objective. It seems the teachers are well-versed in this strategy. They also showed confidence in its effectiveness. The study of Smith *et al.* (2021) indicated a good and bad relationship between prior knowledge and reading comprehension; a good relationship is when learners have high prior knowledge that will impact a high level of reading comprehension, and a bad relationship is when they have low prior knowledge resulting in low reading comprehension.

Furthermore, Cho and Hyun (2020) suggested that activating schema and prior knowledge will help build the learners' confidence, and it can be successful by explaining photos, identifying, writing, and making a story using those words. From the observation, Ms. Mololo started the reading lesson by linking previous work to new text when highlighting elements needed to comprehend the text. This made it easier

for learners to identify. In the observation, Ms.Nolo activated learners' prior information by asking them to view the title and picture to envision the passage. The analysis from the CAPS document outlined pre-reading activities that teachers can implement when activating prior knowledge of learners in reading activities.

4.4.3 Group-guided reading

Another theme identified by the participants was group-guided reading as one of the strategies for teaching reading. Mescht (2023) from the literature indicates that group-guided reading is a reading lesson where teachers give learners a framework and motive for reading and answering questions from the text. Moreover, an ideal group for guided reading is six learners with different levels of reading proficiency (Mescht, 2023). Group-guided reading allows learners to advance from their proficiency level and critically close in if their reading level is below grade. Furthermore, group-guided reading is one strategy that has the most significant impact on reading comprehension for learners of different levels of reading proficiency. Hence, Ms Nolo employs group-guided reading during her lesson; she mentioned:

I usually used guided reading to work with small groups to provide targeted support and discussion in comprehending text.

Mr Bonolo also indicated: *I always encourage reading group guided reading."*

Ms Mokole stated: *What we do is we have groups of specific learners we know "hore" these are the ones who can read.*

This is supported by Suckow (2019), who states that in a strategy of group guided reading, a group of learners with the same reading abilities read under the direction of the teacher, which is essential as it allows learners to apply background knowledge to new text. Kitsili and Murray (2024) are concerned that this strategy helps teachers quickly identify Learners' needs. Moreover, Ramsa and Rawian (2021) argued that once the teacher knows the needs of learners, it can also help support and monitor reading comprehension progress. Guided reading is an extraordinary strategy for motivating learners to read and understand the text (Bermillo & Merto, 2022).

For instance, during observations, Mr Bonolo practised group-guided reading; learners read a piece in the DBE book with seven characters. Learners were split into six groups, each reading a specific character from the story while the teacher was the story's narrator. Learners showed much interest and anticipation in reading their pieces, and those who struggled to read could read because of the short lines they had to read. Studies have shown learners display improved comprehension capabilities during group-guided reading (Mescht, 2023). Mescht (2023) also indicated that group-guided gives teachers fundamental differentiated strategies that enable them to cater to learners' needs at their proficiency levels and for teachers to create independent readers who can read for comprehension. Because of the small groups, the teacher could correct a learner when they made mistakes while reading and understanding what they read. The CAPS document also recognises the importance of group-guided reading; it encourages teachers first to make learners read in small groups before they can read independently.

4.4.4 Reading Aloud

Reading aloud was identified as a strategy for facilitating reading comprehension in ESL. Mitchell (2015) indicates that reading aloud shows relations between printed words and meaning, meaning that print demonstrates the story or information and lets them converse with the writer. It is the most vital activity teachers need to do with learners. Khamsuk and Whanchit (2021) add that read-aloud is purposefully used to enhance learner motivation for reading, accumulate background knowledge, and increase learners' vocabulary. For the effective and secure implementation of read-aloud, teachers must use different comprehension strategies in the classroom so that learners can gain more meaning from the text (Drew, 2021). Furthermore, they must choose texts relevant to learners' levels and interests, have appropriate reading tempo, have time for questions and comments, and create connections between learners and the texts.

In the interview, Ms Matla indicated:

I read aloud as it helps my learners hear how words sound, which will also help their language development.

Ms. Nolo said: I start first by reading while learners are listening.

This is aligned with Senawati *et al.*, 2021; and Drew's, 2021 argument that teachers' reading-aloud strategy affects learners' language development. Reading aloud is vital for learners to become familiar with the language, a method for creating a good chance for learners to participate in a class discussion about the text (Khamsuk & Whanchit, 2021). Wilkison and Nelson (2020) suggested that teachers implement a strategy that it is called "interactive read-aloud, which is a method that encourages learners to participate in discussions of the text actively. Wilkison and Nelson (2020) indicated the importance of connecting reading aloud and discussion to establish learners' development in communication skills.

Ms. Nolo also stated in the interview that after we all read together, we discuss and reflect after reading. Ehh, *we discuss the words that might be difficult to understand and where they did not understand.*

Ms Mololo said, *...And after that, oral questions whereby I will ask them to answer the questions to see whether they understand or what their progress is.*

It is noted that teachers use this strategy to reinforce the language as well as the reading comprehension and pace. It was evident from the responses that reading without any discussion afterwards would be fruitless and would not allow them to meet the lesson's objectives. Ali, Masoor and Khan (2020) refer to this as the teacher's ability or skill to allow learners to work on the text in various ways. Santoso *et al.* (2023) and Zondi and Mbatha (2024) further articulate that active working with the text prevents loss of interest because learners are engaged. This is important because learners will listen to and visualise the contents while reading a passage using their imagination (Kassim, 2019).

Xiao (2024) stated that in reading aloud, teachers must ask open questions capable of encouraging learners to contribute their background information, pose questions, and uphold each other's learning; through listening to and discussing variables perspectives, learners can become critical thinkers about the text. This was noted during classroom observations. Three of the six participants used the reading-aloud strategy to facilitate reading comprehension. In Mr. Mololo's and Ms. Nolo's class, learners articulated interest as they were engaged and actively participating with the

text from the beginning of the lesson till the end. The teacher read, paused, asked questions, and elaborated.

They generated a conducive environment for teaching and learning that stimulated participation and learning motivation and fostered an open discourse (Ail *et al.*, 2020). However, in Ms. Mokole's class, most of the learners seemed uninterested and motivated as the execution of the lesson did not include active participation or any connection to the text. The entire text was read and only explained, and questions were asked at the end of the reading. It resulted in poor participation and led to learners misbehaving and causing disruptions. Jacob (2022) indicates that if learners are bored, they will lack attention, resulting in being easily distracted, misbehaving, and preventing others from learning.

Analysis from the CAPS document indicates that prepared and unprepared read-aloud is one of the strategies used in reading and viewing. It further revealed that prepared and unprepared read-aloud text focuses on these skills: Tone, voice projection, pace, eye contact, posture, and gestures to pronounce words without distorting meaning and reading fluently according to purpose.

4.4.5 Codeswitching

Only using English when teaching Grade 4 ESL learners typically poses problems for teachers. Teachers usually use multilingual pedagogies, such as code-switching, which are proven and effective strategies (Zondi & Mncube, 2024). ESL is a problem in Grade 4 classes as teachers are forced to code-switch regularly during their lessons. Code-switching constitutes a context in which two languages within the same conversational frame are applied (Abdulkhay & G'olumova, 2024). Using Sesotho to explain some concepts to facilitate understanding is one strategy that most teachers mentioned they used.

For instance, Mr Molemo indicated:

...And then the other challenge is that the learners, uhm, I forgot the word that you used to uhm, codeswitching, yes, yes, yes codeswitching is the correct word uhm, they rely a lot on me explaining in Sesotho. It helps them to understand better what they are reading in English.

Ms Nolo: I opt for Sesotho when I realise they are confused or suspect before the lesson begins that this would be challenging. I would only teach part of the lesson in Sesotho to help them here and there.

It was noted from the findings that teachers were aware of their learners' strengths and weaknesses, which were mitigated by using the language learners understand better. This is also emphasised by Jogulu (2024). What is beneficial about using code-switching is that it facilitates overcoming communication hurdles and allows learners to communicate within themselves, mitigating comprehension challenges that are out of their reach and translating and merging new knowledge (Bratchuk & Smith, 2023). Most importantly, the participants noted they did not overuse codeswitching, avoiding learner overdependence. Hence, teachers are advised to mitigate code-switching to help learners.

When the teachers were interviewed, only Mr Molemo mentioned that he uses code-switching to elaborate complex topics to learners. However, all sampled teachers resorted to code-switching throughout observations. Thus, it became apparent that they use it to supplement their teaching strategies. Another observation was that teachers use code-switching partially because of their incompetence and partially because learners failed to understand when only English was used in the classroom.

The CAPS document is unclear about using codeswitching or other languages in the English classroom. The teachers' lesson plans did not allude to this, but the teaching extensively used code-switching. The learners seemed to be comfortable and understanding the texts that were taught in all six classrooms.

4.4.6 Use of WhatsApp Groups

Today's learners are obsessed with everything technology. This implies that they are interested in being engaged in cyberspace and modern technology devices such as smartphones and computers in areas of their lives, which can easily include teaching and learning (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Hence, the global usage of technological communication, such as WhatsApp, has revolutionised how people communicate and gain information (Seufert *et al.*, 2022). However, the study's primary concern is WhatsApp's impact on language learning and reading comprehension for ESL learners.

Ms Matla indicated: *At school, we have a WhatsApp group where we post reading materials and ask parents to help their kids with reading, understanding words, and using them in different contexts.*

While there is a positive correlation between the use of smartphones and reading comprehension (Klimova & Zamborova, 2020), there is not enough body of research that proves that the use of WhatsApp may improve or hamper reading comprehension. However, from the interviews, only one participant stated that he shared different reading materials using WhatsApp for reading activities. It is then evident that most teachers do not use WhatsApp as a strategy to enhance reading comprehension. The researcher observed that most schools need more reading materials. Therefore, they need to take advantage of sharing reading materials in WhatsApp groups so that learners can read at home and possibly independently build their schemata.

4.4.7 Vocabulary charts

Zano (2022) highlights that vocabulary knowledge directly affects reading comprehension. Hence, for learners to comprehend the text, they must know the meaning of at least 90% of the vocabulary used in that text. From the interviews, all the participants mentioned that most learners have poor vocabulary, making it challenging to master reading comprehension. Nanda and Azmy (2020) confirm that learners' limited vocabulary inhibits reading comprehension. For example,

Ms Nolo said: *We discuss the words that might be difficult to understand and where they did not understand.*

Ms Matla indicated: *I also use vocabulary charts, which are aimed at helping my learners always reference words they may have forgotten, such as what they mean, how they are spelt, and how they are used.*

Ms Matla also said: *If parents cannot read, support their kids' education even if they can buy them dictionaries to help with vocabulary.*

Ms Mololo said: *Then I will select and explain the vocabulary or unfamiliar words for them to understand the story better.*

The participants' responses showed they are frustrated by learners' limited vocabulary, which inhibits their understanding of texts. Also, it was noted that some teachers

complained of learners who could not read in English. Such learners need more assistance before they move on to reading for understanding. Budiman *et al.* (2023) posit that to mitigate such problems, providing short and clear activities would help learners exercise vocabulary construction and improve fluency in English. This was noted during lesson observations. Teachers used the prescribed material, which was not lengthy, allowing the teacher and learners to go through it step by step. Fengyu (2023) reported that clear vocabulary instructions placed into meaningful texts and merged with various opportunities to practice results in a vital vocabulary gain for at-risk children. Therefore, clear vocabulary instructions placed into meaningful texts and merged with multiple opportunities to practice results in a critical vocabulary gain for at-risk children (Fengyu, 2023). Also, teachers can implement small group and one-on-one instructional environments to increase word knowledge (Leifler, 2020).

The findings indicated that common factors teachers experience that affect the teaching of reading comprehension include language barrier, vocabulary, and learners' attention span. The teacher must activate Linguistic schema when reading a text (Huang, 2023). Linguistic schema from the literature, Ntshangase (2023) argued that learners get bored quickly when reading a text without having enough vocabulary. Mlakar (2022) highlighted that non-English speaking learners attempting to learn ESL must read texts in English to acquire relevant background knowledge on ESL linguistics, such as vocabulary or grammar, resulting in better comprehension. Linguistic schema encourages teachers to build schema groups by pre-teaching new words and grammatical points before reading and listening; learners will be actively involved in grammar and vocabulary activities (Nguyen & Huyen, 2020). Miolo *et al.* (2023) suggested that building schema activities is valuable to improve reading comprehension in English as a second language context.

Furthermore, during observations, the researcher noticed that despite how well learners read a text, most could not emulate the gist of the text and respond to some of the questions asked. However, when the teacher activated the vocabulary schema by explaining all the words that learners might not know and the text was reread, learners could make sense of what they were reading and comfortably answered questions from the text.

Hence, vocabulary charts can come in handy. With Ms. Nolo, the teachers came to class and had already written the vocabulary on the big chart pasted on the chalkboard. Vocabulary charts can be found in several forms. Using them can help learners focus on specific areas of English to create word clusters and demonstrate structures and hierarchy, just to name a few advantages (Fengyu, 2023). Vocabulary charts assist learners in expanding their passive and active vocabulary due to the connectedness of word group areas. Furthermore, image-orientated vocabulary charts provide visual support for learners, which can be used by Grade 4 learners whose reading abilities and vocabulary bank are under construction. For instance, they can consult the vocabulary chart for assistance when encountering a new word. Most importantly, vocabulary charts are crucial for Grade 4 ESL learners learning new English words and needing image references. Thus, exposing learners to new vocabulary allows them to build their schema, leading to adequate reading comprehension.

4.4.8 Collaboration of Teachers

Collaborating among teachers is a critical factor in ensuring teacher's professional development. It has been extensively studied that teachers should be motivated to collaborate with their peers (Cojorn & Sonsupap, 2024). This notion acts as a learning platform for teachers to bridge the gap experienced by teachers in specific topics. Moreover, teachers' collaboration assists in creating a robust framework in which teachers can strive to understand and review their approaches and develop new ones relevant to learners' needs. Thus, the teaching strategy that works best for learners is one that learners can quickly grasp. The same sentiments were asserted by

Mr Molemo, during the interviews, said: *A strategy that we use here at school where we have the previous Grade 3 teachers they will come and then. Before we write the baseline uhm, activities are at the beginning of the year. They will come uhm, and make uhm, their learners familiar with, a new phase and also, we as the intermediate uhm, teachers will come to the learners and tell them “hore” uhm, this is a new phase, this is what will be happening you will be meeting new teachers and all.*

The response indicates that strong teachers' cohesion and improvement of the schooling community should consist of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). From the interviews,

Mr Molemo further indicated: *Another thing is we do have the PLCs that we created as teachers who teach the same subject.*

To put it briefly, the participant highlights that teachers' involvement in PLCs and collaborative teaching might positively influence the improvement of teachers so that they might have test approaches in teaching reading comprehension. However, successful collaboration may be hindered by factors such as the school's culture, the SMT, and the attributes of specific teachers (Jadallah *et al.*, 2023). Jadallah *et al.*, (2023). indicates that for teachers' collaboration to be successful, it is essential to first deal with obstacles as they arise.

4.4.9 The Designing and Use of Visual Learning Aids

visual aids are expressions that enable learners to observe and hear clearly (Patesan *et al.*, 2024). These scholars define Visual aids as sketches, illustrations, representations, motion pictures, film strips, or any object that can enhance teaching and learning through visual senses. Furthermore, these are teaching devices used in the classroom to supplement and simplify learning and improve the learning experience (Ordu, 2021). Consequently, teachers need to identify the correct strategies, select the best-suited materials for teaching, supplement materials for the class, and adapt teaching materials. Hanna (2021) emphasises that visualising while reading a complex text from the textbook will help with reading comprehension skills.

During interviews, all six participants indicated that they use different learning aids in one way or another, namely, Chalkboards, side words, charts, puppets, textbooks, readers, DBE workbooks, PIRSP handouts, and visual media. All sampled teachers used the chalkboard in their classrooms. For example,

Ms Mololo mentioned, *...and then write a story using a frame on the chalkboard so that learners can see what is happening and have direction.*

Ms. Mololo further indicated that she used the chalkboard to guide learners in the lesson. This is aligned with Mugani (2020); the chalkboard can be used as a supportive system that can assist the facilitator in ushering in a communicative lesson by allowing

learners to have an open discussion with the teacher during lessons. While using the chalkboard, teachers could give learners more activities while reading to help them understand. During interviews, all the teachers indicated that they used the DBE book to read and comprehend. However, during observations, three teachers were reading from the DBE books, one teacher from PRSIP, one from reader, and the last one was using reading handouts from the DBE. Mr. Bonolo indicated that he mainly uses the DBE during reading for comprehension because it is a vital aid. After all, all the prescribed resources are contained in it. This was the same feeling for Ms Nolo and Mr Molemo; the DBE book is an all-rounded learning aid with various resources. Tangible objects were also one of the items that the participants agreed to use. This was because tangible objects are very effective in explaining to learners. For example, Mr. Molemo mentioned:

What I usually do when I teach, I come with uhm, teaching media to class uhm, I make puppets uhm, I make cartoons for them to see what we are reading about, if we are talking about the birds uhm, sometimes we go to, to the trees we find if we can see the birds there. I try to take them out so that they can see, and our classes have charts; they have the side-words where they can see and then, the other thing that I, that one of us shall come to it when we get to, to, to, the support.

On top of that, during observations, while Ms. Nolo was reading from the DBE, she also came up with a chart that contained all side words to help learners learn vocabulary. This thinking is consistent with Teferra (2022), who argues that tangible objects effectively present new vocabulary to learners.

Hanna (2021) mentions that giving learners visual schema provides them with a framework for reading with comprehension by simply being allowed to observe the link that connects the facts, prompts, and constructs their schema, thus leading to an understanding of the text. This build-up of meaning strengthens learners' schemas and acts as the foundation of all readings that will be done on the topic. Mpofu and Maphalala (2020) agree with this sentiment by mentioning that the memory created by the past elaboration of previous visual schema strengthens the memory of that schema. Revising the visual schema will further enhance that schema. Hence,

repeating the revising exercises at separate intervals will guarantee that the schema is engraved in the long-term memory.

The CAPS indicates that reading and viewing skills are paramount for fruitful learning in all subjects. Learners' advanced expertise in reading and viewing a broad scope of written, non-written, and visual texts. CAPS document highlights that visual aids include posters, charts, images, pamphlets, film and comic strips, cartoons and drawings, to mention a few. Moreover, regarding reading comprehension, it is paramount for teachers to discuss with learners how to interpret the role of visual pictures while reading a story. Teachers should teach learners to conclude a text using visual clues on things that are not explicit. From Grade 4, learners change the instruction medium from Sesotho, their home language, to English. Still, using visual aids during/ story with images greatly assists learners in listening conscientiously. The reason is that the execution of the text and the utilisation of images supplement the learners' receptive and expressive English abilities.

Lastly, observing the classroom context and setup. The researcher observed no reading corners in all the selected classrooms. Posters and visual material were absent in most classes. In all the observed classrooms, video or audio materials were not used to stimulate reading and understanding. There was also no integration of skills, where a teacher would use one text to teach reading comprehension and other language skills. On a positive note, in all the sampled schools, no classroom had a severe problem of overcrowding, and the classroom with the most learners was 42, with an average of 37 learners. This was a great advantage to these teachers because reading development could be sufficiently monitored.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the findings and explained generated data on investigating Grade 4 Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Reading Comprehension in English as a Second Language at Botshabelo Schools. Data were generated from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analyses. It was then evident that most ESL teachers in Grade 4 face numerous problems with teaching reading comprehension. However, they do apply various strategies to mitigate the challenges. Moreover, the CAPS document lacks a practical strategy teachers can use to mitigate this crisis, especially in multilingual classrooms.

CHAPTER 5 : SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter outlined a comprehensive account of the data and an interpretation of it. This chapter summarises the study and presents recommendations and knowledge of contribution. The study asked what Grade 4 teachers' experiences teaching reading comprehension in ESL classrooms in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa, are. It aimed to answer the research questions below:

- What are Grade 4 teachers' personal and professional experiences of teaching reading comprehension to ESL learners in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?
- What strategies do Grade 4 teachers use to teach ESL learners reading comprehension in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?
- How do Grade 4 teachers teach ESL learners reading comprehension strategies in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa?

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews, lesson observations, and document analysis were used to answer these questions. Six participants from four primary schools participated in the research.

5.2 SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings' synthesis is presented in the order in which the research questions were arranged.

5.2.1 Teachers' experiences of teaching ESL reading comprehension to Grade 4 learners

This research aimed to investigate Grade 4 teachers' experience in teaching ESL reading comprehension. It has been indicated in the study that the sampled teacher's experiences of teaching ESL reading comprehension seem to be averse even though teachers put emphasis on different things and agree on others. For instance, five out

of six teachers agreed that most parents were not involved in the schoolwork of learners, which harms their overall performance. Not only that, but there is also a considerable lack of educational resources. Most learners do not have textbooks, and they share in the classrooms. Those who do not have the privilege of taking the textbook home cannot read while at home. Moreover, almost all classrooms do not have any charts on their walls, which enables learners to keep reading without the assistance of teachers.

Another predominant factor in the study was the learners who could not read because of a lack of phonological awareness. This is problematic for teachers because, according to the CAPS document, teachers are just given a couple of weeks to revise phonics that they were supposed to be taught extensively throughout the foundation phase. No wonder most learners fail to read because, through experience, a child cannot read, let alone read for meaning, if they did not grasp phonics from the Foundation Phase. From the participant's point of view, phonological awareness is one of many problems that learners from the Foundation Phase have; the overall movement from the foundation to the intermediate phase proves to be a problem. All participants indicated that changing the LoLT from Sesotho to English is challenging for learners. Fortunately, most teachers indicate that literacy coaches support them through classroom visitations, regular workshops, and the circulation of reading resources.

5.2.2 Strategies that Teachers use to Improve Grade 4 learners' ESL Reading Comprehension and how they implement them in the classroom

One of the significant findings of this research was that teachers implement various strategies to try to help learners who face challenges with reading comprehension in Grade 4. One of the strategies used was shared reading, and one participant indicated that it is the most important strategy because it allows learners to retell the story and answer questions that root from the text to comprehend what they have just read. During observations in two classrooms where shared reading was used, participants seemed confident and enjoyed, and all learners looked interested. The researcher also observed that shared reading significantly impacts learners' reading comprehension, irrespective of their reading comprehension. An additional strategy that was observed from participants was codeswitching. Even though only one participant acknowledged

using codeswitching to supplement the lesson, the researcher noticed that all participants heavily relied on codeswitching during their lessons.

Impressively in context with the schema theory, two participants mentioned activating their prior knowledge to link what they already know to what they are about to be taught. Moreover, another mentioned strategy by sampled teachers was group-guided reading, where a group of not more than six learners of different proficiencies is bundled and allowed to read the exact text in concert. Moreover, one of the participants indicated that he uses reading aloud to enable learners to hear how words are being pronounced, which leads to language development. One participant stated that she reads while learners listen. Afterwards, they discuss and reflect on what they have read and ask learners questions about the text to assess their comprehension. Furthermore, the participant indicated that when she comes across complex words, she writes them on the vocabulary charts to help learners build their vocabulary and have a reference for words they fail to remember. To emphasise the importance of vocabulary charts, irrespective of how well a learner reads, the researcher noticed that when there are unknown words to a learner in the passage they are reading, they become unable to answer questions on the text, and when those words are explained to learners' ability to answer questions increases drastically.

Not only that, but using visual charts proved very beneficial in reading comprehension. Participants indicated that they use the chalkboard to write sub-topics to guide learners through the text and give them directions on what is happening. Others are more creative and use puppets, cartoons, and charts to write all the side words. On top of that, because it was observed that most schools have a problem with a shortage of textbooks, one participant indicated that different Grades have WhatsApp groups where homework and reading materials are shared so that learners can read at home. Finally, the last strategy picked up was a collaboration of Grade 4 teachers with foundation phase teachers. Before a baseline activity can be written in January, teachers from Grade 3 come talk with learners and comfort and help Grade 4 teachers identify different capabilities of learners. Additionally, teachers from various schools who teach the same subject create PLCs to leverage each other.

5.2.3 The teachers' implementation of the reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms

The CAPS and PSRIP guide teachers to ensure that the prescripts of these policies yield fruitful results. The teacher's understanding of their work context and the pre-empted challenges that learners come with allow teachers to improvise. Using multilingual pedagogies such as code-switching is one fruitful strategy and a scaffold on which teachers can depend. Using the prescribed reading material and WhatsApp groups were some implementation strategies that yielded positive results, but not without challenges.

5.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research sought to explore Grade 4 teachers' experiences teaching reading comprehension in ESL in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa. Thus, using schema theory while conducting this research was very useful because the research findings showed that participants' teachers relied on learners' prior knowledge and experiences while teaching reading comprehension (Xiao, 2024).

Thus, the study demonstrated that to utilise the learners' schema, teachers must intentionally prepare learners to use three schemata for reading comprehension for academic purposes and when they read for leisure (Xiao, 2024). It was further visible in the study that preparing the learner's content and linguistic schemata is critical. Hence, it is impossible to disregard the collection and merger of learners' schema after reading. Xiao (2024) indicates that teachers can use brainstorming and mind maps to direct learners in comprehending the text they have just read. This was seen in the study when teachers used visual aids, vocabulary charts, and chalkboards to ensure learners comprehend. It was also seen in the study that before reading the text, teachers made the learners look at the pictures aligned with the topic and used open-ended questions to predict the story. Then, after reading, the teachers asked questions to verify that the learners understood what they had just read.

5.4 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research objective was to explore Grade 4 teachers' experiences teaching reading comprehension in ESL in Botshabelo Primary Schools in Free State Province, South Africa; thus, the researcher used a qualitative approach to understand and explain the study. Therefore, using an interpretivist paradigm assisted the researcher

in comprehending teachers' personal experiences and truth (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022) independently and as a group. It was needed to understand how teachers experience learners' reading comprehension in ESL. Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis assisted in generating data and comprehending the under-hidden effects on teachers' experiences in teaching ESL reading comprehension. Using these three data-generating techniques led to triangulation and trustworthiness of the research findings because each technique was verified, and others denied some claims.

Apart from the research, teachers were asked to think critically about their strategies and experiences of teaching, and this, by itself, might have impacted their views in a certain way. The techniques caused teachers to openly discuss their experiences, outlooks, and craft. Then, observations endorsed the findings from the interviews. Although the number of sampled teachers was limited, the decision was justifiable because it allowed the researcher to pay attention to and examine their experiences in teaching ESL reading comprehension.

5.5 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The researcher conducted this research because Grade 4 learners struggled to read, especially regarding comprehension. Thus, to tackle the problem head-on, the researcher realised that she had to explore teachers' experiences in teaching ESL. Regardless of all the advancements that can be made in education, the teacher is where the rubber hits the road, and the teacher is the most critical resource in any classroom. However, she was compelled to consider that even though the participants were English teachers and co-workers, the research was a vital data source, and the researcher was cautious about being as objective as possible while generating data. Participants' experiences, apart from data generation, gave an understanding of which strategies can be used to mitigate the problem of ESL reading comprehension. During observations, the researcher noticed no reading corners in all the classrooms of the schools she visited. Thus, from a personal point of view, the researcher recognised the need to have reading corners in ESL classrooms. The importance of reading corners would only have been identified when conducting this research.

By conducting this study, the researcher was compiled to understand her strategies and which techniques she must use to help Grade 4 learners learn how to read for

comprehension. She was also encouraged to reflect and assess how effective her strategies were, which caused her to use those strategies. Hence, conducting this research had significant implications for the researcher.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were several limitations to the study. The first limitation was that the researcher was a teacher in the circuit and the district researcher; therefore, the participants could have shared untrue information to impress the researcher. Additionally, the researcher could be biased in analysing data because she is a teacher in the phase and knows how 'things' should be done in the classroom.

To navigate these limitations, the triangulation of data generation methods was used to confirm data. To ensure that teachers shared their authentic experiences, the researcher shared that their names and school names would be anonymised by coding them. Also, the analysed data were shared with them if requested.

5.7 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This research endorsed prior findings referenced but added context to the studied problem. The research contribution to knowledge is to study the problem of reading comprehension in South Africa, teachers' experience with the problem, and strategies to mitigate the problem. Notably, this study foregrounds the use of multilingual pedagogies and integrated strategies in teaching reading comprehension. Furthermore, it presents teacher autonomy and collaboration as a coping mechanism for teaching in Grade 4. Although the topic has been extensively studied, the fact that it was studied in Botshabelo township and blended the experiences with strategies; might have a context that is otherwise absent in other parts of South Africa and the world.

5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

More research could be done on the following aspects:

- The impact of reading comprehension limitations on spoken language.
- The effect of Multilingual pedagogies on continuous and summative assessment.
- The impact of the subject advisory and mentorship by the SMT and PLCs.

- The extent to which digital technology can enhance reading comprehension in the township primary schools doing ESL.

Ideally, future research could use a mixed or quantitative method approach to gather more data and cope.

5.9 CONCLUSION

This study proves that reading comprehension in ESL is problematic in Grade 4 at Botshabelo primary schools. However, this study showed that teachers' experiences are critical in ensuring that all learners have the skills to make reading more accessible to comprehend. Teachers must be aware of their experiences and how they impact their teaching strategies to develop an environment conducive to ESL learners. The teacher is a critical factor in this complex procedure. From the literature review and throughout the study, an overwhelming amount of evidence indicated that teaching reading comprehension could be exciting and encouraging to learners if suitable teaching strategies are utilised. Learners transform into evaluative and inquisitive readers of the text, and enhancing such capabilities is critical to learning to read for comprehension. Thus, to abolish the persistent problem of learners being unable to read and produce learners as avid and analytical readers, teachers' teaching strategies and how they implement them in the classroom are critical factors. Finally, the research declares the significance of teachers' experiences in teaching reading comprehension, how they teach it, and the grounds for their choice of strategy for teaching ESL learners in Grade 4.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Ethical Clearance Approval from UFS Ethics Committee



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

15-Apr-2024

Dear Ms Matsietsi Mohloki

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Investigating Grade 4 Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Reading Comprehension in English Second Language at Botshabelo Schools.

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2023/2620

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 via an Amendment on RIMS to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit a Final Report on RIMS for your study/research project to the ethics office once the project has concluded. Should you require more time than the allotted 12 months to complete this research, please apply for an extension by submitting a Continuation/Report on RIMS. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sean van der Merwe

Vice-Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Digitally signed by Sean van der Merwe
Date: 2024.04.16 12:11:55 +02'00'

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Appendix B Approval letter from FS DoE

Enquiries: M.Z. Thango
Ref: Research Permission: M. P. Mohloki
Tel. 051 404 8808
Email: M.Z.Thango@fseducation.gov.za



1745 J Section
Botshabelo
9781

Dear Ms. M. P. Mohloki

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: MOTHEO DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that you have been granted permission to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education within the Mthetho Education District. The details in relation to your research project with the University of the Free State are as follows:

Topic: Investigating Grade 4 Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Reading Comprehension in English Second Language at Botshabelo Schools.

1. **List of schools involved:** Makgulo Primary School, Reentseng Primary School and Retsamaile Primary School.
2. **Target Population:** Six educators teaching English in grade 4 at the selected schools.
3. **Period of research:** From the second week of February 2024 until 30 September 2024. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. The approval is subject to the following conditions:
 - 4.1 The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
 - 4.2 A bound copy of the research document should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 101, 1st Floor, Thuto House, St. Andrew Street, Bloemfontein or can be emailed to the above-mentioned email address.
 - 4.3 You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
 - 4.4 The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
5. Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. MZAMO W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 08/02/2024

RESEARCH APPLICATION BY M. P. MOHLOKI, PERMISSION LETTER 07 FEBRUARY 2024, MOTHEO DISTRICT
QASME, M&E and Strategic Planning Directorate Private Bag 20565, Bloemfontein, 9300 - Thuto House, Room 101, 1st Floor, St Andrew Street, Bloemfontein

www.fsdoe.gov.za

Appendix C Letter seeking Gatekeeper Permission

Letter to the school Principal

1745 J Section

Botshabelo

9781

17 July 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for permission to conduct research in your schools

I am a student at the University of the Free State, and my student number is 2017452984. I am pursuing a master's in education specialising in Languages. It would be a great privilege if you would permit me to conduct research in your school and write a research report.

The title of my research is to **investigate Grade 4 teachers' experience in teaching reading comprehension in English as a second language at Botshabelo Schools**. Suppose permission is granted for me to perform my research. Selected teachers within the school will be asked to participate in an interview, which will be recorded and transcribed, followed by classroom observations, where I will observe while the selected teacher is teaching.

The school and teacher who participated in the research will not be named in the final research report. I am looking forward to conducting research in your school and hope that approval will be granted. Any questions or concerns can be directed to me at **073 924 5079** or **Paulinamohloli6@gmail.com**.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Mohloli M.P

Appendix D Letter Seeking Participation from Teachers

1745 J Section

Botshabelo

9781

17 July 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I am currently pursuing a master's degree and working on a thesis titled **Investigating Grade 4 Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Reading Comprehension in English Second Language at Botshabelo Schools**.

I request that you, without any obligation, take part in the two-day scholarly research that will be administered at your school.

You were chosen because your dedication and hard work in teaching English as a second language in Grade 4 did not go unnoticed. I would like you to share your views, opinions, and experiences. The research results will help learners and teachers improve reading comprehension. There is no payment for participating in the interview. The interview will be confidential, and your name will not appear in any document. The discussion will be held in private, will last approximately 30 minutes, and will be audio-recorded to verify the findings. Classroom observation will last for 1 hour, with your permission,

You can withdraw at any time during the interview without fear of repercussions. The research results will be available to you after the research is concluded. Additionally, the University of the Free State approved this research's ethics. Please feel free to contact me with any inquiries or concerns. My contact details are 073 924 5079 or Paulinamohloki6@gmail.com. Filling in the consent form below will indicate that you are, without any obligation, willing to participate in the research.

Thank you in advance for taking time from your busy schedule to participate in this research.

Yours faithfully

Mohloki M.P

Appendix E Informed consent

Consent to participate in this study

I, the undersigned,

(participant's full names to be included), (the "Participant")
confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

Investigating Grade 4 Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Reading Comprehension in English Second Language at Botshabelo Schools. About participating in the study and which Study is being conducted by **Mohloki Matsietsi Paulina.**

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that–

1. The researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as described in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing, and processing my personal data in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation to it;
6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage;
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the interview.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F Interview schedule

Reading Comprehension Teaching Experiences

1. May I ask if you enjoy teaching reading comprehension? What are the reasons for that?
2. Please share any experiences of teaching reading comprehension that stand out in your mind.
3. Do you feel confident that you can teach reading comprehension? What are the reasons for that?
4. What challenges do you experience in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 4?
5. What factors most likely influence your teaching of reading comprehension in your grade 4 class?
6. Explain how the literacy coaches (curriculum advisor, principal, and departmental heads) support you in teaching reading comprehension. Is that helpful, and what are the reasons for your response?

Reading Comprehension Strategies

1. What teaching strategies do you use to teach reading comprehension to grade 4 ESL learners?
2. Would you say that your strategies were learned through experience or from your teacher training or workshops?
3. Do you or your school somehow involve parents in ensuring learners read at home? What is the impact of that?
4. What resources do you use to teach reading comprehension? Are they enough and easily accessible?
5. Would you say the resources you use to teach reading comprehension are effective? What are the reasons for that?
6. Do you know the reading comprehension strategies prescribed in the CAPS document? Which ones do you use, and how effective are they?

Appendix G Observation schedule

1. Participant's Profile

Participant Name/Code:

Gender:

Age:

Years of Experience in teaching English:.....

Highest Qualification:

Position at School:

2. **Classroom observation**

Date of observation:

Grade:

Number of learners:

Genre Taught/ Topic:

Lesson Duration:

Aspects to be observed	Comments
How is the lesson introduced?	

Are the lesson objectives clearly stated to learners?	
Are learners involved from the beginning?	
Which strategies are used by the teacher?	
Are the set lesson objective(s) achieved?	
Do learners appear to be involved during the lesson, and are they enjoying it? What evidence is there for this?	
During the lesson, does the teacher appear to be enjoying the lesson? What	

evidence is there for this?	
How is the lesson concluded?	
How would I describe the teacher's experience of the lesson?	

Overall Comments by the researcher:

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Appendix H Proof-reader and Editor's Report

<i>Independent Editor</i>	kufazano@gmail.com +27631434276
 SATI SOUTH AFRICAN TRANSLATORS' INSTITUTE	
CERTIFICATE OF EDITING	
This confirms that I edited substantively the document below, including a Reference list. The document was returned to the author with various tracked changes to correct errors and clarify meaning.	
TITLE: Investigating Grade 4 Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Reading Comprehension in English Second Language at Botshabelo Schools	
AUTHOR : Matsiesti Paulina Mohloki	
Student number: 2017452984	
Note: The edited work described here may not be identical to that submitted. The authors, at their sole discretion, have the prerogative to accept, delete, or change amendments made by the editor before submission.	
DATE: 25 November 2024	
EDITOR'S COMMENT	
The author was advised to effect suggested corrections regarding subject-verb agreement, punctuation and overall academic writing style, to name a few.	
 Signature	
Dr Kufakunesu Zano, PhD in English. A member of the South African Translators' Institute, Ref 1000686, South Africa 2024	

Appendix I Turnitin Report

Turnitin report.docx			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
5%	4%	2%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	vital.seals.ac.za:8080 Internet Source	<1 %	
2	libdspace.ufh.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %	
3	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1 %	
4	wiredspace.wits.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %	
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