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Investigating Teaching Strategies for Reading in the Motheo Education District

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ABSTRACT The aim of the study was to investigate teachers' knowledge of reading methods. The study was informed by the various reports indicating that South African intermediate learners are not doing well in reading. This was a mixed method study, where both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. Qualitative methods preceded quantitative methods. Qualitative data informed questions to be asked during the quantitative phase. During the first phase of the study 8 teachers who teach English in the intermediate phase were interviewed. The second phase of the questionnaire was distributed to 80 teachers in the different towns in the Motheo district. Most of the participants teach in the township schools where the learners learn in English, which is not their home language. Qualitative data was analysed thematically, with the researcher looking for patterns from the data interpreted. Quantitative analysis involved the use of descriptive analysis. The research findings imply that teachers have superficial knowledge of most reading methods and the

main components of reading. The findings also suggest that there are other factors that might be adding to the difficulties experienced by teachers. It also seems like teachers lack the willingness to ensure that their classes are suitable for the reading tasks due to factors such as class size and the rotation system. The findings show that many schools still do not possess technological devices that can be used as teaching media, and most teachers are still not yet computer literate.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to determine the knowledge level of language teachers in the Motheo education district, with specific emphasis on the different reading methods. Emphasis was particularly on the intermediate phase.

Firstly we address the problem of poor reading performance in our South African schools, cascading from national to district level. An overview of the relevant theories of learning and reading that guided the study is also given. This is followed by a brief discussion of reading strategies, reading methods, and components of reading, as suggested by literature. Suggestions from reviewed literature are compared to the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The article

further gives a summary of the research design. The article concludes by looking into the findings as well as relevant pedagogical implications

The South African reading problem

Over the years, a number of reports painted a bleak picture about South African intermediate learners poor reading levels (Howie et al. 2008; Pretorius 2002; Van den Berg 2011; the systemic evaluation report 2005; the quality learning and teaching campaign launch report of the Free State 2010; Bloch 2009; Macfarlane 2011).

What emerges from the above sources is that the problem of reading in South Africa cuts across the 9 South African provinces. The statistics also prove that the problem of reading is actually worse in the intermediate phase, especially in those schools where learners are studying in English as a first additional language. All the above raises the question why? Various writers over the years have advanced possible reasons why reading instruction may fail to bear the desired results.

Chatry-Komarek (2003) points to the language of instruction as a possible cause. Cambourne (2001), (in Le Cordeur 2010), argues that one of the main reasons for the large number of struggling readers in the intermediate phase is that reading strategies are not demonstrated effectively. As it will be indicated in the later parts of this section, reading strategies are encompassed within reading methods. Machado (2007) points to the following as the factors that may impede effective teaching of reading: teachers' level of training, knowledge of various reading methods, and the ability to plan interesting and appropriate activities. It is this aspect of knowledge of various methods that the study centred upon.

The constructivist and interactive theories

The constructivist and the interactive theories shaped the basis for this study. The constructivist theory forms part of this study as a theory of learning, while the interactive theory forms part of this study as one of the theories of reading.

The constructivist theory is based on the principles of cognitive development, popularized by Jean Piaget. According to Piaget's theory the starting point of cognitive development is active participation by the learner (Child 1997). This aspect of active involvement is supported by a number of writers such as Brown (2000), Eggen and Kauchak (2010), and Center (2005).

Another critical aspect advocated by constructivists is social interaction. Lev Vygotsky, (in Eggen and Kauchak 1999), argues that language instruction should occur in an activity-orientated, social situation. A social situation is all about collaboration with an adult or a more capable peer, which will result in cognition and the ability to function on a higher level (Gunning 2003). However, Piaget was against the idea of social interaction as he felt that it disrupts equilibrium. He also believed that learners construct their own knowledge without the influence of others.

Barchers (1998) point out that the interactive theory combines the bottom-up and the top-down theories in a sense that the learners use their background knowledge and their decoding skills simultaneously to understand text. We also note that in the bottom-up theory the learners learn reading in the following specific sequence: letters; words; sentences; paragraphs; full texts. The top-down theory emphasises the experiences and knowledge that the learner brings to class. When arguing for the interactive theory, Scheckle (2009) points out that for learners to read successfully, they need a combination of decoding and understanding where they are using their knowledge of letters and words to make sense of

what they read.

Reading, reading strategies, components of reading and reading methods

Reading

Reading involves the identification of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli for recall of meanings built up through past experiences and further construction of new meaning through the reader's manipulation of relevant concepts already in his/her possession (Petty et al. 1989). The resulting meanings are organised into thought processes according to the purposes that are operating in the reader.

Reading strategies

According to Li (2010), reading strategies are deliberate, conscious techniques that readers employ to enhance their comprehension or retention of the textual information. Li (2010) argues that reading strategies can be divided into the following three sub-categories: global reading strategies; problem-solving reading strategies; and support-reading strategies. Global reading strategies are explained as generalised, intentional reading strategies aimed at setting the stage for the reading act. Li (2010) gives the following examples of global reading strategies: evaluating what to read or ignore; noting text characteristics; and guessing what the material entails. Problem-solving strategies are explained as localised, focused, problem solving or repair strategies used when problems develop in understanding textual information, such as re-reading, going back when losing concentration, pausing and thinking about reading. Support-reading strategies are mechanisms aimed at sustaining responses to reading, such as, the usage of outside reference material, taking notes, underlining or circling information and other practical strategies that might be described as functional or support strategies.

Components of reading

The Department of education (2007) encourages teachers to focus their attention on the development of the following components when teaching reading: phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight words, phonics), comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. Phonemic awareness is a subject of phonological awareness that involves the awareness that spoken words are composed of individual sounds or phonemes (Yopp and Yopp 2000) (in Christ et

al. 2003). Word recognition is an essential first step in the process of deriving meaning from written text (Ives et al. 1979). Comprehension is a process of relating relevant aspects of the world around us to the knowledge and expectations we already have in our heads (Barchers 1998). Wharton-McDonald and Swiger (2009) stress the point that a student's knowledge of vocabulary strongly relates to his or her ability to comprehend text. Kuhn (in Palumbo and Sanacore 2009) states that, in addition to vocabulary growth, reading fluency is a major goal of literacy instruction.

Reading methods

The DoE (2007) encourages the use of activities such as independent reading, shared reading, as well as guided reading for the intermediate phase. The soon to be introduced Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement refer to these activities as reading methods (Department of Basic Education 2011). This document emphasises methods such as shared reading, reading aloud to the whole class, guided group reading, independent reading, and paired reading.

In shared reading the teacher actively involves the students in small groups and whole class reading, in which the teacher engages students in discussion, modelling and demonstration of more complex reading strategies that promote understanding of literacy devices, vocabulary development, connections to the text, and graphic aids in fiction and non-fiction (Johnson 2008).

The Department of Education (2007) explains that during read aloud, the teacher reads to the whole class or to a small group, using material that is at the listening comprehension level of the learners. Peterson (1995) suggests the following as effective read aloud strategies for older, independent readers: The teacher must choose an appealing, captivating, flowing and enjoyable book. The teacher must ensure variety in terms of genres and publications. The teacher must change the book if he/she suspects that it does not serve the desired purpose.

In Barchers (1998) the following approaches interconnected with group reading are suggested: teacher-prepared book guides, literary discussion groups, student-implemented book guides, and literature circles. The author explains teacher-prepared book guides as the use of short-answer questions to determine comprehension. Literary discussion groups are formed when students are reading the same book, reading books on a similar level or reading books without thematic connectors. Student implemented book guides are used when a group

of five to ten learners read a book and write a set of responses for each chapter. In the end, the students discuss the chapter and the responses with the teacher. Literature circles are small groups of learners reading and discussing the same book. After this, they need to evaluate the group's progress and follow up with a programme to extend reading. Literature circles can improve co-operation, accountability and self-evaluation.

Cunningham and Allington (2003) encourage the use of play school groups. This strategy involves arranging the learners into groups of three to five. One of the learners acts as the teacher and directs the proceedings.

Independent reading methods come in different formations. The Department of Education (2007) explains independent reading as a purposeful, planned activity where learners have the opportunity to choose what to read according to their interest and ability. During independent reading sessions, the teacher should always be observing, listening and gathering information about learners' reading behaviour. We have individual reading conferences, which affords the learner a chance to choose what to read and to report to the other learners on their return (Barchers 1998). There is also self-directed reading, which is a multilevel approach where the learners get to choose what they want to read (Cunningham and Allington 2003). The common thing about independent methods is the freedom afforded to the learners to choose what to read.

Paired reading is a procedure where a parent or another more advanced reader helps a novice reader to practice reading, which includes modelling of fluent reading, helping with difficult words, talking about ideas in the passage and giving praise (Kozey 1995). There is a format of paired reading where two students plan a reading schedule together (Barchers 1998). One of the learners has to read while the other one listens. Discussion and questions follow this process. There is also partner reading, where children work together on a task (Cunningham and Allington 2003).

Focus was put on these methods because they are what one can call "a matter of policy", meaning that teachers in the intermediate phase in South Africa are expected to implement them.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study was embedded in a pragmatic paradigm. Tashakkori and Teddlie (in Mertens 2010) refer to the pragmatic paradigm as one of the paradigms that provides an underlying framework for mixed method research. Researchers can use multiple paradigms in their mixed method research (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). For this study both the interpretivist paradigm, which is qualitative, and the positivist paradigm, which is quantitative, were employed. This was done to reduce the limitations of each paradigm, and to make the normative and meta-theoretical assumptions explicit (Clarke 2009). According to Dzurec and Abram (in Onwuegbuzie 2005), we link qualitative and quantitative research because we are in pursue of the following: mastery over self and the world, complexity reduction to enhance understanding, understanding through re-composition, innovation, meaningfulness and truthfulness.

According to Babbie and Mouton (1998) the interpretive paradigm is in operation when human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their lives. Positivist researchers believe that the truth is objective and extrinsic, and attach importance to explaining matters by means of clear data, specific facts, and observable actions (Xinping 2002).

The basis of the study was an exploratory mixed method design. This allowed the researcher to start with qualitative data, to explore the phenomenon, and then build to a second, quantitative phase (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). The quantitative data results were used to refine and extend the qualitative findings (Creswell 2008).

This study focused on the intermediate phase, and focus was on the Motheo education district, which comprises of the following towns: Bloemfontein, Clocolan, Thaba-Nchu, Botshabelo, Hobhouse, Wepener, Ladybrand, Vanstadensrus, Dewetsdorp, Excelsior and Verkeerdevlei.

The study commenced with the individual interviewing of participants. Best and Kahn (2003) argues that the purpose of an interview is to find out what is on someone else's mind. For the interviews, 8 teachers were interviewed. An interview schedule was used to guide the interviews. The teachers had to outline the reading methods, components of reading, factors, environment, and the use of technology in the reading classrooms.

The quantitative process involved using a questionnaire, which is a survey tool where the respondents read questions themselves and mark the answers (Neuman 2007). The questionnaires were hand delivered to the participants, and they had the opportunity to complete them on their own. The researcher opted for self-completion questionnaires because they are appealing for gathering large numbers of responses at relatively low costs (Leman

2010). The questionnaire made it possible to quantify the responses. A total of 80 questionnaires were collected in a number of towns in the Motheo district.

Section A of the questionnaire focused on nominal measurements so that the researcher could assign numbers to individuals in order to quantify demographic factors such as gender, age, race, and teaching experience. Section B of the questionnaire focused on ordinal measurements. The items in this section were informed by the themes that were identified during the qualitative phase of the study. This section was sub-divided into the following sub-sections: Reading methods, components of reading, factors influencing the teaching of reading, creation of an environment conducive to reading, and the use of technology.

Since this was a mixed methods research, data analysis consisted of analysing the quantitative data using quantitative methods and qualitative data using qualitative methods and procedures (Delpont and Fouche 2011).

The researcher opted for the approach encouraged by Leedy and Ormrod (2005), who argue that when doing qualitative analysis, a large body of information should be inductively sorted and categorised to gradually bring it to a small set of abstract, underlying themes. The qualitative analysis ended with the interpretation of the data.

The second phase of data analysis, which was quantitative, consisted of using descriptive statistics. This made it possible to clarify proportions, percentages, ratios, measures of dispersion, and measures of central tendencies (Blaxter et al. 2001). Graphic data such as graphs, pies, and charts were used to clarify distribution patterns. In conjunction with these, measures of central tendencies were also used.

FINDINGS

The qualitative data analysis process yielded a rich, in-depth data that was divided into the following five themes: reading methods, components of reading, a suitable reading environment, factors affecting the teaching of reading, and the use of technology in the reading classroom. Having developed the themes they were subsequently divided into sub-themes.

Reading methods

Firstly, it emerged from the findings that grade 4 English teachers implement most of the reading methods recommended by literature, but most of the time they could not provide

details. At certain points there is a correlation between qualitative and quantitative data, whereas at certain points the two sets of data contradict each other.

Paired reading is one method that was not mentioned by any of the interviewees, although 47.5% of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they have a good understanding of this reading method. Twenty percent of the respondents claimed to have a very good understanding of this method.

Only 2 of the interviewees indicated that they use independent reading as a method. According to quantitative data 45% of the respondents claimed to have good understanding of what independent reading is all about. Another 27.5% claimed to have a very good understanding. The quantitative data contradicts with qualitative data in this regard. The following response by one of the interviewees indicates that there might be some teachers who cannot make a distinction between independent and individual reading.

P5: *“Eh, sometimes I do independent reading. That is where sometimes I am able to see those that need help, when they read individually”.*

Read aloud seems to be one of the unpopular methods because only 1 of the interviewees alluded to using this method. Qualitative data indicates that only 18.8% of the respondents perceive their knowledge of this method to be good, while only 2.5% think they have a very good understanding of this method. In this instance there seems to be correlation between qualitative and quantitative data.

When responding about group reading the teachers could only relate it to seating arrangement, division of the learners and the choosing of a group leader. The interviewee quoted below was the only one who tried to give a detailed account of how she implements this method:

P5: *“Let me say, when I do group reading, I take about only six pupils, and then I make them read. All the groups read the same story, but they read different parts of that story”.*

These qualitative data contradicts with quantitative data which indicates that 48.8% of the respondents to the questionnaire think they have a good knowledge of group reading. Another 20% feels that their knowledge of this method is very good.

Half of those interviewed indicated that they use shared reading. The response below shows

that some of the teachers do have an understanding of what shared reading entails:

P2: *"Sometimes I do shared reading with them. That's most of the time ... Sometimes I read, they will read after me. They will follow me ... I like to read to them, then after that they will read after me, then I can go to another methodology"*.

Quantitative data shows that 33.8% of the respondents think they have a good understanding of shared reading, while another 17.5% feel their knowledge is very good. This data also correlates with the qualitative data.

About half of the interviewed teachers indicated that they do implement guided reading. Of those who responded to the questionnaire, 52.5% indicated that they have a good knowledge of this method, 25.5% of them said they have a very good knowledge of this method. The responses of some of the interviewed teachers, however, indicate that some teachers confuse guided reading with shared reading:

P3: *"Then guided reading. This is where I read with them. Actually guided reading we need a big book, whereby we take a pointer, read with them. Like this word is 'wall', then they come after me"*.

P6: *"Firstly, I think the first one which is more vital for me; it is this one of guided reading. The teacher will read first, and then they will read after the teacher"*.

Lastly, all the interviewed teachers indicated that they do some corrective reading to assist struggling readers. Just more than half (52%) of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they implement corrective reading.

Components of reading

Regarding components of reading the participants had to indicate their knowledge in relation to the specified components. The interviews proved that the participant's understanding of most of these components is not adequate, but during the quantitative stage the respondents gave an indication that they teach the different components of reading.

The interviews required the participants to outline how they develop the various components, while in the questionnaire the participants had to choose from the following categories: never,

seldom, uncertain, sometimes and always. Only the majority views will be indicated here.

In relation to comprehension, the popular belief among the interviewees is that it can be achieved by using assessment. The majority of those interviewed indicated that they ask questions during or after the lesson to determine comprehension. Sixty one percent of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they always make an attempt to develop comprehension, while another 36.5% said they sometimes try to develop the learner's comprehension. The remaining 2.5% represents those who seldom focus on comprehension.

In relation to phonemic awareness there is parity between qualitative and quantitative data. More than half of those interviewed indicated that they treat phonemic awareness, even though they could not go into detail in terms of outlining how they do it. There were arguments that the learning and teaching support material (LTSM) used nowadays impedes on the teacher's ability to improve phonemic awareness, as the example below will show. One aspect noticed is that teachers think of phonics and phonemic awareness as the same thing. The quotation below highlights the two aspects discussed above.

P6: The thing that we should do. You know apartheid. Those books from that dispensation, they were, in Afrikaans we say 'klanke' (sounds). Those books allowed us to drill the phonics. To spell words. That taught us how to spell words, the phonics and how the sounds go. We have to go back to that."

Quantitative data indicates that 38.8% of the respondents to the questionnaire claim to always develop phonemic awareness, while another 38.8% claim to do that sometimes. Some of them (6.2%) seldom focus on phonemic awareness, while 10% never treat phonemic awareness. Some of the participants were uncertain (16.2%).

Modelling to learners seems to be the popular approach used by most of the interviewees to teach fluency, used by more than half of those interviewed. This participant elaborates how:

P2: "I guide them by pronouncing certain words. For an example, if I want them to say 'dolphin', I ask them to repeat the word after me ... I'll start first by reading with them at their pace, because they can't read fluently".

The quantitative data regarding fluency indicates that 45% of the respondents always develop fluency. Another 40% sometimes develop fluency. The remaining 15% is spread between the other three categories (uncertain, seldom, never). These numbers give an indication that not

enough is done by the teachers to develop fluency.

Regarding the development of vocabulary, the teachers could only refer to the use of a dictionary, 'personal dictionary', discussions of difficult words, giving the learners the meaning of difficult words, giving learners homework, and making the learners read certain words daily. A personal dictionary is where the learners write all the new and familiar words. These words they have to practice at home and use them in sentences.

More than half (58.8%) of the respondents to the questionnaire do develop vocabulary, while 35% of them do it sometimes. Five percent said they are uncertain, while another 1.2 % said they seldom do. Based on this numbers one can argue that not enough is done to develop vocabulary.

Reading environment

The following issues emerged under reading environment. The interviewed teachers complained about lack of material that can be used to embellish reading classes. The participants' responses highlight the rotation system in their schools as one of the reasons why they find it impractical to decorate their reading classes accordingly. The participants try to solve the mentioned problem by forming groups in the classroom, also with the hope that this will open up space. Based on these discussions it can be argued that some of the classrooms in the Motheo district are not suitable for reading. 50% of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they seldom make an effort to decorate their classes, while 25% indicated that they never do.

Factors affecting reading instruction

Thirdly, both the literature review and the interviewee's responses gave rise to the conclusion that there are factors that affect their effectiveness to reading instruction. At the end the following factors emerged: time allocation, poor foundation, the language of learning and teaching, size of the class, lack of parental involvement, work load, the departmental policies, and the lack of reading material.

These factors were included in the questionnaire during the quantitative study and the respondents generally agreed that these factors can be considered as impediments. They were given the following choices: totally disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree and totally agree.

The participants responses were summarised as follows: time allocation (55% agree), poor

foundation (38.8% agree), LoLT (55% agree), class size (53.8% totally agree), parental involvement (46.2% totally agree), work load (53% totally agree), promotion policies (56.2% totally agree) and lack of resources (47.5% totally agree).

The use of technology

It emerged from the study that some schools in the Motheo district do not possess the technology necessary to develop reading, as the example below will show:

P1: *“We do not have TV’s. We do not have radios. We do not have anything ... We do not have laptops. We do not have anything, to be honest. I struggle a lot ... They have cell phones, but they can’t come with cell phones to school. They are not allowed at all”.*

It also emerged that some grade 4 English teachers do not possess the expertise to use technological devices. Only 2 of those interviewed were computer literate. During the quantitative phase of the study 45% of the respondents agreed that it is an important tool in the teaching of reading.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In order to reflect on the implications of the conclusions, literature was reviewed on the issues that emerged, and comparisons are made between the reviewed literature and the views of the participants. In the process, recommendations pertaining to the various implications are presented.

Reading methods

The following suggestions were proposed to address the problem of limited knowledge of reading methods: teachers becoming scholars and intensive in-service training, which is focused on reading methods. These two suggestions are in line with the views of Kramer (2007), who argues that training, support and on-going efforts for improvement are the cornerstones of effective professional teaching. It is further suggested that the Department of Education should ensure that the teacher training curriculum for languages is relevant, meaning that it must include the aspect of reading methods.

Components of reading

Literature review has shown that the Department of Education calls on the teachers to focus on components such as phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. Intensive in-service training was once more identified as a solution to improve the teacher's knowledge of these components. Word recognition will not be discussed in this paper as more attention is put on it in the foundation phase. It has already been pointed out by Kramer (2007) that training and continued improvement will lead to effective professional teaching. Literature provided suggestions as to how these components of reading could be developed.

Comprehension

The following can be done to improve comprehension: teaching comprehension strategies to the learners, explaining the purpose of the reading strategy to be used, where, when and how to use it, modelling the use of the strategy to the learners, and providing guided practice (Wharton-McDonald and Swiger 2009).

The Department of Education (2007) provides the following guidelines: activation of the learners' prior knowledge, reading aloud to learners, improving the learners' guessing skills, helping learners to use clues and illustrations in and around the text (cover page, paragraph and chapter headings, sub-headings, words in bold, index, photographs, tables, graphs, and cartoons), developing the learners' decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary skills, and higher-order thinking skills like analysing, evaluating and interpreting. According to Afflerbach and Cho (2009) the following may also help: involving, identifying, remembering important information, as well as monitoring and evaluating.

Vocabulary

The following are the suggestions made by Staudt (2009) about the development of vocabulary: looking for words that have several aspects for study, choosing and using words that are commonly used and that are useful in the content areas, focusing on words that the learners have trouble decoding, and focusing on segmenting, spelling patterns and morphology. If the learner continues to stumble over a word, the teacher should try to relate it to other words.

The DoE (2007) provides teachers with the following tips. Learners must be made to read regularly and read texts that interest them. Teachers must read aloud to learners at least once a week. Have a regular independent reading time. Make sure that every

time you do read aloud, during shared and guided reading, you teach at least six new words. Demonstrate meanings of words. Give examples of the words in sentences. Encourage learners to use the new words orally in sentences formed by them. Display new words on a chart or on the wall. Give the new words to the learners to review at home as homework. Arrange for the use of a personal wordbook.

Fluency

One of the strategies that can help improve the learners' fluency is repeated word study (Staudt 2009; Palumbo and Sanacore 2009). The Department of Education (2007) prescribes the following for teachers to improve fluency: re-reading text to familiarise learners with text, explaining and motivating the learners about fluency, flooding the classroom with reading materials, daily independent reading, allowing the learners to choose a book that is familiar and suitable during group and independent reading sessions and explaining the importance of silent reading. Organising many opportunities for silent reading. Textbooks of other learning areas must also be used as a reading resource.

An environment conducive to reading

In addition to the strategies suggested by literature, the following suggestions were provided regarding the reading environment: intelligent time-tabling and innovativeness by the teachers. Teachers need to be flexible in order for them to ensure the environment suitable for reading lessons.

Factors influencing the teaching of reading

The literature study and the empirical study unearthed the following factors that can influence the teaching of reading: language of learning and teaching, quality of teaching and adult illiteracy, time allocation, poor foundation, class size, parental involvement, workload, promotion policy, and lack of resources.

One of the suggestions was the implementation of mother tongue instruction. The Department of Education has already implemented strategies to ensure the utilisation of mother tongue teaching (Curriculum News May 2011). The issue of poor quality has also been identified by the Department of Education, hence the implementation of the Quality Learning and teaching campaign.

It was suggested that the problem of reluctance of parental involvement can be solved

through parental engagement. It was further suggested that schools should have programmes of meetings with parents, where they do not only converse about learners' progress, but about all the other issues related to the curriculum, including new developments in education.

It emerged from reviewed literature that the DoE was already doing something to address the problem of time allocation (Curriculum News May 2011).

The DoE is also doing something about workload. The Curriculum News of May (2011) highlights that, according to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements, the following will be implemented as a way of reducing the teachers' workload in the intermediate phase: The teachers will have to use only one file. The number of projects to be done by the learners will be decreased and the number of learning areas will be reduced to six.

The DoE has not given any indication that it intends to reduce the size of classes. Strategies such as peer coaching, mentoring and team teaching were suggested from literature review to solve this problem (Otianno 2010).

Since it is evident that some parents find it difficult to get involved in the education of their children, it emerged that it might benefit the learners and the schools if the latter can be given the power to refer children of the parents who are not co-operative.

The suggested approach to solve the problem of a lack of resources was resourcefulness by the teachers, and a lot more accountability put on the shoulders of the school managers.

Use of technology in the reading class

The study has drawn our attention to the reality that some schools in the Motheo education district do not have the necessary computer technology and software to use for reading, as well as the reality that some teachers still lack the capacity to use technological devices such as a computer.

The study raised the laptop initiative by the Department of Education. It was suggested that the following be considered to make the teacher-laptop initiative a success: Firstly, the department should speed up the roll out process, meaning that it should not be rolled out in stages as is the case at the moment. Secondly, it was suggested that the department should consider providing the software free of charge to those teachers and schools who already own computers and laptops. It might also be a positive step if the department can train teachers in the use of technology in reading classes.

Gudmundsdottir (2010) argues that even though computer instruction can be beneficial in reading instruction in South African schools, it tends to benefit mostly those learners who use English as a mother tongue. This is due to the fact that most of the software is in English.

This calls on the DoE to engage with the different software companies and convince them to develop software in other official languages.

CONCLUSION

Data gathering and analysis culminated in the following conclusions: Firstly, grade 4 English teachers in the Motheo education district do not possess an in-depth knowledge of reading methods.

Secondly, grade 4 English teachers in the Motheo education district do not have a blue print of how they can develop the different components of reading such as comprehension, phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary.

Thirdly, it emerged that there are factors that can influence the teaching of reading such as: time allocation, poor foundation, LoLT, class size, lack of parental involvement, workload, policies on promotion, and a lack of reading resources.

The fourth conclusion is that some grade 4 English teachers in the Motheo district fail to induce an environment conducive to reading due to reasons such as a lack of artefacts and time-tabling arrangements.

The last conclusion is that some schools in the Motheo district do not possess technological devices such as computers, and some of the grade 4 English teachers lack the expertise to use technological devices such as computers.

The above conclusions resulted in the following implications: Intensive training of education students and in-service training for practicing teachers are crucial to improve the teacher's knowledge on reading methods, as well as their knowledge of the various components of reading.

Some factors such as LoLT, time allocation, workload, and quality teaching are already being addressed by the DoE. Nothing tangible has been done yet about the lack of parental involvement, teacher-learner ratio, and lack of resources. It was suggested that all the identified factors should be addressed to bring about an improvement.

Creation of a suitable environment is also a problem. It was argued that teachers must be proactive and design their own material. Revisiting the time-tabling format and resourcefulness were also highlighted as measures that can help to solve the problem of the reading environment.

Efforts are being made to address the issue of technology but they are not enough. The laptop initiative must be intensified and training on CAI must also be vigorously implemented.

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