Profiling reading strategies used by Grade 10 English First Additional Language learners in two selected high schools in KwaZulu-Natal

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In order to address learners' reading difficulties, several researchers recommend the development of their reading profiles. To this end, South Africa is no exception. Many South African based researchers are of the view that designing and analysing learners' reading profiles should be seen as a wise move towards fixing South African learners' reading challenges. The study sought to profile the reading strategies that Grade 10 English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners used more and least frequently. The idea was to make teachers aware of their learners' strengths and weaknesses with regard to reading. The study was quantitative in nature and a survey design was followed. A reading strategies questionnaire was administered to 60 Grade 10 EFAL learners who were purposively selected from two high schools. The mean and standard deviation (SD) were calculated in order to assess the frequency of strategy used by the Grade 10 EFAL learners. The results indicated that before-reading and during-reading strategies were least frequently used by the learners. Moreover, the results showed that learners appeared to be using after-reading strategies more frequently. Recommendations are made that learners need to be made aware of the wide range of before-reading and after-reading strategies, along with how to use them during the process of reading.

Contribution: The contribution of the study resides in the conclusion that teachers' knowledge on how to develop and monitor learners' reading profiles has the potential to improve learners' reading proficiency.

Keywords: reading strategies; reading strategy profile; reading comprehension; differentiated curriculum; reading strategies instruction; engaging instruction.

Introduction

Several researchers advocate the creation of learners' reading profiles in an effort to address learners' reading difficulties in many countries around the world (Caner, Vural & Yalcin 2021; Dinsmore et al. 2019; Holopainen, Hoang & Kofler 2020; Karlsson et al. 2018; Mouzaki & Sideridis 2007). South Africa is no exception. Following that, this study is informed by South African learners' poor reading performance in comparison to their peers in other countries (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019; McBride 2019; Rule & Land 2017) and the findings of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (2006, 2011, 2016). Progress in International Reading Literacy Study results, for example, consistently show that South African students struggle with reading. Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2006, 2011, 2016) discovered that fourth-grade students were reading two grades behind their international peers. Furthermore, poor results by South African Grade six learners in the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ 2007) revealed that South Africa came tenth out of the 15 countries that participated in the study for reading literacy, trailing poorer countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Swaziland. Researchers such as Boakye (2017), Nel, Dreyer and Kopper (2004), and Nel and Adams (2014) believe that designing and analysing learners' reading profiles can help improve the reading proficiency of South African learners. However, in order to achieve this goal, teachers must learn how to develop and monitor students' reading profiles. It is also critical that teachers understand how to collect and analyse data relevant to these profiles. In this regard, Nel et al. (2004) argue that:

> Profiles result in a comprehensive view of learners' strengths and weaknesses across many aspects of the reading process and can be used to design a programme of instruction that addresses all aspects of the reading process during instruction. (p. 95)

Thereby, designing interactive and useful instruction means considering the reading needs of the learners. For this article's discussion, the term 'reading profile' refers to learners' strengths and weaknesses in many aspects of the reading process such as identifying the main idea, making inferences and predictions, identifying unfamiliar vocabulary, and so on.

The Department of Education in Queensland (2020) asserts that the reader profile identifies intervention strategies and access to divergent curriculum implementation, pedagogy and assessment practises. Differentiated Curriculum Delivery has been identified as an important component of developing a reader profile outcome. According to Odegard et al. (2018), differentiated instruction is made possible by teachers' intentional reflection on who their students are and how they learn. Reader profiles, in particular, assist teachers in identifying their students' individual and collective strengths, needs, challenges and interests. This information is critical in selecting effective instructional strategies, additional support, resources and topics of interest.

Although some studies have concentrated on reader profiles with specific reference to various aspects of the reading process such as vocabulary, fluency, reading comprehension and reading strategy use (Nel et al. 2004), others have concentrated on a single aspect (Bedle 2018). And hence, the present investigation profiles the reading strategies used by Grade 10 English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners in two selected high schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Reading strategies are defined as 'conscious actions used by learners to improve their language learning' by Anderson (2009:132). According to Pokharel (2018):

> [R]eading strategies range from bottom-up vocabulary strategies, such as looking up an unknown word in the dictionary, to more comprehension actions, such as connecting what is being read to the reader's background knowledge. (p. 75)

Pokharel further refers to the reading strategies such as predicting, connecting, comparing, inferring, synthesising, re-reading, et cetera. Previous studies have shown that profiling learners' reading strategies is critical for the timely identification of those learners who are at risk, allowing for the effective organisation of support (Holopainen et al. 2020). At-risk learners are individuals or groups who are thought of as those who are more likely to perform poorly academically or drop out. Furthermore, according to Nel et al. (2004), learners' reading profiles provide teachers with far more instructionally relevant information than any single-component test. In line with this view, Caner et al. (2021) conclude that if teachers are aware of their language learners' reading profiles, they can help their students comprehend the significant meaning of any text they read. Furthermore, Pokharel (2018) is of the view that reading profiles provide a comprehensive view of learners' shortcomings and strengths across many aspects of the reading process and can be used to design an instructional programme that addresses all aspects of the reading process during instruction. As a result, many researchers, including Boakye (2017), Nel et al. (2004),

and Nel and Adams (2014), have focused on understanding learners' reading profiles.

Despite the importance of having knowledge of learners' reading profiles, Caner et al. (2021) mention that research on learners' reading profiles generally focuses on first-language reading strategies. They also highlight the scarcity of research on reading strategies used by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, arguing that this situation necessitates additional research. When one considers the diverse learner population in South African classrooms, the lack of EFL research is concerning. Regarding South Africa's diverse learner population, Van Wyk (2021) contends that democratic South Africa inherited and must come to grips with large inequalities in material and human resources between black and white schooling. This clearly has an impact on how teachers teach reading, particularly in black schools where the majority of black students are EFAL learners. According to Brown (2017), while most research on learners' reading strategy profiles focuses on primary-school learners or university students, little is known about high-school learners' reading profiles and the strategies they use to empower themselves to construct meaning from complex texts. As a result, this article contributes to the improvement of the situation. The investigation was guided by the following research questions:

- Which reading strategies do Grade 10 EFAL learners use more frequently?
- Which reading strategies do Grade 10 EFAL learners use least frequently?

Reading strategies

Reading strategy is a broad term that refers to deliberate and explicit actions that aid in the translation of print to meaning. Reading strategies, according to Afflerback, Pearson and Paris (2008), are intended actions taken by readers to decode written messages, understand the meaning conveyed by words, and construct the meaning of the text. Readers differ in the frequency with which they employ reading strategies, the variety of strategies with which they are familiar, the extent to which they employ these strategies effectively to lead to improved proficiency and reading for meaning, and the cognitive level at which they interact with the text (Fox 2009). Caner et al. (2021) agree, arguing that in order to achieve maximum comprehension in reading, readers must employ a variety of essential reading strategies. Previous research in the literature on reading strategies has yielded several lists of reading strategies. Malotja (2020), for example, investigated the academic reading strategies employed by first-year university students at a South African university. According to the findings, metacognitive reading strategies are critical for students to access information in academic texts. Research has indicated that learners' knowledge of the reading strategies they employ is likely to assist them in exerting some effort to compensate for their poorly developed strategies, which would ultimately help them increase their reading comprehension gains in the target language (Olifant,

Cekiso & Boakye 2021; Warner, Fay & Sporer 2017). Furthermore, Cekiso (2012) is of the opinion that if teachers are given notice of the benefit of reading strategy instruction, they are likely to improve their teaching techniques. It is thus clear that knowledge and implementation of reading strategies are beneficial for both teachers and learners. Similarly, teachers gain insight into their students' current use of reading strategies, allowing them to recognise their own methods of teaching reading and assist their students in becoming good readers. This approach is significant, because teachers can diagnose the reading strategies that are causing difficulties for their students and can focus on improving their students' frequent use and mastery of those reading strategies.

The impactful use of reading strategies has been acknowledged as a crucial way to improve reading comprehension. For example, Saraprajit (2019) observes that reading strategies serve a key role in reading comprehension among learners for whom English is their second or foreign language. Saraprajit (2019) further discloses that students who are English second-language learners use reading techniques to make up for the shortage of other English linguistic knowledge like grammar and vocabulary. Saraprajit (2019) also claims that using reading strategies will help learners better comprehend the text and complete their reading tasks. Hence, several studies have looked into the relationship between reading strategy use and reading comprehension. To that end, the findings of a study conducted on different Grade groups by Sun et al. (2021) revealed that reading strategies in all four categories (monitoring strategy, reading comprehension, affective reading strategy and elaboration reading strategy) had a comparable similarity effect size with reading comprehension. The results of their research suggested that the reading strategies of all four categories may contribute similarly to text comprehension activities.

Qanwal and Karim (2014) conducted related research to that of Sun et al. (2021) of which the focus was on identifying the correlation between reading strategies instruction and second-language text comprehension. The empirical study focused on the degree to which teachers integrate reading strategies into their teaching of ESL. The findings showed a significant positive linkage between reading strategy instruction and learners' text comprehension proficiency.

The author believes that teaching reading strategies within a South African context could improve reading comprehension. This viewpoint is informed by the reading difficulties that South African learners face, as mentioned in the introduction. According to Selles et al. (2015), learners' reading difficulties have been linked to contextual factors such as reading instruction methods, and the education system such as pre-primary education. In addition, Connelly et al. (2009) deduced that there exists evidence to indicate that the methods used to educate pupils how to read, can affect their

skills and predict their reading progress and the ways in which their reading development will continue. Poor reading by students is attributed in part to teachers, according to Olifant et al. (2020). Their study on teachers' reading instructional practises, found that teachers did not provide opportunities for learners to use independent comprehension strategies. Olifant et al. (2020) refer to and blame poor teaching practise on teachers' lack of understanding of how to use reading comprehension as an instructional tool during reading comprehension lessons. Taking cues from this problem, as discussed by Olifant et al. (2020), the current study, which aims to raise teachers' awareness of their students' reading strategies, garnered inspiration from the Olifant et al. study.

Learner reading profiles

Several authors have emphasised the significance of reading profiles in the EFAL classroom. Dinsmore et al. (2019), for example, believe that multidimensional reader profiles can best capture explanatory patterns regarding situational differences in reading comprehension performance. Such profiles, according to these authors, attempt to identify key reader characteristics that interact with reading performance. The authors go on to say that such profiles can be used to capture the pattern behind a reader's relatively consistent approach to reading at a specific developmental time point, an approach that is thought to be derived from the reader's current status for certain of those reader characteristics. Purpura (2014) concurs with the importance of reading profiles, arguing that the fundamental foundation for investigating reading strategies is identifying the reading profiles of learners and addressing better education and instruction opportunities for them. On the other hand, the findings of a study conducted by Nel et al. (2004) on the analysis of first-year students' reading assessment profiles at Potchefstroom University, revealed that the students encountered difficulties in all facets of the process of reading (i.e. vocabulary, fluency, reading comprehension and reading strategy use). One possibility is that students are not properly instructed in reading comprehension in secondary school, and thus arrive at university underprepared for the demands of academic literacy. Furthermore, Boakye (2017) carried out another study that investigated students' reading profiles. According to the findings of her study, several students had very little reading experience, used inappropriate reading strategies, had low self-efficacy, and had poor reading habits.

Akin to the aforementioned studies is a study done by Caner et al. (2021) that aimed to examine the reading strategy use profiles of EFL learners. According to the findings of this study, focal participants used global reading strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support strategies in general. Furthermore, some studies have concentrated on the profiles of poor readers. Mouzaki and Sideridis (2007), for example, did a study on poor reader profiles among Greek elementary school students. According to the findings of their study, poor readers exhibited deficits in word recognition, comprehension

and fluency. Another study on the profiles of Grade 6 and 7 readers was conducted by Karlsson et al. (2018), and the results revealed that the profiles of literal readers, paraphrasing readers and elaborating readers emerged as three distinct profiles. Literal readers, according to Karlsson et al. (2018), are learners who stay close to the literal text by repeating it frequently. Paraphrasing readers are defined by them as learners who extract the text's meaning by paraphrasing it, and elaborating readers are learners who use previous knowledge to clarify the text by generating inferences. The latter reading strategy is essential, as readers need to go deeper than the literal text and draw upon background information to make extrapolations to understand the meaning of the text. In a South African context, the results of a study performed by Nel and Adams (2014) on the reading literary profiles of first-year B.Ed. foundation phase students, indicated a varied pattern of strengths and requirements in terms of pseudo-word reading, spelling, oral fluency, vocabulary size and depth, and reading comprehension. Considering the research on reader profiles cited above, it is evident that profiles provide a view of students' strengths and weaknesses in several parts of the act of reading and can be utilised to design an insightful programme of instruction. However, the focus of the current study is on the choice of reading strategies used by Grade 10 EFAL learners.

Methodology

Research approach and design

This study, which was conducted between 10 and 14 June 2022, used a quantitative methodology and a survey design. According to Bhandari (2020), quantitative research is the process of gathering and analysing numerical data. He goes on to say that quantitative research can be used to identify trends and averages, predict outcomes, test causal relations, and generalise findings to larger populations. This research method was deemed appropriate for the current study, because the goal was to identify a pattern in the reading strategies that were used more frequently and least frequently by Grade 10 EFAL learners.

Respondents

Sixty Grade 10 EFAL students from two high schools in the KwaZulu-Natal Province comprised the sample. These students were chosen using convenience sampling, which means that they were chosen based on their ease of availability and/or accessibility. All students were EFAL Grade 10 students. The sample included 39 female participants and 21 male participants ranging in age from 15 to 17 years. The respondents' mother tongue is isiZulu.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. Nduku (2020) defines a questionnaire as a research device or instrument that is made up of a series of questions, which are either closed-ended or open-ended. Specifically, the Reading Strategies Questionnaire, developed by Oxford (1990), Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) and Pressley et al. (1994), was modified and used to determine learners' use of reading strategies. The questionnaire was partially derived from each of the above-mentioned authors' work. The reading strategy questionnaire for this study consisted of 28 items. All items were closed-ended. The reading strategies questionnaire was administered to all respondents, and each reading strategy in the questionnaire was explained. Learners answered in terms of how well a particular statement described them. The reading questionnaire included before, during and after reading strategies. Pre-reading strategies activate learners' prior knowledge and set a goal for reading, whereas during-reading strategies assist learners in making connections, monitoring their understanding, generating questions and remaining focused. After-reading strategies allow students to summarise, question, reflect on, discuss and respond to the text. The mastery of the three reading stages is crucial, because it allows learners to read the text with comprehension. Furthermore, the three reading strategies are consistent with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for EFAL. The CAPS document's reading section first suggests pre-reading strategies such as activating previous knowledge, predicting and scanning headings to prepare the students for reading. The second reading stage recommended by CAPS is a close reading of text supported by teacher interviews, development of strategies such as an emphasis on phrasing, use of language imagery, and so on. The third stage is the post-reading strategy, which refers to interpreting the entire text using strategies such as synthesising, paraphrasing, comparing and contrasting. Responding to the questionnaire, students selected one of the following options on a Likert scale:

- Never or almost never true of me.
- Usually not true of me.
- Somewhat true of me.
- Usually true of me.
- Always or almost always true of me.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using a three-stage Reading Strategy Framework: before, during and after reading strategies. The reading strategies used during the process of data collection were put in place to be able to characterise the reading techniques used by Grade 10 EFAL learners. The data gathered in each of the three stages, namely (1) before-reading strategies; (2) during-reading strategies; and (3) after-reading strategies, were summed up for each reading stage. Each stage was totalled and then divided by the number of items, that is, the number of strategies enclosed in each stage to obtain the learners' average use of that stage of strategies (the mean score [M]). The standard deviation (SD) demonstrates that the spread of the values around the M was also provided. The SD quantifies dispersion. A small value (indicating that the data are more reliable) signifies that the data are tightly clustered around the M. A high value (i.e. the data are less accurate) suggests that the data are spread widely along either side of the mean.

BOX 1: Values used.

High	Always or almost used	4.5 – 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 – 4.4
Medium	Sometimes	2.5 – 3.4
Low	Usually not used	1.5 – 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 – 1.4

Source: Oxford, R., 1990, *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*, Henle & Henle, New York, NY.

According to Creswell (2014:3), descriptive statistics reflect data in response to a group of questions that determines and indicates trends such as the M and SD to describe the findings derived from the questionnaire.

The following guide was used to assess the frequency of strategy (see Box 1).

Results

Table 1 represents the reading methods of Grade 10 EFAL learners in both schools used as research sites. The outcomes are presented based on the learners' strategies used before, during and after reading. The most and least frequently used reading strategies from both schools are presented based on the mean values.

Before-reading strategies

Strategies used more frequently than other reading strategies were as follows (see Table 1):

- I briefly skim the text before reading (School A = 2.99 [M] with a SD of 0.66 & School B = 2.99 with a SD of 0.58).
- I skim/scan to get the main idea (School A = 2.98 [SD = 0.71] & School B = 3.00 with SD = 0.70).

The least frequently used reading strategies at the before-reading stage included the following:

- I often look for how the text is organised and pay attention to headings and sub-headings (School A = 2.55 [M] and 0.70 [SD] and School B = 2.44 and 0.73 [SD1]).
- I set goals for reading e.g., studying for a multiple-choice test, reading for a research paper (School A = 2.39 [M] and a SD of 0.71 and School B = 2.26 [M] with SD = 0.69).

The before-reading strategy phase indicates that for learners in both schools, the gap between the more frequently used and the least frequently used strategies is not wide:

- I briefly skim the text before reading (School A = 2.99; School B = 2.99).
- I skim or scan to get the main idea (School Identifier A = 2.98; School B = 3.00)
- I search out information relevant to my reading goals (School Identifier A = 2.99; School B = 2.66).

The least frequently used strategies:

- I usually make predictions as to what will follow next as I pre-read (School A = 1.99; School B = 2.00)

TABLE 1: The reading strategy use of Grade 10 English First Additional Language learners in School A and School B.

Strategies	School A (*N* = 30)		School B (*N* = 30)	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Before reading				
I briefly skim the text before reading.	2.99	0.66	2.99	0.58
I skim/scan to get the main idea.	2.98	0.71	3.00	0.70
I plan how I am going to read a text.	2.11	2.66	2.07	0.58
I often look for how the text is organised and pay attention to headings and sub-headings.	2.55	0.70	2.44	0.73
I usually make predictions as to what will follow next as I pre-read.	1.99	0.48	2.00	0.54
I set goals for reading (e.g., studying for a multiple-choice test, reading for a research paper).	2.39	0.71	2.26	0.69
I search out information relevant to my reading goals.	2.99	0.66	2.66	0.67
During reading				
I pay greater attention to important information than other information.	2.66	0.50	2.68	0.54
I try to relate the important points in the text to one another to understand the entire text.	2.28	0.58	2.44	0.60
While I am reading, I reconsider and revise my prior questions about the text based on the text's content.	2.23	0.54	2.17	0.56
While I am reading, I reconsider and revise my background knowledge about the subject based on the text's content.	1.70	0.60	1.75	0.57
While I am reading, I try to determine the meaning of unknown words that seem critical to the meaning of the text.	2.11	0.58	2.10	0.52
I try to underline when reading to remember the text.	3.40	0.71	3.38	0.64
When appropriate, I try to visualise the descriptions in the text that I am reading to remember the text.	2.11	0.59	2.19	0.61
When reading, I ask myself questions about the text content to better remember the text.	1.98	0.44	1.99	0.50
When I think that I am not comprehending a text, I change my reading strategies (e.g., re-reading).	2.39	0.66	2.37	0.68
As I am reading, I evaluate the text to determine whether it contributes to my knowledge/understanding of the subject.	2.34	0.54	2.34	0.53
While reading, I jump forward and/or backward in the text to find the important information.	2.12	0.49	2.14	0.53
While reading, I distinguish between the information I already know and new information.	2.00	0.54	2.10	0.56
I try to anticipate information in the text.	2.13	0.63	2.20	0.69
During reading, I check whether I anticipated information correctly in the before reading phase.	2.15	0.61	2.19	0.64
I evaluate whether what I am reading is relevant to my reading goals.	2.20	0.56	2.20	0.56
I vary my reading style depending on my reading goals.	1.99	0.53	2.00	0.5
After reading				
I paraphrase the material that I am reading to remember the text.	3.52	0.63	3.54	0.64
After I have read a text, I review it.	3.35	0.63	3.34	0.69
After I have read a text, I try to interpret what I have read.	2.87	0.71	2.79	0.78
After I have read a text, I evaluate what I have read.	2.33	0.66	2.19	0.66
After I have read a text, I summarise it.	3.56	0.68	3.48	0.69

M, Mean; SD, Standard deviation.

- I plan how I am going to read a text (School A = 2.11; School B = 2.07).

Moreover, the frequently used reading strategies do not reveal a high-frequency use (mean of 3.5 or higher) of such reading strategies. Therefore, the strategy use profile of

both groups shows that the averages were low, ranging between means values of 1.5 – 2.4, which is categorised as low-frequency usage. The strategies all reflected a lower SD value than the associated mean, which indicates indirectly that the spread of values around the means was clustered closely to each other.

During-reading strategies

In the during-reading stage, the learners used the following reading strategies far more frequently than other reading strategies:

- I pay greater attention to important information than other information (School A = 2.66 [M] with SD = 0.50 & School B = 2.68 [M] with SD = 0.54).
- I try to anticipate information in the text (School A produced a mean of 2.13 [SD = 0.63] & School B produced a mean of 2.20 [SD.069]).
- I usually make predictions as to what will follow next (School A = 1.99 [M]; [SD = 0.48] & School B = 2.00 [M]; [SD = 0.54]).
- I try to underline when reading in order to remember the text (School A with a mean of 3.40 [SD = 3.38] & School B with a mean of 3.38; [SD = 0.64]).
- I search out information relevant to my reading goals (School A = 2.99 [M] & School B = 2.89 [M]).

The least frequently used reading strategies at this stage included the following:

- While I am reading, I reconsider and revise my background knowledge about the subject based on the text's content (School A = 1.70 [SD = 0.60] & School B = 1.75 [SD = 0.57]).
- When reading, I ask myself questions about the text content to better remember the text (School A = 1.98 [M] with a SD of 0.44 & School B produced a mean of 1.99 with a SD of 0.50).

A deconstruction of the during-reading strategy use stage indicates that in both groups, the gap between the more frequently used reading strategies and the least frequently used reading strategies was wider than in the before-reading stage. The more frequently used strategies are:

- I pay greater attention to important information than other information (School A = 2.66 & School B = 2.68) and I try to anticipate information in the text (School A produced a mean of 2.13 & School B produced a mean of 2.20); I try to underline when reading in order to remember the text (School A with a mean of 3.40 & School B with a mean of 3.38) and
- I search out information relevant to my reading goals School A = 2.99 [M] & School B = 2.89 [M].

However, the mean scores for the least frequently used reading strategies in the during-reading stage were lower than the mean scores in the before-reading stage. For example:

- *While I am reading, I reconsider and revise my background knowledge about the subject based on the text's content* produced the following averages: (School A = 1.70 & School B = 1.75). When reading, I ask myself questions about the text content to better remember the text (School A = 1.98 [M] & School B produced a mean of 1.99).

Furthermore, all the SD values are low, indicating that the data is tightly grouped about the mean, implying that the data is reliable.

After-reading strategies

The after-reading strategy use stage indicates that both groups used the following reading strategies far more frequently than other reading strategies:

- I paraphrase the material that I am reading in order to remember the text (School A = 3.52 [SD = 0.63] & School B = 3.54 [SD = 0.64]).
- After I have read a text, I review it (School A = 3.35 & School B = 3.54) (School A = 0.63 [SD] & School B = 3.34 [SD = 0.69]).
- After I have read a text, I summarize it (School A = 3.56 [SD = 0.68] & School B = 3.48 [SD = 0.69]).

These three reading strategies fell in the high-usage category (mean of 3.5 or higher). The least frequently used reading strategies at this stage were the following:

- After I have read a text, I try to interpret what I have read (School A = 2.87 [SD = 0.71] & School B = 2.79 [SD = 0.78]).
- After I have read a text, I evaluate what I have read (School A = 2.33 [SD = 0.66] & School B = 2.19 [SD = 0.66]).

A deconstruction of the after-reading strategy use stage indicates that for both groups, the mean scores for the more frequently used reading strategies as well as for the least frequently used reading strategies are higher compared to the other two reading strategy use stages (before-reading and during-reading). In other words, compared to the before-reading and during-reading strategies, it appeared that the learners use the after-reading strategies more, with average scores such as:

- (School A = 3.52 & School B = 3.54) for I summarize/ paraphrase the material that I am reading to remember the text. After I have read a text, I review it scored the following averages: School A = 3.35 & School B = 3.54. After I have read a text, I summarize it produced an average of 3.56 for School A and & 3.48 for School B.

This could be attributed to the fact that teachers' presentations of lessons and class activities are relevant to the development of such strategies. In addition, the spread of the SD values recorded is smaller than the means on each occasion, which indicates that the data are spread out closely around the mean, validating that the data documented is more reliable.

Discussion of findings

The current research was aimed at trying to identify the most and the least frequently used comprehension strategies of Grade 10 EFAL learners. The first research question focused on the reading strategies more frequently used by Grade 10 EFAL learners. The study's findings revealed that respondents in both groups reported common themes of reading strategy selection while reading academic texts. This observation could be explained by the fact that both schools were in the same socio-cultural environment. Another important aspect of this study that sets it apart from other published studies is that the least and most frequently used reading strategies were investigated according to different reading stages, namely before-reading, during-reading and after-reading. In this regard, the findings revealed that students used different reading behaviours depending on their reading stage. This finding backs up the findings of a study conducted by Maeng (2006) to determine what reading strategies Korean learners used in L2 reading at various reading stages. The findings revealed that learners used various reading strategies at various stages of reading.

The results of the current study revealed that, in the before-reading stage, learners used:

- I briefly skim the text before reading and I skim or scan to get the main idea' more frequently.

Even though these two reading strategies were used at this stage, the average frequency of use was not nearly as high as one would expect. The average frequency strategy employed was medium (2.5–3.4). This is a cause for concern, because the frequent use of pre-reading strategies plays an important role in improving learners' reading comprehension. According to Ferlazzo and Sypnieski (2018), before-reading strategies activate learners' prior knowledge and establish a purpose for reading. Hashemi, Mobini and Karimkhanlooie (2016) agree that frequent use of before-reading strategies improves learners' reading comprehension. The outcomes of their study on the effect of content-based pre-reading activities on Iranian high school ESL learners' reading comprehension indicated that the pre-reading phase is the step where teachers can stimulate learners' prior knowledge so that they can interact with the text. Furthermore, Ferlazzo and Sypnieski (2018) make the argument that the pre-reading stage is necessary for accessing complex texts, because it elicits what learners already know.

The findings of this study also revealed that the learners showed greater frequency in strategy use only during the after-reading stage. The frequency of strategy use was low in the before-reading and during-reading stages. Nordin et al. (2012) obtained similar results in their study on how ESL learners read. The study's findings revealed that students used post-reading strategies to understand the significance of a text.

The results further revealed that during the before-reading stage, learners frequently used this strategy:

- I often look for how the text is organised and pay attention to headings and sub-headings; I try to anticipate information in the text; I set goals for reading; I usually make predictions as to what will follow next.

These strategies, like the previously mentioned before-reading strategies, were not used very frequently. This finding, however, supports the findings of a study conducted by Hall et al. (2020) who investigated the effects of inference instruction on learners' reading comprehension. According to the findings of their study, inferential instruction was effective in improving text-connecting extrapolation generation and literal reading ability.

The findings of the study also revealed the least frequently used reading strategies used by EFAL learners during-reading stage. Those reading strategies include:

- While I am reading, I reconsider and revise my background knowledge about the subject based on the text's content; When reading, I ask myself questions about the text content to better remember the text.

Unfortunately, students used these reading strategies the least frequently, despite the fact that they play an important role in facilitating readers' comprehension of the text by allowing one to monitor one's reading process. These students struggle to ask questions premised on the text's content and to keep track of their reading progress.

The findings also showed that learners prefer after-reading strategies over before- and during-reading strategies. This could be attributed to the students' exposure to traditional teaching methods. This assumption is founded on the previously discussed literature. According to Rule and Land (2017), teachers were focusing on oral reading when teaching reading comprehension. As a result, learners' listening and reproductive skills were developed at the expense of reading comprehension. In that way, they might not experience severe issues with the summarising reading strategy. Specifically, learners used the following strategies more frequently:

- I summarise/paraphrase the material that I am reading in order to remember the text; After I have read a text, I review it; After I have read a text, I summarise it.

These three reading strategies fell in the high usage category (mean of 3.5 or higher). The frequent use of these reading strategies might not make a strong contribution to the learners' reading comprehension. This assumption is drawn, because the three stages of reading (pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading) are linked. Each reading stage contributes significantly to comprehension; so, mastery of all three stages is essential for readers. These two groups of students must be educated on the significance of pre-reading or before-reading strategies, which set the tone for the reading process. According to research, explicit teaching of the strategies enhances learners' reading comprehension (Cekiso & Madikiza 2014). Based on the results of the current study, learners need to be introduced

to the during-reading strategies, so that they are able to track their reading exercise.

The least frequently used reading strategies used during the after-reading stage were the following:

- After I have read a text, I try to interpret what I have read; After I have read a text, I evaluate what I have read.

These reading strategies are the least commonly used. This is regrettable, given that the more frequently these strategies are used, the more likely they are to assist learners in developing their critical thinking, which is the ultimate goal of the reading process. As a result, teachers must raise students' knowledge, understanding and use of these reading techniques.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the reading strategies used by Grade 10 EFAL learners in the two selected high schools. The study specifically sought to identify the types of strategies used by Grade 10 EFAL learners before, during and after reading as well as the frequency with which these strategies were used. The findings of the research identified the most and least utilised methods implemented by the learners. In particular, the results showed that the disparity between the most frequently used and least frequently used strategies before and during reading was not large. Furthermore, the most frequently used reading strategies did not show a high frequency of use. The implication of this result is that learners must be made aware of the various reading strategies and how to apply them during the reading process. If teachers can achieve this goal, students' reading comprehension will improve, as research shows that students who use a variety of reading strategies have an advantage when it comes to text comprehension.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that learners used after-reading strategies more frequently than both before- and during-reading strategies. Although this is commendable, the frequent use of after-reading strategies may not greatly assist learners' reading challenges if they do not use a variety of before-reading and during-reading strategies that set the tone for the reading process. Although this study revealed important findings about the reading strategies chosen by the Grade 10 EFAL students sample, there are constraints that must be acknowledged. The primary drawback worthy of note is reliance only on the reading strategies questionnaire to gather information. Naturally, learners use a variety of comprehension strategies when reading texts. However, reading strategies questionnaires, such as the one used in this study, do not account for all of the reading strategies that students possess and employ. As a result, reading strategy questionnaires limit learners' reading strategy selection to some extent. Another limitation of the reading strategies questionnaire is that self-reports are frequently untrustworthy. This is because it is impossible to know with certainty whether the reading strategies chosen by students are used while reading texts. It is suggested that, rather than relying solely on closed-ended questionnaire items, learners should be interviewed about their reading strategies to supplement the findings of similar future studies.

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