

Teachers' perceptions of Grades 8–10 English First Additional Language learners' reading habits, attitudes and motivation

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Background: Owing to the dearth of reading practices within the South African literacy landscape, many learners neither engage in productive reading habits, nor exhibit a positive attitude towards English First Additional Language (EFAL) reading. Consequently, many learners experience reading challenges, which negatively impact on their academic performance.

Objective: This study investigated the reading habits, attitudes and motivation of Grades 8–10 EFAL learners through the perceptive lens of EFAL teachers.

Method: This qualitative study employed a case study design and a thematic data analysis process. The purposively selected sample for the semi-structured interviews consisted of six Grade 8–10 EFAL teachers from two high schools in the Tshwane South district.

Results: Teachers believe that learners experience academic challenges because they do not habitually engage with texts, have a negative attitude towards printed text and read only to progress academically. The results further indicated that all these teachers concurred that there is a corresponding relationship between productive reading habits, a positive attitude towards reading and the academic performance of learners. Regrettably, the data analysis reported that the teachers have a pessimistic perception of the EFAL learners' reading habits, attitudes and motivation to read. More disturbingly, most of the teachers lacked the responsibility for their contribution towards the ongoing demise of productive reading practices among learners in their classrooms.

Conclusion: The findings revealed grave implications about learners' reading habits, attitudes and motivation to read. Alarming, one of the most remarkable findings produced by this study is that the teachers themselves harbour negative perceptions about the reading practices of the learners in their classrooms.

Keywords: Teachers' perceptions; reading; reading habits; reading attitudes; motivation to read; English First Additional Language; EFAL; learners.

Introduction

Reading forms the basis for the literacy acquirement process of every learner. In South Africa, many learners use English as a second, third or fourth language, yet it remains the medium through which the learners access literacy in school. This sentiment is supported by Lemmer and Van Wyk (2010:226), who report that although only 9.6% of the South African population use English as their first language, it remains the primary language of access to education. For this reason, Lemmer and Van Wyk (2010:227) state that English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners are the dominant population in South African schools. Baatjies (2003:1) points out that reading is the most critical element of literacy education. Consequently, in both L1 and L2 or subsequently, in any language of learning, poor reading skills produce low academic achievement (Chall 2000). It thus appears as if reading ability in any language of learning can either advance or impede scholastic performance. Concurring, Cekiso (2017:1) asserts that reading literacy is the essence of schooling, which enables the academic advancement of learners. Seeing that reading literacy affects learners' performance in school, it thus appears that the cultivation of productive reading habits and positive attitudes is likely to assist learners to progress intellectually and academically. In fact, reading habits and attitudes seem to be based on people's 'perceptions' derived from past reading experiences (Guthrie & Greaney 1991:87), regarding the pleasure and the value that reading provides.

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Against this background, this study investigated 10 Grades 8–10 EFAL learners' reading habits, attitudes and motivation to read through the perceptive lens of the Grades 8–10 EFAL teachers, to obtain insight about the reading practices of the learners. The focus on teachers' perceptions is motivated by the fact that teachers play an important role in the reading performance of their learners. Teachers are the ones who create classroom environments that promote engaged reading. Moreover, not only do teachers have a significant influence upon a child's acquisition of the habit of engaged reading (Ruddell 1995), but teachers also appear to be very much aware of the need for motivating their students to read (O'Flahavan et al. 1992).

Purpose of the study

There is a pursuit for a better understanding of the EFAL learners' reading habits, attitudes and motivation to read, which has been a continuous, active area of research (Braguglia 2005; Majid & Tan 2007; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson 2014; Van Staden 2011). Moreover, Braguglia (2005), argues that reading is essential to academic progress and intellectual prosperity. This sentiment is rearticulated by Majid and Tan (2007), who reported that learners are inspired to read for academically related reasons, with the purpose of advancing to the next higher grade. This view is echoed in the findings of a study conducted by Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2014), who confirmed that the reading habits of learners, specifically Grades 8–10 EFAL learners in the context of this study, do indeed influence their academic performance. For this reason, Van Staden (2011) suggests that knowledgeable teachers, in other words well-trained and well-informed teachers, are instrumental in addressing and assisting with the reading challenges that learners experience in school.

As previously stated, teachers are regarded as primary contributors towards the learners' ability and attitude to read. For this reason, Richards in Rido, Ibrahim and Nambiar (2014) asserts that teachers operate as mediators, facilitators and monitors in classrooms, guiding learners through the reading process. This assertion is echoed by Mckenna (2001), who indicates that teachers, among others, contribute significantly in the mentoring as well as modelling of reading, which includes reading habits, attitudes and reading motivation towards EFAL reading. Concurrently, Kuzborska (2011) argues that the process of how a teacher understands and interprets the act of reading (through their pedagogy, paradigms and interaction strategies) impacts on classroom practices, and ultimately impacts the learner's academic achievement, which includes the practice of reading.

Therefore, insight into the learners' reading habits and attitude towards EFAL reading from the EFAL teachers' perspective is fundamental to address and assist with the reading challenges that these learners experience in school. Consequently, this study sought to investigate and describe the Grades 8–10 EFAL teachers' perceptions of reading habits and attitudes of learners in two high schools in Tshwane South district, Gauteng, with a view to making

recommendations that can possibly promote the reading habits and attitudes among learners.

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

- What are the EFAL teachers' perceptions of the reading habits of the Grades 8–10 learners?
- What are the EFAL teachers' perceptions of the attitudes of Grades 8–10 learners towards reading?
- What are the EFAL teachers' perceptions of the Grades 8–10 learners' motivation towards reading?

Reading challenges

Schmidt, Rozendal and Greenman (2002:131) recapitulate that the ability to read is a fundamental building block in the schooling programme. Reading proficiency ensures not only academic success, but also success throughout life (Oberholzer 2005:2). In contrast, a learner's failure in reading, as noted by Bohlmann and Pretorius (2002:205), impairs academic success and may also prevent the learners from reaching their full potential in life. Although research (Matjila & Pretorius 2004; Pretorius 2002) affirms the importance of reading and accentuates the corresponding relationship between reading and academic performance, it is regrettable to note that 'the South African learners are reading far below the age appropriate expected level' (Department of Education [DoE] 2008:2).

A study by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (2011) reviewed the reading literacy levels of 40 countries, which included countries such as Australia, Austria, Botswana, Denmark, England, Germany, Indonesia, Morocco, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden and the United States. South Africa recorded the lowest reading comprehension ability among the investigated countries. PIRLS (2016) reported that 78% of the Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners are unable to read with interpretation. Congruously, the dearth in reading as experienced by the South African learners is also highlighted by Pretorius and Machet (2004:47), who affirm that primary, secondary and even tertiary learners exhibit inadequately developed reading skills. Furthermore, Benevides and Peterson (2010:298) propose that in an education system that shows signs of reading fragility, it is essential that teachers routinely evaluate their teaching approaches, methods and resources, to augment the perception that reading is a vital resource within the educational environment.

The poor reading ability displayed by learners is cause for concern not only in South Africa, but also for the global community. In the United States, 40% of children experience challenges to become competent readers (Hugo et al. 2005:210). A study conducted by Abadzi (2008:4) states that most learners in Francophone Guinea do not know the entire alphabet by the time they complete Grade 2, which resulted in the average learner being able to read only 4 of the 20 words presented to them in the study. The importance of productive reading habits and positive attitudes is also highlighted in the United Kingdom, based on a study by Twist et al. (2004:393–394), who established that as learners increase in

age, their attitude towards reading declines and become more negative. Hence, research on reading habits and attitudes indicates that most learners have lost interest in reading (Bragulia 2005; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson 2014), and consequently display poor reading habits and a negative reading attitude.

Despite the many initiatives by the various South African governmental departments, non-governmental institutions and a number of enterprises (Ithuteng [ready to learn]; The South African National Literacy Initiative [SANLI]; project by Read 2010; Read2Lead 2015; Room to Read 2012; The National Reading Strategy [NRS] 2008; A National Book Week; Reading Association of South Africa; Read Educational Trust 2010 and the Drop all and Read programme [better known as Read Me a Book]), it appears as if the South African population exhibits a perennial and reluctant culture, interest and attitude towards reading. To add insult to injury, Cekiso (2017:1) postulates that teachers worldwide exhibit an inability to 'teach reading to learners whose mother tongue is not English'. Yet there remains a clear preference for English as medium to access education among most scholars (Lemmer & Van Wyk 2010:226).

An absence of literature seems to suggest that very little is known about the reading habits and attitudes of Grades 8–10 EFAL learners in South Africa, especially in Gauteng. Additionally, there also appears to be a deficit knowledge pertaining to teachers' perceptions regarding the issue.

Reading habits and reading attitudes

No child is born without the ability to learn how to read; however, reading is taught (and modelled) to the child through perennial reading and practice (Van Wyk 2002:30). The routine performance of this activity can possibly result in the establishment of constructive reading habits and positive attitudes.

Reading habits have been examined by several researchers (Akanda, Hoq & Hasan 2013; Chauhan & Lal 2012; Karim & Hasan 2006; Majid & Tan 2007; Scales & Rhee 2001; Shen in Annamalai & Muniandy 2013; Wagner in Chettri & Rout 2013). Reading habits, as alluded to by Wagner (2002) in Chettri and Rout (2013:13) are 'often considered in terms of the amount of materials being read, the frequency of reading as well as the average time spent on reading'. On the other hand, Shen (2006) in Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) defines reading habits as how often, how much, and what the readers read.

Reading attitude is explained as the feeling that an individual harbours about reading, which can be positive or negative, resulting in the learner either persisting with or desisting from a reading situation (Ajzen & Fishbein in Annamalai & Muniandy 2013; Karim & Hasan 2006). Alternatively, attitude (which includes reading attitude), is delineated by Guthrie and Knowles (2001:161) as 'affective responses that

accompany behaviour of reading initiated by a motivational state'. To this end, Walberg and Tshai (1995) in Karim and Hasan (2006:289) point out that factors such as: (1) having a high self-concept as a reader, (2) believing that reading is important, (3) reading enjoyment and (4) growing up in a verbally stimulated and verbally interactive social context contribute to a constructive attitude among adolescents.

It thus appears that a positive attitude fosters a positive reading attitude, whereas a negative attitude fosters a negative reading attitude among learners.

The importance of reading attitudes

Why is reading important? Sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally, the act of reading is part of our daily lives. It thus appears that reading is an act of engagement, an act of interaction with text in its various forms, from which we can construe that 'reading is alive'. This sentiment is supported by Van Der Walt, Evans and Kilfoil (2002:149) who advocate that 'reading is a search for meaning that requires the active participation of the reader'. Stahl and Hayes (1997:137) mention that the different interpretations readers arrive at when reading provide fresh and alternative perspectives to texts.

Sometimes voluntarily and sometimes involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously, the act of reading forms part of our socio-cultural practices.

Regardless of the purpose, be it for education, be it for leisure purposes, be it to administer medicine, or simply just to be able to voice your opinion on a topic of discussion, reading is embedded and a vital element of our daily lives. Consequently, our reading habits and attitudes are important as they influence our reading ability or inability. It is this reading ability or inability that enables the learner to advance academically or not.

The impact of reading habits and attitudes on academic performance

Numerous research projects (Bharuthram 2012; Gunning 2007; Majid & Tan 2007; Matjila & Pretorius 2004; Nel, Dreyer & Klopper 2004; Pretorius 2002) about the connection between reading habits and attitudes on academic progress have been conducted. Research conducted by Pretorius (2002) as well as Matjila and Pretorius (2004) indicate a parallel relationship between literacy (which includes reading ability) and academic achievement. Gunning (2007:3) asserts that when learners enter high school (Grades 8–12), it is expected that they have already accomplished a certain level of reading proficiency, since the development of reading occurs in primary school (Grade R to Grade 7), where the learners are taught to read. At high school level, learners read to learn. Consequently, reading is viewed as a process of cognitive development and the learner needs to exhibit a certain level of text comprehension by means of understanding, interpreting and relating the meaning of the text.

A study by Nel et al. (2004) reports that teaching learners how to apply different reading strategies can impact and improve reading ability. On the other hand, Bharuthram (2012) hypothesises that the teaching of reading across the curriculum both in school and in Higher Education can possibly advance the reading ability of the learners. It is for this reason that Majid and Tan (2007) conducted research on the impact of learners' reading habits and preferences, focusing on the learners' reading attitudes. These researchers found that learners who were motivated, that is, learners who had a positive attitude towards reading, showed improved language skills and performed better academically. Considering these studies, Lukhele (2013:2) suggests that both primary and high school teachers need to function more proactively in influencing learners to read. In other words, through teaching and modelling constructive reading habits and a positive attitude towards reading, teachers can motivate readers towards constructive reading practices.

Shanker and Cockrum (2009:2) are of the view that every learner needs to be taught how to read (and practise the habit of reading) at an age and grade appropriate level of difficulty. This will not only improve the learner's academic performance, but also stimulate personal growth and ensure the learners' literacy empowerment within their socio-cultural context. Therefore, it is important that the EFAL teachers' perceptions about the EFAL learners' reading habits, attitudes and motivation to read also need to be analysed and understood so that their views can also be reflected on when designing literacy enhancement or remedial programmes to assist learners. Furthermore, it is important to consider the perceptions of the teachers, so that their views and suggestions can be evaluated when they are workshopped, facilitated and equipped to instruct reading literacy skills that will assist learners to improve their reading abilities, and subsequently their generic academic performance

Motivation to read

Motivation, specifically within the socio-cultural context, refers to the processes of interaction and learning (Moore, Viljoen & Meyer 2017:297). In addition, Alatis, Altman and Alatis (1981:114) point out that motivation refers to the willingness or desire that moves a person to perform a specific act. Congruently, Ormrod (2008:384) points out that motivation propels a learner in a specific direction. For this reason, the researcher would like to add that not only does motivation influence the willingness to read, but it also cultivates an innate desire to read as well as sustains the will to read, which can most probably culminate in constructive reading habits and positive attitudes towards reading.

On the other hand, Guthrie and Knowles (2001:3) argues that as learners progress through school they compare themselves with their classmates, which can possibly result in an inferiority complex and consequently decrease their motivation to read. In contrast, Cullum (1998:11) narrates that the interaction of learners within a class and among various grades may improve 'reading comprehension', which may bring about a positive

attitude and enjoyment in reading, and subsequently stimulate the motivation to engage in more reading practices.

It thus appears to the researcher that when a learner demonstrates motivation to read, in other words, a willingness to read, it can cause the learner to move from a practice of not reading to a practice of productive reading habits and positive reading attitudes. For this reason, this study investigates, analyses and describes the reading habits, attitudes and motivation to read of Grades 8–10 EFAL learners through a socio-cultural lens.

Theoretical framework

The study was informed by the socio-cultural theory of literacy and the attitude-influence model of reading by Mathewson (2004). Literacy as Social Practice hinges on the diverse forms in which humanity employ literacy in their daily practices of society (Perry 2012:53). To put it differently, Literacy as Social Practice refers to the multiple ways in which people use numerous forms of text to perform various functions in their diverse lifestyles. Street (2001:430) maintains that 'an understanding of literacy (which includes reading, and subsequently reading habits and attitudes) requires a detailed, in-depth account of actual practices in different cultural settings', because literacy is a social practice that exists between people, within groups and communities, as well as the daily practices of society (Olifant, Rautenbach & Cekiso 2017:5). This suggests that the reading practices of learners and how they are modelled by teachers in the classroom (a socio-cultural context) can be influenced by and influence our perceptions and be interpreted in terms of motivation, beliefs, interest, habits and attitudes that the learners demonstrate when they read. Mathewson's attitude-influence model of reading (Ruddel & Unrau 2004:1431–1448) relates that variables such as attitude, motivation, involvement, prior knowledge, purpose and comprehension influence the learners' intention to read and, in turn, influence reading behaviour. This model increases one's insight into the understanding of the reading habits and attitudes of Grades 8–10 learners towards EFAL. Moreover, this model also expands our understanding about teachers' perceptions of reading habits and attitudes of Grades 8–10 learners towards EFAL in high schools in Tshwane.

Methodology

The study followed a qualitative approach in the exploration of the research questions. Hammarberg, Kirkman and De Lacey (2016) state that qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. The authors further point out that qualitative research is effective in obtaining culturally specific information about values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of specific populations. The qualitative research approach was deemed relevant for this study, since its aim is to get teachers' insight to the EFAL learner's reading habits, attitude and motivation to read. The study also followed a case study design. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as:

... an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. (p. 23)

Six Grades 8–10 EFAL teachers (one teacher per grade in two schools) served as sample for this study, which was substantiated by Batchelder (in Maree 2007:84), who states that ‘small samples can be quite sufficient in complete and accurate information within a particular cultural context’. Furthermore, since the teachers were selected to serve the ‘purpose’ of the study and directly address the research questions, purposive sampling was implemented. Maree (2007:85) provided guidance by advocating that, in most cases, qualitative study uses purposive sampling. The use of an audio-recorder to conduct individual semi-structured interviews with the permission of the teachers allowed them the opportunity to narrate their perceptions about the reading habits and attitudes of Grades 8–10 EFAL learners. Handwritten notes were also made and corroborated the audio recordings, which considered the non-verbal responses of the interviewees. The interviews were conducted at a prescheduled time most suitable to the individual teachers, in their respective classrooms. The interviews with the six teachers covered the perceptions that the teachers had about the reading habits and reading attitudes of the learners towards English as a second language. The data collected were analysed thematically.

Results

Individual interviews were conducted with six EFAL teachers to obtain their perceptions about the reading habits, attitudes and motivation to read of Grades 8–10 EFAL learners. The focus of the data analysis was to investigate, understand and describe how the learners’ reading habits, attitude and motivation to read impact on their academic performance, through the perceptive lens of the teachers.

The labelling procedure (Figure 1) produced three categories: ‘Reading habits of learners’, ‘Reading attitudes of learners’

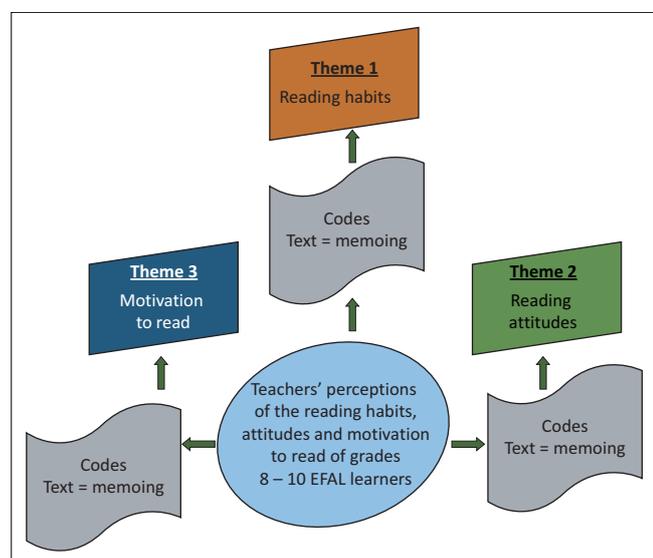


FIGURE 1: Themes emerging from findings based on interview questions.

and ‘Motivation to read among learners’. The six teachers interviewed were labelled I1, I2, I3, I4, I5 and I6. What follows is detail extracted from the conducted interviews that generated the establishment of the categorised themes based on the perceptions of the interviewed teachers.

Theme 1: Reading habits

This theme related the perceptions of teachers about how they viewed the behavioural relationship that learners displayed towards reading according to their observations.

Teachers’ perceptions of Grades 8–10 English First Additional Language learners’ reading habits

The teachers noted that there were those learners who read for the enjoyment thereof, as well as relaxation, but that those learners were in the minority. During all the interviews with EFAL teachers, a strong notion of agreement came through that most learners did not participate in after-school reading practices. Teachers believed most learners read only per instruction in the class and for assessment purposes. Outside of school learners did not read.

The following interview extracts support the above:

‘Many of our learners only read in class because they are forced to read. ... They read when it is necessary to read. Very few of them have developed a habit of taking a book for enjoyment, and for relaxation. There are very few that are into those habits ... that they read for just enhancing their knowledge, their skills and for the betterment and just for enjoyment.’ (Teacher I3, Male, Grade 10)

‘They only read when they are supposed to read in class, and they never read after that. They only do it when they’re in class ... [referring to when do learners read] Yes, exactly, it’s on request only. They also do it only for marks. If it’s not for marks, they won’t do it.’ (Teacher I4, Male, Grade 10)

‘Really not good. Reading, I’m struggling to force my learners to read. To read ... on their own at home and then start to read, start to force the habit of reading and trying to help them. I even asked them to read when they go to the toilet. I advised them to sit and just read something for that half an hour or 15 minutes they spend there. And that’s where you develop reading interest and they don’t even do that. They don’t even do that.’ (Teacher I5, Female, Grade 8)

The influence of reading habits and attitudes the learning process

The teachers agreed that the reading habits and the attitudes of learners influenced their learning experiences, with one of the teachers emphasising that it was important for learners to be able to read to understand and appropriately answer the questions put to them. Teacher I2 conceptualised the influence of reading habits and attitude of learners on their learning experience by pointing out that ‘the more you read, the better you do in your test’.

The following interview extracts support the above:

‘Definitely. If they are not able to read, they will not be able to study. So, studying is out. They do not study, and they take

shortcuts, every mind map or everything they can try out without reading. And that is where our problem lies and our learners do not have enough content to show in answering their questions.’ (Teacher I5, Female, Grade 8)

‘Of course, it does. The more you read, the more, the better you do in your tests, in your, in your, anything else. But ... if you don’t read, if you don’t have a good reading habit, that’s the reason for the marks being so low.’ (Teacher I2, Female, Grade 9)

‘It does. It does. Even though we are aware of the technology and everything, their question papers are still ... their question papers are still written in a formal language, they have to read so that they are able to answer questions. If they are unable to read, then they won’t be able to answer questions, which will lead to them failing. Not failing because they do not know but failing because they do not understand what is expected of them when the exam comes.’ (Teacher I4, Male, Grade 10)

Teacher I4 mentioned that learners sometimes failed because they did not understand what was expected of them (due to their reading ability) and Teacher I5 articulated that if learners were not able to read, they could not study. This opinion interlinked indirectly with Meeks’s (1984:25) assertion that learning to read occurs in the early stages, such as primary grades. Thus, in the secondary school grades, the learners need to read to study to achieve academic success.

Theme 2: Reading attitude

This theme is related to the EFAL reading attitude of learners. It examined the teachers’ viewpoint of the learners’ reading attitude.

Teachers’ perceptions of Grades 8–10 English First Additional Language learners’ reading attitudes

The teachers disclosed that it was difficult to instil a positive reading attitude in learners. Teacher I4 reported that as teachers they were trying to cultivate a positive attitude towards reading among learners, but they were challenged by the careless attitude that learners displayed towards reading. All the teachers communicated that learners had a negative attitude towards reading, accompanied by what Teacher I1 referred to as learners’ ‘reluctance to read’.

The following interview extracts support the above:

‘Children are generally reluctant to read. But I think the problem is they don’t get a chance to read what they like.’ (Teacher I1, Male, Grade 9)

‘It’s a difficult one to answer, because at our school the children are not very, very exposed to the outside world. It depends how things go ... At home, if the parents are buying newspapers and magazines, and fashion magazines, the children will read, but I think there’s, there’s a problem at home, I don’t think that there’s enough reading material there to motivate them to read.’ (Teacher I6, Female, Grade 10)

‘Sjoe, the minute they hear reading, ... they feel bored already. And they moan, and they complain. So [laughs] ... with the attitude I think, they feel negative about it.’ (Teacher I2, Female, Grade 9)

‘Their attitude is mostly, why do I have to read? ... It’s negative.’ (Teacher I3, Male, Grade 10)

‘Lower grades, attitude, positive ... Like to read, like to read in class, but when we are doing the reading period. ... The problem lies with the Grade 10s who are not willing to show.’ (Teacher I5, Female, Grade 8)

‘We’re trying, we’re trying, but we have a huge obstacle of cell phone and the lax attitude of the learners.’ (Teacher I5, Female, Grade 8)

‘Then, our school doesn’t have a library. So, it’s, the access to ... to material ... to reading material is, a little bit restricted to them. And, then you have the influence of, your social influence out there, where people see reading as a waste of time and reading properly as a waste of time. And it is mainly displayed by their peers, friends outside, and sometimes it’s been influenced in the habits of their elders, their parents at home.’ (Teacher I6, Female, Grade 10)

From the teachers’ responses, it was evident that they perceived that learners had a negative attitude towards EFAL. They were of the view that learners were reluctant to read because of a lack of reading material that is of interest to them, the absence of libraries on the school premises, the perpetual access to cell phones and lack of exposure to various types of reading materials. Based on this information, Mckenna (2001:139) proposes that to understand the reason why learners display either a positive or a negative attitude towards reading, causative factors should be considered.

Theme 3: Motivation to read

This theme examined teachers’ perceptions on the learners’ motivation to read. Teachers share their views on whether they perceive learners to be motivated to read, which subsequently constitutes the practice not to read, or the practice of constructive reading habits and positive attitudes towards EFAL reading.

Teachers’ perceptions of Grades 8–10 English First Additional Language learners’ motivation to read

In relation to the learners’ motivation to read, all the teachers included and referred to extrinsic factors of motivation in their responses. Teacher I2 insinuated that the learners’ reading ability may also be influenced by the fact that the skill of reading was not reinforced in learners during the primary grades, by saying that high school learners could not go back to teaching learners to read. Teacher I2 also articulated that it was not every learner that ‘is not interested’ in reading, and Teacher I5 said that the learners in themselves were not motivated to read.

The following interview extracts support the above:

‘It’s a difficult one to answer, because ... I don’t think that there’s enough reading material there [referring to the home environment] to motivate them to read. Because reading starts basically at home.’ (Teacher I1, Male, Grade 10)

‘[whistle] That’s a tough one. [laughs and pauses] Look it’s not everyone, not everyone is, not motivated. Not everyone is not

interested. [pause] I think this is a [pause] this is a problem that comes from home. And since we're a high school here, we can't be going back to Grade 1 or Grade 2 standards where you have to teach someone to read.' (Teacher I2, Female, Grade 9)

'We're trying to motivate them, and they in themselves are not really good, well-motivated.' (Teacher I5, Female, Grade 8)

Practices that teachers perform to motivate the Grades 8–10 English First Additional Language learners to read

All the teachers concurred in their responses that they try to do what they can to motivate learners to engage in constructive reading practices. Teacher I6 suggested that schools should invest in on-site libraries which host a variety of print material, to motivate learners. Teacher I2 pointed out that learners should be 'trapped' into reading by allowing them to read about topics that are of interest to them. Teacher I1 directed the responsibility for motivating learners to read to their parents, as opposed to Teacher I3, who suggested that motivating learners to read is a collective effort among teachers.

The following interview extracts support the above:

'It starts at home. If there's ... if there's poverty at home the chances [that] the parents will have money to buy books and things are very, very slim, because they have to make a decision between what they are going... what is priority for them to spend the money on. But I think schools should do more in terms of libraries, reading material and ... newspapers, I think the news ... the [news houses] can also help in this regard to help to sponsor schools to get reading material into the schools that the parents can't provide to their kids.' (Teacher I6, Female, Grade 10)

'I encourage children to read what they like. I tell them to bring the current topics into the class, in, in, in, reading form. And then before a child knows he's actually has been trapped into something that he didn't really want to do ... We must just give them a chance to read what they like.' (Teacher I2, Female, Grade 9)

'In my opinion, if you can get the mind-set of parents starting with parents, to develop and to show interest in the learners, in their children, we might have a better outcome. So, attention, basically, learners need the attention. I, I, I can't see any one of them getting that from home. Do you understand? So as a teacher, that is where I can, ... I try to pay attention.' (Teacher I1, Male, Grade 10)

'From any teacher's side, preaching and preaching and preaching. It's basically preaching the gospel of it pays to enrich your work power. I got that from school level, from the Reader's Digest, and, I don't know whether it was my brother or something that subscribed to it. Reader's Digest, and motivate children to [pause] ... read in groups. Exchange books in groups. Attend libraries. The library's open even on a Saturday, every second Saturday up here ... The public library. ... The internet has got a lot of information. Read about the topics that interest you. Not necessary you read a novel because it's a story that you must know. But now and then, read about things that interest you. Cooking, habits, things that you do at home. Hobbies. Read about it. But the skill in it is reading. That goes a long way. In your subjects. Everywhere. But from our side, I think, a teacher

needs to preach about it. Because you must practise it. I read a lot, and many a time the children see I sit with a novel, I encourage them now and then, come read this passage for me, at random. And they may ask me questions around it. I'll, I supply them with newspapers whenever I can, and, my reading books are always there for them, and the more access they have to reading, the better.' (Teacher I3, Male, Grade 10)

In relation to teachers' perceptions on learners' motivation to read, teachers referred to various role players, processes and facilities that can assist learners to cultivate constructive reading practices. However, none of the teachers indicated that they make it a personal goal to do more to motivate the learners to engage in constructive reading habits and attitudes. Yet, Woolfolk (2013:364) stipulates that a person may not perform a specific behaviour until there is some motivation to do so. To put it differently, learners will refrain from engaging in constructive reading practices until they become motivated to do so.

The interview extracts show that the teachers' perceptions provided insightful knowledge in relation to the phenomenon of the reading habits, attitudes and reading motivation of learners, based on their observations and interaction with the learners.

Discussion

The gist of this study was that it provided evidence that substantiated that South African learners are not only experiencing a dearth of reading, but they do not engage in productive reading habits, nor are they motivated to read. Although the ability to read does not automatically ensure the learner of academic achievement, reading inability usually equates to academic decay. More alarming about the findings based on the perceptions of the teachers is that it appears that the teachers themselves exhibit a negative attitude about the reading habits and attitudes of the readers.

Furthermore, teachers concurred that although access to computer-based media presents learners with a wide variety of reading options at any time and anywhere with little effort, it undermines constructive reading habits, which require effort.

To achieve the purpose of this study and answer the research questions, the following points of discussion emerged from the interpretation of the findings according to the themes:

- Teachers perceived that learners did not practise reading as a habit.
- Teachers perceived that learners did not read enough to develop productive reading habits.
- Teachers perceived that learners had a negative attitude towards reading.
- Teachers have a pessimistic perception about the reading practices and attitudes of the learners in their classroom.
- Teachers do not take responsibility for contributing towards the dearth of productive reading practices among the learners in their classroom.

This study revealed that teachers were of the view that learners were not in the habit of reading frequently. The interviews with teachers gave a clear indication that they believed the learners did not read at home or in their spare time.

Teacher I2 related: 'the minute they hear reading, they feel bored already'. It was evident from the data collected based on the perceptions of the teachers that learners displayed behaviour reflecting a lack of interest when it came to the reading of print resources. This behaviour indicated that learners had a negative attitude towards reading. The attitude-influence reading model of G.C. Mathewson in Ruddell and Unrau (2004:1431–1448) explains that a reader's attitude towards reading, such as prevailing feelings, and evaluative beliefs about reading as well as action readiness for reading, will influence the intention to read, and, in turn, influence reading behaviour. Concurringly, Woolfolk (2013:213) also postulates that when a specific action or type of behaviour is being avoided, it relates to negative reinforcement. Hence, if teachers can make learners aware of the benefits and advantages of reading, learners will start to appreciate (develop a positive attitude to) the skill of reading and, consequently, it will generate an inner driving force (motivation) to increase the habit of reading, and this development will give life to the words of Winston Churchill: 'Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference!'

Perceptions articulated by the teachers indicated that learners should read more because should their reading habits improve, it would have a positive effect on their overall academic performance. However, reading habits, attitudes and the motivation to read are not about academic ability per se and the achievements of the learner; instead, reading habits, attitudes and reading motivation influence the reading abilities (cognitive abilities) of learners, and as a result, they have an impact on the academic performance of learners. Furthermore, reading habits refer to the reading behaviour in which learners engage. Therefore, sound reading habits, attitude and reading motivation can influence academic performance and constructively benefit the academic performance of the learner. For this reason, we can thus conclude that if a learner engages in good reading habits, it can lead to good reading capabilities and, consequently, it can result in academic success. Since teachers play a pivotal role within the academic context, their observations can contribute to an insightful understanding of the reading habits, attitudes and the motivation to read of learners.

Recommendations

Learners, parents, teachers, caregivers, librarians, publishers, government officials from the Department of Education, community members and civil society, that is, every stakeholder within the socio-cultural environment, should all collaborate to assist learners to cultivate constructive reading habits and acquire positive attitudes and motivation to read.

Based on the findings of this study, which focused on the teachers' perceptions of Grades 8–10 EFAL learners, the following recommendations should be considered.

Early childhood reading development

Early childhood reading practices should be promoted by parents as well as early childhood teachers. Literature reveals that many factors influence the reading practices of a child; consequently it is imperative that the formation of positive attitudes and motivation towards reading be scaffolded in learners from an early age. Children develop habits, including the habit of reading, from an early age in life. Should a learner cultivate the habit of constructive reading practices at an early age, the motivation to read will augment a positive reading attitude. Also, parents and caregivers who set the example of positive reading practices contribute significantly to children developing a positive reading attitude, because as the child matures, constructive early reading habits can result in the incorporation of voluntary reading as a part of their lives.

Parental involvement should be increased

Parents should be encouraged to model reading to their children from an early age. Most of the time, children emulate their parents' behaviour; thus, it is crucial that parents expose their children to reading materials and practices from an early development stage, so that they can cultivate a constructive reading habit and positive attitude and motivation to read early in their lives. For example, the reading of bedtime stories by the parent or caregiver can contribute to enhance the child's interest in reading.

Parents and caregivers who buy books for children to read from a young age demonstrate to learners that the purchasing of books is a 'literacy investment' for their learning career. Furthermore, when parents and caregivers buy books for their children, it can possibly reverse the current lack of constructive reading habits and positive attitudes among learners, and substitute it with a reading practice that will increase learners' motivation to read.

Teacher-parent reading partnerships should be established

The establishment of effective teacher-parent partnerships may possibly amplify parental involvement and awareness of the reading practices of learners and, as a result, increase the chances of the learners of engaging in constructive reading habits and positive attitudes towards reading. Through effective teacher-parent reading partnerships, learners' perceptions of reading practices can be positively galvanised. If a learner thinks positively about reading, they will most probably be motivated to read more. To put it another way, when learners think positively about reading, it will motivate them to read more, and the more they read, the more they will grow into the habit of reading.

Teacher reading workshops and related dialogue should be implemented

For teachers to be better equipped to act as a model of constructive reading habits and positive reading attitudes in their classrooms, they themselves need to be skilled readers. For this reason, teachers should attend reading workshops regularly, to equip them on how to develop effective literacy skills and habits in their learners. These reading training sessions should also serve as an opportunity for language teachers to workshop different reading instruction approaches and strategies. Such teacher training sessions may establish and introduce dialogue channels in which teachers can have constructive conversations about classroom reading practices among themselves, as well as with their learners. These teacher reading workshops will also present teachers with the platform to reflect, internalise and share their reading experiences, which can be used to address reading behaviour. To put it differently, teacher reading workshops can be used to implement acute reading redress among learners.

Teacher empowerment using various literature genres and reading materials

When teachers are exposed to and equipped with the knowledge of a variety of literature genres, they will be empowered to introduce a wide range of literature genres in their reading lessons, which may possibly encourage learners to read for pleasure, rather than to focus on reading only for academic purposes, such as to pass exams.

Incorporation of cooperative learning and teaching strategies

Teachers should incorporate more cooperative learning and teaching strategies within their reading lessons. Strategies such as peer reading or group reading should be used as a reading support, a social activity that creates space for learners to enjoy reading together, as well as to discuss what they have read with their peers. Since group structures present multi-level reading habits, attitudes and reading motivations, it can serve as a constructive reading platform to contribute to the development of positive reading attitudes for the group, as well as for the individual learner. Silent reading opportunities for learners should be promoted because this improves learners' understanding. It helps them concentrate on what they are reading, rather than the pronunciation of individual words which takes place in oral reading.

Independent reading strategies for learners

Teachers should assign different reading tasks to learners, so that they should learn how to create their own opportunities and select their own material to read and practise the reading strategies that they have learned in class. To ensure the effectiveness of the independent reading strategy, teachers need to liaise with librarians to present learners with a range of reading options, such as non-fiction, fiction, contemporary

writings, graphic text and digital texts such as audio books. To present learners with a reading choice that excites them will cultivate a positive reading attitude.

Introduction of reading support strategies

Teachers can also use storytelling, role play, folklore and poetry recitals as reading support strategies. However, teachers should select stories that are contemporary and within the knowledge and visualisation framework of the learners so that their interest to read can be stimulated and possibly promote and result in constructive reading habits.

School library facilities should be established and promoted at all schools

To assist learners to be exposed to and have access to a variety of types of print text, as well as develop good reading habits, it is essential that every school, regardless of the area in which it is located, should offer learners a library facility. The South African Schools Act of 1996 states that each school receives a financial allowance, from which they must provide for the operation and maintenance of their teaching and learning programmes. Accordingly, each school should invest in presenting learners with a contemporary library support facility and learners should be encouraged to use this facility.

Conclusion

The study sought to investigate the reading habits, attitudes and motivation of Grades 8–10 EFAL learners through the perceptive lens of EFAL teachers. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of acknowledging the teachers' perceptions about the reading habits and attitudes of learners and their motivation to read, which can contribute to ensuring that the literacy expectations of learners are proactive, realistic and in context with an ever-developing socio-cultural environment. Consequently, teachers' perceptions should be considered and recognised, since they can be used to contribute to the acute reading redress within the literacy landscape of South Africa.

Acute reading awareness is crucially needed in South Africa. Some of the findings based on the perspectives of teachers indirectly acknowledged that reading instruction elements within the EFAL classroom failed to support or motivate the learners in their reading practices. This perception is significant since teachers have to determine whether the learners' motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic. The results of the current study revealed that the learners had lower levels of motivation. The results further reveal a relationship between motivation to read and reading attitudes and habits. Thus, based on the teachers' perceptions, the lower reading motivation of the learners affected their choices of reading or not reading. It also affected the type of material they chose to read.

The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge on the phenomenon of reading by means of the personal

narratives of the research participants. The teachers' observations, perceptions and recommendations made through this study should be considered to influence and model acute reading redress within our classrooms. The inclusion of teachers as research participants to examine their perceptions continuously, may provide a different approach on how we as a country can redress the reading deficit in our country. It is also likely to inspire teachers in other contexts to diagnose the reading habits, attitudes and motivation of their learners in order to provide a well-informed intervention.

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