



# Whose reading translates into mastery in English First Additional Language at Intermediate Phase?



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## Dates:

Received: 14 July 2023

Accepted: 05 Feb. 2024

Published: 05 Apr. 2024

## How to cite this article:

Mokgadi, T. & Hove, M.L., 2024, 'Whose reading translates into mastery in English First Additional Language at Intermediate Phase?', *Reading & Writing* 15(1), a449. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.449>

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**Background:** A large number of studies have established that reading for comprehension in South African schools is comparably poor relative to other Southern African states. Some of these studies confirm that learners' competency in reading in English is lacking when contextualised in a learning environment. Various systemic evaluations were conducted intended to establish the gap in the literacy and numeracy of learners as the average achieved in Grade 3 for reading with comprehension was only 39%. Furthermore, a recent study found that only 19% of South Africa's Grade 4 learners can read for meaning.

**Objective:** To investigate whose reading translates to mastery in English First Additional Language (EFAL) in the intermediate phase.

**Method:** An interpretive paradigm, using a qualitative approach was used. Four teachers from two schools were purposively selected for this study. The research involved the participation of 234 learners in Grade 4 and 152 learners in Grade 5 totaling 386 participants.

**Results:** Teachers in the intermediate phase possess pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) which is strengthened by the subject matter knowledge in the teaching of reading in EFAL. While teachers demonstrate PCK, there is a necessity for enhancing the aspect of imparting knowledge of reading for meaning to learners.

**Conclusion:** Teachers were knowledgeable in demonstrating diverse skills in the teaching of reading for meaning.

**Contribution:** This study generates specific strategies for teachers to exhibit their PCK in developing and improving reading for meaning.

**Keywords:** literacy; pedagogical content knowledge; systemic evaluation; Intermediate Phase; reading; content knowledge.

## Introduction

Their reading ability has an impact on learners' academic performance (Boakye 2017). Mastery of reading for meaning leads to an improvement in the range of subjects taught in schools (Schmidt, Condy & Tiba 2021). The significant importance of reading is acknowledged by national and international scholars who emphasise the benefits of reading by acknowledging that success in academics relies on learners having effective reading strategies (Cekiso 2017; Mullis et al. 2023). Even though reading is critical to the achievement of learners, research has proven that a large number of South African learners lack the ability to read for meaning (Mullis, Martin & Gonzalez 2004; Mullis et al. 2023; Wallner-Paschon 2009). This is evident in various reports which, amongst others, include the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016, and 2021 (Howie et al. 2017; Mullis et al. 2023; Pretorius 2014). Consequently, poor reading has been linked to overcrowded classrooms, lack of reading material, teachers' inadequate training, and lack of expertise to clearly teach reading comprehension strategies (Cekiso 2017; Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2016; Makena, Mpiti & Mbodila 2020; Phala & Hugo 2022). Inadequate teacher training and dysfunctional schools lead to learners' poor reading achievements in English First Additional Language (EFAL) at the Intermediate Phase (IP). Teachers at the IP of schooling experience challenges regarding knowledge and how to approach improving the teaching of English reading (Ferris 2018). In general, the generated data in this study revealed the extent to which teachers matched their reading lessons with the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) requirements, despite the perceived inadequacy of these requirements (Meyer & Ray 2011; Weideman, Du Plessis, & Steyn 2017). The conclusion is that some teachers lack the expertise

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to purposefully read a text for comprehension. Until now this lack of comprehension amongst teachers did not present any urgency for the explicit teaching of reading for comprehension strategies to learners (Entwisle, Alexander & Olson 2019; Ferris 2018; Medina et al. 2021; Spaull, Pretorius & Mohohlwane 2018). However, in the study by Medina et al. (2021), teachers were extensively taught how to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies, this as a result of learners transitioning from mother tongue to learning in English (Fesi & Mncube 2021). The strategies were integrated in the teachers' classroom teaching, leading to improved learners' reading competencies.

Furthermore, the inadequacy of reading levels amongst learners in South Africa has been raised by educationists, in particular at the IP (Blevins 2020; Bloch 2009; De Witt & Lessing 2016; Ramphele 2008; Rule & Land 2017). The assessments performed at the national level by the DBE in South Africa and international research bodies show that learners' performance is below the expected grade levels in numeracy and literacy (Foy et al. 2020; Mullis et al. 2023; Department of Education [DoE] 2008; Spaull 2023). In 2001 and 2004, two national systemic evaluation tests were conducted to determine the state of literacy readiness in South African learners (DBE 2008), with a follow-up assessment in 2011 and 2013 (Howie et al. 2017). The results of the tests established poor performance of learners across the country (DBE 2017; NRS 2008). These systemic tests established that 63% of learners achieved a lower score than the required level for the grade within a phase, with 23% receiving partial attainment for the grade and a paltry 14% demonstrating exceptional achievement (DBE 2017; Jhingran 2011:6). Even though PIRLS does not test EFAL learners, and the latest survey in 2021 was conducted during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the assessment showed that only 19% of South Africa's Grade 4 learners can read for meaning. This is a decline from the 2016 study, which verified that 22% of Grade 4 learners could read for meaning.

As a result of learners' poor performance in both national and international assessments, the role of teachers emerges as important in developing learners' skills to improve reading comprehension strategies and purposefully teach these strategies to learners so that they become competent readers. It is the responsibility of teachers to generate and disseminate skills by guiding learners on how to read and how to apply this skill to better understand any text designed for the elicitation of reading for meaning skills (Cekiso 2017; Muzammil & Suhono 2019). Empowerment of teachers has been identified as central in studies aimed at equipping teachers to explicitly teach reading strategies for comprehension as evident in countries like the United States and Ireland (Concannon-Gibney & Murphy 2012; Medina et al. 2021). The purpose of this study was to establish, through qualitative data, the role teachers play in the mastery of reading for meaning in EFAL IP classrooms. In a South African context EFAL will be an added language taught alongside the learners' primary or home language. English, as an EFAL, involves integrating it into the curriculum, classroom

activities, and assessments in a way that recognises its importance as a key language for communication, education, and future opportunities. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What reading attributes, identified by teachers in IP learners, signify mastery in EFAL?
- What pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and subject content knowledge (SCK) strategies do teachers in the IP classrooms in EFAL settings deploy to facilitate and nurture reading for meaning?

These guiding questions culminated in the formulation of the main question: What pedagogic practices and strategies do teachers exhibit in teaching reading amongst EFAL learners in the IP?

## Literature review

Muzammil and Suhono (2019) submit that proficiency in reading must be accompanied by comprehension of the text being read. As a result, both reading and comprehension are intertwined, with Vongkrachang and Chinwonno (2015) defining the two competencies as a learner's ability to recognise words, develop and use vocabulary, and the ability to use a variety of strategies to read a text with comprehension. Even though the focus in this study is on the IP, the skills that learners need to read proficiently should be introduced in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1–3), as this would assist in minimising future challenges regarding reading for meaning (Phala & Hugo 2022). Thus, teachers should put emphasis on explicitly teaching reading strategies to IP learners (Phala & Hugo 2022). Teachers must skillfully enrich the reading environment, guiding and monitoring reading practices in the classroom (Hilden & Pressley 2007; Marchand-Martella, Klingner & Martella 2013). It is equally important for schools to introduce learners to reading for learning at IP (as a complement and higher dimension of learning to read), and further develop the important competencies in reading for comprehension, analysis and evaluation. Despite the perceived inadequacies, teachers align their reading lessons with the CAPS requirements (Meyer & Ray 2011; Weideman et al. 2017). Govender and Hugo (2018:25) found that topics in the CAPS documents were not presented systematically and sequentially. A prior study (Khoza 2017:189) concluded that teachers, confronted with various CAPS documents in their subject areas, often felt confused and, consequently, opted to continue with their established teaching methods. In a newspaper article in the *Sowetan*, the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, stresses the need for learners in the IP to be equipped with reading skills to perform optimally in their school careers, and play a meaningful role in their economically active years as they mature (Nkanjani 2023).

## Lesson delivery

The delivery of a reading lesson in EFAL in the IP is deeply rooted in intricate and changing contexts (Banegas 2020) in

which both teachers and learners collaborate to reach the objectives of the presentation. The success of such a lesson in the classroom lies in the cooperation between teachers and learners, with the teachers pacing and monitoring the entire process (Koning et al. 2011), and learners contributing their own funds of knowledge (FoK) to the engagement with texts. Koning et al. (2011) highlight four elements that lead to effective delivery of the lesson.

### Quality of instruction

The emphasis is on the range of teaching activities challenging the learners to engage, with reference to presenting information in an organised way, sequencing and noting transition to new topics.

### Appropriateness of the level of instruction

It is important for teachers to adapt their strategies of instruction to the learners' grade level and varied needs. Even though the learner-teacher ratio is a challenge in South Africa, teachers should improvise to ensure that the level of instruction, embedded in a lesson, is not too challenging or too easy for the learners, or to the various layers of within-class ability grouping.

### Incentives

A classroom environment should provide an atmosphere that allows learners to actively participate in lessons, be sufficiently motivated to pay attention, study and take part in the tasks assigned to them. When learners perform adequately, they become motivated by the marks achieved in the classroom, and this acts as an incentive for their progressive learning. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that they devise an improvement plan that informs them regarding the intervention programme (Wang 2021).

### Time

Time is the quantitative feature of teaching and learning, for instance plans for classroom management permitting learners to offer a significant amount of time for reading activities. It is imperative that teachers work towards improving the learners' language skills, as neglecting this responsibility tends to impact negatively on the progress to other grades (Pretorius & Stoffelsma 2017).

The aforementioned elements are interconnected, with effectiveness in teaching reading for meaning being evident only if all of them are applied (Koning et al. 2011).

### Pedagogical content knowledge

Pedagogical content knowledge, a concept which initially had reference to science education, is the teachers' ability to fuse pedagogical knowledge with subject matter knowledge (Oliveira, Lopes & Spear-Swerling 2019). This comprises the conceptions and preconceptions that teachers have of

learners of different ages and backgrounds and what learners bring with them to the learning of the most frequently taught topics and lessons. In the event those preconceptions are misconceptions, as they so often are, teachers require an alchemy of strategies most effective in reorganising their understanding of learners (FoK) because the learners are unlikely to appear before them as blank slates (McHugh et al. 2021; Shulman 1986). In the following section, the components of teaching English as an EFAL, that have been identified under PCK, are discussed. Each component (cf. Figure 1) is expanded in this discussion, in terms of definition and how the various components are linked.

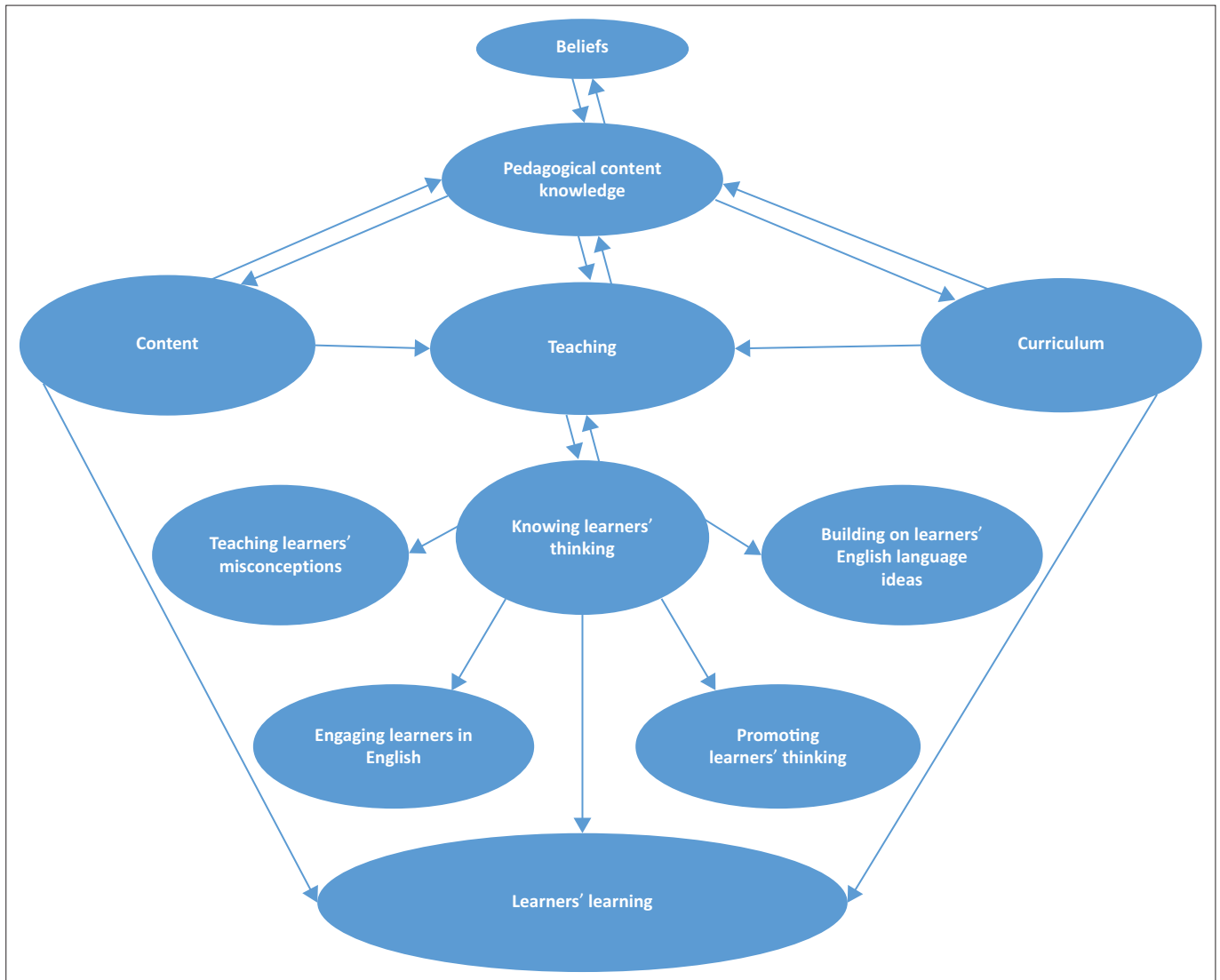
Figure 1 illustrates 'the interactive relationship among the three components and shows that knowledge of teaching can be enhanced by content and curriculum knowledge' (An et al. 2004:147). The emphasis is on the three components of PCK, that is: content, curriculum and knowing learners' thinking as these components are important to effective teaching; nonetheless, the crucial element of PCK is the knowledge of teaching. It is clear, from the discussion above, that actual teaching is a practice that depends on the teacher's PCK, beliefs and knowledge of the learner. The vital connection regarding the three components marks the inauguration of exceptional teaching and learning of reading for meaning in English in the context of an EFAL (Khanjani et al. 2017; Grabe 2009; Ibrahim 2016; Setiadi & Musthafa 2013).

### Subject content knowledge

The international research conducted on assessing teachers' knowledge focuses primarily on mathematics teachers (Baumert et al. 2010; Kandjinga & Kapenda 2022; Nalipay et al. 2022; Tuithof et al. 2023). Though this study focuses on EFAL teachers, it is appropriate to extrapolate some of the insights from mathematics and science teachers since SCK plays an important role in all teaching. The proficiency in English *subject content knowledge* may be considered adaptable, yet it remains paramount in instructing EFAL, despite the apparent lack of clarity in traditional content knowledge for effectively managing the responsibilities of teaching English. In this study, subject matter knowledge, as detailed by Denbel and Hu (2023) in their mathematics research study, plays a vital role in the teachers' PCK, in particular at the IP. The widely acknowledged belief is that the knowledge, possessed by teachers, significantly contributes to successful teaching and the learning outcomes of learners (Nel, Nel & Malindi 2022). The domain of SCK comprises three elements, namely general content knowledge, specialised content knowledge, and expertise at the English language level (Dhungana et al. 2022).

### Methodology

This is a qualitative study, viewed through an interpretivist lens, in which data were collected and interpreted in relation to teachers' execution of their PCK to explicitly transform the learning environment through reading for meaning. Researchers should strive to comprehend a situation



Source: Adapted from An, S., Kulm, G. & Wu, Z., 2004, 'The pedagogical content knowledge of middle school, mathematics teachers in China and the U.S.', *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education* 7, 145–172. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JMTE.0000021943.35739.1c>

**FIGURE 1:** The network of pedagogical content knowledge.

through the distinctive perspectives of the participants' individual experiences (Creswell 2015). The discussion in this section focuses on the sampling, site selection, participant selection, data analysis and data generation strategies.

Purposive sampling was used for this study as we strove to identify specific participants who could provide information that answers the research questions. The participants were teachers, being adults who approved directly and learners who received consent letters from their respective parents or guardians. Permission to access the schools was sought through the district office where the two schools are located. This ethical procedure aligns with the principles of engaging with participants responsibly. Four teachers from two schools were purposively selected for the study. The participants possessed rich information due to their specific characteristics (Clark et al. 2022). This is in line with Punch and Oancea's (2014) definition of purposive sampling, as a deliberate selection of participants, informed regarding a phenomenon of study.

In Ngaka Modiri Molema district there are 246 schools of which two in Rekopantswe sub-district were selected, Bakgatla and Bakwena Primary schools. The PCK of four teachers (two per school) was established through their experience and how they presented reading sessions with their learners. Furthermore, 234 Grade 4 and 152 Grade 5 learners, a total of 386 learners, were involved through classroom observation by the researchers.

Furthermore, the strategies applied in the generation of data included semi-structured interviews with teachers, as well as classroom observations of lessons prepared by teachers in reading for meaning at the IP. This allowed for the analysis of qualitative data to determine the learners' performance in the selected schools. The researchers examined the learners' responses during observations of the lessons delivered by the four teachers interviewed. In the lessons observed, learners were able to respond to questions posed by the teachers. This approach allowed us to establish differences in the learners' responses to their experiences of reading for meaning

according to the teacher's qualifications and teaching experience as attributes relevant to PCK.

The study includes visual evidence (Figure 2 and Figure 3) of the classrooms observed to buttress the impact that the physical appearance of the classroom exerts on reading levels. The data generated also illustrate the number of lessons observed in the EFAL classrooms, the reading activities conducted and how the reading lessons unfolded. This is informed by the narrative texts used, the questions formulated and asked by the teachers, and the opportunities presented to the learners to ask pertinent questions, thereby tapping into their FoK and equally advancing new knowledge about the subject. Overall, the data generated established the degree to which the teachers aligned their reading lessons to the CAPS requirements, insufficient though these requirements might be (Meyer & Ray 2011; Weideman et al. 2017).

## Findings and discussion

The teachers in the IP possess PCK which is further strengthened by the subject matter knowledge in the teaching of reading in EFAL. Their PCK was realised during the interviews and classroom observations where thorough engagement with learners characterised their lessons. This was helpful to them because they could scaffold (method of support provided by teachers to learners as they develop new skills) and intervene in the learner's reading for meaning. The adherence to the curriculum, knowing learners' ways of learning and content knowledge possessed by teachers contribute to effective teaching of reading for meaning as illustrated during the interviews and classroom observation.

In relation to the pedagogic content knowledge in reading, two of the teachers who were interviewed modelled for fluency in the IP. Ms Mogomotsi (pseudonym) mentions:

'I use comprehension texts in class when they read. They can make connections to the texts. They use such information to answer the questions. The questions seek to identify what, when, where aspects of comprehension. We move to why and how questions so that we can identify the higher comprehension levels. But at the phase I teach, these difficult questions are sparse ... deliberately.' (T4, 60-years, Female, Teacher, BEd Hon)

Mr Moatshe (pseudonym) states:

'When they read comprehension, they develop their thinking skills, and they can analyse and answer questions. They must articulate words correctly ... phonics ... And they must pace the reading. Some words need emphasis ... I stop to encourage them as I model the pace.' (T2, 25-years, Male, Teacher, BEd)

It emerges from this submission that these teachers engaged learners by asking them questions that facilitated not just sentence-level reading, but allowed the learners to read for inferences, tapping into their FoK. They also read for pace and pronunciation. In reading the sentences at the correct pace, we realised that there was sufficient knowledge of syntax and the semantic aspect of reading. Words arranged in a sentence may convey a particular meaning; the same words, re-arranged differently, could convey different meanings to the listeners. In terms of PCK, therefore, it emerged that semantics and syntax were inter-related concepts that teachers exhibited when guiding their learners in reading for meaning.

Prosody engages the learner in weaving in and out of the text, often calling on intonation and the rise and fall of the voice as the learner incorporates paralinguistic devices in creative ways. It is crucial that teachers identify errors made by learners in their reading and suggest corrections on mispronounced words, and identify incorrect pauses at the comma, semi-colon, colon, and full-stop levels for prosodic

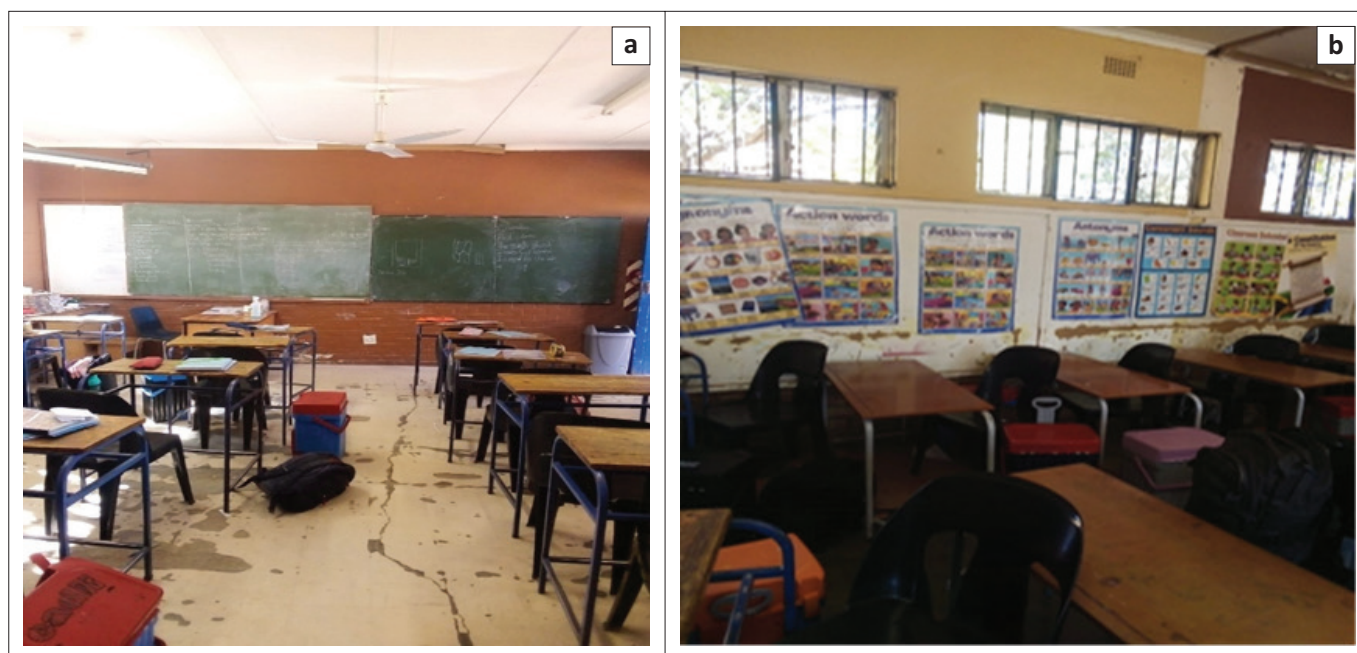
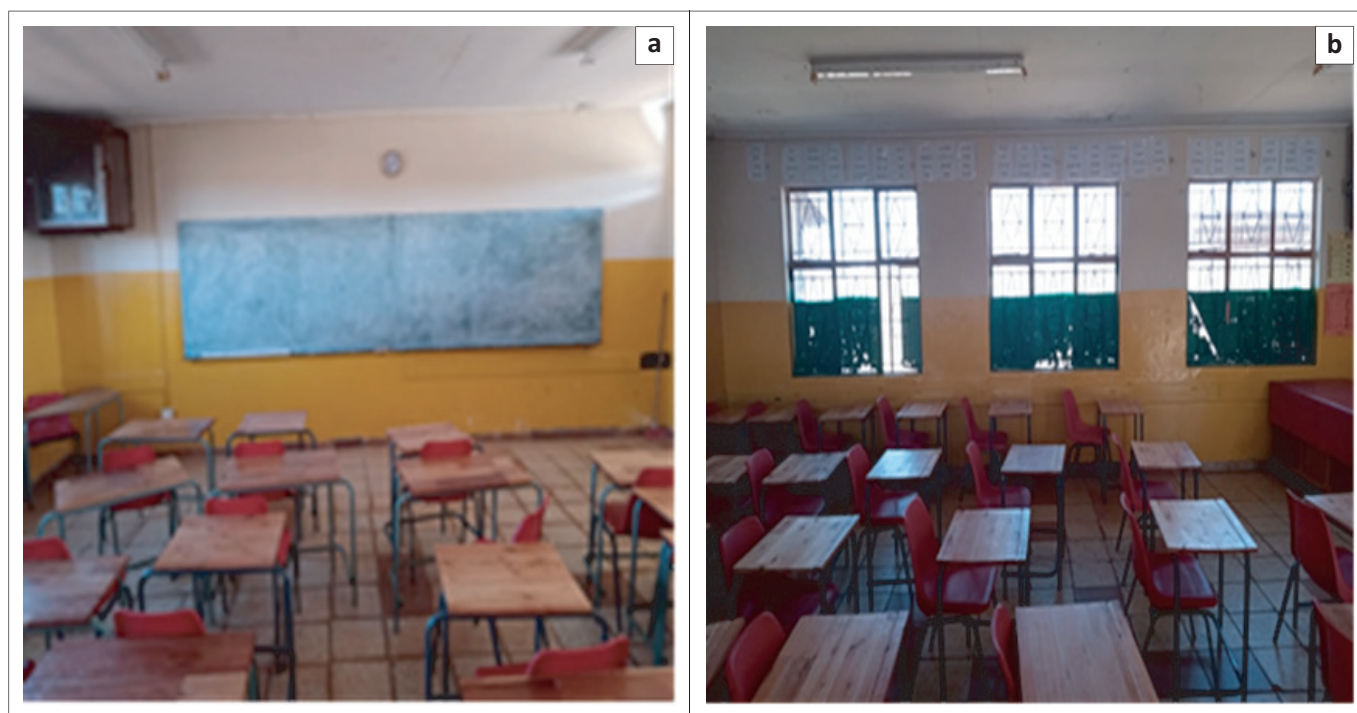


FIGURE 2: (a) Front view of a reading classroom in Bakgatla Primary school, and (b) Side view of a reading classroom in Bakgatla Primary school.



**FIGURE 3:** (a) Front view of a reading classroom in Bakgatla Primary school, and (b) Side view of a reading classroom in Bakgatla Primary school.

reading. Teachers should strive to enhance English literacy in the classroom by aligning their expertise with the evolving competencies of their learners.

The effectiveness of teachers in the teaching of reading is improved by content and curricular knowledge which incorporates the complete knowledge of various language and reading programmes designed for the teaching of reading for meaning in EFAL.

Ms Mooketsi (pseudonym) states:

'I follow the annual teaching plan as it specifies areas that should be taught in reading. It provides me with topics to teach ... I also follow the CAPS document as it prescribes methods of teaching reading, like shared reading in Grade 4.' (33-years, Female, Teacher, BEd, Teacher)

It is important that teachers have a nuanced consideration for their learners to prepare lessons that meet their individual reading needs. Learners appreciate reading material that is suitable and recommended by their teachers. Such dedicated teachers further manage time in the reading process.

Ms Thuto (pseudonym) states:

'We have a library at school and when they are free, I lead them on a visit to the library where they read for leisure. They sit at the library corner, and they read books that I model from the prescribed texts, and they do it for fun. They love reading stories and recounting them to their peers.' (T3, 30-years, Female, BEd Hon)

When teachers are informed by constructivist knowledge practices, they understand that learners independently construct knowledge in the learning and command of

reading. When the learners recount the stories they have read in the library, they demonstrate competencies in summarising, and oftentimes, dramatising the story. The identification of main points in the stories retold to peers suggests some mastery of the skills of reading for meaning. Such teachers also give learners an opportunity to work at their pace while scaffolding reading practices as knowledgeable others to make meaning of their reading.

The study found that teachers were adequately equipped to share knowledge with their learners by preparing lessons that enhanced their learners' reading, applying teaching methods that are articulate and inspiring to learners. This was evident as stated by Ms Mogomotsi when she said:

'I prepare reading lessons that are meaningful to the learners and developmental to their reading. I always skim and scan texts in preparing my lessons. It is helpful as learners lose focus if they are not engaged in the lesson, in particular during reading ... I select interesting texts that they can easily relate to their own experiences.' (T4, 60-years, Female, Teacher, BEd Hon)

Teachers effectively supervised the classroom during the reading instruction, but a notable issue arose when learners were not encouraged to convey and articulate their understanding of the material in their own words. Although this is a worrying factor as observed by the researchers, teachers assured researchers that they spur on and motivate learners' reading.

The teacher's ability to adapt their teaching methods in reading to the learners culminated in various competencies, more specifically the capacity to identify challenged learners to emulate the more capable ones through modelling. Ms Mooketsi mentions:

'I praise and applaud when they do well in their reading activities, like linking what they see from the texts with their own life experiences. I encourage my learners to appreciate each other when they do well in reading. You know ... they clap hands for a good reader ... they seem to know when the reading is good and then you get the others also wanting to copy this good reading ... When they stumble on new words ... you hear them stammer and look up to you to help them along ... You break down the difficult words into syllables ... it helps a lot.' (33-years, Female, Teacher, BEd, Teacher)

It is evident that teachers in the two selected primary schools possess the PCK that enhances reading for meaning in the classroom. However, despite these abilities, there are gaps identified that may impede the progress anticipated at the IP. Teachers show little creativity due to their adherence to 'the annual teaching plan' as stated by Ms Mooketsi. However, from the submission of the participants, the demonstration of PCK shows teacher-centred classroom practices by rote. While they adhere to the curriculum in terms of what to teach, teachers do not improvise in creative ways in the classroom. The teachers know how to routinely teach reading for meaning. The national and international assessments foster a bleak outlook on the capabilities of learners, yet in these evaluations, teachers are consistently disregarded. The curriculum materials used by these teachers are a source of tasks regarding reading for comprehension that restrict deviating from the prescribed materials. The participants, save one, were not able to state if they offered alternative materials in the teaching of reading in the classroom.

The general picture is that teachers do not emphasise the recognition of punctuation while reading to factor in reading stylisations such as pace, rhythm, vocabulary extension, reading between the lines, asking interrogative questions at the level of how and why, and scaffolding from more knowledgeable others. The only method applied by teachers is what is generic to reading, for example the whole-language approach with the focus on reading, combining various language skills such as vocabulary and reading aloud, when the teacher reads a passage or a text aloud, modelling correct pronunciation and expression for learners. Their knowledge of shared reading is not adequate for teaching reading for meaning. The latter involves helping learners comprehend and understand the context of a text; *inter alia*, teaching reading for meaning entails strategies like questioning techniques according to which learners are encouraged to ask questions before, during, and after reading to guide their understanding; making predictions, sharply looking into the content based on the title, cover, or paragraphs sequencing the narrative. Teachers at the purposively selected schools did not adequately assist learners to deduce meanings, make inferences and deal with diverse sentence structures in their reading performances. The process of skimming and scanning was mentioned as a good indication of being cognisant of PCK, but it concerned us that it was only mentioned by one participant, confirming the observation that teaching by rote is the pervasive and generic practice of teachers in many classrooms.

In the selection of exciting texts for the learners, the conclusion is that teachers are aware of what to do in their reading lessons; however, the presentation of the lessons seems not to be adequately planned. Ms Mogomotsi in her lessons is always mindful of 'selecting interesting texts that they (learners) can easily relate to their own experiences'. This proves the fact that teaching reading does take place even though this is done with less impact to the learners' engagement. In motivating learners, teachers should present learners with interesting texts, with choices in reading and writing and modelling reading for enjoyment, for instance making reports, writing letters, and exhibiting some new ability or skill. The motivation shown like giving 'praise and applause' was evident in the classroom; however, there was little if any proof that it led to meaningful reading or shaping the reading competencies of learners. The teachers emphasised time management in their classrooms where reading is practised. This important aspect was, however, not mentioned by other participants and how helpful it could be in preparing for teaching reading for meaning.

### **Evidence of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge regarding reading in English First Additional Language**

The adaptation to methods of teaching reading for meaning where constructivism is applied improves the learning process as observed in this study. Constructivism, as an educational theory, emphasises the active role played by learners in constructing their comprehension and knowledge. The teachers should provide novel approaches to presenting reading lessons and demonstrate the conviction that learners are instrumental in the success of such a lesson, as evidenced in this study, though at a minimal level. The learners' achievement in reading must tap into the new literacies approaches and be based on their familiarity with changes in the curriculum intentions. Even though *exciting texts* are used by teachers in this study, teachers need to increase their use in schools, particularly authentic texts, as this culminates in an improvement in the quality of teaching reading for meaning. Using authentic texts in teaching reading offers an advantage to learners as they experience *real-world relevance*, because these texts mirror the language and communication styles in real-life situations, making the learning experience more relevant for learners. This is evident in Ms Mogomotsi's classroom as she regularly 'selects interesting texts that learners can easily relate to their own experiences'.

The important part is for teachers to take responsibility to assist learners in fostering critical thinking in the reading process in the EFAL classroom by directing learners to higher-order questions (as outlined in Bloom's taxonomy) such as why and how rather than the when, what and where questions that allow learners to voice only single-word answers (Anderson & Krathwohl 2001:67–68). When learners are asked the how and why questions, they tend to be thoughtful and circumspect in drawing inferences derived from their comprehension of the texts read in the classroom.

It is important for teachers to create an ideal constructivist learning environment that promotes collaboration in reading, particularly in EFAL in the IP. This constructivist learning environment is designed to facilitate active engagement and meaning making among learners.

They should present learners with a challenging, yet motivating, learning environment where there are opportunities to relate to their life experiences. And the teachers ought to provide learners with immediate feedback about their learning of reading, as this compels learners to realise their mistakes and allows them to improve pace, enunciation, and prosody.

Based on the above summation, teachers play a critical role in imparting knowledge to learners on factors that may lead to improvement of reading in the classroom. Teachers at the IP put more emphasis on the narrative texts and ignored introducing expository texts. Evidence from the interviews showed that learners were not exposed to the critical analysis of texts, as conveyed in the reading of expository texts. Additionally, teachers play a role in exploring different approaches to reaching out to learners, irrespective of their circumstances, and this was evident in participants' responses. In relation to the curriculum, teachers appeared to be knowledgeable of the requirements. The most evident lack was regarding their role in the selection of prescribed materials suitable for reading at the IP, as this was not mentioned. An advantage in selecting reading texts for learners is that the teacher will be able to acquire reading material that resonates with learners' experiences, making the content more relevant and meaningful. Additionally, when learners see their own experiences reflected in reading material, their motivation for reading and learning will be boosted. In this study the creativity of teachers was not stated, as the focus was more on the pacesetter which leads to teachers' styles to teaching reading being routine in that teachers only apply what is presented to them by the department. Teachers lacked innovation in the teaching of reading. In the classrooms it appeared that teachers did not rest from finding creative ways to teach and improve reading. The impression was for them to strive to be better teachers than they were in training. They demonstrated knowledge and ideas on how to improve the teaching of reading competencies in their submissions.

An important factor to be considered further would be what specific strategies they might have learnt and how they had adopted these in their specific teaching methods, specifically in helping the struggling readers. The teachers in the two primary schools relied on the *Reader* which has prescribed material. There was no evidence of them exploring other relevant material suitable to engage learners in reading. Additional materials were considered only when learners were encouraged to look for books in the library. The PCK of looking into other material was important, but the teachers did not consistently assist learners in making choices for appropriate texts.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Teachers' mastery translating into an intervention in the teaching of EFAL in the IP classrooms was examined. The findings illustrate that teachers were able to present reading lessons informed by their PCK. While these educators demonstrated expertise in teaching reading, it is crucial to ensure that lessons are thoroughly planned to enhance learners' comprehension of reading in EFAL. The crucial aspect involves teachers assuming responsibility for aiding learners in developing critical thinking skills during the reading process by guiding them toward higher-order questions. When learners engage, using this type of question, they tend to approach their understanding of texts in a thoughtful and discerning manner, drawing meaningful inferences. Moreover, it is imperative for teachers to create a challenging, yet motivating, learning environment that allows learners to relate their experiences to what they are taught. Teachers should offer prompt feedback to learners in their reading endeavors, encouraging them to identify errors and enhance their pace, pronunciation, and prosody. One noticeable gap concerning the curriculum was the absence of explicit mention regarding teachers' role in selecting appropriate reading material at the IP. Additionally, there was a lack of innovation in the teaching of reading; it seemed that teachers were not actively seeking creative methods to teach and enhance skills. The overall impression was, however, that teachers were not resting but striving to continually improve and become more effective educators than they were during their training.

This was a small-scale study of four teachers in the IP from purposively selected schools. Furthermore, a total of 386 learners were involved through observation (234 Grade 4 and 152 Grade 5 learners). As Ngaka Modiri Molema district has 246 schools, and only two in the Rekopantswe sub-district were selected, this qualitative study cannot be generalised to the entire district. Nonetheless, the findings may bear similarities to schools in the neighbourhood with the same features.

It is recommended that a qualitative study be initiated at the Foundation Phase with regard to factors impeding reading which lead to learners underperforming in the IP in EFAL. Strengthening reading skills in a qualitative study at the Foundation Phase of schooling involves a holistic approach taking into account various factors like a literacy-rich environment where teachers create a classroom environment that is rich in print material, including books, posters, and labels. It is also recommended that a comparative study on the teachers' pedagogic content knowledge in EFAL and their prowess in teaching reading in the IP should be conducted. Such a comparison could lead to researchers being able to determine the extent to which teachers in other schools play a mediatory and scaffolding role in the teaching of reading for meaning at this phase.

Furthermore, this study, in responding to its question, provides specific strategies for teachers to exhibit their PCK in the enhancement and advancement of reading for meaning



in the IP in EFAL (Ismail & Aziz 2020; Ying & Aziz 2019). This repertoire of knowledge from the study could inform the DBE to adapt and implement diverse strategies for intervention to enhance reading for meaning in schools, specifically in this important phase. Amongst others, these should focus on training on PCK of teachers in EFAL.

Additionally, this study demonstrated that IP learners in the two schools do have exposure to teachers who could prepare them for the reading experience through the nurturing of a reading culture. Consequently, even though they might have been disadvantaged because of the disparity between their own familiar multilingual culture and the challenges of a reading culture at school, they exhibited the capacity to learn and master the epistemic context of the schools. Literature on reading and writing in South Africa shows that higher education institutions have tended to blame the IP in the schooling system for the under-preparedness of students, but in the specific context reported in this article, we garnered sufficient evidence to refute this claim. It is prudent to recommend that in teaching the reading strategies explored in this study, the teachers could be more explicit in developing the voice of the learners in reading for meaning, reading between the lines, and reading with an interpretive intention that enhances epistemic access. In the article are examined the entanglements of PCK, SCK, interpersonal conviviality, and curious reading strategies that privilege learner agency and the application of prior knowledge in purposeful reading under the guidance of knowledgeable others. Through genre analysis we verified that the different semiotic resources in the trajectory become patterned repertoires. Within such repertoires, we distinguished how certain linguistic resources and reading and writing genres enjoy greater functionality, significance, and salience. We also distinguished how some styles and resources are permanent and enduring and others are temporary and dynamic so that learners actively participate in taking ownership on behalf of their own generation of multilingual resources and, therefore, developing strategies for reading for meaning.

## Acknowledgements

We are thankful to the schools, principals, teachers, and learners who participated in this study.

## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

T.M. and M.L.H contributed equally to this work.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the North-West University Education, Management and Economic Sciences, Law, Theology, Engineering, and Natural

Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The number is NWU-00067-19-A2.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors, or the publisher.

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