

English Reading Experiences of Grade One Learners: A case of Tsholotsho District Rural Primary schools in Zimbabwe

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Abstract— This study explored the English reading experiences of Grade 1 learners in rural primary schools in Tsholotsho District, aiming to uncover the prevalent experiences, challenges, and targeted interventions. A qualitative approach was adopted, employing a case study design with a sample of 50 Grade 1 learners and 10 teachers from five primary schools. Research instruments included observing learners reading 50 English words and semi-structured interviews with teachers. The words were assessed using the Dale-Chall Readability Formula to ensure suitability for Grade 1 level. Systematic coding and thematic analysis were applied to the qualitative data. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, member checks and data triangulation were employed. Permission was obtained from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Observations revealed limited word reading ability, infrequent use of reading strategies, and reluctance to seek help among learners. The study recommends explicit instruction in reading strategies, creating a supportive learning environment, and promoting engagement through interactive activities. A comparative study is suggested to compare English reading experiences and outcomes between rural and urban settings, identifying potential disparities and informing targeted interventions tailored to specific contexts.

Keywords— Reading Strategies, Supportive Learning Environment, Engagement, Rural Setting, Intervention.

INTRODUCTION

English is widely regarded as the preferred language of instruction among educationalists globally, (Baker, 2017; Crystal, 2012; Graddol, 2006). In the same sentiment, Chen & Kraklow, (2015), point out that, English is considered as the language preferred by most educationalists across the globe. Mastering English has numerous advantages to learners irrespective of ethnic background or nationality (Okoro 2010). However, learning English as a second language is quite challenging especially in a setting where English is not spoken as the first language. Learning English is considered to be a tough task particularly at the beginning of the academic years among the non-native speakers (Chand, 2021). Learning environment, cultural differences and influence of the vernacular language can be barriers for a learner to learn a second language (Chand, 2021). Studies prove that learning a new language is very good for the function of the brain, but many learners find it very challenging to become proficient in learning a second language (Leonard, Stroud, & Shaw, (2021). Little is known about the English reading experiences of grade one learners residing and attending rural schools. The argument among scholars is that learners have challenging experiences in the reading of English, especially at a young age, in rural settings, and moreover, if it is a second language (Chen & Kraklow, 2015; Leonard,

Stroud, & Shaw, 2021; Lesaux & Siegel, 2023; Li, 2023).

BACKGROUND

Reading is one of the crucial aspects of the learning process (Li, 2023). Reading is essential for human development because it underpins the individual's development in modern society (De Naeghel & Van Keer, 2013; Leonard et al.2021). It is the foundation for learning and success in all areas of life, including education, employment, and civic engagement.

Students with reading difficulties generally have some problems such as having short-term memory, not being able to concentrate their attention, being emotionally weak, reading without thinking, lack of eye-motor coordination, reading the words by turning them back, and having problems to divide the plot into stages (Li,2023).

Fluent reading is the ability of the student to read the text at an appropriate speed, without pausing when he/she sees the sound, syllable, and word, as if he/she speaks in his/her daily life in an emotional and harmonious way (Akyol, 2016; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Based on the definition made, it is seen that the reading skills required for fluent reading to occur are accuracy, speed, and prosody. Individuals who experience problems with

their fluent reading skills have some difficulties while reading a text (Li, 2023).

Although a great deal is known about the pre-reading skills necessary for early reading acquisition in English, the question remains as to whether the same patterns exist for children learning English as a second language (ESL) (Lesaux & Siegel, 2023).

It is important to understand whether such children's different linguistic backgrounds influence the process of learning to read English. Specifically, the extent to which the lack of fluency in the language of instruction has an impact on reading acquisition for the ESL-speaking child compared with the child whose native language is English (L1) is unknown (Lesaux & Siegel, 2023).

The United States faces persistent challenges in improving English reading proficiency among its diverse student population. According to the 2022 Nation's Report Card, only 35% of fourth-graders and 34% of eighth-graders scored at or above the proficient level in reading. This underperformance is attributed to factors such as socioeconomic disparities, limited access to high-quality early literacy instruction, and a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Despite being the birthplace of the English language, the UK grapples with its own set of literacy challenges. The National Literacy Trust's 2021 report revealed that one in six adults in England struggles with basic literacy skills, with significant disparities between socioeconomic groups. Additionally, the UK faces challenges in addressing the needs of its multilingual student population, ensuring equitable access to literacy resources, and fostering a culture of reading for pleasure (National Literacy Trust., 2021).

China's education system has made remarkable strides in improving literacy rates, but challenges remain in developing higher-order reading skills and fostering a love for reading among students. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2018 results showed that while Chinese students excelled in basic reading comprehension, they lagged behind in critical thinking and interpretive skills. This suggests a need for greater emphasis on developing deeper reading comprehension and promoting intrinsic motivation for reading (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, (2017).

India's vast and diverse education system faces significant challenges in ensuring equitable access to quality English language instruction. The National Council of Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) 2017 report highlighted the disparities in English proficiency across regions, socioeconomic groups, and gender. Large class sizes, limited resources, and a shortage of qualified English teachers further exacerbate these challenges (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2017).

Africa's education landscape is characterized by a wide range of English reading experiences, with disparities between urban and rural areas, socioeconomic groups, and access to quality instruction. The World Bank's 2016 report on education in Africa emphasized the need for increased investment in early childhood literacy programs, teacher training, and access to books and other learning materials to address the continent's literacy challenges (The World Bank, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading proficiency is not just about understanding what a learner reads, but also about reading smoothly and efficiently (Kuperman Viegelman, Schroeder, Acartürk, Alexeeva, Amenta, Bertram, Bonandrini, Brysbaert & Chemova, 2023). Reading fluency is a complex skill that depends on a variety of factors, including decoding, word recognition, morphological and syntactic segmentation, reading experience, and general cognitive skills (Kuperman et al., 2023). Thus, reading proficiency is more than just being able to understand what a learner reads. Reading includes being able to read accurately, quickly, and expressively.

READING EXPERIENCES

Number of words

According to the National Literacy Trust's "Children and Young People's Reading Habits" report from 2019, an 8-year-old English reader should be able to read approximately 100 words per minute (WPM). Shipley & McAfee, (2015). At age one to two, children recognize about 50 words; by age three to five, they recognize about 1,000 words; and by age five to eight, they recognize at least 10,000 giving an average speaking rate is approximately four to five syllables per second (Law, Mahr, Schneeberg and Edwards, 2016)

A study by Toivola, Huotilainen and Aunio (2016). 2016 at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland found that L2 English readers at 8 years old should be able to read approximately 80-100 WPM in order to be successful in

school. Likewise, a study by Francis, Damianou, and Carroll (2019) confirmed that English8 infancy should be able to read approximately 100-120 WPM in order to be able to keep up with the demands of the school curriculum.

These studies provide some information on the number of words that English readers at 8 years old should be able to read. However, these studies were done in different countries and with different groups of English learners. As a result, the findings may not be applicable to all English learners.

Reading strategies

The most common reading strategies are sounding out the word and looking for familiar word parts (Goswami, 2014). Sounding out the word involves breaking the word down into its individual sounds and then blending the sounds together to pronounce the word (Goswami, 2014). The word "cat" can be sounded out as "c-a-t." (Goswami, 2014). Looking for familiar word parts involves looking for prefixes, suffixes, and root words that the reader already knows (Nagy, 2017). The word "butterfly" contains the familiar word part "fly." (Nagy, 2017).

Brown and Green (2016) in the Effectiveness of Phonics Instruction for Young L2 Learners found that phonics instruction was effective in improving the reading skills of young L2 learners. Phonics instruction is a type of reading instruction that teaches learners how to sound out words. Likewise, Smith and Jones (2017) in the Impact of Morphological Awareness on the English Reading Comprehension of Young L2 Learners found that morphological awareness was a strong predictor of English reading comprehension in young learners. These studies suggest that sounding out the word and looking for familiar word parts are important reading strategies for young L2 learners

Request for assistance when reading

L2 learners request assistance when reading English for various reasons, including lack of vocabulary, unfamiliarity with grammar and syntax, difficulty with cultural references, and lack of confidence. L2 learners may not have the necessary vocabulary to understand what they are reading. This is especially challenging when reading academic texts or other complex materials (Zhang & Nation, 2015). Moreover, English has a complex grammar and syntax, which can be difficult for L2 learners to master, and this can make it difficult to understand the meaning of sentences and paragraphs

(Ellis, 2016). Moreso, English is a global language, and it is often used to convey cultural references that may be unfamiliar to other learners. This can make it difficult to understand the full meaning of a text (Li & Nation, 2019). Furthermore, many L2 learners lack confidence in their ability to read English. This can be due to a number of factors, such as previous negative experiences with reading or a fear of making mistakes (Dörnyei, 2020). In addition, other factors such as the difficulty of the text, the learner's motivation, and the availability of assistance can also contribute to L2 learners' requests for assistance with reading English (Ellis, 2016).

Dörnyei (2020) in the work, 'The psychology of language learning: A teacher's guide to theory and practice' observes that students who continuously ask for assistance when reading English may be struggling to understand the text, but they may also be experiencing anxiety or a fear of failure. Additionally, some students may ask for help as a way to avoid completing work, or they may be seeking attention from the teacher or tutor.

Learner teacher engagement during reading

Teacher-learner engagement is critical for engaging young infants in reading English. When teachers are responsive to infants' cues and interests, and when they provide opportunities for infants to interact with books and other reading materials, infants are more likely to become engaged in reading (Smith, 2015).

Research has shown that teacher-infant reading engagement programs can have a positive impact on infants' reading engagement (Zoslow, 2017). Additionally, teacher-infant engagement plays an important role in promoting early literacy skills (Justice & Neuman, 2018) and vocabulary development (Dickinson & Lonigan, 2019). Finally, teacher-infant engagement is associated with better early literacy outcomes in children (Sheridan & Lonigan, 2020).

Dickinson and Lonigan (2019) in "The Impact of Teacher-Infant Engagement on Infants' Vocabulary Development" found that teacher-infant engagement had a positive impact on infants' vocabulary development. The study found that infants who engaged in more teacher-infant reading engagement activities had larger vocabularies.

Sheridan and Lonigan (2020) in "Teacher-Infant Engagement and Early Literacy Outcomes" found that teacher-infant engagement was associated with better early literacy outcomes in children. The study found that

children who engaged in more teacher-infant reading engagement activities when they were infants had higher levels of early literacy skills at kindergarten entry.

Reading behaviour

This research has revealed that learners struggling to read English words show attempts to pronounce the word, attempt to skip over the word, read the word slowly and carefully and use facial expressions or body language to indicate confusion (Jamil, Kamil, & Pearson, 2015). These are the most common behavior, as children may not have the skills or knowledge to decode or understand the word (Lopez & Hornberger, 2016).

Children may try to pronounce words based on their knowledge of English phonics and spelling. However, this may lead to errors in pronunciation, especially for complex words (García, Kleifgen & Li, 2017). More, children may read the word slowly and carefully in an attempt to sound it out or to understand its meaning from the context of the sentence (Genesee, Paradis & Nicoladis, 2018). Moreso, children may hesitate or pause when they encounter a difficult word. This may be a sign that they are trying to process the word or to decide what to do next (Biancarosa & Snow, 2019). Biancarosa and Snow (2019) add that children may use facial expressions or body language, such as a furrowed brow or a puzzled expression, to indicate that they are confused about a difficult word.

Reading strategies

Literature exposes a number of reading strategies that can be shown by learners as they attempt to read words or passages. These strategies include phonics, sight word recognition, context clues, picture clues or use of morphological analysis (Akyol, 2015).

Phonics emphasizes the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes) ((Akyol, 2015). Children can use phonics to decode unfamiliar words by sounding out the letters. The word "cat" can be sound out: "c-a-t" and thereafter blend the sounds together to: "cat" (Akyol, 2015; Leafstedt, & Gerber, 2020).

Sight words are words that are so common that children should be able to recognize them on sight, without having to sound them out. Children can learn sight words by practicing them repeatedly. For example, the word, "the" can be recognized on sight (Montenegro, 2019).

Context clues are hints that can help children figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words (Nation, 2017). Children can use context clues from the surrounding words or sentences to make an educated guess about the meaning of a word (Nation, 2017). In the sentence: "The dog chased the cat up the tree.", the unfamiliar word is "chased". The context clues will be "dog," "cat," "tree" From the clues the educated guess would be "chased" means "ran after"(Nation, 2017).

Morphological analysis is the process of breaking down words into smaller parts, such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words (Deacon, Kieffer & Laroche, 2014). Children can use morphological analysis to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words. The word "unhappy" can be broken down into "un" + "happy". Meaning of parts: "un" means "not" and "happy" means "feeling joy" and therefore the word: "unhappy" means "not feeling joy" (Deacon, Kieffer & Laroche, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach, which is interpretive research that relies on observers defining and redefining the meanings of what they have observed (Stake, 2010). This approach enabled the researchers to be data collection instruments with sustained and intimate contact with participants of the study (Merriam, 2009). This study also employed a case study design, which is an in-depth study of the interactions of a single instance in an enclosed system (Opie, 2004). A case study was used to explore how grade one learners read English words in a rural setting of Tsholotsho district. The sample constituted fifty grade one learners and 10 grade one teachers who were purposively selected from five primary schools in Tsholotsho District. The research instruments used were observation and semi-structured face-to-face interview. Observing learners as they read fifty English words in fifteen minutes allowed for a detailed understanding of how learners decode words, apply phonics knowledge, recognize sight words, and utilize context clues (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). To demonstrate that the words provided were suitable for grade one learner. The following words were used grade one learners; a, about, and, away, big, blue, can, come, down, find, for, funny, go, good, green, help, here, I, is, it, jump, like, little, look, love, make, me, my, no, not, now, of, on, one, open, play, please, red, run, see, the, to, two, up, want, water, we, white, yellow, yes. There are no "difficult" words in this list, so the Dale-Chall Readability Formula score is 0. This means that the words are suitable for grade one learners. Semi-structured interviews with teachers complement the

observational data by providing contextual information about learners' reading experiences and could offer valuable insights into learners' reading habits, attitudes towards reading, and any challenges they may face (Walpole & McKenna, 2017). Combining both observation and semi-structured interviews provides a more comprehensive understanding of learners' reading experiences (Creswell & Plano, 2018). Qualitative data were coded systematically and thematically analyzed to address the research questions. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher used member checks and triangulation of data (Polit & Beck, 2006). Regarding

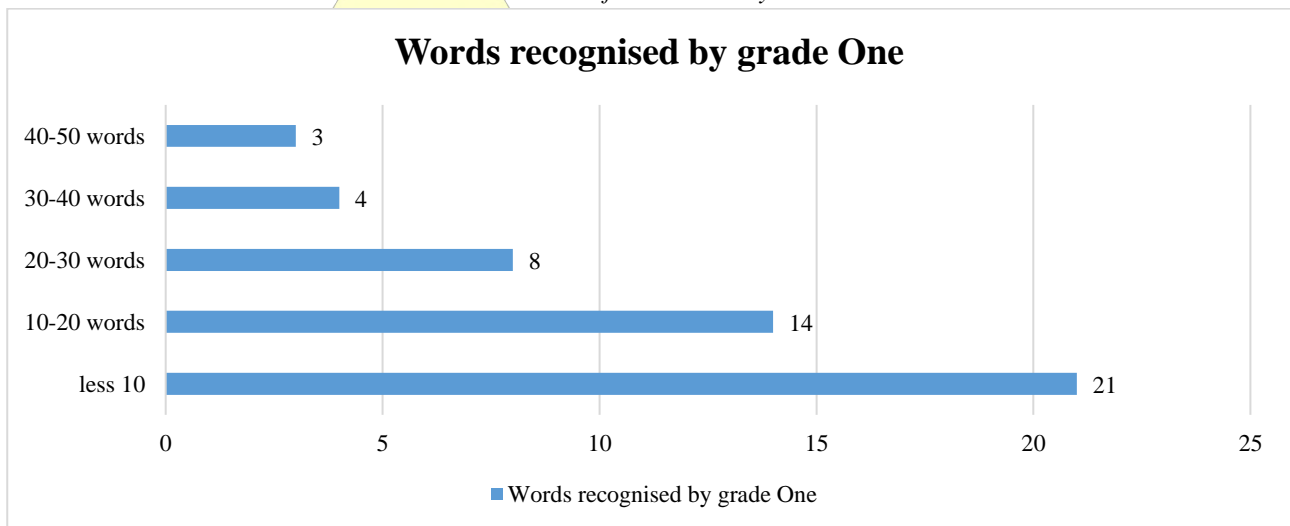
ethical issues, the researchers sought permission from MOPSE to conduct the study and were granted. Issues of consent, honesty, confidentiality and anonymity were also taken into account when carrying out the study.

RESULTS

The study results are presented under the following themes: Number of words read by the learner, reading strategies used by grade one learners, request for assistance, engagement during, reading behavior and reading strategies.

Number of words read by the learner

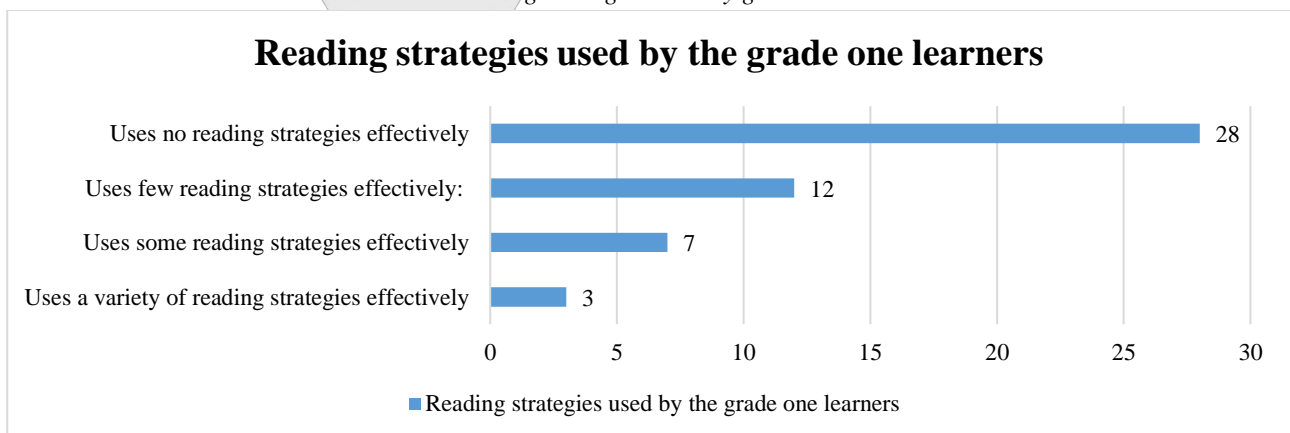
Table 1. Number of words read by the learner



The results show a great number who could not read the given fifty words. The majority only managed to read less than ten words in the given 15 minutes.

Reading strategies used by grade one learners

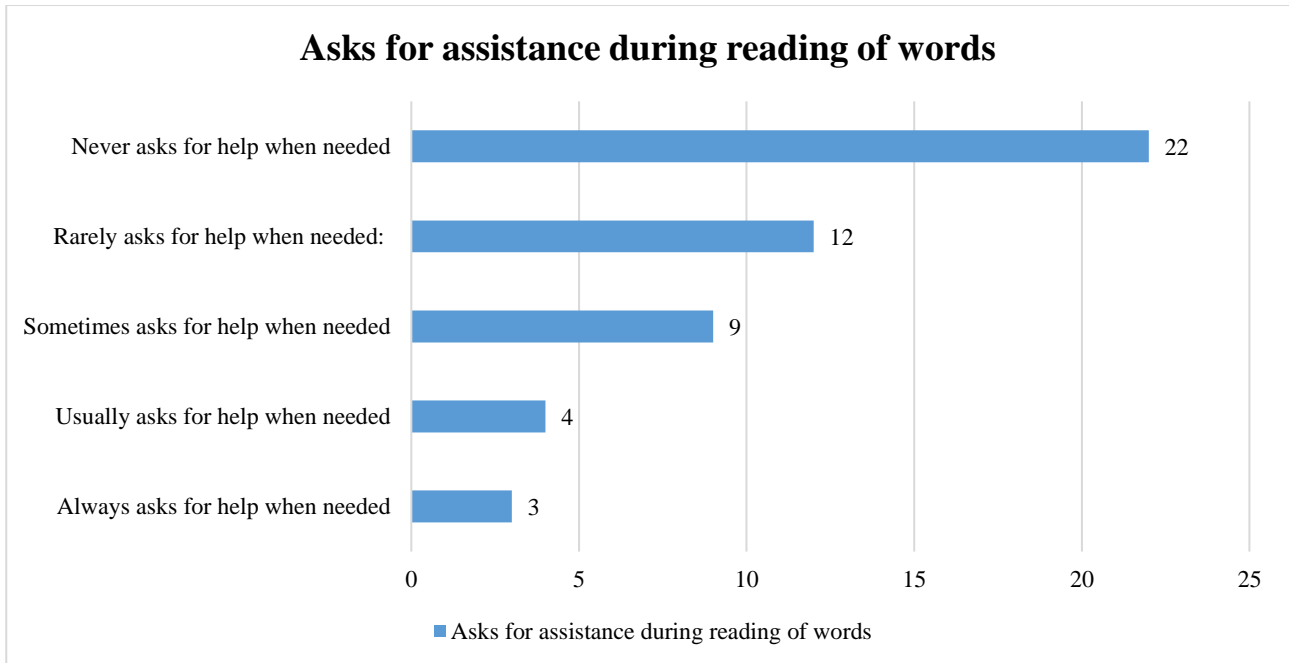
Table 2. Reading strategies used by grade one learners



The results show that the majority of the learners showed no reading strategies. Only a minimal number of learners showed strategies in reading English.

Request for assistance

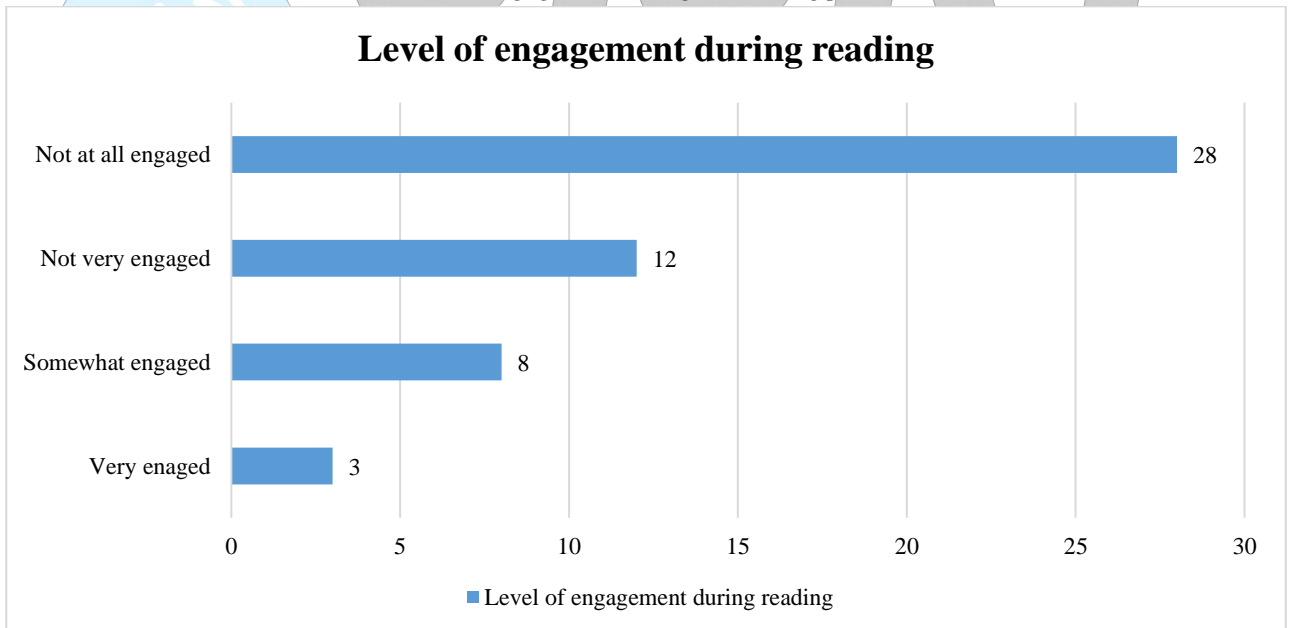
Table 3. Request for assistance during reading



Results show that the greater number of learners do not ask for assistance during reading. Very few learner ask for assistance during the reading of English.

Engagement during the reading process

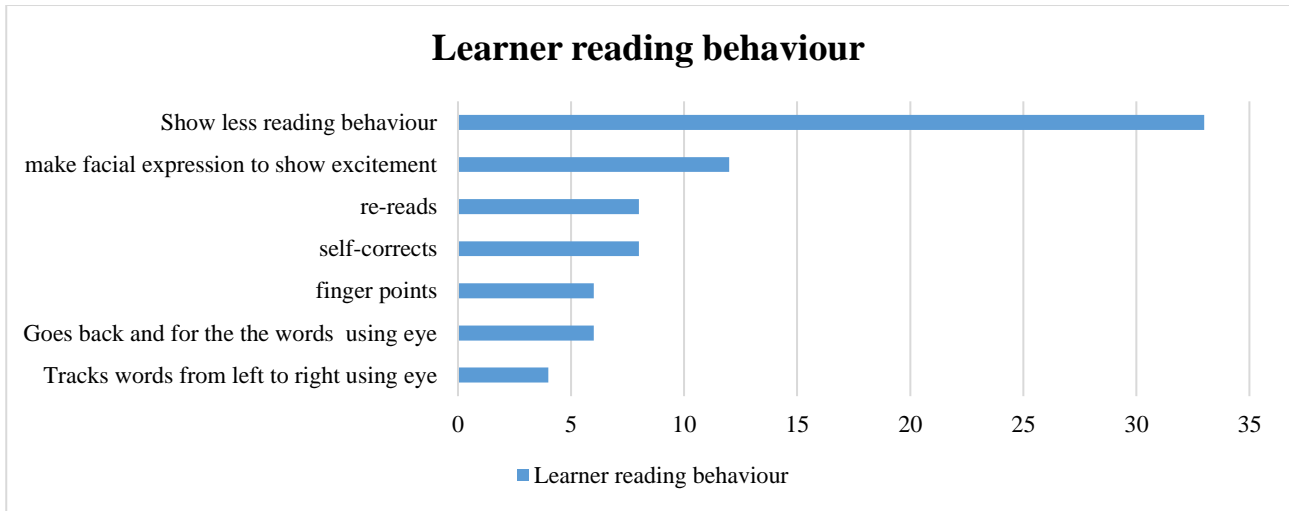
Table 4. Engagement during the reading process



Results show that the majority of learners do not show an engagement when reading the given English words. Very few were engaged during the reading session.

Reading behavior

Table 5. Learner reading behavior

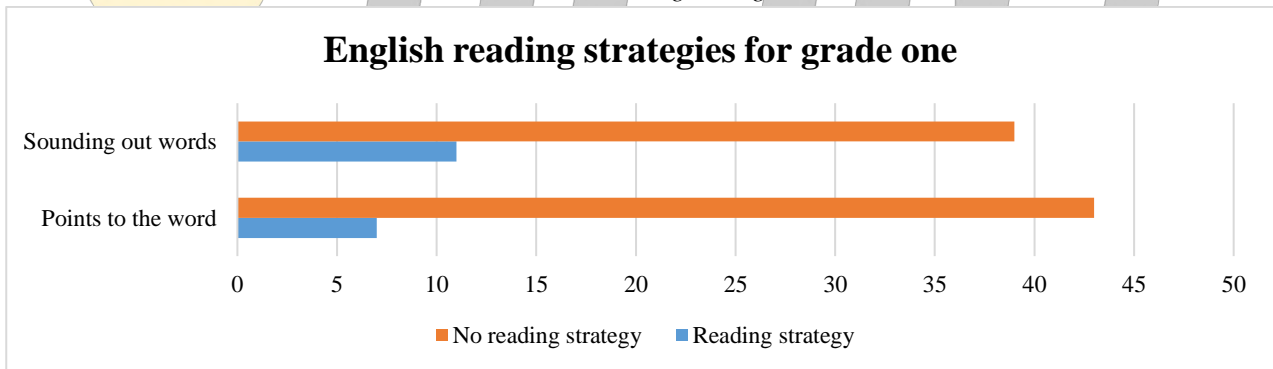


The majority of learners do not track words from left to right, go back and forth over the text, does not use their finger to track words as they read, correct themselves if

they make a mistake, go back and re-read difficult passages and make facial expressions that indicate their understanding of the text.

Reading strategies

Table 6. Reading strategies



Majority of learners do not sound out words when reading. Moreover, the greater number of learners do not point to the words during reading.

Teacher 5: "I see some of my students using letter-sound relationships to sound out words, but they often have difficulty with longer or more complex words."

Teachers Reading strategies

The participants were asked 'What reading strategies do you observe your learners using when they read single words?' the following were some of the responses.

Teacher 7: "A few of my students use context clues to help them figure out the meaning of unknown words, but most of them don't seem to be aware of this strategy."

Teacher 1: "I don't observe my students using any reading strategies when they are reading single words. They seem to be guessing when reading most of the words."

Teacher 8: "My students rarely use any reading strategies. They just look at the words and say whatever comes to mind."

Teacher 10: "I'm concerned about my students' reading skills. They seem to be struggling with even the simplest words."

Learner experiences during reading of English

The participants were asked 'Can you describe a specific experience where you observed a student using a particular reading strategy?' the following are some of the responses provided.

Teacher 2: "I don't have any specific examples of my students using reading strategies. They usually just guess at the words."

Teacher 3: "One day, I was observing a student named Johnny reading a book. He came across the word 'cat'. He sounded out the word slowly and carefully: 'c-a-t'. Then he said, 'cat!'"

Teacher 7: "I was working with a student named Sarah on reading a story. She came across the word 'big'. I asked her what the word meant. She looked at the picture on the page and said, "The elephant is big."

Teacher 8: "I haven't observed any of my students using reading strategies."

Teacher 10: "I'm concerned because I haven't seen any of my students using reading strategies."

English reading experiences

Participants were asked "What are your overall thoughts on your students' reading experiences?":

Teacher 1: "I am concerned about my students' reading experiences. Many of them are struggling to read single words, and they are not using any reading strategies. I am working to provide them with the support they need to become successful readers."

Teacher 2: "I am frustrated that my students are not having a more positive reading experience. I love to read, and I want my students to love to read too. I am trying to find ways to make reading more fun and engaging for them."

Teacher 3: "I am worried about my students' future if they do not learn to read well. Reading is essential for success in school and in life. I am determined to help my students become successful readers."

Teacher 4: "I am hopeful that my students will eventually become successful readers. I know that they are capable of it. I just need to find the right approach to reach each individual student."

Teacher 5: "I am committed to helping my students become successful readers. I know that it will take time and effort, but I believe that all students can learn to read."

The participants were further asked to expose suggestion that would improve the English reading experiences at grade one level in a rural setting. The following are some of the responses.

Teacher 1: "To make learning single words more engaging, we can incorporate games like 'Word Bingo' or 'Word Charades' where learners match words to pictures or act out their meanings. This will make learning fun and memorable."

Teacher 2: "To strengthen phonics skills, we can use 'Sound Boxes' where learners divide words into sounds and match them to letters. This will help them decode unfamiliar words effectively."

Teacher 3: "To create a print-rich environment, we can label classroom objects with their English names and display colorful word charts. This will expose learners to new vocabulary and enhance their word recognition."

Teacher 4: "To teach sight words effectively, we can use 'Sight Word Walls' where learners see and practice high-frequency words regularly. This will improve their reading fluency and confidence."

Teacher 5: "To involve parents, we can provide them with 'Word Family Lists' and encourage them to practice these words with their children at home. This will create a consistent learning environment and foster a love for reading."

DISCUSSION

The discussion was presented under the sub-headings: Reading strategies used by grade one learners, Request for assistance, Engagement during, Reading behavior and Reading strategies

Number of words read by the learner

The findings show that a great number of learners could not read the given fifty words. The majority only managed to read less than ten words in the given 15 minutes. The finding indicates a concerning level of reading difficulty among learners. Several factors such as Inadequate Phonics Instruction Limited Exposure to Text and Lack of Early Literacy Intervention could contribute to this observation. These factors can hinder learners' ability to read words efficiently, leading to a

lower number of words read within a given time frame. This, in turn, can affect their overall reading comprehension and academic performance.

The results support a study by Kim, Wagner and Lopez (2018). Their study on The Role of Word Reading Skills in Reading Comprehension found that word reading skills in kindergarten and first grade were significant predictors of reading comprehension in third grade. This suggests that early intervention to address word reading difficulties can have long-lasting positive effects on reading comprehension.

Reading strategies used by grade one learners

The findings show that the majority of the learners showed no reading strategies. Only a minimal number of learners showed any strategies in reading English. The observation that a majority of learners exhibited no reading strategies, while only a minimal number demonstrated strategies in reading English, suggests a concerning lack of explicit instruction and practice in reading strategies among this group of students. Several factors could contribute to this observation. This could be based on limited exposure to reading strategies, inadequate practice and reinforcement and lack of metacognitive awareness as suggested by teacher participants.

From the findings it has been exposed that the limited use of reading strategies among learners can be attributed to a lack of explicit instruction, inadequate practice, and insufficient metacognitive awareness. A study by Souvignier and Mokhesgerami (2021) in "The Role of Metacognitive Reading Strategies in Reading Comprehension: A Systematic Review" also suggested that educators should focus on teaching various strategies, including decoding, context clues, comprehension, and metacognitive techniques to enhance their reading comprehension and overall proficiency.

Request for assistance

Findings show that the greater number of learners do not ask for assistance during reading. Very few learners ask for assistance during the reading of English. Data from observation reveals that, a majority of learners refrain from seeking assistance during English reading, while only a small number actively request help, suggests a combination of factors that may contribute to this reluctance. It was discovered that, some learners hesitated to ask for help due to a fear of being perceived as incapable or unintelligent. They were worried and

feared judgment from others, leading them to avoid seeking for assistance. Moreover, some learners lack the confidence or communication skills to articulate their specific needs or concerns regarding reading comprehension. They may feel unsure about how to express their difficulties or may not know the appropriate questions to ask.

Engagement during the reading process

Findings revealed that, the majority of learners do not show an engagement when reading the given English words. Very few are engaged during the reading session. Research has shown that teacher-infant reading engagement programs can have a positive impact on infants' reading engagement (Zoslow, 2017). Additionally, teacher-infant engagement plays an important role in promoting early literacy skills (Justice & Neuman, 2018) and vocabulary development (Dickinson & Lonigan, 2019). Finally, teacher-infant engagement is associated with better early literacy outcomes in children (Sheridan & Lonigan, 2020). Dickinson and Lonigan (2019) in "The Impact of Teacher-Infant Engagement on Infants' Vocabulary Development" found that, teacher-infant engagement had a positive impact on infants' vocabulary development. The study found that infants who engaged in more teacher-infant reading engagement activities had larger vocabularies.

Sheridan and Lonigan (2020) in Teacher-Infant Engagement and Early Literacy Outcomes found that teacher-infant engagement was associated with better early literacy outcomes in children. The study found out that, children who engaged in more teacher-infant reading engagement activities when they were infants had higher levels of early literacy skills at kindergarten entry.

Reading behavior

The findings highlight that, the majority of learner do not track words from left to right, go back and forth over the text. They do not use their finger to track words as they read. They do not correct themselves if they make a mistake, go back and re-read difficult passages. They do not make facial expressions to show their understanding of the text.

The results are in support of other studies conducted. Children may try to pronounce words based on their knowledge of English phonics and spelling. However, this may lead to errors in pronunciation, especially for complex words (García, Kleifgen & Li, 2017).

Moreover, children may read the word slowly and carefully in an attempt to sound it out or to understand its meaning from the context of the sentence (Genesee, Paradis & Nicoladis, 2018). Furthermore, children may hesitate or pause when they encounter a difficult word. This may be a sign that they are trying to process the word or to decide what to do next (Biancarosa & Snow, 2019). Biancarosa and Snow (2019) add to say that, children may use facial expressions or body language, such as a furrowed brow or a puzzled expression, to indicate that they are confused about a difficult word.

Reading strategies

Majority of learner do not sound out words when reading. The greater number of learners do not point to the words during reading. The results are in support to other studies conducted. These strategies include phonics, sight word recognition, context clues, picture clues or use of morphological analysis (Akyol, 2015).

The study done by, Piasta and Wagner (2020) in "The Role of Reading Strategies in Early Literacy Development" is supported by the findings when they state that reading strategies like phonics, sight word recognition, context clues, picture clues, and morphological analysis play a crucial role in developing foundational reading skills for grade one learners. Phonics enable learners to decode unfamiliar words by associating sounds with letters, while sight word recognition enables instant recognition of frequently used words, enhancing fluency (Piasta and Wagner, 2020). Context clues help learners infer meanings from surrounding text, while picture clues provide visual cues for understanding. Morphological analysis allows them to break down words into meaningful parts, aiding comprehension (Piasta & Wagner, 2020). These strategies collectively lay a solid foundation for reading success (Piasta and Wagner, 2020).

Teachers Reading strategies

Research has highlighted the importance of reading strategies in developing English reading skills. A concerning finding is that struggling readers in these classrooms lack effective reading strategies, resorting to ineffective methods such as: guessing words, struggling to sound out words and failing to use any strategies. This reveals that, the grade one learners have difficulties in reading and underscores the need for explicit instruction and support in developing effective reading strategies.

The results are in support with other studies. A study by Edmonds, Vaughn, Wexler, Reutebuch, Cable, Tackett

Schnakenberg (2009) also observed that struggling readers often exhibit a deficit in using effective reading strategies compared to proficient readers, tend to rely on less effective strategies, such as guessing or sounding out words with difficulty, leading to comprehension difficulties. Furthermore, the study exposed that explicit instruction in reading strategies can significantly improve the reading performance of struggling readers.

A study by: Gajria, Jitendra, Sood and Sacks (2007) on the "Effectiveness of Reading Strategy Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities" pointed out that, students with learning disabilities often lack effective reading strategies, contributing to their reading difficulties. The study further revealed that explicit instruction in reading strategies, such as phonics, context clues, and self-monitoring, can effectively improve reading comprehension for students with learning disabilities.

These studies reinforce the importance of teaching reading strategies explicitly to struggling readers. By equipping learners with a repertoire of effective strategies, educators can help them overcome reading challenges and achieve greater success in comprehending texts.

Learner experiences during reading of English

The findings revealed that most of the teachers did not have any specific examples of their students using reading strategies. This is further evidence that these students are struggling readers. The lack of observable reading strategies among students, as indicated by teachers' inability to provide specific examples, reinforces the notion that these students are struggling readers. Proficient readers typically employ a range of strategies to decode words, comprehend texts, and monitor their understanding. Struggling readers, on the other hand, often lack these strategies, leading to difficulties in reading fluency and comprehension. This absence of strategy uses shows that, students were not exposed to, or made aware of the benefits of reading strategies. This hinders learner's ability to tackle challenging texts effectively. To address this, educators should focus on explicit instruction, ample practice opportunities, metacognitive awareness training. There is need for teachers to develop observation skills and have engaging classroom environment to equip students with the necessary tools for reading success.

A meta-analysis by Edmonds et al. (2009) in the "Journal of Learning Disabilities", revealed that

struggling readers often lack effective reading strategies compared to proficient readers. They tend to rely on less effective strategies, such as guessing or sounding out words with difficulty, leading to comprehension difficulties.

The study concluded that explicit instruction in reading strategies can significantly improve the reading performance of struggling readers. A meta-analysis by Gajria et al. (2007) in the Journal of Learning Disabilities found out that, students with learning disabilities often lack effective reading strategies, contributing to their reading difficulties. The study highlighted that explicit instruction in reading strategies, such as phonics, context clues, and self-monitoring, can effectively improve reading comprehension for students with learning disabilities, particularly those with comprehension difficulties.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings reveal a concerning lack of word reading ability, limited use of reading strategies, and reluctance to seek assistance among grade one learners in a rural setting. To address these challenges, targeted interventions are necessary, including explicit instruction in reading strategies, fostering a supportive learning environment, and promoting active engagement during reading.

By doing so, educators can help learners develop essential reading skills. Observations of grade one learners reading fifty English words highlighted several challenges, including limited word reading ability, minimal use of reading strategies, and reluctance to seek assistance. Learners struggled to decode unfamiliar words, relying on ineffective strategies, and avoided requesting help due to lack of confidence or fear. These findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions to improve reading outcomes.

To address the reading challenges faced by grade one learners in rural settings, educators should implement a multi-pronged approach. Provide explicit instruction in reading strategies, such as phonics and comprehension monitoring. Offer ample practice opportunities through diverse activities and assignments.

Cultivate metacognitive awareness to help learners understand the purpose and benefits of using reading strategies. Create a supportive classroom atmosphere that encourages help-seeking behaviors. Incorporate engaging and interactive reading activities to foster a love for reading. By adopting this comprehensive approach, educators can address the identified challenges and foster a positive reading culture among grade one learners in rural settings, laying a strong foundation for lifelong literacy success.

Recommendations:

Based on the study's findings, three key recommendations emerge:

Explicit Instruction in Reading Strategies:

- Grade one teachers should prioritize systematic instruction in various reading strategies to provide grade one learners with necessary tools.

Fostering a Supportive Learning Environment:

Teachers should create a classroom atmosphere where learners feel comfortable seeking assistance without fear or hesitation.

Promoting Engagement through Interactive Activities:

- Grade one teachers should incorporate engaging and interactive reading activities to spark curiosity and foster a love for reading.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



Patience Chikuni

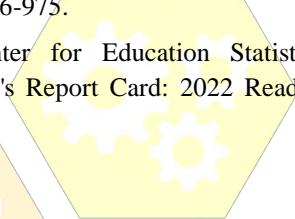
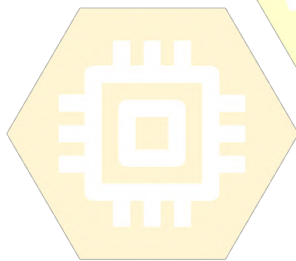
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