Practitioners' Corner

Challenges faced by intermediate phase English First Additional Language teachers in establishing classroom libraries in Limpopo Province[1]

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ABSTRACT

Classroom libraries have an important function in the development of reading abilities for English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners in the Intermediate Phase (grades 4 to 6). This research aimed at exploring the challenges faced by the Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers in establishing classroom libraries in a rural circuit of the Limpopo Province to promote learners' reading ability. A qualitative grounded theory approach was employed using observations and an interview schedule with semi-structured open-ended questions. Nine participants were purposefully selected. The study found that there was limited relevant reading material, a lack of space for setting up a classroom library in overcrowded classrooms, teachers' lack of knowledge on organising the classroom library books and a lack of strategies on how to control the checking in and out of books. It is recommended that schools should first allocate funds for buying books and seek donations for reading material from public libraries as well as non-governmental organisations. Inservice training should be conducted to equip teachers with the basic skills of organising and facilitating the checking out and returning of classroom library books.

Keywords: classroom libraries, classroom interaction pedagogy, English First Additional Language (EFAL), rural circuit, primary school teachers, reading ability, reading comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Classroom libraries play a significant role in developing the Intermediate Phase (grades 4 to 6) learners' reading ability in English First Additional Language (EFAL), especially in disadvantaged rural primary schools with limited access to books. Harmon et al. (2019) state that an essential characteristic of the classroom environment that encourages reading ability provides learners with immediate and easy access to books. According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), South African primary school learners, particularly those in rural regions, fared below the threshold of 500 countries, with some failing to meet the benchmark for fundamental reading skills (Howie et al., 2017). These learners are from poor backgrounds where parents cannot afford to buy books to read at home, the schools they attend are under-resourced and far from public and city libraries. Krashen (2019) maintains that classroom libraries are the only source of books for many children from poor backgrounds and more investment in these libraries means better language and reading ability development. Krashen (2019) emphasises that without access to reading materials, it becomes challenging to develop learners' reading ability, which is the basis for learning expansion, independent and life-long learning. Asri, Cahyono and Trisnani (2021) assert that learners with deprived solid basic reading skills will have difficulty in developing appropriate reading ability later in the advanced reading

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 18 (1) / 2023
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

167

phase. Therefore, the establishment of classroom libraries with diverse reading materials may improve reading abilities in the rural Intermediate Phase.

Omigie and Idiedo (2019) describe the classroom library as a resource centre that the teacher in the classroom organises to enable learners to easily access reading books and other learning materials, while the National Council of Teachers of English (2017) describes the purpose of having the classroom library as developing learners' reading ability, increasing their vocabulary, increasing inspiration, engagement, academic attainment and helping them become critical thinkers. In addition, Mojapelo (2020) asserts that learners who have access to library reading materials such as books and magazines, develop reading habits that are essential for lifelong learning. Gao et al. (2018) find that in classrooms with book corners in rural China, the amount of time learners spent reading on their own increased and allowed learners to develop reading abilities. However, Gao et al. (2021) found that learners from the urban Shaanxi province in China scored better in reading in English as they were from wealthy families with reading books at home and classroom libraries at schools. On the other hand, learners from disadvantaged rural areas of Guizhou and Jiangxi provinces with no classroom libraries scored very low on their reading tests (Gao et al., 2021). Hughes-Hassell (2021) found that classroom libraries in disadvantaged communities tend to be smaller with fewer new books being added every year.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Classroom Interaction Pedagogy (CIP) is funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and Women in Research (WiR) engaged scholarship project which works cooperatively with teachers to find innovative ways in which to teach and learn EFAL in the Intermediate Phase. Since its commencement in 2018, workshops have been conducted in Limpopo province. Several topics on teaching English were included in different training sessions where the facilitators and teachers shared their ideas on how to improve the teaching practices of this target language. The establishment of classroom libraries was one of the suggested teaching strategies to improve learners' reading ability in the rural circuit in South Africa's Limpopo region. The circuit includes 14 primary schools and is located in an area with significant levels of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy among adults. The home language, Sepedi, is used as the language of instruction in the Foundation Phase (grades R–3), but EFAL is introduced in the early grades to equip learners with the English language skills needed in the Intermediate Phase (grades 4–6) and the Senior Phase entry grade - Grade 7 - where English is the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). There are no public libraries in the neighbourhood, and no school libraries at any of the schools visited by the researchers which mean that most primary school learners do not have access to reading materials.

Against this background, the study aimed to explore the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers in establishing classroom libraries in a rural circuit of the Limpopo province to promote learners' reading ability. The aim of the study is to answer the question: What are the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers in establishing classroom libraries in a rural circuit of the Limpopo province to promote learners' reading ability?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study used grounded theory, established by Glaser and Strauss (1967), as a framework to answer the stated research question. Glaser and Strauss (1967) established this approach with the determination of the construction of a theory grounded in the data and the understanding that the theory might be developed through qualitative data analysis. In contrast to other approaches, grounded theory is an explicit methodology that creates a theory based on data that has been meticulously gathered and analysed. The body of research tends to favour an inductive strategy that lets

the data drive the conclusion of the investigation rather than attempting to push it into a pre-set pattern.

Conducting a grounded theory study allows for the identification of general ideas, the development of theoretical explanations and offers new insights into a variety of relational experiences of the participants and the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this case, the grounded theory was considered relevant as the study focused on the challenges that Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers faced in establishing classroom libraries in a rural circuit of the Limpopo province to promote learners' reading ability. Grounded theory, according to Charmaz (2006) and Kolb (2012), operates inductively, is less theory-bound, is frequently performed in local languages, and can capture real-life experiences and narratives, such as challenges faced by the Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers in establishing classroom libraries. The methodology of grounded theory is a way of building a social theory about a topic by studying the experiences of people who are involved with it (Du Plessis & Marais, 2017). The theory was deemed suitable since it permitted the researchers to ground the study in the participants' responses which aligned with the study's findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature, which draws on current topics from an international, African and South African context, discusses the establishment of classroom libraries to enhance reading ability to provide further insight from a global perspective. The review also highlights challenges faced by teachers in establishing classroom libraries for learners to access reading materials in disadvantaged rural areas to improve their reading ability.

Classroom libraries are the backbone of classroom activities in the Intermediate Phase (IP) since daily activities draw on the reading materials from the classroom library (Reutzel, Parker & Fawson, 2002). Santa et al. (2000) found that children who have access to books that they have selected (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013) are more likely to improve their ability to recognise words, sentences and paragraphs, and to make sense of the overall meaning and increase their desire to learn to read. Without ready access to reading material such as storybooks, magazines, newspapers, and dictionaries, learners may be taught to read, but will not develop the habit of reading and thus improve their reading ability. However, in establishing classroom libraries, teachers have been faced with a number of challenges which are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Reading materials

The lack of reading materials to establish classroom libraries is a burning issue around the world specifically in rural areas. This led to a lack of motivation among Filipino learners as there was slow progress in their reading (Mangila & Adapon, 2020). Similarly, in Nigeria, Akinfenwa (2019) noticed that the lack of reading materials had eroded the reading culture that used to prevail in producing the best authors and publishers which implies that the literacy standard dropped amongst Intermediate Phase learners. Mohammed and Amponsah (2018) discovered that learners' poor reading skills in Ghana were caused by a number of factors such as a lack of classroom libraries, reading materials and a lack of reading competition among learners in primary schools. This lack of interaction with reading materials gives rise to learners experiencing difficulties in developing their literacy skills. Mupa and Chinooneka (2016) found that in Zimbabwe, learners who lack reading materials at home and school, even if they were being taught by highly qualified teachers, performed poorly at school. The lack of reading resources means that learners do not develop good reading habits, nor do they develop their literacy skills. Creating a rich environment filled with relevant reading material enhances reading abilities among learners (Chou, Cheng & Cheng, 2016).

169

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 18 (1) / 2023
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

In Tanzania, Malekani and Mubofu (2019) found that the lack of reading materials to establish and maintain classroom libraries was due to inadequate funds allocated as those in authority did not see the vital role that libraries play in the enhancement of reading ability. Paton-Ash and Wilmot (2015) discovered that in some South African schools, funds allotted for libraries were used for other purposes since libraries were not considered seriously as the foundation for academic success. The few materials teachers had in the classrooms were not given to learners to read at home as they were not returned or returned in a dilapidated state. Therefore, teachers decided to keep the materials safe in the cupboards, only to be read while in class, to avoid losing books (Makena & Mpiti, 2020). In the same vein, Mojapelo (2018) found that the deteriorating situation with reading material, especially in historically underprivileged rural regions in the province of Limpopo deprived teachers and learners of the opportunity to establish and maintain functional classroom libraries.

Overcrowded classrooms
Overcrowding in classrooms seems to be the norm in most primary schools in disadvantaged areas. In South Africa, the learner-teacher ratio of 32.90 (that is, 32 learners for every teacher) was increased to 37.90 in 2013 (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2016). There are consistent reports of overcrowded classrooms in South Africa and in some cases, the recommended teacher-learner ratio is exceeded. According to Khan and Iqbal (2012), a classroom is considered overcrowded if there are more learners present than is ideal and this results in a reduction in the learners' ability to read. However, due to escalating numbers of enrolled learners in schools, teachers are facing classes of learners of 50 or more (West & Meier, 2020).

In Namibia, the teacher-learner ratio in many schools is reported to be 1:55 or 1:90 in rural schools, which is beyond the stipulated norm of 1:40 (Nakale, 2020). As a result, there is a lack of space in the classroom to establish a classroom library and a daily struggle for teachers to explain and teach the learning content. Research has shown that overcrowded classrooms cause disruptive behaviour, health problems, lack of efficiency in lesson delivery and lack of space (Boyi, 2013; Marais, 2016; Olaleye, Ajayi, Oyebola & Ajayi, 2017; Matsepe, Maluleke & Cross, 2019; Ntsala et al., 2021). Teachers face challenges while trying to inspire learners to read at their particular levels of excellence in this type of learning environment (Marais, 2016). In addition, the lack of cooperative learning activities (Matsepe et al., 2019) deprives learners for individual attention (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020), and modern interactive pedagogies, which are crucial in the modern era, cannot be implemented (Ayub, Saud & Akhtar, 2018).

In contrast, in countries such as Finland, the average 2017 teacher-learner ratio was 13.67 at the primary level (The Global Economy, 2021). Teachers were able to actively support and provide scaffolding for learners' reading, adapt flexibly to the groups, interact with learners individually and organise tasks in a flexible manner (Lempinen, 2017). Consequently, the Fins are better at reading as it is believed that smaller classes provide a better teaching and learning environment (Lempinen, 2017).

Organising of books
To be organised is good practice as everything will be in its place and easily accessible. Nagaraja (2018) affirms that organising the reading material in the classroom library helps the user to locate books easily. Bates and Cook (2020) assert that it is the duty of the teacher to develop and manage a system for organising, arranging and cataloguing their classroom library - without a consistent system and maintenance, the classroom library can become neglected and disorganised.

Though there is no wrong way of organising a classroom library, Paton-Ash and Wilmot (2015) assert that a system should still be in place, for instance, an alphabetised-by-author system for fiction and the Dewey decimal system for non-fiction books and Antunez (2021) explains that the Dewey decimal system is a classification scheme used by libraries to organise books on shelves according to the

subject. However, Berrill (2018) revealed that in the United Kingdom, most teachers were not in favour of arranging classroom library books on shelves as congestion was a problem when returning books. The preferred strategies were to use bins, organised by topic, placed in areas of the room that allows easy access, while other teachers used bins on the shelves. Starr (2021) indicated that challenges were encountered when the classroom library was positioned at the back of the classroom; however, learners' attitudes changed when the library was moved to the centre of the classroom as it was the very first thing that the learners saw when they walked in and every time they needed to go to the bathroom (Starr, 2021). Although the reading resources in classroom libraries were freely accessible, according to a case study done in Ghana public primary schools by Omenyo (2016), the arrangement was not based on any official classification scheme. Sometimes, some learners could not find their favourite books and it was discovered that learners had purposefully concealed the books for later use, particularly books that were limited in number (Omenyo, 2016).

A study carried out in 10 primary schools located in South-Western Townships (Soweto) and northern and western suburbs of Johannesburg, South Africa by Paton-Ash and Wilmot (2015), found that the five no-fee paying schools that had established classroom libraries did not follow a particular shelving or recording system. This meant that there was no record of what resources were in the library and who had the books. Even though some public primary schools had sourced books, these were locked in staff rooms, or stored in cupboards or boxes as teachers did not know what to do with them (Paton-Ash & Wilmot, 2015; Shandu, Evans & Mostert, 2014). This finding implies a lack of knowledge among teachers on the appropriate organisation and management of classroom libraries, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Shonhe (2019) asserts that insufficient development training in organising libraries results in additional difficulties including poorly organised books, poor treatment of books, and general loss of stock. In contrast, Paton-Ash and Wilmot (2015) found that all five fee-paying schools were equipped with a library software programme that recorded their acquisition. This means that all books were organised and issued through the computer to the learners whose names were also on the computer (Paton-Ash & Wilmot, 2015).

Checking out and returning books
Checking in and out of classroom library books can be daunting as it can take time away from teaching. Adding pockets, printing cards, and reshelving books can be overwhelming and shorten teaching time in order to make books available to learners (Catapano, Fleming & Elias, 2009). The Elementary Librarian (2012) finds that when the responsibility of checking books in and out is given to learners, books were checked out to the wrong learners, and not returned on time, and sometimes learners went home with books that were not checked out. To mitigate the loss of books, Stroup (2021) put in place a policy that was shared with parents, which stipulated that if a book was lost or damaged, they would pay for the book at the current expense. This suggests that parents were encouraged and assigned the responsibility of instilling in their children a passion and reverence for books.

Knows (2018) identified the challenges of checking out and returning books. These included learners who failed to sign out books before taking them to their seats and ultimately home, who often forgot to sign their books back in before checking out another and who took more than the number of books allowed when signing them in and out. Additionally, lost books and torn pages were never reported and there was no way to keep track of the records. Much teaching time was wasted when learners had to write their names, book titles and dates, particularly when the sheet for signing in and out was misplaced (Andersen, 2012; Harmon et al., 2019; Knows, 2018). However, Coppens (2018) found that a designated return spot, labelled 'Books to be returned to the Class Library' assisted learners in returning books to the correct basket.

Knows (2018) suggests that using a computer-assisted program or an app such as the Booksource App, makes the whole check-in and out process easy and timesaving. In addition, Visness (2018)

claims that the Booksource App was the perfect tool to address all checkout needs as the app can scan new books, easily find learners' names added to the system and check out the books directly to them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers' motivation for using grounded theory as the theoretical framework and research methodology was the decision of the researchers for conducting an open-minded investigation of the nature and challenges faced by the Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers in establishing classroom libraries in a rural circuit by applying the principles of grounded theory.

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to learn more about the difficulties Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers encounter when creating classroom libraries in a rural Limpopo province circuit to support learners' reading skills. Phenomenology is an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). The selection of nine Intermediate Phase teachers with more than five years of EFAL experience was purposeful. These teachers attended the Classroom Interaction Pedagogy (CIP) workshop where they were trained on how to establish classroom libraries. The criteria for the selection of schools were schools with overcrowded classrooms, a sufficient number of learners and a smaller number of learners.

When selecting the data collection instruments, grounded theory was employed since the development of the theory is aided by the information gathered via fieldwork observations and interviewing the participants. In addition, the inductive data analysis process entailing open coding, axial coding, and selective coding which is the main characteristic of grounded theory, was followed. To gather qualitative data for this study, semi-structured interviews and observations were used. During the interviews, an interview schedule with open-ended questions was used. The following questions were posed: Have you established the classroom library? If yes, how did you access the reading material? If not, why? How do you organise your classroom library books? Briefly, explain your checking out and returning books. Notes were made (memos, which are in line with grounded theory) to recognise the main ideas which needed further investigation. With the participants' consent, a tape recorder was used during the interviews which lasted for about 45 minutes.

Since the researchers were not involved in the activities of the participants, non-participant observation was conducted. Using an observation sheet, the researchers noted the reading materials in each classroom library and how these were arranged, the classroom space, how many learners were in each class, and how books were checked out and then returned. A reflective journal was kept where the research process was documented to ensure the study's credibility. The study used triangulation to ensure the reliability and validity of the research instruments.

Data analysis

The researchers employed an inductive data analysis process to analyse qualitative data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasise that the inductive process illustrates working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researchers have established a comprehensive set of themes. After successfully collecting the data, and transcribing observations and interviews, the commencement of 'open coding' took place. Open coding entailed reading every word in the text to find the solution to the research question was the first stage, followed by the analysis process with axial coding. The process involved regathering the data emerging from the first step of open coding with the aim of identifying a fundamental phenomenon. The purpose was to identify the connection between the categories, which is demonstrated in the findings, as identified from the data. As the underlying relationship between sub-categories and categories, Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain that axial coding mostly requires inquiry and comparison, which fits well with inductive and deductive thinking. The final stage, selective coding, is described as a process of finding and placing the core category,

172

linking it to other categories in a systematic way, corroborating similarities and relations among categories, and finalising categories that require modification and development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Memos were written to connect codes and categories. Memos are the theorising and noting of thoughts concerning the codes/themes and their relationships that the analyst finds interesting while coding, (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data from the observations and interviews were grouped into themes and supporting categories. The participants were offered the opportunity to read the transcripts in order to check that the data was accurate, a process referred to as member checking or verification.

Ethical issues

This research adhered to institution policy which required ethical clearance (certificate number: 2017/09/13/90233522/01/MC), before interaction with the participants. Participants were given copies of the consent forms to sign. Anonymity was strictly adhered to by not indicating the participants' names and their schools. Participants were informed that they might leave the study at any moment if they felt uncomfortable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of the study was to examine the difficulties that Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers faced in establishing classroom libraries in a rural circuit of the Limpopo province to promote learners' reading ability.

Table 1:
Biographical information of the Intermediate Phase EFAL teachers (n = 9)

School	Number of learners in each classroom	Participants	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Ages of participants
A	63	P1	Female	17	39
	68	P2	Female	21	49
B	65	P3	Female	6	30
	59	P4	Male	22	49
C	38	P5	Female	17	42
	37	P6	Male	19	51
D	40	P7	Male	25	55
	36	P8	Female	11	37
E	35	P9	Male	10	37

As indicated in Table 1, four male and five female teachers were interviewed. There was no attempt to balance the genders as the teachers were already employed and allocated EFAL as their teaching subject. Most of the participants were in their 30s to 50s and had between six and 25 years of teaching experience. Data revealed that five of the nine teachers were not qualified to teach EFAL as they had specialised in other subjects. The following challenges were indicated by the participants and are discussed under four themes.

Lack of reading materials

Of the nine participants, six managed to establish classroom libraries. It was observed that all the established classroom libraries had limited reading material. However, teachers were innovative and creative in locating reading material from a number of sources.

> P5: I just picked here and there but I managed to get something even the newspapers. I got the books from the school. I found the books in an old school building which was closed.

> P8: After the workshop, I went to the storeroom to check books and establish a classroom library. Some were just gathering dust in there. Though they are few books, I tried to get whatever I could.

> P9: Books are not enough. Learners are restricted in reading so that others can get a chance. Learners like what we have as they are very much interesting; they take them home.

> P7. The challenge is that we do not have funding for purchasing reading material. I asked parents during the meeting to assist with any reading material.

Six classroom libraries were established with teachers obtaining books from a variety of sources which implied that learners were able to access the reading material, even though it was limited, and learners were encouraged to share the available books. Therefore, having classroom libraries in every class means that quality and age-appropriate reading material is easily accessible (Haupt, 2020). Teachers were motivated to find and collect the unused available reading materials to promote learners' reading ability. Although reading material was limited, learners were able to have something to read in class and take home. The teachers also invited the parents to participate in their children's reading by donating or providing any available reading materials since school funds were limited. However, limited funds deprived teachers of the opportunity of establishing and maintaining functional classroom libraries (Mojapelo, 2018).

Overcrowded classrooms
The number of learners in their classrooms was between 35 and 68. The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2016) prescribes the teacher-learner ratio of 1:33. However, the data revealed that the number of learners was well over the number prescribed and not in line with Departmental policy. This implies that in these under-resourced schools, overcrowded classrooms may result in challenges such as lack of individual learner attention, classroom management and an environment not appropriate for teaching and learning.

Of the nine participants, three did not establish classroom libraries citing overcrowded classrooms leading to lack of space as the reason.

> P4: The problem of overcrowding is disturbing us very much. As you see, the class is overcrowded. It is not easy for me to make those smaller groups.

One of the six teachers placed reading materials available in the classroom on the learners' tables.

> P3: I did not set up the classroom library because the class is full to the brim. So, we just use flashcards, reader books, and newspapers. Every Wednesday we do drop all and read as well because we do not have the library, we give them newspapers, and other books that they can borrow and then they read for fun.

174

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 18 (1) / 2023
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

The other four teachers arranged the class in large groups by positioning the tables which made it difficult to move around as the tables were too close to the door. Yet, another teacher established a classroom library in the storage room as space in the classroom was limited.

> P2: We asked the principal to turn the storage room into a library because there is no accommodation. The classes will take turns in visiting the library. We tried to make the space and put shelves.

Overcrowded classrooms, an escalating number of learners in classrooms and a lack of space-challenged teachers in implementing strategies such as classroom libraries to provide a reading environment conducive to developing reading comprehension, are challenges that teachers face. The overcrowding also makes it difficult for learners to work in smaller groups where the teacher can effectively attend to diverse reading abilities (Marais, 2016). However, the ability of teachers to provide learners with reading materials despite the growing number of learners in their classrooms is commendable.

Lack of knowledge in organising books
Lack of knowledge in organising books for the classroom library was identified as a challenge, particularly in the limited space in each of the classrooms. One of the teachers wanted to organise the books in levels of difficulty; however, the books were haphazardly organised in the classroom library.

> P5: Even though we found a few books, we lack knowledge on how to organise them at their levels, we pack them as like books being there. As you see, we have magazines that learners read for enjoyment. We do not channel them to say go and read this book.

In three classrooms, books were shelved, though the teachers did not follow a particular system. One teacher grouped books according to fiction and non-fiction genres.

> P8: The challenge is the grouping of books. We have several types, fiction, non-fiction, and references. These books and newspapers were locked in the school library, and we did not have the keys. We have taken them to be used in our classroom library. I have a lack of knowledge in arranging books.

Another teacher organised books with spines facing the learners. However, because there was no adequate library equipment such as book ends, the books kept falling over due to a lack of support.

> P9: The books are just falling; I am not sure how to get them to stand straight. I don't know how to support them, and I have no ideas.

Teachers tried several ways of organising books, though it was challenging as there was a lack of knowledge in achieving this exercise and perhaps a lack of logic in arranging the books according to the reading needs of their learners and a lack of creativity in using substitutes for library equipment such as bricks as book ends. According to Bates and Cook (2020), organising and arranging reading material without a consistent system and maintenance results in the classroom library becoming disorganised. A system should be put in place which would enable the learners to know where to get books and find them with ease.

Checking out and returning books
The six teachers had concerns about checking out books for reading in class and at home and returning them to the classroom library. One teacher had allocated the responsibility to a learner

175

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 18 (1) / 2023
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

librarian who oversees writing down the books' names, dates, and titles. Learners were observed choosing a book and queueing for registration at the learner librarian's table.

> P6: In my classroom, we have a librarian, she is responsible for writing the dates when the learners take the books and retrieve them. I ask learners to stand in a queue, and she writes down the names and comes to me so that I can sign. She also has a section where she writes several books per title so that they can be constantly counted. If there is a problem, then we can know who is accountable for that book.

However, another teacher was worried about the state of the books brought back after reading.

> P7: Some books are torn or shabby in their return. Maybe they were not taught to respect books. Others are troublesome as they lose books.

The teachers used various strategies for checking out and returning books. The six teachers were not comfortable with the strategies used in the past, as they were considered time-consuming and ineffective in preventing the loss of books. Though learners were responsible for checking out and returning books, the Elementary Librarian (2012) warns that it is risky for learners to be assigned the responsibility as they can be overwhelmed by the process and the system can fail.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper sought to explore the difficulties encountered by the grade 4 to 6 EFAL teachers in establishing classroom libraries in a rural circuit of the Limpopo province to promote learners' reading ability.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the current study were supported by the literature reviewed earlier. A classroom library is a readily accessible source of reading material for learners living in rural areas to develop their reading ability which increases their vocabulary, fluency and comprehension all of which influence academic achievement. Access to relevant and interesting reading material can also develop reading habits and a culture of reading amongst the learners, which is essential for lifelong learning. Participants agreed that they encountered challenges in establishing classroom libraries. However, they were determined to find reading material to create a reading environment conducive to promoting reading as they realised the importance of developing reading literacy skills at this level of schooling. However, motivated teachers encountered challenges that hindered them in creating and maintaining interesting and age-appropriate classroom libraries:

- Limited relevant reading material.
- A lack of space in overcrowded classrooms.
- Little knowledge of organising the classroom library books.
- A lack of strategies on how to control the checking in and out of books.

Due to the study's qualitative nature, the findings are contextually bound and cannot be generalised to a larger population. There is room for further research to be conducted from the perspective of urban primary schools, specifically in the Intermediate Phase. Even though the study used a small rural sample, it was able to get detailed descriptions of the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives, and the goals were met.

176

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 18 (1) / 2023
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research, firstly, contributed to the body of knowledge on this topic. Secondly, the practical implication is that the findings could be used to address the challenges faced by teachers in establishing classroom libraries. Thirdly, policy regarding classroom libraries could be influenced by this data. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- Schools should actively allocate funds for buying books and seek donations for reading material from public libraries, non-governmental organisations and private institutions.
- Schools should put a central library where classes can take turns to its access. This can be a temporary solution to a lack of space in the classrooms.
- Inservice training should be conducted to equip teachers with the basic skills of organising and facilitating the checking out and returning of classroom library books.

Finally, it is suggested that a quantitative study be conducted in more rural schools so that the results can be generalised because the findings of this study are contextually bound.

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177

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178

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180

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 18 (1) / 2023
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*