AUTHOR:
Dr Roy Venketsamy[1] (ID)
Ms Sophie Sibanda[1] (ID)

AFFILIATION:
[1]University of Pretoria

# EXPLORING STRATEGIES TEACHERS USE TO DEVELOP LITERACY SKILLS AMONG ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

## ABSTRACT

*Teachers play a significant role in literacy development. They are responsible for using different approaches to develop literacy skills among learners whose mother tongue is not the same as the language of learning and teaching in schools. This article aims to explore strategies teachers use to develop literacy skills among English First Additional Language learners. A qualitative case study was conducted that involved focus group interviews to gain in-depth knowledge of the strategies teachers use in their classes to develop literacy skills. For this article, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is used as a theoretical framework. The participants were six foundation phase teachers from one district in Gauteng. The data gathered showed that teachers are trying to use strategies described in the curriculum policy document. Teachers were unaware that they were using some of the most contemporary strategies in their classes such as balanced-literacy approach, play-based approach and evidence-based approach. Findings showed that teachers had good knowledge and understanding of literacy however, they were experiencing some challenges. They cited lack of support from knowledgeable others and appropriate teacher development and training. The study recommends that teachers need continuous training and development, literacy text should be contextualised and continued support from the school heads of department, curriculum advisors and subject specialist. It also recommends an in-depth knowledge, understanding and implementation of the curriculum policy.*

**Keywords:** *Literacy skills; English first additional language; foundation phase; learning/teaching strategies*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning in a language that is not the mother-tongue is an international phenomenon that is brought about by increased mobility and movement of people from one place to another (Dreyer, 2017). According to the Language in Education Policy (Department of Education [DoE], 1997), 11 official languages are nationally recognised in South Africa.

Although the national policy states that learners have the right to education in their own language (mother tongue), every school has the right to its own language policy. According to Dreyer (2017), many learners who are non-English speaking are attending schools where the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is English. These learners are significantly challenged in classes. Teachers need to employ different strategies to ensure these learners become literate in the LoLT.

Excell and Linington (2011) define a literate child as someone who can read, write, speak and listen, however, the ability to accomplish these skill among English First Additional Language learners (EFAL) is of great concern in South African public schools (Zinn, Stilwell & Hoskins, 2015). Being literate is about learners making meaning for themselves and communicating with others (Bracefield & Woodgate, 2020). Reading for meaning and pleasure is an essential skill that children learn in the foundation phase (FP). According to Pretorius *et al.,* (2016), all future learning will depend on the basic understanding of the relationship between print and spoken language. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2017) agrees that most learners cannot read or write. Therefore, it is crucial to improve the teaching and learning of literacy skills in schools, mainly serving historically disadvantaged communities. Sadly, the opportunity to become literate is not afforded to most South African learners (Pretorius *et al.,* 2016). According to both national and international assessments namely, Annual National Assessment (ANA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PiRLS), literacy skills among most learners is low (DBE, 2014; Howie *et al.,* 2017).

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) explains that learning to use language successfully is the learners' ability to express their identity, feelings and ideas DBE, 2011). Language is a vehicle that learners use to describe their cultural and social diversity. Through language development, literacy skills can be shaped, changed, widened and refined (Mudzielwana *et al.,* 2012). The purpose of this paper is to explore the strategies FP teachers use to support EFAL learners to develop their literacy skills. Literacy learning starts in the learner's immediate environment. Being literate is not limited to reading and writing skills or that of static skills and knowledge (Pretorius *et al.,* 2016). It is the employment of a wide range of adaptable literacy practices, strategies and knowledge to effectively use texts within social and cultural situations for a variety of purposes (Anstey & Bull, 2010).

## 2.  WHAT IS MEANT BY LITERACY?

The concept of literacy has progressed from the ability of a learner just to read and/or write to include activities such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, symbolising, with a variety of supplementary texts including, but not limited to print, digital, video, images and conversations (Kennedy *et al.,* 2012). Basic literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate (DBE, 2011). To accomplish this skill, learners can use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts (Pretorius *et al.,* 2016). Literacy skills help learners develop their knowledge and potential and participate fully in their community and broader society. This is achieved through developing speaking, listening, reading and writing skills (Greenhill & Petroe, 2010).

## 3.  THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN TEACHING LITERACY SKILLS

The teacher plays a crucial role in supporting literacy development (Bracefield *et al.,* 2020). What teachers do and say influences their learner's literacy development, even the language

they use determines what is learnt and how it is learnt (Mielonen & Paterson, 2009). Teachers need to know several approaches to developing literacy skills among learners and providing flexible instructive feedback (Persaud, 2019). The Victoria Department of Education (2020) agrees that the teacher's role is to ensure that learners develop fundamental literacy skills.

They need to encourage learners to practise their literacy skills as often as possible. Teachers must ensure that learners are making sense of what they read (Pretorius *et al.,* 2016). Learners should be able to summarise the main ideas in a text and respond using appropriate language. According to Mudzielwana *et al.* (2012), children need to write answers to questions on what they have read; teachers must also ensure that children can demonstrate their understanding of new concepts taught. Another fundamental role of teachers is to encourage learner-centred learning by allowing learners to share decisions (McCarthy, 2015). Learner-centred teaching generally involves teaching methods that move instruction from the teacher to the learner (Du Plessis, 2020). Teachers are expected to promote literacy development with various resources such as games, audiobooks, classroom and literacy programmes.

The development of literacy skills among EFAL learners is critical for them to become competent in the LoLT (Dreyer, 2017). Dennis and Horn (2011) agree that it is essential that teachers know and understand the various strategies that can be used in their classrooms. The DBE (2011) allows teachers to use different strategies in the foundation phase to develop literacy skills among EFAL learners. Some of the strategies listed in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements: First Additional Language (DBE, 2011: 12–17) include, "shared reading, guided reading, reading aloud, vocabulary instructions and guided writing." This section describes the different strategies and techniques teachers can use to support their learners.

## 3.1 Balanced-approach to literacy development

Nugent *et al.,* (2016) articulate that children's early literacy experiences need to involve a balance of varied activities and experiences. Learners must be exposed to effective literacy instruction that requires a combination of skills-based and whole language teaching in a motivating and supportive environment. The new literacy skills system has been formulated known as the Balanced literacy Approach (Siaulys, 2013). This approach incorporates the fundamental elements to learn the English language by combining two or more methods into the curriculum. According to Uzuner cited in Siaulys (2013), the Balanced literacy system combines the whole language and skills development approaches. This method combines several approaches to increase the learner's level of literacy comprehension. The different strategies teachers can use in their classrooms are literature circles, basal reading programmes, reading and writing workshops, literature focus units and thematic units (Tompkins, 2013)

## 3.2 Evidence-based approach

Teaching literacy skills through an evidence-based approach provides opportunities for learners to engage in a dialogue. The teacher models listening and speaking skills in an additional language and provides feedback for learners' participation. Teachers need to have a comprehensive knowledge of literacy development, informed by evidence-based best practice (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). Teachers need to engage learners in meaningful literacy activities, exposing them to key literacy concepts and meaningful engagement. Morrow *et al.,* (2011) state that teachers need to create a classroom culture that fosters literacy motivation. They should teach reading for authentic meaning-making purposes; provide learners with

scaffolder instructions in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary and comprehension to promote independent reading; give children time for self-selected reading; provide learners with high-quality literature across a wide range of genres; build a whole-class context that emphasises community and collaboration and balance teacher and learner-led discussion of texts.

## 3.3 Problem–based learning

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an active-learning learner-centred technique. PBL provides teachers with a way to integrate information literacy naturally into an assignment or course by guiding learners through their activities as they work to find a solution to a problem (Wenger, 2014). During language lessons, the teacher must ensure that PBL depicts the real-life situation that learners can relate. PBL motivates active-learning techniques, thus maintaining learners' attention to the task on hand and becoming fruitfully engaged in the activity. PBL takes the focus away from the task-based process of information retrieval and focuses on developing an understanding of the learning (Servant-Miklos, 2018). Information literacy skills, such as the evaluation and synthesis of information, are naturally incorporated throughout a PBL assignment. Studies have shown that learner engagement and participation is higher in PBL instruction sessions than in teacher-based sessions (Paterson & Gamtso, 2012). According to Pourshafie and Murray-Harvey (2013), a problem-based teaching approach shifts facilitation responsibility from teachers to learners. As learners construct their knowledge and learning, this approach creates independence in a controlled learning context.

## 3.4 Play–based approach

Zosh *et al.*, (2017) agree that play has a fundamental role in developing learners' literacy skills. During play activities, learners think about things, events, people and share and create their ideas to extend their play. Research by Fleer (2015) has found that learning through play enhances learners' oral communication, their social, innovative and creative use of play material together with divergent thinking and problem-solving skills. On their website, Gryphon House (2018) state that symbolic play has an essential place where children can use their voices to role-play characters in a storybook utilising a range of different props that have functions in the real world. Irrespective of the kind of play, play is vital to the social development of learners. Therefore, a play-based approach to literacy skills teaching is significant in relation to learners' higher-order cognitive development, especially their flexible thinking and predicting skills (Fleer, 2015).

## 3.5 Reciprocal teaching (RT)

Reciprocal teaching is a systematic approach to literacy development. An instructional technique develops reading comprehension skills by capacitating learners to take on the role of the teacher. This approach makes learners active participants in learning activities. It helps learners to gradually transit from guided to independent readers and reinforces strategies for comprehension of text (Bale, 2020) Salehi and Vafakhah (2013) articulate that the role of the teacher is to introduce the learners to the four critical components of this approach, namely predicting, clarifying, question generation and summarising to increase learners' reading comprehension. According to McAllum (2014), when applying these critical components in a lesson, they (teachers) can observe and monitor the discussion amongst learners in the class. This approach encourages cognitive dialogue before reading, during reading and after reading (Meyer, 2010)

## 4.  THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For this article, Lev Vygotsky's theory of language development focusing on social learning and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) are used as a theoretical framework. The ZPD is the range of abilities a learner can accomplish with assistance from the knowledgeable other (teacher) (Cherry, 2020). EFAL learners in the foundation phase have not yet mastered fundamental literacy skills and therefore need guidance and support from their teachers to independently perform literacy tasks (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011).

Teachers play a crucial role in language development and support of learners in the foundation phase. EFAL learners are already challenged with mastering the language of teaching and learning; however, learners will transition from being dependent to independent learners through the support from knowledge others (teachers). Le, Janssen and Wubbels (2016) state that to develop literacy skills teachers can use group work, peer learning, paired and shared learning whereby learners will be able to interact and learn from each other socially. Vygotsky (1976) believed that peer interaction is an essential part of the learning process. For children to learn new skills, he suggested pairing more competent students with less skilled ones (Mishra, 2013).

## 5.  RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

The researchers applied a qualitative research approach within the interpretivist paradigm (Yin, 2018) to explore the strategies foundation phase teachers use to support EFAL learners in developing their literacy skills. Qualitative research helps researchers understand the social phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Viswambharan & Priya, 2016). A case study method was used, enabling the researchers to closely examine the data within a specific context. For this study, a case study method was appropriate because the authors selected a small geographical area with a limited number of participants (Creswell, 2014). Purposive sampling was applied to this study because the authors focused particularly on foundation phase teachers teaching EFAL learners in public primary schools. Six (6) foundation phase teachers were chosen from two schools in one district in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. A semi-structured questionnaire guided the group interview process to collect data from the participants. For this article, teachers were coded as T1–T6 to ensure anonymity, confidentiality and privacy of the data. The coding confirmed that no individual could be identified.

Data analysis was inductive. According to Denzin (2012), the validity and reliability of qualitative research are dependent on what the researcher as an inquirer hear and interpret the meaning that s/he thought s/he heard. The study compared multiple data sources in search of common themes. This paper's ethical consideration included obtaining informed consent and maintaining anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, avoidance of betrayal and deception to meet the requirements of the ethical code of conduct. Ethics for the study was approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria and Gauteng Education Department.

## 6.  RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the coding process, three major themes emerged from the data: teachers' understanding of literacy; the importance of literacy development for EFAL learners and the strategies teachers employ to help learners develop literacy skills in the foundation phase. Verbatim quotes are included in the discussion.

## 6.1 Theme 1: Understanding of literacy

The authors wanted to explore teachers' understanding of the concept "literacy" and its significance in the FP EFAL classroom. It was interesting to note that the participants were eager to share their knowledge of what literacy means to them. All the participants agreed that developing literacy skills could not be taught in isolation from other skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing activities (DBE, 2011). Participant T1 and T2 explained*,*

> Literacy skills do not only involve the ability to listen, speak, read and write. In my opinion (T1), it is important for children to have knowledge, skills and the ability to comprehend the written texts of the curriculum to actively participate in classroom activities and outside of the school.

This is in accordance with Pretorius *et al.* (2015) that literacy development is more than just teaching children to read and write. They need to comprehend what they read and write. T5 added*,*

> for children to learn to speak, read and write, I think it starts with pre-literacy skills, long before the child comes to school through active engagement at home and in Grade R through listening to stories, singing songs and performing rhymes.

T6 stated,

> although I agree with my colleague about learning at home, the low socio-economic status of many families, unemployment and poverty contributes to poor literacy skills; as a result, children's literacy skills development is delayed.

T2 added,

> Most of the learner's parents in my class cannot read or write. Parents are unable to help their children at home. It is the teacher's responsibility to help develop learner's literacy skills.

It was evident that participants understood that learner exposure to pre-literacy skills is another literacy approach at home. In the FP, participants felt that the pre-literacy skills approach has a crucial role in developing learners' literacy skills. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that there are factors that contribute to the learners' literacy skills development. It was clear that without pre-literacy skills, it was unfair to expect learners to read, write and comprehend English as FAL in the FP. Biggs (2011) states that teachers are expected to add value to literacy skills development through the knowledge and expertise gained from higher learning institutions. According to the DBE (2011), basic literacy skills are described to teachers in the policy. Although this information is available, many teachers are unaware of the different strategies. The author assumed that most of the teachers were not trained or did not read and understand the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) document. Research by Maharajh, Nkosi and Mkhize (2016) found that teachers were poorly trained in implementing the curriculum and were also plagued by the lack of appropriate resources, especially CAPS documents.

## 6.2 Theme 2: The importance of literacy development for EFAL learners

During the interviews, participants were asked about the importance of literacy development among EFAL learners in the foundation phase.

The authors probed further to get the participants to respond to the importance of developing literacy skills among EFAL learners. According to T2,

> Every child in our classes deserves to be allowed to learn to read and write meaningfully in their lives.

T5 agreed and stated,

> Our children must become literature [literate], and that is what their parents also wish. As teachers, we need to help our learners in the best way we can. However, we are struggling with our learners. There are many challenges in teaching literacy skills.

T4 interjected by saying,

> The biggest challenge that I face in my schools is my knowledge and understanding of how to teach the different component of literacy skills. I am also not an English first language, and I have to learn how to teach them. There are some aspects I can teach, but there are other skills I need to learn and read up before coming to class. Regarding the importance of teaching literacy skills, I must agree that it is imperative, because these learners will go to Grade 4, and they have to have the necessary skills to communicate in the language of teaching and learning of the school.

All the participants agreed that most learners in their classes do not have English as their Home Language, so English is their 'First Additional Language' in school. Teaching English is our school is crucial to the success of our learners, as their ability to read, write and speak will impact on all their other learning subjects. Therefore, in the foundation phase, we must be able to develop the fundamental skills of our learners.

T6 articulated her view on the importance of developing literacy skills among EFAL learners,

> When we help our children to become good readers and writers, we give them the key to exploring the world and community. As teachers, we need to spark their literacy development and keep it going by inspiring and encouraging them. We need to be role-models for our children. They come from impoverished backgrounds and they look up to us. We must be able to shine for these learners.

To this comment, T5 said, "I agree with my colleague, we must make sure that our children are literate when they leave our classes." T2 added,

> These children need us as teachers to help them read, write and comprehend. We must be encouragers and not break down their spirits and tell them they cannot read or write. We must use different methods of helping our children to become literate.

From the above findings, there is explicit agreement that literacy development is fundamental in the foundation phase, especially to those learners whose home language is not aligned to the language of teaching and learning at the school. All the participants agreed that their role as teachers is to help learners to become literate. This view concurs with Bracefield *et al.* (2020) who state that teachers play a crucial role in ensuring learners' literacy skills are adequately developed. Pretorius *et al.* (2016) also agree that teachers play a pivotal role in encouraging learners to practise their literacy skills and their literacy activities; learners should be motivated to reflect on their learning. Mudzielwanta *et al.* (2012) and McCarthy (2015) state that teachers should ensure that children can demonstrate their understanding of

new concepts and encourage learner-centred learning and allow learners to share and make decisions during literacy lessons.

It is expected that learners from diverse language backgrounds may have challenges with conceptualising EFAL stories, listening and comprehension, merely because they have inadequate English vocabulary. The EFAL teacher is therefore assumed to be the knowledgeable other in selecting suitable reading material. The language level of the story must be at the learner's ability, be contextual, meaningful and give the learner a sense of enjoyment. All the participants indicated that they always considered the learners' context when selecting stories to teach literacy skills in the foundation phase. T2 mentioned,

> I choose stories that the learners can relate to, they feel they know the context and situation – they can identify with the characters also. My stories are very African and I include the learner's names in the story.

Regarding the prescribed reading books for foundation phase EFAL learners, T4 and T5 indicated,

> Sometimes I feel that some stories are too difficult for our learners to understand. They do not link the child's context in which he lives. For example, in the workbooks and readers, there are stories about some animals that my learners are not aware of (T4).

> They have not seen a polar bear and the story is all about polar bears. As teachers, we must go and research some of these animals so that we can make learning meaningful (T5).

Teachers play an essential role in ensuring that written text is of value to the children and that it relates to their lifeworld. As adults, they set an example for their learners, making sure that they are accommodated during literacy teaching. It is the responsibility of the teacher to select the most appropriate reading materials for their learners. To this, T3 added,

> the DBE select all the reading materials for our learners. We must buy books from the national catalogue. Some of these stories and books are not relevant to our learners. My principal told me that I could find my own stories for my children.

To this T1 mentioned,

> I ask my children what stories and books they like to read. I then go to the library and the internet and find literacy materials that they enjoy and bring to class." T6 mentioned, "the biggest challenge for me is making copies of the stories. Our schools do not have a photocopier or the necessary resource materials to promote literacy.

However, all the participants agreed that teachers set the example for literacy development for their learners. T2 mentioned,

> I show my learners that I love reading. I have noticed that my children are now taking books on their own and started reading, without any coaxing from me.

T3 mentioned,

> Our schools do not have a library where our young children can get books to read. We are trying hard to build a library in our class. We have heard that the department has given some school 'Mobile Libraries', but we did not get one.

T6 agreed by saying,

> we need age appropriate books for our children. We want stories that reflect their own life-world, not western type stories, we need African stories.

From the responses of the participants, it is evident that teachers are aware of the importance of literacy; however, the challenges are hindering them from developing literacy skills. Teachers need the necessary resources to make literacy teaching and learning exciting.

## 6.3 Theme 3: Strategies for literacy skills teaching

Teachers believed that literacy skills teaching is meant to teach learners to listen, speak, read and write (DBE, 2011). It should be seen as providing learners with literacy skills to participate understand and gain control of the social and literacy practices entrenched within their society (Nugent *et al.,* 2016). Samuels, Shorter and Plaut (2012) state that learning a language is dependent on the social world of the learner; it is shaped by the cultural context in which the learner resides. Similarly, literacy skills embrace and integrate written language with specific ways of talking, acting, interacting, thinking and feeling, valuing and using various sorts of symbols and tools to transfer knowledge from situation to situation (DBE, 2017). During the interview, participants were asked about the strategies used in teaching EFAL learners. Most participants indicated that they are familiar with the strategies described in the CAPS document. T1, T3, T6 agreed that they use the following literacy strategies to assist learners "reading aloud, paired reading, shared reading, listening comprehension, thinking and reasoning, vocabulary development, phonics, creative writing and grammar". Upon further probing, the participants responded in the following manner: T1 said,

> according to me the strategies to teach literacy especially reading includes decoding and understanding meaning as well as the manner in which words can be used in a sentence.

T3 stated,

> The strategies that I use in my class involve vocabulary teaching through play-based learning during a reading lessons and I also teach through stories in my class.

T2 mentioned,

> Some of the strategies I use in my class to get my learners to understand what they read are making connections with their life-world and experience and picturing/visualising what they have read. They are allowed to act out their stories, e.g. 'Wash Day.' My learners use the words in the story and convert it into a song and dramatise washing clothes and drying them on the grass.

T2 and 3's strategies correspond with Zosh *et al.* (2017) who articulate that a play-based approach to teaching literacy encourages literacy development. This view agrees with Gryphon House (2018), who state that role-play is vital in literacy development and visualisation. Fleer (2015) found that learning through play activities enhance learner's enthusiasm and interest in learning.

Although there is evidence that teachers had some knowledge and understanding of the approaches used in literacy teaching, participant T2, T4 and T6 stated,

> as educators in the Foundation Phase we need training and development. The department should plan some training for us on the different strategies to teach literacy.

T3 added,

> It's difficult when we are put in a class to teach; we have to learn from other teachers and sometimes we have to read and use the internet. That is helpful, but proper training by the subject advisors will do us a lot of good."

According to Pretorius *et al.* (2015), there is an increasing agreement that specialised knowledge is necessary for teaching literacy skills. Some of the teachers interviewed knew the required literacy skills, such as connecting with the text and real-life, visualising, inferring, questioning and determining the importance and synthesising of written text. There is still a need for more focused capacity building and teacher development programmes aligned to CAPS (Maharajh, Nkosi & Mkhize, 2016).

According to T4, she indicated that her class tries to use different ways and methods to develop literacy skills. She revealed,

> When I teach reading and comprehension, I first get my learners to skim through the text. I always ask them to look at the title of the story and the pictures. This is the first clue. Once they can make meaning and understanding of the title and pictures, I then ask them to predict what the story is about. I also ask my learners to use the 5W + H questioning technique (who, what, where, when, why and how.

From the explanation of T4, her strategy correlates with Salehi *et al.* (2013) who advocate prediction as a skill in reading and understanding comprehension. Her use of the 5W+H technique corresponds with a problem-based learning strategy. Here the learners ask their questions about what they have read, thus shifting the teacher's responsibility to the learners (Pourshafie *et al.,* 2013). To this comment on comprehension, T6 stated,

> some of my learners struggle to read, so I pair them with other good readers in my class. In this way, good readers teach slow readers. They also help to explain what they have read. I found this method works very well in my class. My slow learners are always eager to learn from their peers.

According to Vygotsky's theory of social learning, it is evident that learners in T6's class learn from their peers through social interaction. Bale (2020) agrees that this method will eventually help the slow learners to become less guided and independent learners.

T5 shared her methods of developing literacy skills in her class. She indicated that she uses two or more different approaches to literacy development. She explained further,

> In my class, I always ask the learners to relate what they have read to their life-world – their experiences in their community or at home. I also allow them to share their own experiences in a class about a story, for example, "Fat Pig's birthday" from New Way Series. The learners love to share their birthday experiences and relate them to the story, especially all their friends whom they invited, the presents they received and what they ate at the party.

It is evident that T5 uses the evidence-based approach and the balanced-literacy approach to literacy development. According to Morrow *et al.,* (2011), teachers need to create a classroom that fosters literacy motivation and this is evident in the learners' sharing their birthday experience in class. Accordingly, Taylor (2013) pointed out that teacher-learner talk was necessary. He further stated that the teachers could encroach into the learners' ways of thinking; push learners to think, feel or behave in a specific way, which will enhance learners' creative thinking. Through adult guidance (knowledgeable others) and patience, learners can approach literacy challenges positively (Cherry, 2020).

## 7.  RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to explore the strategies FP teachers use to support EFAL learners to develop their literacy skills. The interpretivist approach and group interviews gave participants the opportunity of sharing their knowledge and understanding of the strategies they used in assisting EFAL learners in their classroom. From their discussions, the authors agreed upon the following recommendations:

• Strengthening teacher knowledge - although teachers are applying some of these strategies to enhance literacy skills development, there should be continuous ongoing professional development and capacity building programmes on these strategies especially the following, balanced-approach, evidence-based approach, play-based approach, reciprocal teaching. CAPS describe a few strategies; however, teachers should be given in-depth training on the following strategies: balanced-approach to literacy development; PBL, evidence-based approach; problem-based approach; play-based approach and reciprocal teaching.

• In-service training and development on policy implementation - it is therefore recommended that all EFAL teachers be trained on implementing the content of CAPS in their classrooms. Most teachers are restricted to using the text and resources supplied by the department. They should be encouraged to use other resources that CAPS describe in Section 3 especially the use of magazines, comic strips, newspaper articles and library books.

• Appropriate teaching resources – literacy text and other resources should accommodate all learners in the class. Material developers should take into consideration the different context and situations learners come from. These learning materials should resonate with the learners' lifeworld. Mobile libraries should be made available to all schools.

• Support from parents, district official and curriculum advisors – there should be continued support from parents. Parents should encourage learners to read at home. Family literacy is an essential aspect of developing literacy skills. District officials and subject advisors need to frequent schools to address and support teachers with daily challenges.

In conclusion, reading for meaning and pleasure is one of the most important skills a child learns in primary school. A lack of foundation skills is a significant cause of poor performance in struggling literacy skills among EFAL learners. Learners need to be motivated using different strategies to excel in their literacy development. All learners can develop a strong foundation for literacy and reading when they are allowed to engage in meaningful language and print activities. This study was significant because it highlighted the different approaches teachers might use to teach English to EFAL learners. In the process of teaching literacy, teachers make room for learner-generated ideas through oral and written text to provide EFAL learners with opportunities to weave their own experiences, feelings and interests into literacy development.

## REFERENCES

Anstey, M. & Bull, G. 2010. Helping teachers to explore multimodal texts. *Curriculum Leadership Journal,* 8(16): 1–3.

Biggs, J.B. 2011. *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bracefield, C. & Woodgate, F. 2020. Early literacy and the teacher's role. *He Kupu – The Word,* 6(3): 14–19.

Cherry, K. 2020. *The zone of proximal development as defined by Vygotsky.* Available at https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-zone-of-proximal-development-2796034. [Accessed 28 April 2020].

Creswell, J.W. 2014. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach,* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Dennis, L.R. & Horn, R. 2011. Strategies for supporting early literacy development. *Young Exceptional Children,* 14(3): 29–40 https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250611420553.

Denzin, N.K. 2012. Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6(2): 80–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689812437186.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2011. *National curriculum statement (NCS): Curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS). Foundation Phase Grades 1–3: English Second Additional Language*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2014. *Report on the annual national assessment of 2014. Grades 1 to 6 & 9.* Pretoria. Government Printers.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2017. *The early grade reading study summary report*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Education (DoE). 2008. *Teaching reading in the early grades. A teacher's handbook.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Education (DoE). 1997. *Language in education policy*. Pretoria. Government Printers.

Dreyer, .M. 2017. Addressing barriers to learning in first additional language (second language) In M.D. Magano, S. Mohapi and D. Robinson (Eds.). *Realigning teacher training in the 21st century* (pp.203–216). UK: Cengage Learning EMEA.

Du Plessis, E. 2020. Student teachers' perceptions, experience, and challenges regarding learner-centred teaching. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(1): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n1a1631

Excell, L. & Linington, V. 2011. Move to literacy. Fanning emergent literacy in early childhood education in a pedagogy of play. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 1(2): 27–45. https://sajce.co.za/index.php/sajce/article/view/83/29. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v1i2.83

Fleer, M. 2015. Pedagogical positioning in play – teachers being inside and outside of children's imaginary play. *Early Child Development and Care,* 185(11–12): 1801–1814. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2015.1028393.

Greenhill, V. & Petroe S. 2010. *2lst century knowledge and skills in educator preparation*. London: Pearson.

Gryphon House. 2018. *What is symbolic play? Classroom management.* Available at https://www.gryphonhouse.com/resources/what-is-symbolic-play.

Howie, S.J., Combrinck, C., Roux, K., Tshele, M., Mokoena, G.M. & Palane, M.N. 2017. *PIRLS Literacy 2016 progress in international reading literacy study 2016: South African children's reading literacy achievement*. Pretoria: Centre for Evaluation and Assessment. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n1a1631.

Kennedy, E., Dunphy, E., Dwyer, B., Hayes, G., McPhillips, T., Marsch, J., O'Connor, M. & Shiel, G. 2012. *Literacy in early childhood and primary education (3–8 years). Commissioned research report. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.* Dublin. https://ncca.ie/media/2137/literacy_in_early_childhood_and_primary_education_3-8_years.pdf.

Le, H., Janssen, J. & Wubbels, T. 2016. Collaborative learning practices: teacher and student perceived obstacles to effective student collaboration. *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 48(1): 103-122 https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2016.1259389.

Maharajh, L.R., Nkosi, T. and Mkhize, M.C. 2017. Teachers' experiences in the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in three primary schools in KwaZulu Natal. *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review,* 4(2): 371–388. https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v4i3.120

McAllum, R. 2014. Reciprocal teaching: critical reflection on practice. *Kairaranga,* 15(1): 26–35.

McCarthy, J. 2015. Student-centred learning: It starts with the teacher. Available at https://www.edutopia.org/blog/student-centered-learning-starts-with-teacher-john-mccarthy.

Meyer, K. 2010. Diving into reading: revisiting reciprocal teaching in the middle years. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years,* 18(1): 41–52.

Mielonen, A.M. & Paterson, W. 2009. Developing literacy through play. *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education*, 3(1): 15–32.

Mishra, R.K. 2013. Vygotskian perspective of teaching-learning. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 1(1): 21–28.

Morrow, L. & Gambrell, L. (Eds.). (2011). *Best practices in literacy instruction,* 4th ed. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Mudzielwana, N.P., Joubert, I., Phatudi, N.C. & Cycil, G. 2012. Teaching reading comprehension to Foundation Phase Tshivenda-speaking learners. *Journal of Educational Studies,* 11(1): 67–84.

Nugent, M., Gannon, L., Mullan, Y & O' Rouke, D. 2016. *A balanced approach to literacy development in the early years. National Education Psychological Services (NEPS).* Available at https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/Balanced-Approach-to-Literacy-Development-in-the-Early-Years-.pdf.

Persaud, C. 2019. *Pedagogy: What educators need to know.* Available at https://tophat.com/blog/pedagogy/.

Pourshafie, T. & Murray-Harvery, R. 2013. Facilitating problem-based learning in teacher education getting the challenge right. *Journal of Education for Teaching,* 39(2): 169–180 https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2013.765190.

Pretorius, E., Jackson, M., McKay, V., Murray, S., Spaull, N. 2015. *Teaching reading and writing in the foundation phase: A concept note*. Cape Town. The University of Stellenbosch.

Salehi, M. & Vafakhah, S. 2013. A comparative study of reciprocal teaching only (RTO) and explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching (ET-RT) on reading. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences,* 7(2):148–155.

Samuels, A., Shorter, B. & Plaut, F. 2012. *A critical dictionary of Jungian analysis*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203713822

Servant-Miklos, V.F.C. 2018. Problem-solving skills versus knowledge acquisition. The historical dispute that split problem-based learning into two camps. *Health Sciences Education,* 24, 619–653. https://linkspringer.com/article/10.1007/s10459-018-9835-0.

Siaulys, K. 2013. A balanced literacy approach to the classroom. Unpublished thesis. Liberty University.

Tani, R. & & Ghaemi, F. 2011. Implications of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZDP) in teacher education: ZPTD and self-scaffolding. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences,* 29: 1549–1554. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.396

Taylor, F. 2013. Listening to Romanian teenagers: Lessons in motivation and ELT methodology. In E. Ushioda (Ed). *International Perspectives on Motivation* (pp.35–59). London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137000873_3

Tompkins, G.E. 2013. *Language arts, patterns of practice,* 8th ed. Upper Saddle River. NJ. Pearson Education, Inc.

Victoria Education Department. 2020. *Literacy teaching toolkit: Guided reading*. Available at https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/readingviewing/Pages/teachingpracguided.aspx.

Viswambharan, A.P. & Priya, K.R. 2016. Documentary analysis as a qualitative methodology to explore disaster mental health: Insights from analysing a documentary on communal riots. *Qualitative Research,* 16(1): 43–59. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794114567494

Vygotsky, L. 1976. Play and its role in the mental development of the child. *Soviet Psychology,* 5(3): 6–18. https://doi.org/10.2753/RPO1061-040505036

Wenger, K. 2014. Problem-based learning and information literacy. A natural partnership. *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice*, 2(2): 142–154. https://doi.org/10.5195/PALRAP.2014.61

Yin, R.K. 2018. *Case study research and applications: Design and methods,* 6th ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Zinn, S., Stilwell, C. & Hoskins, R. 2015. Information literacy education in the South African classroom: Reflections from teachers' journals in the Western Cape Province. *Libri*, 66(1): 31–44. https://doi.org/10.1515/libri-2015-0102

Zosh, J.M., Hopkins, E.J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Solis, S.L. & Whitebread, D. 2017. *Learning through play: A review of the evidence (white paper).* Denmark: The LEGO Foundation.