



Incorporating Comprehension Reading Strategies in Grade 4 English First Additional Language Classrooms: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is a foundational skill that is essential for learners' academic achievement in the intermediate phase. However, Grade 4 learners in South Africa continue to face challenges in acquiring this skill, particularly because English is not their home language. This study aimed to explore the barriers and facilitators that Grade 4 English First Additional Language (FAL) teachers encounter when incorporating comprehension reading strategies into their instructional practices. Guided by Shulman's theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), the study adopted a qualitative approach situated within the interpretivist paradigm. An exploratory case study design was used to gain in-depth insights from three Grade 4 English FAL teachers in the Motheo District, Free State Province. Data was generated through document analysis, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed that technological resources and teacher collaboration served as methods of effective comprehension instruction. In contrast, challenges such as limited pedagogical knowledge, curriculum misalignment, and persistent language barriers hindered the implementation of comprehension strategies. The study concludes that meaningful professional development, combined with improved alignment between curriculum content and reading pedagogy, is crucial for equipping teachers to support learners' reading comprehension effectively.



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INTRODUCTION

Reading for meaning is a critical skill that underpins academic success, yet a substantial number of learners in South Africa lack this foundational ability. According to the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read for comprehension (Roux et al., 2023). This alarming figure reflects more than a learner deficit. The PIRLS results highlight persistent instructional challenges, particularly in the teaching of reading comprehension in English First Additional Language (FAL) classrooms. Despite curriculum reforms and the provision of teaching resources, many learners remain unable to engage meaningfully with a text. The root of this problem lies not only in learners' linguistic challenges but also in the extent to which teachers are equipped with both pedagogical and contextual knowledge to effectively incorporate comprehension strategies. The alarming PIRLS results indicate a national crisis in literacy education that extends beyond learner deficits and reflects deeper on the instructional shortcomings. This signals an urgent need to explore not only linguistic barriers but also to understand how teachers are equipped pedagogically to



incorporate effective comprehension strategies in classrooms. Addressing this challenge is critical, as the ability to read with understanding at Grade 4 is pivotal to learners' academic progression and long-term educational outcomes.

Globally, reading comprehension challenges are evident across multiple contexts. In the United States, insufficient access to technological tools and inadequate teacher training have been identified as key barriers to developing reading proficiency (Long & Bowles, 2024; Wagner, 2023). Similarly, in China, despite the employment of international English teachers, learners continue to struggle with understanding English texts (Zhang et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2025). In Australia, reading difficulties are compounded by economic disparities, limited educational resources, and learning conditions such as dyslexia (Serry et al., 2022; Kelso et al., 2022). These international examples underscore the widespread nature of reading comprehension challenges. However, they do not fully account for the unique sociolinguistic complexities that South African teachers face in multilingual classrooms.

This study explores the barriers and facilitators encountered by Grade 4 English FAL teachers when implementing comprehension reading strategies in the Motheo District, Free State Province. The significance of this research lies in its focus on the actual classroom realities and pedagogical practices of teachers, aiming to bridge the gap between curriculum expectations and practical implementation. This study contributes to the broader discourse on improving literacy outcomes by focusing on the teachers' role, the barriers they face, and the support they require to teach reading comprehension effectively in grade 4 English FAL classrooms.

In this literature review, we introduce three key headings that frame the discussion of reading comprehension by examining the scholarly debate on what constitutes reading comprehension strategies, their multifaceted roles in educational improvement, and the practical benefits they offer to enhance learners' understanding and critical thinking skills. Additionally, we delve into the challenges teachers face in incorporating comprehension reading strategies, considering issues such as a lack of training and the complexities of language policy transitions in South Africa's educational system.

Reading comprehension strategies are often at the center of educational discourse, occasionally being conflated with general reading skills or instructional methodologies. According to Aini (2023), comprehension reading strategies serve as developmental tools that aid in enhancing learners' ability to comprehend text, suggesting that they are part of a dynamic skill set. This perspective is supported by Yapp (2023), who argues that comprehension strategies are critical instructional tools for teachers, emphasizing a process-oriented approach to teaching reading comprehension. Additionally, Peng (2024) describes comprehension reading strategies as multi-component methods aimed at improving reading skills, highlighting their role as essential tools for educational enhancement.

However, there is a differing view among scholars such as Abenojar (2024) and Carvajal with Sanchez (2024), who consider reading comprehension strategies more as integral parts of the reading process rather than distinct entities. They contend that while these strategies focus on text comprehension, they should not be divorced from other reading aspects like vocabulary and fluency. This stance is supported by the work of Smith (2023) and Castells (2022), which collectively assert that truly effective reading strategies encompass a broad range of reading components for more integrated skill development. This approach situates comprehension strategies within the broader framework of reading abilities, where they are vital yet not isolated elements.

In the context of this study, reading comprehension strategies are defined as intentional techniques designed to enhance learners' understanding of texts through active and purposeful engagement (Ghafar, 2024; Siraj et al., 2025). Key strategies like previewing, questioning, making connections, visualizing, summarizing, and monitoring comprehension are deemed essential (Fadila et al., 2024; Kheang et al., 2024). These techniques go beyond basic literacy to engage

learners in higher-order cognitive processes, thereby preparing them for academic success by enabling them to navigate complex textual information.

Reading comprehension is important in educational contexts to assist learners with interacting effectively with written materials. To counter the ongoing challenges in reading comprehension among fourth graders, various strategies have been suggested by researchers (Ma'youf & Aburezeq, 2022; Roux et al., 2023). These strategies not only facilitate understanding but also encourage critical thinking and making meaning from texts.

A key strategy involves activating prior knowledge, where learners link new information with their existing understanding (Olifant et al., 2022; Elston et al., 2022). This method aids in contextualizing new material, enhancing comprehension. Reading aloud to learners has also been shown to be beneficial, particularly in the initial stages of reading development (Carter et al., 2024), modeling necessary reading skills like fluency and expression (Ntshikila et al., 2022; Rezaei et al., 2024). Additionally, teaching learners to make informed guesses about unknown words using context clues and word analysis skills forms part of empowering them to decode and interpret text more effectively.

According to Shapaka (2024), the mastery of reading comprehension is crucial for academic achievement, necessitating the use of effective strategies by teachers. Therefore, this demonstrates that comprehension strategies play a significant role in improving learners' reading abilities, critical thinking, and confidence in reading English (Simango, 2023; Olifant, 2024). This aligns with the current study, which intends to explore the challenges and supports within the local context to understand how teachers' use of comprehension reading strategies impacts learners' comprehension development.

The research emphasizes the importance of teachers' proficiency in comprehension strategies for effective reading instruction (Fesi & Mncube, 2021). However, Elston (2022) highlights that inadequate training leads to challenges in conveying these skills to learners. Overcrowded classrooms are another significant challenge, limiting personalized teaching approaches necessary for reading comprehension (Maseko & Mkhize, 2021). Despite suggestions for a model to incorporate these strategies (Sun et al., 2021; Bogaert et al., 2023), practical guidance for teachers remains scarce.

Maseko and Mkhize (2021) and Phala with Hugo (2022) present an alternative perspective, linking the difficulties in teaching reading comprehension to the South African language policy. They argue that the transition from native language education to English being the language of teaching and learning in Grade 4 can disrupt comprehension development, leading to comprehension gaps due to insufficient foundational support in English (FAL) (Maseko & Mkhize, 2021; Phala & Hugo, 2022).

This study employs the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) framework, initially conceptualized by Lee Shulman in the 1980s. Shulman argued that effective teaching integrates pedagogical knowledge with content knowledge, suggesting teachers need not only to understand the subject matter but also how to teach it effectively (Shulman, 1987). PCK is about how teachers can make content accessible, which is particularly relevant in teaching reading comprehension (Alka et al., 2023). In the context of this study, understanding the content (reading comprehension strategies) is not enough. Teachers must also be equipped with the pedagogical knowledge necessary to make this content accessible to learners, particularly in multilingual classrooms where English is not the learners' home language (Peyer et al., 2020; Burner & Carlsen, 2023). By using PCK, this study can explore how teachers combine their understanding of reading comprehension with teaching strategies that address the challenges learners face due to language barriers and limited prior knowledge.

Critics of PCK suggest it might not fully capture the evolving nature of education (Elvianasti et al., 2023; Tallman, 2023). PCK offers a flexible approach by allowing teachers to creatively incorporate new methods and technologies (Correia & Baptista, 2022; Vázquez-Bernal et al., 2022). This study recognizes the development of PCK requires time and experience (Mafa-

Theladi, 2024), and by examining teachers' practices, it aims to understand both the challenges and prospects of strategy incorporation, offering insights into adapting to educational changes. This study sees that the field of reading comprehension strategies is constantly evolving, and teachers' PCK develops over time as they encounter new teaching challenges and opportunities. The PCK framework, therefore, offers a useful approach for understanding how teachers adapt their strategies in response to changing educational demands.

RESEARCH METHOD

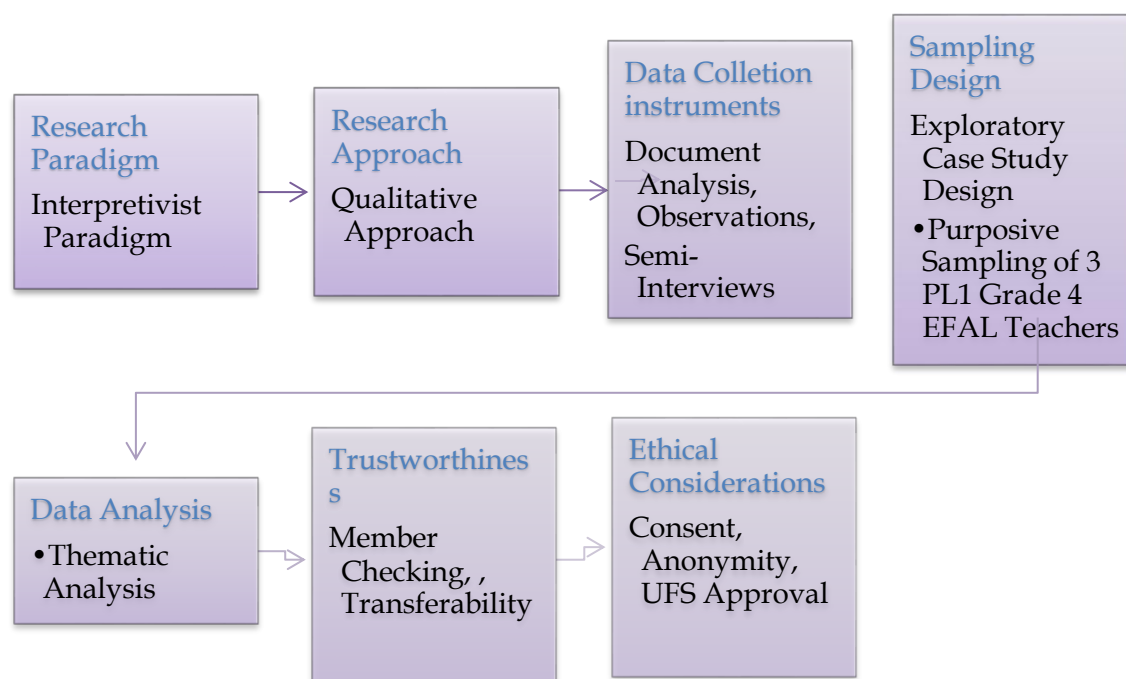


Figure 1. Below provides a visual overview of the research process followed in the study.

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm guiding this study is interpretivism, which aligns with the aim to understand the subjective meanings teachers attribute to their pedagogical practices. Interpretivism allows for an in-depth exploration of how teachers perceive and incorporate reading strategies, providing insight into the complexities of their teaching contexts (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). This paradigm is suitable, as it facilitates understanding how Grade 4 PL1 teachers incorporate comprehension strategies in their English FAL classrooms, thereby addressing the study's research objectives concerning the exploration of opportunities and challenges of incorporating comprehension reading strategies.

Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was chosen in alignment with the interpretivist paradigm, aiming to explore the phenomenon in its natural setting. Qualitative research is suitable for this study, as it seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences and practices (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). This approach involves fewer participants but focuses on depth rather than breadth, employing various data collection methods such as document analysis, participant observation, and interviews to gather rich contextual data about the incorporation of comprehension strategies by Grade 4 English FAL teachers.

Data Collection Instruments

The study used three data collection tools, which are document analysis, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis was the key method in this study, involving

the examination of teachers' lesson plans and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), providing insights into how reading comprehension strategies were planned and officially framed. Four Grade 4 English FAL teachers' lesson plans from different schools were analyzed to understand their pedagogical approaches, with CAPS offering the national curriculum context for teaching reading in South African schools (CAPS, 2011). Observations, another fundamental qualitative method, allowed firsthand insights into the practical application of these strategies, capturing the informative data of classroom interaction and teacher adaptability (Howat, 2022). Additionally, semi-structured interviews were important, facilitating deep exploration of teachers' perspectives through open-ended questions, enhancing understanding by linking document analysis with real-world classroom practices (Yin, 2009; Flick, 2020; Kakilla, 2021). Together, these methods provided a comprehensive view of reading comprehension strategy teachers' incorporation in Grade 4 English FAL classrooms.

Sampling

The study population consisted of post-level 1 (PL1) Grade 4 English First Additional Language (FAL) teachers, with a purposive sample of three teachers selected. Three teachers were selected from three public township primary schools in the Motheo District, Free State Province. PL1 teachers are classroom-based teachers who do not occupy managerial or supervisory roles, such as heads of department or principals (Kgomo, 2021; Matemane & Chauke, 2025). Post-level 1 teachers are directly responsible for delivering lessons, implementing instructional strategies, and assessing learner understanding daily. Therefore, PL1 teachers were best positioned to provide rich, practical insights into how comprehension reading strategies are incorporated into actual teaching practices. The sampling was purposive, focusing on teachers who were actively teaching Grade 4 English FAL.

To ensure that the objectives of the study were met. All three participants were qualified teachers working in similar under-resourced township school environments, allowing the study to explore common instructional realities and contextual influences on reading comprehension strategies and teaching practices. This methodological choice was made to represent the larger population of interest, acknowledging that, due to the vastness of the target group, a sample was necessary to draw feasible conclusions about the broader educational context (Flick, 2020). By focusing on this specific group, the study aimed to identify the opportunities and challenges that grade 4 English FAL teachers encounter when they are incorporating the comprehension reading strategies in their classrooms.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed a thematic analysis as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2016) and Lochmiller (2021), where data were systematically read, coded, and then organized into emergent themes. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was utilized, where data were returned to the participants for verification before being incorporated into the study (Lochmiller, 2021). The analysis was guided by the sub-research questions as shown in the result section.

Ethical Considerations

This study reports part of the findings from a master's project and adhered to ethical issues as per the university where the study was registered. Ethics was granted by the University of the Free State (research number UFS-HSD2023/2059), securing permission from the Free State Department of Education, ensuring informed consent and voluntary participation with clear options for withdrawal, and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity by de-identifying participants in all data-handling stages. These actions collectively aim to uphold ethical standards, respecting participant autonomy, privacy, and dignity throughout the research process.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and Discussion

The results of this study were organized into two overarching themes: (1) Opportunities and (2) Challenges in the incorporation of comprehension reading strategies in Grade 4 English First Additional Language (FAL) classrooms. Each theme was further broken down into sub-themes that reflect the core experiences of three Grade 4 English FAL teachers from three primary schools in the Motheo District, Free State Province. These sub-themes were identified through thematic analysis of data generated from document analysis (including the CAPS policy document and the Primary School Reading Intervention Programme (PSRIP)). The Primary School Reading Intervention Programme is a document created by the Free State Department of Education for English First Additional teachers to use as a guideline when teaching the subject in their grade 4 English FAL classrooms. Therefore, Grade 4 English FAL teachers use the PSRIP document as their lesson plan. Observations and semi-structured interviews were also employed for data collection for this study.

As shown in Table 1 below, the findings reveal that teachers identified technology advancement and collaboration initiatives as key opportunities that support their use of comprehension reading strategies. In contrast, content knowledge limitations and language barriers emerged as prominent challenges that hinder their ability to implement these strategies effectively.

Table 1. Opportunities and Challenges in Incorporating Comprehension Reading Strategies

Theme	Category	Description
Opportunities	Technology advancement	Teachers use platforms like YouTube to enhance their understanding of comprehension strategies.
	Collaboration initiatives	Peer support and sharing of strategies among colleagues improve implementation confidence.
Challenges	Content Knowledge	Teachers lack deep understanding of all elements of comprehension strategies, limiting full application.
	Language barriers	Learners struggle with English-only instruction; teachers resort to code-switching, translanguaging, and mother tongue instruction for clarity.

a Technology serves as an informal professional development tool, especially where formal training is lacking.

b Lack of training in all strategies leads to selective use, limiting learner exposure.

c While code-switching, translanguaging, and mother tongue instruction helps clarify meaning, it can hinder exposure to English vocabulary development.

Opportunities for Technology Advancement

The findings show that technology serves as an important opportunity for Grade 4 English First Additional Language (FAL) teachers in the Motheo District to enhance the incorporation of comprehension reading strategies. Teachers use digital platforms to access teaching resources and improve their understanding of comprehension instruction. Teacher 1 explained how online videos helped her visualize teaching techniques:



I was excited about the potential of technology to assist in teaching reading comprehension strategies. I watched online videos of other English teachers using various techniques, and I could see how beneficial they could be for my Grade 4s. [...] The tools and resources I saw online were not accessible to me within the classroom environment. This made it difficult to incorporate comprehension reading strategies into my teaching.

This response reflects that, although digital tools are not readily available in school, teachers seek out informal professional development opportunities outside of the classroom. Similarly, **Teacher 2** highlighted the lack of resources in her school:

Finding someone to assist you with teaching reading using comprehension reading strategies is hard. [...] I try to look online, but we do not have proper access to technology at school.

Despite these limitations, technology was consistently described by teachers as a valuable self-directed learning tool. The reliance on informal digital learning aligns with Aini (2023), who argues that comprehension strategies require ongoing development through exposure to evolving pedagogical techniques. Yapp, de Graaff, and van den Bergh (2023) also note that observing best practices through technology supports teachers' process-oriented instructional design, further reinforcing the potential role of digital platforms in developing Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK).

Document analysis of CAPS shows that while the policy emphasizes reading comprehension development, it does not explicitly provide digital resources or recommend the use of technology for strategy implementation (CAPS, 2011). This omission reinforces teachers' dependence on external digital content to fill knowledge gaps, echoing the findings of Alka et al. (2023), who argue that informal learning plays a critical role in teacher professional development when formal training is insufficient.

The absence of practical, accessible examples in official documents reinforces teachers' reliance on external digital content to bridge this gap.

The observations in School A and School B revealed that no digital devices were used during classroom instruction. Teachers relied on chalkboards, textbooks, and printed worksheets. This gap between teachers' interest in digital tools and lack of classroom access illustrates the tension between intent and implementation. This shows that technology is not formally incorporated into school instruction; it offers an informal yet vital support system for teachers seeking to enhance their comprehension strategy knowledge. However, the lack of infrastructure within schools continues to constrain the practical use of such tools in classroom settings.

Opportunities for Collaboration Initiatives

The study found that collaboration among teachers provides a valuable opportunity for supporting the incorporation of comprehension reading strategies in Grade 4 English FAL classrooms. Teachers reported that peer support, both formally and informally, helped them to understand and apply comprehension strategies more effectively. Teacher 1 shared how face-to-face collaboration within the school supported her practice:

When I get stuck with how to teach a comprehension reading strategy, I ask my colleagues. They always share their ways of doing it. Sometimes they show me examples from their classes, and that really helps me understand better.

This illustrates how peer-led knowledge sharing helps to resolve practical challenges during instruction. Likewise, Teacher 2 discussed how collaboration made it easier to interpret departmental documents:

Last week I asked my colleague to explain something from the document that was given to us. I was struggling to understand how to make learners visualise a text. My colleague explained it in a simple way that made it easier for me to teach.

This reinforces the idea that collaboration can act as a bridge between policy and practice, especially when teachers struggle to interpret PSRIP document guidance on comprehension reading strategies.

From a digital collaboration perspective, Teacher 3 mentioned the use of messaging platforms:

There is a WhatsApp group that we have as English teachers. If I am confused about something, then I will send a WhatsApp message to the group. But I have realised that as English teachers, we struggle with the incorporation of comprehension reading strategies

She further shared:

I once sent a text in the WhatsApp group asking my colleagues how they are incorporating all the elements of comprehension reading strategies when they are teaching reading for comprehension.

These reflections show that digital collaboration platforms, though useful, also expose the shared struggles among teachers, pointing out a need for more structured professional development. These findings reflect Roux et al. (2023) assertion that collaborative engagement enhances comprehension instruction practices. However, the unevenness of knowledge even within collaborative circles highlights the need for more equitable training support.

Observations from School A and School C did not reveal any formal collaboration meetings taking place. However, informal collaboration was evident through spontaneous peer discussions before and after lessons. This highlights that teacher collaboration is largely informal and self-initiated, rather than embedded within structured professional learning communities.

Challenges Content Knowledge

The key challenge that emerged from the data was the limited content knowledge of comprehension reading strategies among Grade 4 English FAL teachers. Teachers expressed difficulty in fully understanding and applying all the elements of comprehension strategies in their classrooms, which in turn affected their confidence and instructional effectiveness.

Teacher 2 openly admitted to struggling with both learner diversity and her own content knowledge:

To be honest, we do have learners who should be attending special schools, and it is not easy to teach these learners how to read for comprehension. But besides that, I cannot shy away from acknowledging that I also do not have knowledge on teaching comprehension reading strategies

This statement points to a dual challenge, which is the lack of training and inadequate support in teaching learners with diverse needs, highlighting how limited pedagogical content knowledge hampers effective teaching, regardless of learner ability.

The PSRIP document provides guidance on reading activities such as prediction, summarizing, questioning, and visualizing, but it does not offer in-depth practical support on how to teach these strategies step-by-step, especially for multilingual English FAL classrooms. Teachers are expected to interpret and implement these strategies independently, often without adequate training.

Teacher 2 further described difficulty interpreting curriculum documents:

Last week I asked my colleague to explain to me something from the document that was given to us. [...] I was finding it hard to understand how I make learners visualize.

Similarly, Teacher 3 explained the difficulty of covering all elements of comprehension strategies within limited instructional time:

It is not easy to incorporate all the elements of comprehension reading strategies. I am saying this because the elements of comprehension reading strategies are a lot for one class period that is 45 minutes.

While this points to time constraints, it also reveals that limited understanding of the strategies leads teachers to select only what they feel confident using – typically a small subset of the broader comprehension toolkit.

During classroom observations in School B, the teacher focused mostly on literal comprehension questions (e.g., “What happened in the story?”) and skipped over higher-order questions such as inference, prediction, and evaluation. When probed during post-observation



discussions, the teacher admitted she was “not very comfortable” teaching those aspects because she was “*never shown how to do it.*” Despite having access to policy documents like CAPS and PSRIP, the lack of practical professional development remains a barrier to successful implementation. These findings echo those of Fesi and Mncube (2021) and Elston et al. (2022), who highlight that the absence of adequate training hinders effective strategy implementation. Using Shulman’s (1987) Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) framework, these limitations underscore the gap between knowing what to teach and knowing how to teach it effectively.

Challenges Language Barriers

Another significant challenge that emerged from the data was the issue of language barriers, which affected learners’ ability to engage with comprehension reading tasks in Grade 4 English First Additional Language (FAL) classrooms. Teachers reported that most learners lacked the necessary English vocabulary and fluency to access meaning in texts, forcing them to adapt their instructional approaches. Teacher 1 described how she often had to code-switch between English and isiXhosa to support learner understanding:

Code-switching assists a lot when you want learners to know what they are reading. Otherwise, they would not know what they are reading if the text is not translated into their home language. I use their home language to explain what the text is saying and the questions that are being asked

Similarly, Teacher 2 stated that she used Sesotho to translate complex words during reading lessons:

I cannot teach them everything in English because they will not understand. I explain difficult words in Sesotho so that they can follow the story.

These responses reflect how teachers employ translanguaging and mother tongue instruction to scaffold learners’ comprehension. However, this practice, while helpful in the short term, can inadvertently limit exposure to English vocabulary, which is essential for developing reading proficiency in an additional language. This is consistent with findings by Maseko with Mkhize (2021) and Phala with Hugo (2022), who emphasize the difficulties associated with South Africa’s language policy shift in Grade 4. Although teachers demonstrated adaptive strategies aligned with PCK development (Alka et al., 2023), Elston et al. (2022) caution that such adaptations must be carefully balanced to avoid undermining learners’ long-term English proficiency.

It was also observed in School A, where the teacher frequently translated entire reading passages into isiXhosa during lessons. While this helped learners engage with the material, it meant that learners were rarely required to process meaning directly in English. The same trend was observed in School C, where comprehension questions were read and answered in Sesotho.

Teachers also expressed concern about the lack of direct equivalents between English and African languages. Teacher 1 noted:

Sometimes you struggle to find the right word in isiXhosa when you are trying to explain what is in the English text. Some words do not have the same meaning, so learners may still get confused.

These insights show how linguistic mismatches between English and learners’ home languages can lead to misunderstandings, especially with abstract vocabulary and figurative language.

According to CAPS (2011), English FAL instruction should be conducted mostly in English, with support in learners’ home language where necessary. However, the policy does not clearly define how or when to use code-switching or translanguaging effectively. This creates a grey area, leaving teachers to make instructional decisions without formal guidance, which often leads to inconsistencies across classrooms.

The findings indicate that learners’ difficulties with English as the language of instruction force teachers to adapt by using code-switching, translanguaging, and mother tongue explanations. While these strategies help to make reading comprehension more accessible, they



also present challenges in maintaining consistency and accuracy of the intended meaning in English texts.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the crucial role that comprehension reading strategies play in shaping Grade 4 English First Additional Language (FAL) learners' reading development. The findings revealed that while opportunities such as technology advancement and teacher collaboration support the incorporation of comprehension strategies, significant challenges persist, particularly concerning teachers' limited content knowledge and the language barriers faced by learners in English-only instruction.

The importance of this research lies in its illumination of the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities. Using the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) framework, this study shows that effective comprehension instruction requires more than access to materials; it demands the integration of content knowledge and pedagogical skill. Without strengthening teachers' professional capacities, particularly in multilingual contexts, the implementation of comprehension strategies remains uneven and fragmented. These findings stress the urgent need for targeted professional development that not only builds teachers' knowledge of comprehension strategies but also equips them with the skills to adapt these strategies within linguistically diverse classrooms.

The implications of this study extend to curriculum designers, policymakers, and educational trainers. A more cohesive alignment between curricular documents and classroom practice is essential to ensure that teachers receive consistent guidance. Moreover, professional development programs must address both the theoretical understanding and practical application of comprehension reading strategies while recognising the linguistic realities faced by South African learners.

Future research should explore longitudinal interventions that monitor how ongoing professional development in comprehension strategies impacts learner outcomes over time. Additionally, comparative studies across provinces or school quintiles could reveal further in-depth research on how comprehension strategy incorporation differs according to school contexts. Finally, research into the role of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool for comprehension strategy instruction would provide valuable insights into supporting learners' bilingual and biliterate development.

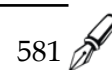
This study ultimately contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between teacher knowledge, instructional practice, and learner success in reading comprehension. It calls for systemic efforts to empower teachers, bridge curriculum-practice gaps, and foster reading comprehension skills essential for academic achievement.

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