



English Teachers' Experiences with Intervention Strategy Implementation Addressing Literacy Skill Gaps in Progressed Learners

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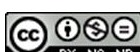
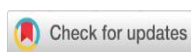
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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Grade 7 English teachers' experiences in implementing inclusive intervention strategies to address the literacy skills gap for progressed learners. Fewer studies exist for teachers' implementation of intervention strategies for literacy skills gaps and the criteria on which they are based. Thus, the study examines the existing intervention strategies for addressing the literacy skills gap and their effectiveness. A qualitative case study, framed within the interpretivist paradigm, was implemented in six primary schools in the Johannesburg North District. Six Grade 7 English teachers with 4-16 years of experience implementing intervention strategies for progressed learners were purposively selected. Non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis methods were used to collect data, which were then interpreted thematically through the lens of sociocultural learning theory to extract findings, limitations, and recommendations. Findings demonstrated that teachers' intervention strategies are ineffective in marginalized contexts due to the intersectionality of pedagogical and social-related challenges. Additionally, teachers' lack of sufficient training, resources, support, and unclear policy guidelines related to the implementation of support interventions sets them up for failure. Consequently, this study advocates for sufficient teacher training and support focused on their knowledge of intervention strategies for progressed learners and knowledge of teaching literacy.



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INTRODUCTION

For all learners to understand basic economic concepts, socialize well with others, and make informed social and political decisions, they must be well-equipped in their literacy skills and competencies. While literacy skills and competencies are a need for all learners, no matter the grade they are in, as seen (Phala & Hugo, 2022; Spaul & Taylor, 2022; Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2021), the reality is that gaps in the literacy of most progressed learners are far below average and continue to complicate their educational achievements in South Africa (Brahmbhatt, 2020; Moagi, 2020; Hlasa, 2022; Bhagwonparsadh & Pule, 2023). Although all learners are expected to have acquired sufficient literacy skills, including reading, viewing, listening, speaking, writing, and understanding language structures, by the time they enter Grade 7 (SA Department of Basic Education, 2011), this has not been the case. Evidence from South African-based studies indicates that a significant proportion of progressed learners struggle to read symbols in text or posters, and they also have difficulty writing their ideas accurately (Hlasa & Gcelu, 2024; Muedi et al., 2021; Mavuso, 2022). Similarly, Mavuso (2022) demonstrated that these learners could not write their own names and had repeated grades many times. The implication of poorly developed literacy skills results in their inability to make sense of the written texts, extract meaning, and



expand their vocabulary (Mavuso, 2022; Bhagwonparsadh & Pule, 2023; Hlasa & Gcelu, 2024; Dube, 2025). Also, teachers themselves are ambivalent on how their gaps in literacy progress may be accommodated (Bester & Conway, 2021; Engelbrecht, 2020; Dube, 2025). In addition, poorly developed literacy skills result in progressed learners' inability to meet grade-level requirements for passing, which necessitates well-thought-out and structured interventions, as Khan et al. (2025) & Muedi et al. (2021) advised. Additionally, most authors raised concerns about how these progressed learners will cope in their subsequent grades, given their gaps in reading and writing abilities (Brahmbhatt, 2020; Ramputla, 2020; Dube, 2025). Put simply, progressed learners are learners who have moved up to their next higher grade despite failing to meet the criteria for passing (Muedi et al., 2021; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021; Mogale & Malatji, 2025), which means that they need structured and well-thought-out support to cope with their academic demands. This then presents teachers with increased work, as they must come up with well-thought-out literacy intervention strategies to successfully support these learners. Without this support, a large group of learners may become overwhelmed, disheartened, and drop out of school (Mogale & Malatji, 2025; Mogale & Modipane, 2021).

Many local and international literacy analyses are clear about South African literacy's current state, which needs well-thought-out, practical solutions, as advised by Khan et al. (2025). For instance, the latest results of the Progress International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2021 found that nearly 81% of Grade 4 learners tested in South Africa failed to meet the requirements for passing due to reading and writing inabilities in both English and their home language (Department of Basic Education, 2023; Phala & Hugo, 2022). Still on gaps in literacy in South Africa, research done by many authors in South Africa revealed that most primary and high school learners in South Africa face significant challenges due to difficulties with reading and writing (Meiklejohn et al., 2021; Olifant, 2024), leading to the inability to grasp concepts and skills. Thus, this demonstrates a pressing need for better and well-thought-out support interventions, informed by teachers' experiences as literacy developers and supporters in class, which may practically show how gaps in the literacy of progressed learners may be accommodated.

Research demonstrated the intersectionality of many challenges that may be responsible for the literacy deficit in most learners. The use of English as the language of teaching and learning, instead of their dominant languages, as per the need by the Education Language Policy of 2015, is critiqued by Venketsamy & Sibanda (2021) and Khan et al. (2025) for being responsible for the lowest literacy skills and competencies in these learners. Another challenge is that progressed learners themselves form a large group of learners who are in desperate need of various types of support from their teachers (Brahmbhatt, 2020; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021), making it difficult to receive personalized help in class (Dube, 2025). Furthermore, the lack of resources made available to enable learners to catch up with their classmates on missed skills, poverty at home, and low parental literacy support account for low literacy skills (Graham & Mtsweni, 2024; Moagi, 2020; Molongwane et al., 2024). In addition, other challenges related to the lack of literacy need focused materials, such as functioning libraries, reading materials, and visual aids, which also complicate teachers' ability to successfully address literacy gaps. (Khan et al., 2025; Phala & Hugo, 2022; Dube & Ndaba, 2021; Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2025). Additionally, other challenges related to the excessive workload of teachers, overcrowded classrooms with mixed-ability learners, and the lack of time devoted to improving literacy skills have been critiqued mainly for contributing to the low literacy skills and competencies of advanced learners (Phala & Hugo, 2022; Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2021). These challenges will continue to perpetuate inequality and epistemic access to these learners the longer they go without remedy.

Apart from the challenges mentioned above, teachers' readiness, skills, and specialized competencies related to the implementation of these intervention strategies are other key challenges, complicating their abilities to address gaps in the literacy of advanced learners (Muedi et al., 2021; Ramputla, 2020; Mavuso, 2022). Supporting the above, Mogale and Malatji (2023) mentioned that the success and failure of intervention strategies lie in the type of support given.



Thus, teachers must be well-informed and follow the most accurate procedures when providing support and intervention strategies to accommodate the needs and preferred learning styles of all learners. However, reviewed studies have critiqued the fact that most teachers are without specialized skills and knowledge related to designing and implementing more practical and inclusive intervention strategies for addressing gaps in the literacy of progressed learners in mixed-ability classes (Molongwane et al., 2024; Moagi, 2020), which complicates the effectiveness of these intervention strategies. Without sufficient teacher support and training on the knowledge of intervention strategies, they may not be able to assist with the implementation of intervention strategies.

In addition, most authors have critiqued the unclear implementation guidelines of the progression policy itself for worsening gaps in the literacy of progressed learners (Brahmbhatt, 2020; Muedi et al., 2021). While progression is largely used as a support intervention strategy for addressing high rates of learner dropout and retention issues (Department of Basic Education, 2016), it does not offer any practical solutions and working guidelines on how the literacy of the progressed learners and their preferred learning may be accommodated in large classes full of mixed abilities (Hlasa, 2022; Hlasa & Gcelu, 2024; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). Similarly, authors such as Muedi et al. (2021) and Makonko (2020) have critiqued the progression approach for being unclear and less effective in showing practically how the gaps in literacy of progressed learners may be accommodated in the classroom setting. Thus, implementing progression policy requirements hinders both progressed and non-progressed learners' educational achievements and future trajectories by failing to practically demonstrate how their needs can be accommodated in their next higher grades (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021; Dube, 2025).

While teachers are currently implementing various types of literacy-focused programs at the school level, learners' reading and writing difficulties continue to have dire implications in township schools, presenting a challenging task to address (Kolobe & Mihai, 2021; Mahlangu et al., 2024). Literacy-focused initiatives such as the implementation of the National Reading Strategy (2008), the use of spelling bee competitions, Drop All and Read (DEAR), book clubs, and library corners aimed to improve the language literacy of all learners in South Africa as support interventions (SA Department of Basic Education, 2008; Van Staden & Roux, 2022). However, they have not been successful, as many progressed learners still face enormous obstacles in their literacy learning and development. (Bhagwonparsadh & Pule, 2023; Brahmbhatt, 2020; Muedi et al., 2021). Equally, authors like Van Staden and Roux (2022) critiqued these literacy-focused programs, saying that they are more of slogans than implementable action plans and practical solutions. This then necessitates an urgent need for intervention strategies that are practical, structured, and well-thought-out, which can be put into action to circumvent the ongoing literacy skills gap in advanced learners.

Consequently, the gap from the above findings inspired the researcher to explore teachers' experiences with the implementation of intervention strategies to understand what they are, how well they understand them, their effectiveness, and the criteria on which they are based. Since intervention strategies can ensure that no learner is left behind in their learning, regardless of their literacy level, it is imperative to investigate them as an important curriculum support for these learners. Additionally, this study will understand these intervention strategies through the lens of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory to determine their successes and failures. Again, the study will guide policy decisions related to the implementation of support intervention by encouraging the implementation of a multilingual approach to teaching and individualized instructions when support is offered to advanced learners. Lastly, teachers must be sufficiently trained, supported, and provided with resources to fully implement support intervention instructions that follow a one-size-fits-one approach. Thus, this study aims to explore the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of Grade 7 English teachers regarding the implementation of intervention strategies for progressed learners with literacy skills gaps?

- What criteria are these intervention strategies based on?
- How do the progressed learners themselves respond to the intervention strategies?

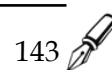
LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies reviewed show that while education policies advocate for proper literacy support intervention strategies (SA Department of Basic Education, 2011; Department of Basic Education, 2014), teachers are not implementing them as expected due to many contextual factors (Mogale & Modipane, 2021; Maree et al., 2023). The 2014 Screening Identification Assessment Support policy implementation guidelines in South Africa stipulate that learners who experience difficulties in their educational achievement should be supported by their teachers in class and beyond the school timetable (SA Department of Basic Education, 2014). While this is true, the reality is that the guidelines of these education legislative frameworks do not specify the type or nature of support that teachers must offer, which often leads to their ineffectiveness (Brahmbhatt, 2020; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). While implementation guidelines for progression and retention policies are being adopted and put into action worldwide, authors are divided on the benefits, with some arguing in favor and others arguing against these practices. Those who argue against progression demonstrated that it does not specify how gaps in the literacy skills of learners will be accommodated in their next grade, along with the resources required (Munje & Maarman, 2016; Ndaba, 2020; Makhanya, 2021). Again, the progression policy implementation guidelines do not give practical guidance on how gaps in the literacy of progressed learners will be addressed and the criteria these intervention strategies should be based on (Kika & Kotze, 2019; Chidi et al., 2021), resulting in their ineffectiveness. On the other hand, Dube (2025) critiqued progression policy implementation stipulations by stating that these learners never catch up due to limited time and well-thought-out intervention strategies supported by research, leading them to drop out of school. Additionally, a South African-based study by Nkosi and Adebayo (2021) critiqued the implementation of the progression policy for failing to consider that learners who have progressed from a large group require a variety of literacy support interventions and face different challenges. The implication here is that some teachers must deal with underprepared learners, which complicates their morale and makes them less interested in supporting these learners (Hlasa & Gcelu, 2024; Brahmbhatt, 2020). Also, the gap here is that less attention has been given to teachers' experiences with these intervention strategies, learners' responses to them, and the criteria on which they need to be based on to serve the purpose for which they were designed. However, very few studies reported on the advantages of the progression policy regarding its effectiveness in enhancing literacy skills and competencies for progressed learners.

For instance, the South African Department of Basic Education (2015) argued in support of progression, as it allows learners to progress through age cohorts, reducing the high rate of dropouts. On the other hand, Dlamini (2020) and Kika and Kotze (2019) provided evidence that progression keeps many learners within the system. Also, in favor of grade progression, author Maogi (2020) states that it reduces challenges such as class congestion that may happen due to the retention of learners. While this might be true to some extent, most teachers are ambivalent about practical ways of supporting these learners with their lowest literacy and the criteria on which these support intervention strategies must be based. Hence, this study is needed to explore the experiences of Grade 7 English teachers on what they do as literacy support in their class to identify a widely accepted approach on how gaps in the literacy of progressed learners may be remediated through well-thought-out and structured interventions.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Teachers

According to Shulman (1986), teachers should possess specialized knowledge and practical skills to teach a particular skill, concept, or subject successfully. In support of the above, Santos and Castro (2021) advocated for the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of teachers, as it enables them to successfully teach specific skills or concepts, particularly when they are poorly equipped



in teaching methods and strategies. For this study, while the success and failures of intervention strategies largely depend on teachers' understanding and knowledge (Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025), most reviewed studies found that teachers' knowledge of intervention strategies and knowledge of teaching literacy in general is lacking, thereby complicating the effectiveness of any intervention strategies (Brahmbhatt, 2020; Bester & Conway, 2021). Thus, the PCK of teachers is imperative in developing and implementing literacy-focused support intervention strategies that will bring out the best in each learner, thereby effectively gaining literacy skills and competencies (Santos & Castro, 2021). Without this, progressed learners with significant and wide gaps may not benefit from teachers' daily lessons, as they need personalized and well-thought-out intervention strategies that match their learning styles.

Teachers' Awareness of Learners' Diversity and Knowledge of Literacy

Knowing how each learner learns and differs from others is a prerequisite for teachers to effectively support learners who struggle with literacy (Davids, 2020). Progressed learners are a large group who learn differently and require personalized help to learn more effectively (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). Thus, teachers must be well-grounded in theories and teaching methods related to literacy skills development, which will take full advantage of these learners' differences. Without specialized knowledge, they may not know which strategies to use in developing literacy skills and competence (Yoro et al., 2020; Bless, 2020). Even though Spaul and Pretorius (2019) consider teachers to be responsible for the literacy skills development and competencies of all learners, no matter their start in literacy, many studies have demonstrated that teachers lack literacy pedagogies and teaching methods (Englebrecht, 2020). This prevents them from identifying learners' literacy needs and coming up with suitable interventions.

Teachers' Knowledge of Literacy Support Interventions in Large Classes of Mixed Abilities

While Mavuso (2022) advocated for teachers to possess practical knowledge and specialized skills of how to measure learners' literacy skills and competencies so that they could remediate areas of concern, Merga (2020), on the other hand, argued that it remains unclear how teachers implement their teaching approaches to accommodate the learning needs of the learners, given their limited knowledge. While Spuall (2019a) argued that the success of any intervention lies largely in teachers' knowledge of the intervention strategies, Mavuso (2022), on the other hand, made a case that most teachers are ambivalent about the support interventions accommodating the learning needs and learning preferences of each learner, which prevents them from supporting learners. Most teachers were not trained on how to support learners struggling with reading and writing inabilities (Fesi et al., 2021; Meiklejohn et al., 2021). Additionally, Muedi et al. (2021) demonstrated that support interventions focused on literacy skills gaps of the progressed learners are presently unavailable. Thus, in the absence of widely used and well-thought-out interventions, as well as limited knowledge of interventions among teachers, there is a pressing need to explore the perspectives and experiences of Grade 7 English teachers on using interventions to address literacy deficits in progressed learners through the lens of sociocultural learning theory.

Social-related Challenges Hinder Teachers' Ability to Implement Intervention Strategies for Progressed Learners.

Most township schools experience large class sizes with mixed abilities, complicating the quality of learning and practical learning (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2025; Phala & Hugo, 2022). Similarly, Wester and Meier (2020) demonstrated that when classes are large with mixed abilities, spotting learners who may then need additional personalized help and giving that help may be a complicated exercise for many teachers. (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2025; West & Meier, 2020). Furthermore, the scarcity of need-specific resources in most township schools has been critiqued by many authors as a significant factor contributing to poor literacy development among learners



(Ndaba & Dube, 2021; Phala & Hugo, 2022). The absence of functional libraries and reading material continued to complicate educational achievements in most township schools (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). Thus, without properly graded readers, written materials, and working libraries, interventions – no matter how effective they may be – may not yield the positive development of literacy skills and competence, as critiqued by (Dube & Ndaba, 2021; Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2025).

Another challenge is that progressed learners themselves form a large group of learners requiring different types of support from their teachers, which can be a challenging task for teachers in large classes with mixed abilities (Brahmbhatt, 2020; Hlasa & Gcelu, 2024; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). Furthermore, the lack of time allocated for teachers to implement inclusive support is another key challenge responsible for gaps in the literacy of advanced learners, as noted by Makonko (2020) and Makhanya (2021). The issue of the timetable primarily hinders teachers' efforts and plans to provide personalized support and multiple learning opportunities (Main et al., 2023). Also, authors like Mavuso & Malahlela (2022) critiqued the lack of parental support at home in their children's literacy as being responsible for some learners' inability to gain literacy. Additionally, the use of the English language, which is often not their native language, is critiqued by Sibanda & Tshehla (2025) as a factor contributing to low literacy levels among most learners. Unless these challenges are given the attention they deserve, a large group of progressed learners may not receive well-thought-out and personalized help with their low literacy skills. Hence, well-thought-out and practical literacy support intervention strategies tailored to the personal needs, as outlined in sociocultural learning theory, may be practical if applied correctly.

RESEARCH METHOD

The following section explains the methodology implemented in this study. The flow chart for this study is shown in Figure 1 below.

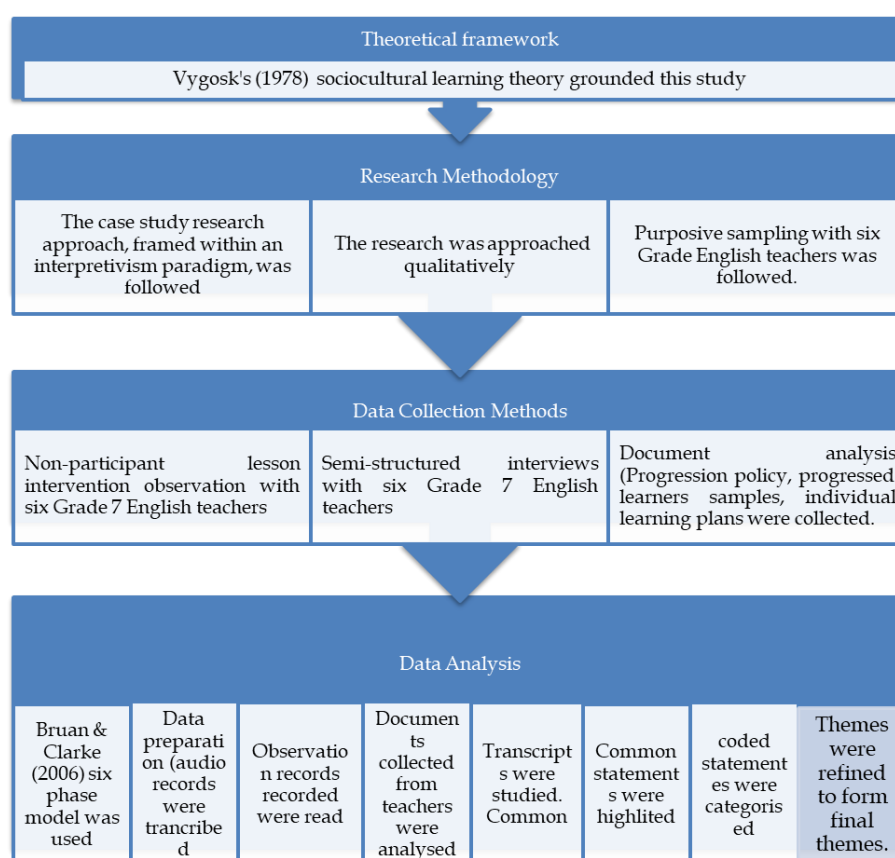


Figure 1. Show the research process flow chart

Theoretical Framework Implemented

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory to explore teachers' implementation of their support intervention strategies addressing gaps in the literacy of advanced learners. Vygotsky (1978) demonstrated that literacy skills and competencies are embedded in social processes, which means that they can only happen through social interaction with others (Yusof, 2021; Ortega, 2023). This simply means that learning literacy skills and competencies is seen as being actively involved in activities that enable learners to gain societal symbols and meanings (Huang, 2021; Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). In other words, this theory puts a strong emphasis on the influence of social and cultural components in learners' learning, development, and growth (as seen by Zhou, 2024). Accordingly, Vygotsky (1978) values social interaction and culture because what learners learn about literacy skills and competencies in class and outside of the classroom is strongly influenced by their out-of-school social and cultural worlds (Yusof, 2021; Zhou, 2024). This shows that learners learn from their peers through having discussions with them and from their surroundings as well (Davids, 2020). Additionally, the theory also emphasizes the Zone of Proximal Development, which is related to scaffolding, to show that learners can only learn new skills with the help of adults (Huang, 2021; Zhou, 2024). In this study, the focus is on understanding teachers' intervention strategies implemented to accommodate gaps in the literacy of progressed learners. By examining these social and cultural factors influencing learners' learning, we can gain a deeper understanding of what these intervention strategies are and the criteria they are based on to be effective. Furthermore, we can also understand that literacy skills and competencies are learned through the support of their peers, teachers, and parents at home through social interaction (Davids, 2020). Thus, teachers at the school level should give numerous literacy-focused opportunities for learners to practice their literacy skills and competencies with the assistance of their peers and teachers (Huang, 2021). Additionally, this can also help us understand that support intervention strategies must be personalized and implemented within the 'zones' of each learner until they achieve mastery. Thus, the intervention strategies must be provided right there in learners' zones and gradually removed as learners gain independence, as seen by Ortega (2023).

Research Paradigm

The interpretivism paradigm served as the guide for this study. The interpretivist paradigm was crucial, as the researcher sought to address the issue interrogated by interpreting the perspectives and real-life experiences of Grade 7 English teachers who develop and implement intervention strategies, as advised by Alharahsheh and Pius (2020). Again, interpretivism allowed for a deeper understanding of what support intervention strategies teachers implement and the criteria on which they are based to determine their successes and failures.

Research Approach

The qualitative case study design investigated teachers' experiences with implementing intervention strategies addressing literacy deficits in advanced learners to evaluate their successes and failures. Additionally, authors like Oranga & Matere (2023) have advocated for this approach to research because it can capture the essence of an interrogated issue from the selected participants. Thus, this research approach and design helped this study understand what these intervention strategies are, the criteria they are based on, and how well teachers understood them.

Sampling

The purposive sampling method was followed to select Grade 7 English teachers who intentionally teach or have taught advanced learners. Most authors argued that selecting participants with valuable insights and experience into the issue in question informs the study. (Thomas, 2022). In this case, six grade 7 English teachers with 4-16 years of experience from six primary schools in the township were purposively selected. Furthermore, these teachers were

selected based on the criteria that they have taught progressed learners, have used support intervention strategies in their teaching careers, are qualified for English teaching, and have been teaching for more than four years. Additionally, these teachers were in township primary schools under Johannesburg North District, which was key in this study, as advised by (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Each teacher's name was given a code, T1 to T6.

Figure 2. Shows how sampling was done and the criteria followed in selecting teachers.

Pseudonym Coded names	Level of education Descriptions	Gender	Title Descriptions	
			Years of experience	Grade taught
T1	Honours	Female	11	6& 7
T2	Honours	Female	16	7
T3	Degree	Female	10	5&7
T4	Honours	Male	8	5& 7
T5	Degree	Male	14	7
T6	Degree	Female	4	6&7

Data Collection Tools

This study used triangulation methods, including non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, to collect rich data from teachers. Ellis (2023) supports non-participant observation as a successful method for documenting events as they occur without the need to ask others. In this study, six intervention lessons for grade 7 teachers were observed and recorded accordingly. The researcher observed but did not take part in data collection at all primary schools. The specific strategies for literacy support employed by teachers, types of interventions applied, and materials observed, including the reactions of progressed learners, were recorded and subsequently interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and the reviewed literature, as Kekeya (2020) advised.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the second method for data collection. In this case, teachers discussed their support intervention strategies in one-on-one interactions and face-to-face settings, as Ruslin et al. (2022) observed. They are more practical given their ability to understand participants' feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about the issue interrogated (Belina, 2022). In this case, teachers were questioned about the nature of these interventions, the materials used when they are implemented, and the criteria on which they are based. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to extract themes, findings, and limitations.

Document analysis was the last method used for data collection. The document analysis method analyzed how teachers used support interventions and criteria that must be based on policy stipulations to gain more insights into them, as seen by Morgan (2022). In this study, all documentary records, such as policies on progression, samples of progressed learners, lesson plans, intervention programs, and timetables, were gathered from teachers during class observation and analyzed against the sociocultural learning theory to evaluate their relevance, successes, and failures in addressing literacy-related gaps.



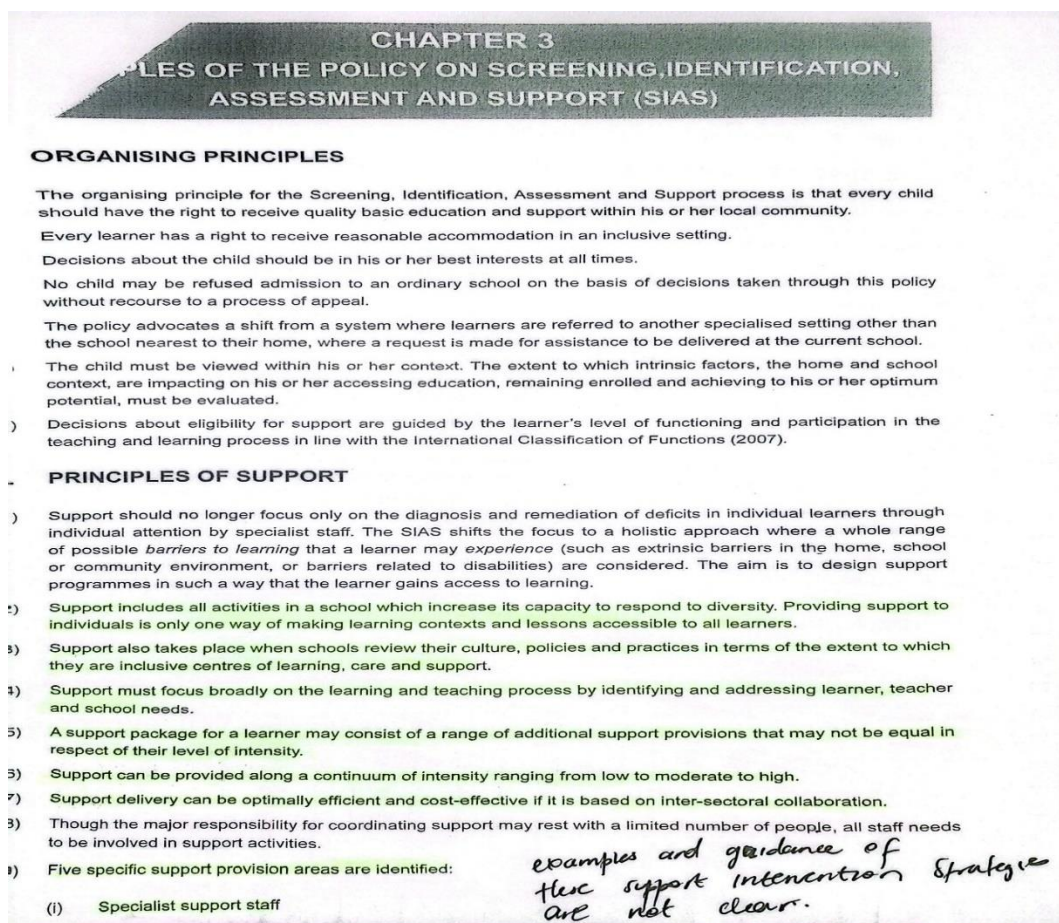


Figure 3. Shows an example of a policy interpreted

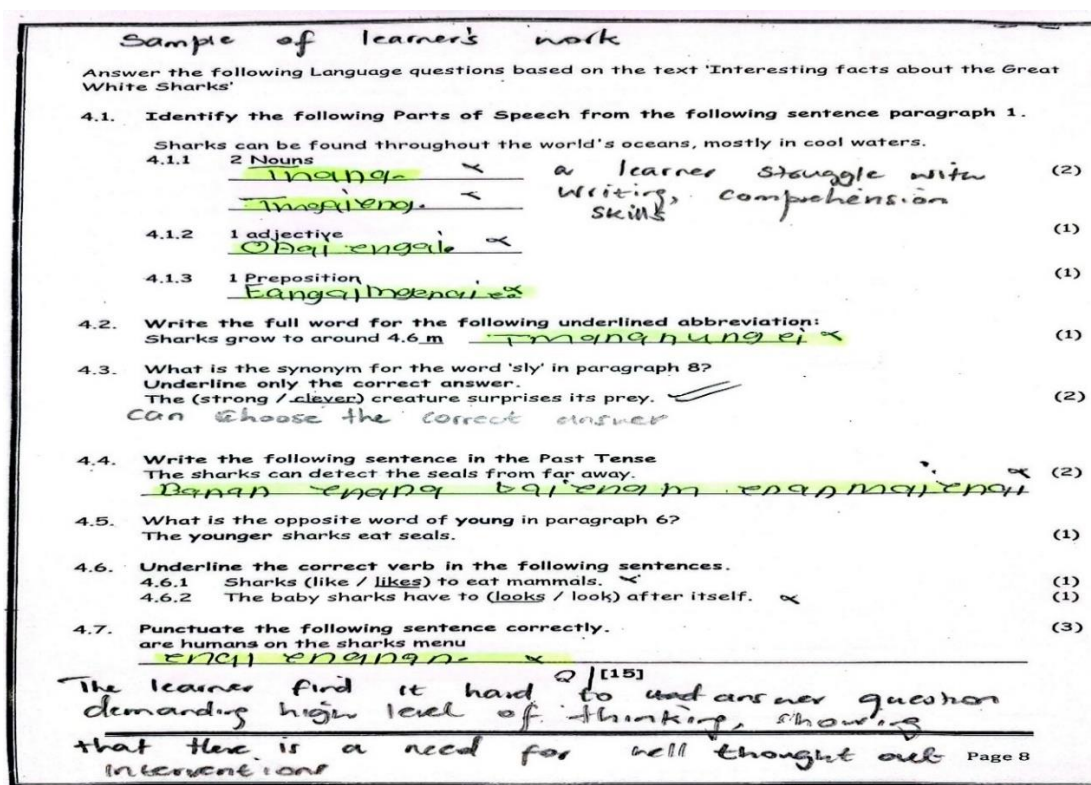


Figure 4. Progressed learners' sample work interpreted against the applied theoretical framework

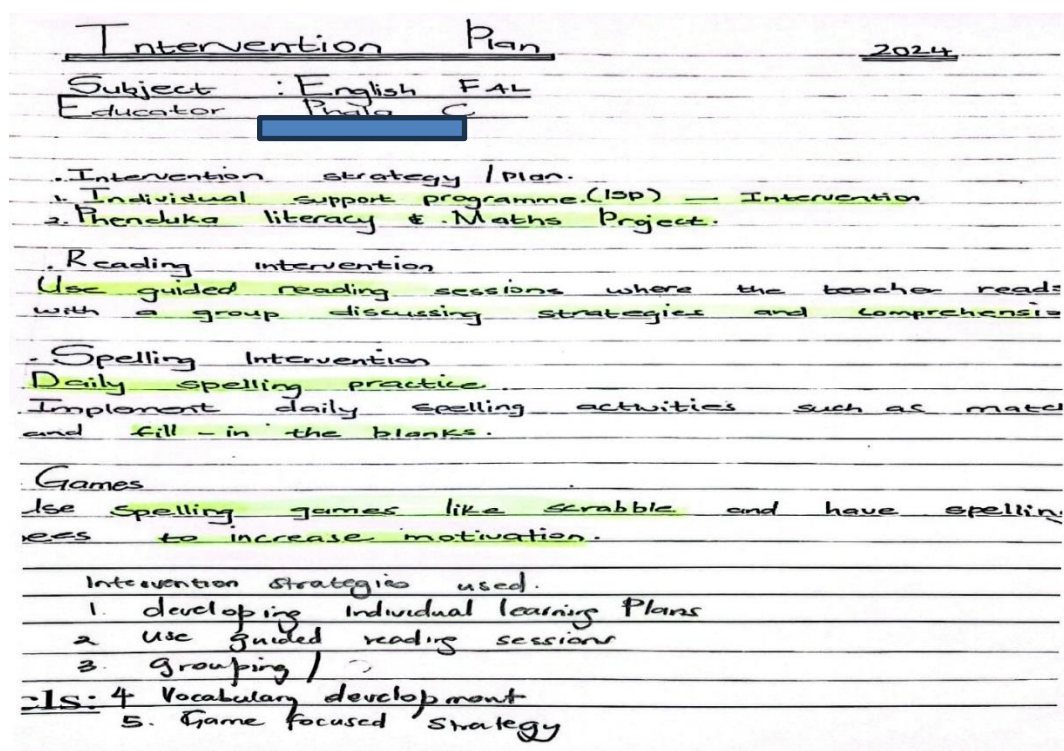


Figure 5. The teacher's intervention plan is interpreted against the applied theoretical framework

Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis guidelines were followed in this study to interpret and make sense of the gathered data from six schools by the researcher. Thematic data analysis recognizes, explains, and understands the themes present in acquired information. (Dawadi, 2020). In this case, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model was followed to extract developing themes, recommendations, limitations, and conclusions. The audio recording of each interview was transcribed and retyped in a Word document to ensure that the exact words of the teachers are accurately captured. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Before the transcripts were finalized, the researcher listened to the recording again to ensure that the words of the participants were captured correctly. The data was then presented in the form of a table. The researcher read the data word for word to identify common phrases, sentences, and statements related to how intervention strategies are implemented (Dawadi, 2020). The sentences with similar meaning were coded using the same color, which was later used for forming a theme. (Rosairo, 2023). In addition, lesson intervention notes were used to verify teachers' intervention strategies. The teachers' material used, the teachers' intervention strategy, and the teachers themselves were observed, as well as how learners themselves responded to the applied interventions. Similarly, teachers' documents, such as their lesson plans, intervention plans, individual learning plans of learners, and samples of learners' work, were interpreted against the applied theoretical framework to evaluate their successes and failures.

Figure 5. Shows how the data transcription from the interview was done

Transcribed data	Codes	Category	Themes
Teachers' Interview Question	Grouping	Intervention strategies	Support for intervention strategies
(a) What specific support do you give to these progressed learners that you do not give to the rest of the learners?	Awareness of learners' diversity		
	Differentiations		



Transcribed data	Codes	Category	Themes
.OK. Usually, I group them together so that I know how to customize teaching in order to suit their forms of intelligence, because learners have got different intelligences. Then I also provide multiple texts in terms of learning materials, and I also have different tasks to give different learners, so that it matches their intelligence.	Multiple learning resources		
(b) How do you go about determining their reading challenges and writing challenges? What do you use?	Assessment	In-class Support Strategies	Support intervention strategies
So, determining their needs when it comes to reading and writing, it will be through the informal assessments that are taking place in class. These assessments gauge their current language skills. This could be either reading or phonics awareness, where we're learning about sounds, and we're doing spelling. So that is one of the ways of determining the needs. Also, this helps me to set clear goals for the learners and to be able to identify their strengths and probably the areas where they need improvement.	Phonic awareness		
Yes, there are some challenges. The first one is a lack of learning materials. It is not enough. When you are obviously supporting learners, you need to involve the third party, which is parents. Parents are failing to help the learners. The other issue is that after school, some of the learners use transport, so by the time we leave school, the learners will leave. That is why we try to intervene even in class.	Vocabulary development		
The other one is also the time, because if the learner is leaving early with transport, then the time that you're supposed to teach the learner is not going to help. Yes. So those are the problems.	Low learning material	Challenges	Pedagogical, social, and logistical challenges
	Non-parental support		
	Transport arrangements issues		
	Time		

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are critical in any study to safeguard participants' privacy and confidentiality. In this case, ethical clearance from the University of Johannesburg's Research Committee was obtained, as Mirza (2023) advised. Additionally, permission was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) research unit and the school's head authorities. Before deciding whether to participate, the researcher physically met with all six teachers before their interviews and observations to properly inform them about the study's purpose, benefits, risks, and funding, as advised by Bos (2020). Informed consent, voluntary participation, and anonymity were followed. The approved ethical clearance for this study is SEM 2-2024-066.

Issues of Trustworthiness of the Study

Strict criteria were implemented to ensure credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability, as Guba and Lincoln (1982) advised. To ensure the confidence and credibility of my findings, a triangulation strategy was employed in policy analysis, lesson observation, and interviews. An audit trail and peer debriefing were implemented in this study to achieve

believability, as advised by Ahmed (2024). Moreover, clarity-seeking and follow-up questions enabled participants to express themselves clearly. To ensure the dependability of my findings, each teacher was allowed to verify the accuracy of the results and determine whether the findings aligned with the insights they had expressed during the interviews, as Guba and Lincoln (1982) recommended. Additionally, the researcher verified the findings against teachers' perspectives to confirm the conformability of his results, as Busetto et al. (2020) advised. Also, sufficient descriptions of the methodology and study background were provided.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings of this study were derived from semi-structured interviews, lesson intervention observations, and document analysis. The data presented in this section came from the themes related to teachers' intervention strategies implemented, the criteria that are based on, and their effectiveness.

Theme 1: Strategies for Interventions Implemented to Accommodate Progressed Learners

Differentiations

Differentiation emerged as one of their meaningful strategies to accommodate gaps in the literacy of progressed learners. Differentiations allow learners to approach their learning in varied ways, grow skills at their own pace and time, and demonstrate their levels of competence in many ways, as Tomlison (2017) explained. When teachers were asked about this strategy, they expressed the following:

T2 noted that, *"I am using a lesson plan as an educator, as we know that we need to prepare a lesson before, and so I am using only a standard lesson plan where I would teach them equally, but where do I differ? I differ only where I need to put their resources to accommodate these learners who are not understanding the lesson."*

T3 added, *"It will be to adapt activities that meet the progressed learner's level of understanding. So, activities might be adjusted a bit just to meet the learners' understanding."*

During lesson intervention observations, I observed teachers using different texts, such as worksheets, low-grade readers, and pictures, during their teaching to accommodate all learning preferences. In one lesson observed, learners were reciting a song as part of lesson differentiations about sharks, which was part of the lesson. This aligns with evidence in the literature, as it suggests that adapting teaching strategies and learning material from time to time is considered adequate when dealing with progressed learners of mixed ability, as seen by Tomlison (2017).

Collaborative Learning Intervention Strategy for Progressed Learners

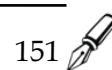
Collaborative learning strategies emerged as one way of accommodating the literacy skills gap in advanced learners. Collaborative learning strategies allow learners to work as a team, share ideas, coach one another, negotiate, and develop a practical solution together, as Vygotsky (1978) explained. When teachers were questioned about their experiences of the implementation of the intervention strategy for their progressed learners, their experiences were the following:

T1 expressed, *"Okay. Usually, I group them so that I know how to customize teaching to suit their forms of intelligence, because learners have different intelligences."*

T4 added, *"We use 5-10 minutes to support them in class with the assistance of their peers when they are partnered with gifted learners in class."*

T6 *"I also group the learners with their peers who share similar abilities."*

During lesson intervention observations, all six teachers had their progressed learners partnered with a gifted learner in class to help them with translations of instructions, according to Street (1984). The researcher observed gifted learners discussing with progressed learners, translating instructions, sharing how they could approach the task in class, and showing the textbook page number. The teachers' experiences perfectly matched and aligned with Vygotsky



(1978), who advocated for collaborative learning as a means through which learners learn societal symbols and meaning through discussions, interaction with others, and other collaborative learning exercises.

The Zone of Proximal Development Intervention Strategy for Progressed Learners

The Zone of Proximal Development [ZPD] strategy emerged as one of the strategies teachers implement to accommodate literacy skills gaps in progressed learners. Teachers implement different forms of assessments, such as baselines, diagnostic tests, psychological tests, and screening tools, to determine the zones of proximal development for learners. When teachers were questioned about how they determine the “zones” or gaps in the literacy of progressed learners, their experiences were:

T4 expressed, *“We normally administer the baseline test, where you can see when you are marking 'ukuthi ooh, OK, this learner is having a problem in writing.”*

On the other hand,

T5 expressed, *“So, determining their needs when it comes to reading and writing will be through the informal assessments that are taking place in class. These assessments gauge their current language skills.”*

T6 noted, *“I assess their reading skills so that I know where their level of competence is, and therefore I then use my break time; there is almost 30 minutes because our break is 45 minutes. I use 30 minutes of my time to assist them gradually until they become able to read, and I also monitor their attitude.”*

During lesson interventions and observations, teachers used question-and-answer methods to assess whether learners followed the instructions. Worksheets and classwork activities from learners' textbooks were used to identify gaps in learners' understanding, and scaffolding was provided on the spot in class.

In addition, when teachers were questioned about the successes and failures of strategies of interventions based on their perspectives and experiences, they expressed this:

T3 said, *“How successful is my support, eeeemhh, my support? It depends on the learner. The success of my support depends on the learner's attitude. I think I want to start there. If the learner is showing interest and wants to improve, then the intervention becomes a success.”*

In addition, T5 stated, *“It can vary depending on several factors, including the type of intervention and availability of intervention, and also the learner's needs and their characteristics, and also with the support that you as a teacher are given by the parents and also other teachers.”*

Theme 2: Challenges Influencing the Success and Failures of the Implementation of Intervention Strategies for Progressed Learners.

Challenges Related to Learning Material for Progressed Learners

It emerged that one of the teachers' challenges complicating their inability to implement intervention strategies for progressed learners is a lack of relevant material.

T3 expressed that *“There is not enough material available, so basically, it is everyday planning. My best materials, for now, are worksheets. You know, worksheets work best for me because they are very creative. There are pictures and puzzles, but few work worksheets or materials.”*

Similarly, T6 stated, *“I think the resources are very limited. They are very limited, and we do not have enough charts.”*

While teachers use their own material and discretion in difficult times, actively engaging in activities that prioritize literacy and using high-quality learning resources, such as books, articles, and magazines, are crucial for developing the best possible literacy learning skills (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2025).

Challenges Related to Time and the Packed Curriculum

Time also emerged as another teacher's challenge that complicates their inability to implement intervention strategies.



T2 stated, *"The time for implementation is not allocated in any timetable. I have never seen a timetable that says ISP period or intervention period. So, there is no time in our CAPS timetable for this. Therefore, it presents a significant challenge because most of these learners recall that they understand at a slower pace, which will prolong the process of doing the right thing. So, there is not enough time."*

Similarly, T5 added that, *"when time is not enough. On Saturdays, again, you find out that these learners do not attend. Yeah, that is the only problem that I am having."*

Curriculum Support and Training-Related Challenges

The lack of support and training also emerged as teachers' challenges, complicating their inability to implement intervention strategies for progressed learners.

T6 expressed, *"Excuse me, support is limited. I will not lie. I will talk about my department. It is limited, but we try to assist each other where we can, based on the little knowledge that we have from the SIAS policy. But in terms of implementing the support for the interventions for the learners, there is not enough training. There is not."*

Similarly, T2 added by saying, *"Honestly speaking, I have not received any training, especially from those officials whom we call subject advisors and those specifically dealing with the special needs department in our circuit. I think that a minimum or nothing has been done. You know, this big challenge is often with us with special needs, and those learners who have progressed are overlooked."*

However, two teachers noted a different view in connection with the training and curriculum support received, given that participants attended training and workshops.

T4 added, *"Yes, we work as a team. We attend the workshops regarding support and also learn how to do the accommodation and screening. Then, that is enough support that you are getting from the department."*

T1 added, *"Yeah, as much as when we attend trainings and then what they have taught us in those trainings, when you come and implement it in class, some of the things are not possible."*

While teachers are available for training, there are still not enough to address challenges related to literacy teaching and learning.

Discussion

Based on data collected, it emerged that teachers implement intervention strategies like collaborative learning, in-class scaffolding, differentiation, and the Zone of Proximal Development as meaningful and practical ways to address gaps in the literacy of progressed learners. Of significant interest to note is that Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory advocated for in-class scaffolding activities, given that if applied correctly, they have the potential to bring about positive learning results.

Differentiations

It emerged that one of the teacher's strategies of intervention implemented to accommodate gaps in the literacy of progressed learners is differentiation. Despite beautiful findings from Groenewald et al. (2024) and Magableh & Abdulla (2020) showing that differentiation can help improve the literacy skills of learners in English, it is unclear how teachers can implement differentiated activities in overcrowded classes with mixed abilities in South Africa, leading to their ineffectiveness. In addition, teachers' knowledge of differentiation remains a huge challenge, leading to its ineffectiveness in South Africa, as critiqued by Phala & Hugo (2022).

Collaborative Learning Strategies

Based on the data collected, collaborative learning strategies emerged as one of the teachers' strategies for literacy interventions. A large group of authors supports the use of collaborative learning strategies, given that they create a space that can improve social skills, understanding of subject matter, and higher-order thinking skills (Ho, 2021; Gilbert, 2021). Even though issues of overcrowding are problematic, these strategies work perfectly in improving literacy skills.

Collaborative learning activities that foster social interaction through discussions, debate, role play, and negotiating with others are highly successful in developing learners' language skills (Vygotsky, 1978; Alzubi et al., 2024). However, teachers' experiences of these interventions' strategies for literacy support for progressed learners are, to some extent, not successful in most township-located schools owing to challenges such as the unavailability of literacy support material, limited time, packed curriculum, and a bunch of intersectional social-related challenges (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2025; Khan et al., 2025; Phala & Hugo, 2022).

The Zone of Proximal Development and in-Class Scaffolding

Based on the data collected, it emerged that teachers implement the zone of proximal development and in-class scaffolding as their meaningful ways of supporting progressing learners. Of significant interest to note is that Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory found these strategies effective in ensuring that children receive help within their zones from their adults. Despite this claim, teachers' experiences resonate with most authors' findings, Ramollo & Kanjee (2023) and Maree et al. (2023), to name a few, when they demonstrated multiple challenges resulting in some teachers' inability to support gaps in the literacy of most learners. Teachers' knowledge of assessment has been critiqued as the major obstacle preventing teachers from identifying learners' learning challenges and developing response intervention strategies (Maree et al., 2023). Also, teachers' knowledge of assessment, literacy, and intervention strategies has been critiqued by several authors as being responsible for teachers' failures to support learners (Mavuso, 2022; Phala & Hugo, 2022), which makes the zone of proximal development strategy less effective.

Additionally, challenges related to overcrowded classes, non-parental support, and lack of materials are complicating the effective implementation of many intervention strategies. (Molwantoa et al., 2025; Ndaba & Dube, 2021; Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2025). When questioned about the successes and failures of these interventions, teachers mentioned that the successes and failures of these strategies for support lie with learners' motivation to learn and the effort they put towards their learning. In other words, teachers' ways of literacy support are largely based on their discretion, own analysis, and interpretation due to a lack of proper guidance and criteria on which these interventions should be based on policy implementation guidelines, as critiqued by Mogale (2023), Muedi et al. (2021), and Nkosi and Adebayo (2021). Consequently, there is still a gap in policy implementation requirements and actual class practices, given that there is no practical and well-thought-out literacy-focused intervention tested and approved by these educational policies, as Muedi et al. (2021) demonstrated. Also, it is unclear what criteria these literacy support interventions should be based on to serve their purpose, which also exacerbates the ineffectiveness of the implemented intervention strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proposes the following recommendations for both English FAL teachers and policy developers. For English policy developers, the education legislation framework, including progression policy implementation requirements, should specify what intervention strategies are applicable specifically for progressed learners and the criteria on which they must be based to successfully support learners' literacy skills gaps. Without this, teachers are to continue implementing intervention strategies in whichever way they see fit, thus leading to their ineffectiveness. Also, learners' dominant language needs to be fully recognized and practiced in South African schools as stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 as amended, given that ample evidence suggests that it improves learners' literacy skills and learning, as Sibanda & Tshehla (2025) demonstrated. Again, professional development training focused on literacy teaching methods and skills in culturally and linguistically different contexts could assist teachers in taking full advantage of these aspects. For teachers, it is recommended that the implementation of literacy strategies of intervention must not follow a one-size-fits-all



principle, as plenty of evidence suggests that this type of approach can never be successful. The size of gaps in learners should be the determinant for the approach to be followed. Also, support literacy interventions should be for both progressed and non-progressed learners so that even those who were not initially progressed do not fall on the verge of being left unattended.

CONCLUSION

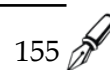
This study concludes that while teachers are responsible for literacy development in all learners, the intersectionality of challenges such as low material availability, limited time, poverty at home, many progressed learners needing different help, non-parental support, and lack of training and support for teachers continually promotes social injustice, inequality, and epistemic access to progressed learners. In addition, the fundamental findings of this study indicated that teachers' implementation of their intervention strategies is largely based on their own analysis and interpretation and follows a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching due to a lack of proper guidance from progression policy implementation requirements. Furthermore, the lack of training, resources, and support for teachers sets them up for failure. The findings have significant implications for literacy development within the unequal context of South African education, highlighting the responsibility of key stakeholders to avoid abandoning learners who struggle with literacy in their early years. For teachers, this means they should not be left to devise their own interventions to help these learners without adequate resources, training, and uninterrupted time to focus on their needs. Additionally, learners require specialized programs that are based on thorough assessment processes to effectively identify their challenges and place them in appropriate programs. One notable limitation of this study is its small sample size. If more teachers could be sampled from different locations, a more comprehensive analysis of interventions to evaluate their effectiveness and failures of these intervention strategies could be conducted. For future research, this study recommends a comparative study that may compare the implementation of specific intervention strategies that are fit enough to accommodate their individual literacy skills gap in different cultural and policy contexts, which may help in establishing a widely applied education remediation program for these learners.

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