SCHOOL MILIEU FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LEARNERS' SECOND-LANGUAGE READING DEVELOPMENT: PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN BOTSWANA.

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ABSTRACT

The study sheds light on the second language reading development of primary school learners. Concerns have been expressed regarding primary school learners' inability to read using a second language. The situation is so dire that it impedes learners' easy progression to higher levels because they have not acquired the requisite communication and writing skills in the lower grades. This paper outlines milieu-enhanced factors contributing to the dilemma. The study was qualitative, constituting a case study of three primary schools to investigate the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling was used to select 15 primary school teachers, five from each school. Face-to-face individual interviews were held with 15 teachers, including two focus groups of six participants each and classroom observation of the same teachers to source data. The findings revealed that school factors, such as insufficient resources, teachers' lack of expertise, and preschool education, contributed to low levels of reading development in children at lower primary schools. The study thus recommends the provision of resources comprising reading material and teachers with the expertise to enhance teaching second language reading skills. Sending children to preschools would be an added advantage. This study could benefit teachers at primary schools, curriculum developers and national policymakers.

INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency contributes positively to acquiring English reading and writing skills (Galebole & Mothudi, 2022:19). This paper focuses on school milieu factors contributing to learners' reading development in English as a second language. Twenty-eight languages are spoken in Botswana, yet only two are taught in schools, namely Setswana (national language) and English (official language) (Ketsitlile & Ukwuoma, 2015). In Botswana, English is the

main language of instruction and is used in official documents, including documents relating to the teaching of Setswana. According to the Botswana Revised National Policy on Education (1994), learners in Botswana study all subjects in Setswana in Standard/Grade 1, except for English as a subject. Then, from Standard/Grade 2, young learners are taught in English in all subjects except for Setswana as a subject. Setswana is the national language, but not all learners' mother tongue. Therefore, Setswana would be their second language and English their third. The use of Setswana and English in primary schools in Botswana makes it difficult for these learners to learn to read when they first enter school.

The context of the current study is primary schools situated in the rural village of the Boteti region in Botswana. The learners in this school speak three mother tongue languages, namely Kalanga, Sesarwa and Setswana (which dominate). The number of learners in most classrooms exceeded 35; for example, some schools had 46, 48 and even 50 learners per classroom.

It is evident that using Setswana as the language of instruction in Standard 1 in Botswana impacts ethnically diverse classes negatively because it presents challenges to effective teaching and learning (Mokibelo, 2014:431). Such a negative impact is supported by Howatt (1984), who suggests a "monolingual principle" that emphasises the use of one language (English) as the language of learning and teaching to prevent interference from learners' home languages. In addition, the study by Kerfoot and Bello-Nonjengele (2022) indicates that the lack of opportunity to learn via a familiar language at school beyond Grade 3 disadvantages primary school learners.

The study focused on the challenges teachers faced when teaching reading to primary school learners in Grades 1–6 whose mother tongue was not English or Setswana. The Botswana National Policy determines that young learners in Standards/Grades 1 to 3 must master reading, which teachers facilitate by using resources such as pictures, word cards and methods like 'look and speak'. According to the national policy, when resources are available in schools and correct reading methods are used, young learners should be able to read fluently and answer well in tests and examinations. It became evident to the researcher that learners found it difficult to read in English, which affected their scholastic performance. The researcher explored school milieu-enhanced factors (resources in the educational setting) that contributed to these challenges and precipitated the failure to deliver reading programmes efficiently and

effectively despite the teachers' likely adequate training and innovativeness. The reasons and explanations for such failures were at the core of the qualitative substance of this research.

Previous studies (Cakici, 2015; Voller, 1997) indicate that teachers need to play the roles of facilitator, counsellor and resource provider to enhance learners' development of reading skills in a second language. Yet the study by Hasnain and Halder (2021) showed that language teachers confront the challenge of applying task-based instructions during language teaching, which are more learner-centred than teacher-centred. While some authors indicate that teachers' lack of proficiency in the English language prevents them from adopting teaching strategies to help learners acquire English literacy (Aliasin, Saeedi & Pineh, 2019; Hasnain & Halder, 2021), the current study presents factors emanating from the school milieu that affect the second-language reading development of learners negatively.

The study aimed to answer the following question: What are the school-based factors that contribute to the second language (English) reading development of learners?

The study was guided by the following sub-questions:
1. Which milieu-related factors pose a challenge to the teaching of reading in English as a second language?
2. How does language transition affect the teaching and learning of reading in English?
3. Which intervention strategies can be employed to mitigate these challenges?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the theory of language transfer (Garcia, 2005). *Transfer* is an established term in the psychology of learning and means the imposition of patterns learnt early in a new learning situation (Garcia, 2005). In the process of acquiring a second language, the influence of the first language (L1) interacts in some way during the acquisition. The child can transfer insights and competencies to a new language if they have already mastered their home language (Vygotsky, 1962). Researchers such as Nkosana (2014) favour this theory, maintaining that children taught in their mother tongue might be able to exploit their knowledge of the mother tongue when acquiring a second or other language.

However, such language transfer (considered to facilitate the acquisition of the second language, known as positive transfer) is only possible when the two languages align well and can afford an easy transition (MacWhinney, 2018).

Whenever the two languages exhibit different systems in meaning and structure, negative transfer occurs. As a result of the differences in the languages, the ability to bring one system of understanding to the other is absent. Evidence of negative transfer is reflected in studies such as by Sabbah, 2015), where the children's first language was Arabic, and they had to learn through the English language. The two languages differ vastly in pronunciation and the use of vowels; e.g., English has five vowels (a, e, i, o, u), whereas Arabic has three vowels (a, u and i) (Sabbah, 2015:281). If there are no or little similarities between the structure of the first and second languages, learners face many problems in L2 acquisition and find it difficult to learn (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015:2115).

Teachers who implement the behaviourist theory in their language teaching tend to view language learning as a learnt behaviour that can be changed, tailored and reinforced using positive and negative reinforcement. According to behaviourists, behavioural change is shaped by the external environment (Skinner, 1953: 60). This suggests that to excel in second-language learning, parents and teachers should give positive reinforcement every time learners perform the desired behaviour. The shared interactions between children and their parents, teachers and peers lead to the development of knowledge, referred to as semiotic meditation by Vygotsky (1978). Children who learn a second language in the classroom gain from the teacher's support and classmates' assistance to learn the language effectively.

The theory is relevant to this article because, generally, in educational settings, the language of learning and teaching influences the learner's understanding of the subject matter. The transition from the mother tongue to a second language contains both negative and positive transfer, depending on how that transition is managed. When a transfer is negative, most learners struggle to relate what they already know (mother tongue) to what they do not know (second language), which prevents an understanding of the subject matter. The situation in Botswana iscommon yet dire; some learners are unable to read in English as a second language, and thus, stringent measures are needed to improve the situation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching and learning environment that promotes English language development.

Language in education plays a crucial role in effective teaching and learning worldwide, and learner proficiency in the medium of instruction largely contributes to academic success (Manyike & Lemmer, 2014)**.** In Africa, most children start school using a foreign language (Ouane & Glanz, 2010), and in Botswana specifically, this affects learners' language development. When learners start their schooling using their mother tongue, they tend to experience negative transfer interferences (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015: 2115) that contribute to their struggles when learning to read in English. For this reason, some educators opt to use the first language when teaching reading, as supported by studies such as that of Nkosana (2014). In addition, Cummins (2009) advocates for utilising bilingual programmes (proficiency in two languages) for academic success.

The teaching and learning environment, consisting of ethnically and linguistically complex classrooms, prevents the acquisition of literacy skills in the language of instruction (Wang, 2015). Mokibelo (2016) agrees with Wang (2015) by indicating barriers in education caused by the implementation of the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), of which some minority groups lack the basics. This situation leads to low reading levels in the language of instruction, for example, in Zambia (Chansa-Kabali, Serpell & Lyytinen, 2014).

Existing literature indicates that introducing programmes in teaching language literacy, such as task-based language teaching, can improve learners' acquisition of the tenets of the new language (Aliasin et al., 2019; Hasnain & Halder, 2021). Mahmoodi and Yousefi (2022) believe that the infusion of such innovative methods to motivate learners has not been a general practice because teachers lack the knowledge and skills to implement strategies that might improve learner acquisition of the LoLT (Hasnain & Halder, 2021). A study by Yiakoumetti (2022) shows that most teachers are likely to be ill-prepared to teach a new language, of which their lack of proficiency is one of the reasons. Apart from teachers' lack of proficiency in the LoLT, research by Hasnain and Halder (2021) further indicates that limited time in the classroom and large class sizes limit effective teaching of the LoLT.

Resources needed to develop learners' reading proficiency.

"In South Africa, many classrooms have no books and even those classes which do have sets of readers, often have them at an insufficient level" (Naidoo, Reddy & Dorasamy, 2014: 159). According to Naidoo et al. (2014), insufficient books and a lack of interesting children's literature are factors hindering learners from developing good reading habits. The importance of the availability of reading material per Çakici's (2015) study is that it fosters learner autonomy, which improves reading. Ivey and Broaddus (2001: 365) agree by indicating that learners become more invested in reading when they are allowed to choose their reading materials. In their study, Morgan and Wagner (2013) find that when learners self-select reading material, reading engagement improves. According to these authors, availing print materials in the form of books, phonic posters, and alphabet charts can improve reading in the learners.

A preponderance of literature points out the importance of the school library as a gateway to knowledge and its services as a starting point or road map to reading and the promotion of a reading culture (Igbokwe, Obidike & Ezeji, 2012; O'Sullivan, Canning & Oliveri, 2012; Nfila, 2013). A study by Igbokwe et al. (2012) indicates the role of libraries in providing books and other resources that help shape thought and influence students' actions throughout life. In addition, a study by Nfila (2013) revealed that the existence of libraries in the two primary schools where the study was conducted motivated the children to read. However, research by Naidoo et al. (2014) reveals that schools in South Africa do not have fully-fledged libraries, which contributes to low reading levels in children. In their study conducted in Botswana, Tella and Akande (2013) showed that the learners depended largely on the notes provided by their teachers as a main source of reading. Providing notes to mitigate the shortage of materials highlights the important role a teacher must play, namely as a resource (Çakici, 2015).

Approaches for teaching a second language.

Second language learning refers to the process of learning a language that is not the learner's native language, typically occurring after the mother tongue is already established. This process can happen in formal educational settings or through natural exposure to the language in daily life (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 4). Learning English as a second language involves the acquisition of English by individuals whose native language is not English (Ellis, 2003: 11).

The study focused on factors contributing to the acquisition of a second language (English) reading skills by Botswanan Grade 1–6 learners. Some teachers use code-switching to facilitate learning a second language, thereby advancing understanding (Songxaba, Coetzer & Molepo, 2017). Code-switching and translanguaging practices are seen as a way of creating a multilingual environment to enhance diverse learners' learning (Shah, Riaz, & Malik, 2019).

To relieve the stress of always searching for words they can use to code-switch, Horwitz (2020) advocates for introducing bilingual education programmes—receiving instruction in both the 1st and 2nd languages—which would prevent learners from falling behind in their content learning. In the same way, Glazer, Harris, Ceprano, Ost and Gower (2017) indicate how creating bilingual books to facilitate second-language learning benefits second-language learners.

While the strategies above help improve learners' acquisition of the second language, teachers are advised to use a variety of teaching techniques to embrace learners' different learning styles (Horwitz, 2020). In this regard, employing visual arts such as paintings can enhance language development by providing a platform for learners to create mental images (De Jesus, 2016).

The literature selected for this study built a base from which to answer the three research questions for this study: Which milieu-related factors pose a challenge to the teaching of reading in English as a second language? How does language transition affect the teaching and learning of reading in English? Which intervention strategies can be employed to mitigate these challenges? To answer the questions above, the researcher provided literature on the role of an environment in enhancing learners' reading abilities, clearly outlining the resources and approaches needed for this exercise. The study is underpinned by the theory of language transfer by Garcia (2005), which outlines the obstacles learners experience when they start to read using English as a second language. The same literature was applied either or both to verify the findings and counteract the existing literature on the factors affecting primary school learners' English reading abilities.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed a qualitative research approach, using an interpretivist paradigm whereby the researcher constructed meaning and developed understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013)

when searching for information about school-based factors contributing to learners' reading development.

Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of primary school teachers of Standards/Grades 1 to 6 in three large schools in a village in Botswana. These are teachers of learners whose ages range between six and nine years (Standards/Grades 1, 2 and 3) and between ten and 12 years (Standards/Grades 4, 5 and 6.

The researcher employed purposive sampling to select 15 teachers who participated in one-on-one individual interviews. Twelve of the 15 teachers participated in two focus groups, and six teachers were observed in the classroom.
The study upheld ethical research principles like informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and the right to withdraw to protect the participants' identities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

Data Collection Strategies

The researcher used one-on-one individual interviews to collect data from the 15 participants. Focus group interviews were held with two groups consisting of six participants each. Using one-on-one interviews provided in-depth insights into individual experiences, beliefs, and motivations, allowing for a detailed exploration of personal perspectives. The focus groups enabled interaction among the participants, which could lead to the emergence of new ideas and a more comprehensive understanding of collective views and social dynamics (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 164–166). The researcher started with the focus groups and then conducted one-on-one interviews to remedy peer-influenced answers and bridge the identified gaps. The same questions were put to all interviewees (See ADDENDUM B).

Classroom observation involved six teachers. The researcher used a semi-structured interview strategy (post-observation) to facilitate probing questions to explore more in-depth knowledge (Hoets, 2012). Open-ended questions were developed, allowing the researcher to pose follow-up questions (See ADDENDUM A).

The table below presents the participants and data collection techniques followed.

Table 1 Participants in the interviews and observation

Type of Data Collection	Schools Participating	Participants	Grades	Teaching Experience	Qualifications
Individual interviews	Three schools with large enrolment in one village in Botswana	Fifteen participants (five from each school)	Standards 1–3 Grades 1–3	6–10 years = 4 11–15 years = 6 16–20 years = 2 21–25 years = 2 31–35 years =1	Ten held a Diploma in Primary Education (DPE). Two held a Primary Teacher's Certificate (PTC). Three held a Bachelor of Education (BEd)
Focus groups	Three schools with large enrolment in one village in Botswana	Two focus groups consisting of six participants each. (Four teachers from each school)	Focus group 1: Six teachers teaching Grades/ Standards 1–3 Focus group 2: Six teachers of Grades/ Standards 4–6	6–10 years = 3 11–15 years = 5 16–20 years = 2 21–25 years = 1 31–35 years =1	Eight held a DPE. Two held a PTC. Two held a BEd degree.
Observation	Three schools with large enrolment in one village in Botswana	Six (Two teachers from each school)	Grades/Standards 1–3 = teachers Grades/Standards 4–6 = 3 teachers	6–10 years = 1 11–15 years = 2 16–20 years = 1 21–25 years = 1 31–35 years = 1	DPE =2 BEd = 2 PTC = 2

Data Analysis

The researcher utilised a qualitative analysis method to analyse the data throughout the data collection process. The interview responses were analysed using Creswell's (2013) thematic analysis, which involved categorising the data into different themes. Three themes emerged from the data analysis, namely (i) milieu-based factors affecting learners' reading skills, (ii) language transition from lower classes as a contributory factor towards the lack of language proficiency and (iii) strategies to mitigate the challenges.

FINDINGS

Classroom Observation

Observation was used as a data collection technique by supplementing data collected through the interviews. The observations were used to obtain information not accessed through other data collection tools and also to cross-check information obtained from the interviews. The lessons were observed without the researcher altering the environment. The purpose of classroom observations in this study was to determine whether what participants said they did in their interviews was reflected in what they did in practice. The researcher observed a sample of six teachers, namely one from the lower classes (Grade 3–4) and another from the upper classes Grade 5–6), thus two teachers per school. Each teacher was observed once; the researcher spent 30 minutes per lesson. The observations included the methods and strategies the teachers use in teaching children to read and the resources used to teach English. Below is a summary of the results from classroom observation using an observation guide. Codes are used to protect the participants' identities; e.g., codes like PA and PB denote Participant A and Participant B, etc.

The findings from observing the teachers' ability to help children who were struggling to read revealed that PA was unable to help learners struggling to read in English, as the rest of the class was engaged using the same teaching approach. This is to say that despite the learners in her class displaying differing abilities in reading, she taught them using one method (chorus reading) instead of differentiated instruction. PB used the same approach to teaching reading despite the learners displaying differing reading abilities. Most of the learners were observed having difficulty reading, yet the teacher seemed to focus on those who could read. PC made an effort by sorting the learners into groups and giving special attention to each group.

Regarding the teachers' ability to help the learners who were struggling to read, one could conclude that five of the six participants did not have the skills to help such struggling learners because they either generalised instruction or generalised the learners when teaching reading. Given their qualifications, one could deduce that despite their varied qualifications and

teaching experience, the participants were still unable to help the struggling learners. This scenario suggests the participants' inability to help the learners was not due to a particular qualification or teaching experience.

The findings indicated that individual attention was minimal; the participants used a one-size-fits-all teaching strategy. Only proficient readers benefitted from the teaching. The teachers at two schools had library corners, but the reading materials were insufficient, and some learners had to share books.

The class observation findings revealed that despite the challenges associated with the lack of teaching material, the teachers tried very hard to teach the learners how to read. They provided reading materials such as cutting pictures from magazines they had bought with their own money or had obtained elsewhere. These teachers are also commended for creating word banks by writing words on cardboard. Some teachers had designed syllable and alphabet charts, which they pasted on the walls for the learners to see daily to aid their reading abilities.

Nevertheless, the teachers' efforts in one school were handicapped by the lack of classrooms, whereby classes had to shift or share classrooms. Shifting meant that when it was one teacher's period, the other teacher had to teach her learners outside the physical classroom and thus had to remove her teaching aids from the wall to allow the other teacher to display her aids for the class to learn from.

ONE-ON-ONE AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Milieu-based factors affecting learners' reading skills.

The findings in this study indicated several factors affecting learners' reading skills development, namely a shortage of materials, a lack of libraries, overcrowded classes, teachers' lack of skills, and school timetables.

The participants stated that the reading materials at schools were either available only in small numbers or not at all. When the participants were asked about the availability of teaching materials, they replied:

PA: *There is a serious shortage of material in our school, and some are not even there. The council no longer supplies us with these readymade materials.*

PB: *We no longer have conversation charts and phonic posters in schools.*

PC: *Readers are in small numbers and children have to share in large numbers all the time.*

PJ: *Children in my class are manageable, but the reading materials are not enough.*

Most participants said that the shortages were exacerbated by the lack of libraries in schools. Sixteen of the participants indicated that their schools lacked libraries, and thus, there was no additional material that either the teachers or learners could access to assist in developing reading skills. They commented:

PD: *Schools do not have libraries, and this negatively affects the learning of reading in English. At my school, we have turned our storeroom into a library but there are no books in there.*

PE: *If the library was available, I would search for other English books that will guide me on how to develop learner reading skills. Even the learners can be sent to the library to borrow an English book to read.*

The findings indicated that classes were overcrowded (60 learners per classroom), which worsened the situation because learners were forced to share the already limited reading materials provided by the Department of Education.

PF: *Large classes stop us from giving children individual attention.*

PG: *We do not have the skills of dealing with such a big number of learners.*

Three quarters of the participants shared their frustrations with the school timetables not affording them enough time to teach the learners reading skills.

PK: *The time allocated for English subjects is not enough; there is no time for one-on-one attention.*

PL: *They should increase the number of periods or the duration of a period for teaching the second language because more time is needed.*

PH: *It is very difficult to give learners a reading exercise and mark it all; it needs more time.*

Language transition from lower classes as a contributory factor to the lack of language proficiency

The findings indicated that teaching only two languages (Setswana and English) in Botswana, which has 28 spoken languages, posed a disadvantage to learners who did not speak either of the two languages.

PM: *Some of the learners in my class do not speak Setswana at home, so it takes time for them to master the language which is called their mother tongue.*

PN: *When English is introduced at a later stage, these kids already have a problem of mastering Setswana and thus it becomes difficult for them to master English language.*

The study showed that mastering the English language and acquiring the ability to read in this language appeared problematic for learners who did not speak Setswana at home.

PO: The *issue of teaching Standard 1s in Setswana and then introducing them to English later in Standard 2 should be investigated because when they are being introduced to English in Standard 2, it is like they are new in the school, and we have to start afresh.*

PP: *Transition slows down learning because instead of proceeding in Standard 2, children take time adjusting to the use of English in instructions, and as a result, reading in English is also delayed.*

The findings indicated that learners from affluent families experienced no challenges because their reading skills were nurtured at home.

PQ alleged*: In my class, I have five learners who are able to read very well and I realised that their parents were professionals; they have reading books at home and their parents encourage them to speak English at home.*

The findings of this study also revealed that teaching English in multicultural classrooms became a challenge for teachers who were not skilled in teaching the language.

PR: *The department must organise breakthrough to literacy workshops for teachers; it will assist teachers to teach learners how to read and write in their early years at primary school.*

PG*: I benefitted from these workshops and my skills in English have improved ever since. I wish more and more of these workshops could be mounted for us.*

Strategies to mitigate challenges.

The findings indicated that teachers developed strategies to try and improve the learners' reading skills. These included self-made material, teaching methodologies and encouraging speaking the language in the school environment.

PD: *Mostly, we cut cardboard boxes to make word cards and pictures from magazines to make picture cards. That is how we survive; otherwise, there will be no teaching of reading.*

Some of the observed teachers claimed that the storybooks assisted learners.

PF *I used letter and syllable cards to teach learners building syllables and words. Learners can build sentences using word cards given.*

PK: *Picture charts help a lot in teaching picture reading. Learners' reading skill are enhanced with the aid of posters and flashcards.*

PP: *The storybooks in classes assist learners in learning new vocabulary and improving their reading skills all round.*

The findings indicated that teachers used role modelling as a teaching methodology to improve reading skills.

PD: *I always take what I read for enjoyment and shares* (sic) *it with my class. The learners automatically develop interest of reading.*

PI: *I spoke with my head of department, and we together decided to make it a norm that learners must communicate in English in the school milieu.*

The findings indicated that some teachers used code-switching to boost learner understanding.

PB: *Learners seem not to understand; I sometimes use code switching to explain abstract words.*

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research revealed that many factors contributed to the low reading development of young children in primary schools. The lack of resources, such as libraries, reading material, classrooms, time and teachers' lack of skills, ranked high on the list.

The absence of or understockelibraries in the schools where this study was conducted affirmed that a reading culture was not promoted (Igbokwe et al., 2012; O'Sullivan et al., 2012; Nfila, 2013). Other African countries experience the same problem; for example, the study affirmed the research finding by Reddy et al. (2014) that schools in South Africa did not have fully-fledged libraries. However, in this study, the researcher also discovered that even though schools experienced a shortage of materials, some were in greater need than others—as observed in the number of readers and that some schools had manila paper, while others had to write on cardboard boxes. This situation might imply an unequal distribution of resources by the responsible parties. The unequal treatment in schools is one of the discriminatory factors prevalent in most government schools and contributes to learners in some schools performing better than their peers in other schools, something that needs urgent attention. The inability of the Ministry of Basic Education in Botswana to provide sufficient reading material to primary schools results in the sharing of what little material is available, which negatively impacts teachers' desire to reach their objectives because some learners become inattentive during lessons.

The study also found that not only the prescribed English material was lacking but also additional books to keep in school libraries or classroom library corners. The absence of libraries not only denied teachers the opportunity to source information on how to teach learners reading per PD's remark but also prevented learners from selecting reading material that interested them (Nfila, 2013). Miller (2015) supports the action of learners engaging in voluntary and independent reading as one way to nurture the zeal to read in learners. Due to learners' lack of voluntary and independent reading, the situation in Botswana is that of the teacher being the only reservoir of knowledge, a situation that leads to poor acquisition of reading skills because teachers are not supported adequately by education authorities. The participants' comments that they need more workshops to become proficient agree with Yiakoumetti's (2022) findings that some teachers lack proficiency in the language. The teachers' incapacity meant that the teaching and learning environment was not conducive for learners to acquire reading skills because the teachers lacked the skills to teach reading. The teachers' incompetency further left them no option but to engage in undifferentiated teaching using a one-size-fits-all approach to develop learners' reading skills, leaving the majority of the learners unattended. It became evident that the one-size-fits-all strategy benefitted only a

few learners; most learners with learning styles different from the one used by the teacher could not progress. This finding attests to Horwitz's (2020) study indicating the importance of accommodating learners' differing learning styles to enhance understanding and good performance.

The inability of teachers to teach reading skills and vary their methods is worsened by overcrowding in the primary schools, which prevents individual attention, per PG's comment. It emerged from this study that overcrowding was caused by a lack of sufficient classrooms, with teachers having to share one classroom by moving in and out of the classroom to allow each other to teach their learners. This strategem impacted teaching time because each teacher had to remove her teaching aids from the classroom to create space for the incoming teacher. Time as a resource was mentioned by all the participants, specifically indicating its impact on teaching learners how to read. This finding meant that teachers who wished to apply effective teaching strategies—like providing learners with paintings once-off, per De Jesus (2016) to enhance language development—would not be possible due to insufficient time for learners to create mental images.

The study also shed light on another factor influencing the development of reading in English, namely the transition from the mother tongue to another language. This finding aligns with Garcia's (2005) theory of language transfer, which states that in the process of acquiring a second language, the influence of the first language (L1) interacts in some way during the acquisition. The delay in primary school learners in Botswana acquiring English reading skills was a clear indication that a negative transfer was brought about insofar as Setswana and English were two different languages. The study confirmed the findings by Sabbah (2015: 281) that Arabic learners struggled to transition to English as a second language because the two languages differed vastly and had different systems. However, the situation in Botswana is exacerbated by Setswana, which is treated as a home language yet is not the home language of all the learners.

Most of the participants queried the practice of teaching Grade 1s in their mother tongue and introducing English later; they felt it was a factor preventing primary school learners' acquisition of reading skills. As expressed by PM and PN, learners who speak one of the 28 languages in Botswana (other than Setswana) as their mother tongue face a double challenge

because, to them, English is now a third language. According to Garcia's (2005) theory of language transfer, these learners will thus encounter a double L1 interference. Hence, these learners would struggle to master Setswana and continue to struggle later when English is introduced. Therefore, such learners are deprived of the opportunity to learn via a familiar language throughout their years of schooling and are disadvantaged (Kerfoot et al., 2022). Using a native language to avoid negative transfer might be a remedy for dealing with such a disadvantage (Brice & Roseberry-McKibbin, 2001:14); however, which language to opt for would be for the Department of Education to decide. If English becomes the LoLT, it would benefit learners from affluent families, as PQ indicated. Since most learners in Botswana are from disadvantaged family backgrounds, they would certainly experience negative language transfer. However, using one language could be an advantage since language transfer would happen once, not twice, as is the current situation.

The findings revealed that the struggle to acquire English reading skills could be mitigated by developing such skills at home (a comment made by PQ). However, the lesson learnt from PQ's comment is that most learners in Botswana are from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, whereby only a few parents can afford to buy reading material for their children. This means that the school milieu is the only space where all learners (poor or rich) can acquire reading skills in English as a second language.

The participants shared the need for literacy workshops to equip teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills to inculcate learner reading skills (Mahmoodi & Yousefi, 2022). The findings of this study (from the classroom observations) indicate that teachers are not skilled in teaching reading skills and, in trying to deal with the challenge, they resort to code-switching, as PB indicated. Nevertheless, as already indicated, code-switching as a way of creating a multilingual environment (Shah et al., 2019) in Botswana would not solve the problem because teachers will likely use one of the 28 languages to translanguage.

Apart from code-switching, the research findings shed light on other strategies the teachers used to mitigate the challenges of imparting reading skills, for example, role modelling. PD's comment indicated that teachers could be agents of change by role modelling what learners needed to know, which is supported by Gallagher (2009: 26), who holds that when teachers set a good example regarding reading, learners' reading interest is stimulated. This finding

resonates with Cakici's (2015: 40) comment that teachers should serve as facilitators and sources of resources.

Teachers are resourceful, for example, by using word cards drawn on cardboard and phonic charts to help children read and understand a range of words in isolation. During the observation, it became clear that some teachers built library corners with charts, newspapers, magazines, posters and sentence strips to assist in developing learners' reading skills. In addition, concrete, real or classroom objects with different words but the same meaning were used in all grades.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on a relatively underexplored area, namely the factors in the school milieu that contribute to the second-language reading development of learners and primary school teachers' experiences in Botswana.

The absence of resources, such as libraries, reading material, classrooms and time, affects primary school teachers' teaching of English reading skills. In addition, the negative inference caused by the transition from the mother tongue to English delays learners' acquisition of reading skills. To mitigate the milieu-based challenges, teachers improvise by creating reading cards and even buying charts and magazines for pictures from their own pockets. Furthermore, some teachers lack valuable skills.

Based on the findings of the study, some action seem necessary to improve the reading development of children in government primary schools in Botswana. Teacher training should include a compulsory course in reading development at all primary teacher training colleges of education. Such a course would enable teacher trainees to acquire the requisite skills to teach reading since there is no specialisation in government primary schools. In addition, in-service teachers should receive regular training in teaching reading. Workshops should be provided to teachers on methods that would empower them to teach reading to children.

The Ministry of Basic Education should supply primary schools with the necessary materials for teaching reading and increase these wherever there is a shortage. In some cases, the

government should build libraries or support the development of library corners in classrooms with exciting reading material available to learners.

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ADDENDUM A

Table 2 Observation checklist

OBSERVATION	YES	NO
Are teachers able to help children who are struggling to read?		
Are materials and resources used to aid reading?		
Are teachers able to attend to every child's needs during teaching reading?		
Are there evidence of reading activities in classes?		

ADDENDUM B

Individual and focus group schedule.

What are your general experiences of teaching reading in English as a second language?

Which resources are required to teach reading in English effectively?

Which barriers can be associated with the teaching of reading in English?

Which strategies have supported you in mitigating the challenges associated with teaching of reading in English?

How have these strategies affected your confidence in teaching reading in English?