

EXPLICIT TEACHING STRATEGIES USED TO ENHANCE COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has a high number of low-achieving learners in reading literacy: 78% of South African learners who took part in the PIRLS study in 2016 could not read for meaning. This study proposes ways of improving literacy in South Africa and elsewhere in an affordable, realistic and short-term manner. The purpose is to show which instructional practices, which include explicit strategies, can be applied to develop sound higher-order comprehension skills. A case study was conducted at a mainstream, non-fee public school. A 12-year-old, second language, Grade 7 learner and two Grade 7 language teachers were purposively selected. Data were collected from various sources: observations, a pre-test, an intervention programme, and post-test and semi-structured interviews. The results of the study suggest that the learner struggled to answer higher-order comprehension skills, particularly inferencing. This research shows how teachers can improve learners' higher-order comprehension skills with the use of explicit teaching through instructional strategies. The study identified explicit teaching strategies for teaching higher-order comprehension skills to a Grade 7 second language learner and successfully deployed them to improve the learner's comprehension skills. Teacher education curricula should include the explicit teaching of higher-order comprehension skills to equip pre-service teachers with the expertise necessary to develop critical thinking processes.

KEYWORDS: Explicit teaching strategies; higher-order thinking skills; reading literacy; anticipation guide; reader's theatre; my turn, your turn

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Bank Report (2019), there exists a global learning crisis. Too many learners are experiencing "learning poverty" by the time they reach the age of 10, implying that they lack foundational literacy skills. South African learners are performing poorly, even when assessed in their home languages. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) in the General Education and Training (GET) Curriculum Reading Strategy for Grades R to 9 (2020–2025:3) has acknowledged that although there is a "demand for reading in new ways as texts today are multimodal... learners still need to read at the appropriate level of fluency, accuracy, prosody

and comprehension”. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2001 (PIRLS) (Mullis et al., 2001) study provided evidence that literacy rates were low and warranted urgent attention: South Africa has the highest number of low-achieving learners in reading literacy. The PIRLS results of 2001 show that 81% of South African Grade 4 learners who took part in the study in 2001 could still not read for meaning.

Although the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) has, in the past, established strategies such as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy to help schools improve reading literacy, it would seem that the situation has not shown any significant improvement. Learners are still struggling to answer comprehension questions that require them to infer or evaluate meaning. Within this context, the research question explores the effect of using explicit teaching strategies to improve a selected learner’s comprehension skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses reading literacy and comprehension, English Second Language as a barrier to learning comprehension skills and explicit strategies for teaching comprehension skills to a Grade 7 second language learner.

Reading literacy and comprehension

Dednam (2009:124) defines reading as “an interactive process that requires the reader to use information from the printed text combined with what they know to construct meaning in a given context”. Comprehension skills include the ability to retrieve information from the text as it is stated, make inferences to relate information stated in the text to something not explicitly stated and relate the text to the world (Dednam, 2009). While first-language learners also face challenges, Beck and Condy (2014) report that second-language learners struggle to apply the information read in a different text or to give their own opinions about what they have read.

English as a second language

In South Africa, learners are required to learn in their mother tongue during the foundation years of schooling (DoE, 2011). Learners are introduced to English as the language of teaching and learning at the Grade 4 level, which means they have to move between two languages to make meaning of what they are learning. Learning in English as first additional language (EFAL) might become a barrier to learning unless the learner receives sufficient support to nurture both the language of teaching and learning (LoLT) and the mother tongue (Roozkhon & Samani, 2013).

According to Nel (2009), an English Second Language (ESL) learner learns in an English medium curriculum while possessing a different home language. This is the case with the learner in this study. Nel (2009) explains that difficulties experienced in the acquisition of a second language may be due to an inability to transfer mother tongue learnt vocabulary to second language structures. She further reports that second language learners may take part in home language conversations but refuse to converse in their second language as they often lack the vocabulary when communicating, which can stifle critical comprehension skills.

In addition, Fernald, Marchman and Weisleder (2013) established that there is a significant difference in language acquisition and proficiency between children from advantaged and

disadvantaged families. Combrinck, Van Staden and Roux (2014: 3) concur that socioeconomic status plays a role in language development because in poorer homes, learner experiences include “lack of books ... parents or caregivers who themselves are illiterate ... no culture of reading ... lack of print-rich environments ... not exposed to books and other print material... absent parents ... poor quality schooling...”. Poverty, therefore, becomes yet another barrier to language development. In South African township schools, where the language foundation has not been adequately laid, there is a need for instructional strategies to help ameliorate this lack of proficiency and enable learners to succeed in reading for meaning.

Instructional strategies for reading and comprehension

Most teachers feel underqualified to teach higher-order comprehension skills and often leave learners to fathom how to answer the questions by themselves. Cambourne (2004: 33) calls this “implicit teaching”. A lack of knowledge and understanding of explicit higher-order comprehension strategies became evident during the interviews, when both teachers expressed their inability to teach comprehension skills explicitly. In my experience, teachers often comment that curriculum documents may mention reading strategies but teachers are not shown how to teach them. In her study, Hungwe (2019:1) reports that “these problems stem from inadequate reading instruction at a very basic level of education”, and it becomes the teachers’ responsibility to change their teaching methods to improve students’ comprehension skills. Comprehension strategies should be taught explicitly to ensure learners become familiar with different strategies and can apply them in all learning areas (Cambourne 2004).

Rupley, Blair and Nichols (2009) set out explicit strategies for developing good reading and comprehension skills. Explicit teaching uses demonstrations to make the learner aware of the unseen processes and skills required to improve reading, compared to implicit teaching. Rasinski, Stokes and Young (2017) promote “reader’s theater” as one such strategy to teach second language learners because it is an inclusive literature-based process that includes learners of all abilities. Other strategies to develop learners’ comprehension skills include anticipation guides, code-switching and the my turn, your turn strategy.

Code-switching

Code-switching is a strategy adopted worldwide, which allows learners to express themselves in two languages to assist with the acquisition of proficiency in the second language (Maluleke, 2019). Learners strategically switch between languages without disrupting the flow of ideas. The functions of code-switching include overcoming communication problems, enabling learner–learner interactions, overcoming comprehension problems that are above their level of understanding, effecting translation and consolidating newly acquired information (Yeganepoor & Seifoori, 2013). However, learners who frequently code-switch may experience challenges. Their eye movement during code-switching might cause a loss of information and, therefore, have a lower comprehension of the overall text. Teachers have to set guidelines for code-switching to assist learners, e.g., code-switching may only occur after the entire text has been read in English at least once (Maki, 2021). Code-switching should not be viewed as cheating but rather as an opportunity for learners to use all their skills to aid reading comprehension. “Code switching has been shown to significantly improve reading comprehension in English” (Maki, 2021: 20).

Anticipation Guide

An *anticipation guide* is a strategy that actively engages learners in discussions about a specific text by encouraging them to consider their thoughts, views and opinions about the content. A series of statements connected to the text are developed in such a way that it encourages learners to think and “spark debate or argument” (Phillips, 2023). Learners agree or disagree with the statements and justify their answers. This interactive reading activity assists in activating prior knowledge and leads the learner to active comprehension of texts. Kozen, Murray and Windell (2006:95) agree that this strategy can be “effective in promoting decoding skills, enhancing word meaning, and strengthening comprehension”. The anticipation guide as a strategy “is an extraordinary tool that allows learners to think beyond, read, write and discuss content in a meaningful way” (Adams, Peg & Case, 2015: 504).

My Turn, Your Turn Strategy

Explicit instruction is a systematic form of teaching which allows students to be more content-focused than task-orientated (Archer & Hughes, 2011). In the *my turn, your turn* strategy, teachers model how to predict text outcomes, make connections between the text and their own lives, clarify word meanings, and summarise and infer meanings. This mediated scaffolding, through guided practice, leads students to independent practice activities in reading for meaning.

Reader’s Theatre

Rasinski et al. (2017: 1) claim that “*Reader’s Theater* is a transformative and influential instructional tool for reading with far-reaching benefits for all students”. This motivational teaching strategy allows learners to use their voices, gestures and facial expressions to convey the meaning of a text. The reader “reads the script through an interpretive process using both the cognitive and affective domains” (Carrick, 2006). Learners are required to analyse the script, which enhances comprehension development and increases word recognition, fluency and vocabulary (Rasinski et al., 2017). The strategy promotes correct sentence phrasing, correct reading of punctuation and reading with greater ease and understanding (Pikulsi & Chard, 2005). If the learner is able to read fluently, less time is spent on decoding and comprehension increases.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework underpinning this study was social constructivism. According to Cambourne (2004), social constructivism is a set of ideas based on the theories of learning pioneered by Lev Vygotsky (1934) and Piaget (1936). Both Vygotskian and Piagetian theories focus on learners as active agents and social interaction as key to learning and development (Verenikina, 2010). The learner in this study became an active participant during the process of working through the intervention programme.

Piaget’s theory of cognition in children includes the development of schemata: assimilation, accommodation and equilibrium. Assimilation refers to gathering and organising new information into existing schema. In the process of accommodation, the schemata are adapted to accept new information, creating new and modified schemes. The participant in this study was a second language learner who experienced difficulty with comprehension. This learner had a history of being supported by the learning support teacher to develop her reading and comprehension skills. Schema theory “deals with reading comprehension as an interactive process between readers’ prior

knowledge and the text being read”. (Aloqaili, 2012). In developing tasks, terms such as “classify, analyse, predict and create” should be used. Learner responses determine how lessons proceed. In this study, the teacher had to “shift instructional strategies; alter content; inquire about student understandings” through an intervention programme before she could share her understandings (Ensar, 2014:36). In the schema theory, the teacher sees the teaching of reading comprehension through a new lens, one which promotes “teaching students techniques for processing text, such as making inferences, activating prior knowledge and using critical thinking” (Aloqaili, 2012:36).

Sometimes, in schema theory, “a reader may end up with a different understanding, based on their previous experiences: their richness or paucity”. The learner in this study was from a disadvantaged background. Aloqaili (2012) explains that the learner with “a rich background” has a higher level of comprehension than the learner from a disadvantaged background. Due to the learner’s low socioeconomic background, she had not been exposed to a print-rich environment, which rendered her existing schema in disequilibrium.

Verenikina (2010) refers to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) as acknowledging the difference between actual and potential development. The learner in this study could retrieve explicitly stated information and was partially able to interpret and integrate information at her actual level of development. After exposure to the intervention programme mediated by the teacher (who represented the more knowledgeable ‘other’), the lack of proficiency was addressed through the process of scaffolding between what was known and the unknown. Mutekwe (2018: 60) claims that “this mediated learning experience describes scaffolded learning activities during which learners are taken through the paces”. After mediation and scaffolding, the learner performed much better in the skill of inferencing, which then became her potential level of development.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed-method approach, during which an intervention was staged, preceded by a pre-test (yielding quantitative results), followed by the intervention, which yielded qualitative results. The intervention was concluded by conducting a post-test.

The intervention programme

This section deals with the Intervention Programme (IP) adopted and adapted for the selected Grade 7 learner. A pre-test was conducted to determine the learner’s working level and the comprehension skills with which the learner struggled. As part of the pre-test, the learner was given four different texts to read. Each text contained four different levels of questions linked to Bloom’s taxonomy and the PIRLS study. The skills included the ability to retrieve explicitly stated information, determine inferences, interpret and integrate, and evaluate. During the IP, summarising, paraphrasing and making inferences were explicitly taught to the learner using the following strategies: code-switching, *Reader’s Theatre*, *anticipation guide* and *my turn, your turn*. These strategies were selected for this learner, who showed an interest in social interactions yet experienced low confidence in her reading and understanding abilities. Table 1 highlights the strategies and comprehension skills used in the IP.

Table 1: Comprehension strategies and skills

Teaching strategy	Higher-order thinking skills
Code-switching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - create opportunities for communication - enhance student understanding - help build critical background knowledge - creates movement from known to unknown
Anticipation Guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - activate her prior knowledge, - anticipate text outcomes and build curiosity about the text topics within a safe environment
My Turn, Your Turn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - predict text outcomes, make connections from the text to her own life - clarify word meanings, - summarise and infer meanings
Reader's Theatre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students brainstorm which characters they have - socially construct a story with a beginning, middle and end - they develop a story – sequencing - once they've done the play, they reflect on how it connects to their real lives

After analysing the pre-test results, shown in Table 2, the researcher concluded that the learner struggled with inferencing. A six-week intervention was conducted during the third school term to assist the learner through explicit teaching activities to improve her inferencing skills.

Table 2: Pre-test results

Skill	Number of texts	Number of questions	Number of errors	Percent of errors
Retrieve explicitly stated information	4	4	1	25
Make straightforward inferences	4	4	3	75
Interpret and integrate ideas and information	4	4	2	50
Evaluate and critique content, language and textual elements	4	4	3	75

To improve reading for meaning, particularly inferencing skills, the researcher focused on vocabulary when reading texts because her knowledge of vocabulary was not at a Grade 7 level. Calvo (2004: 62) states that “readers with large vocabularies will be more likely to find in their memory words with which to represent the inference that they are drawing”. The skill of inference was taught using strategies indicated in Table 2, all of which are linked to social constructivist theory, which states that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and active engagement (Donald, Lazarus & Moolla, 2014).

Table 3: Post-test results

Skill	Number of texts	Number of questions	Number of errors	Percent of errors
Retrieve explicitly stated information	4	4	1	25
Make straightforward inferences	4	4	1	25
Interpret and integrate ideas and information	4	4	2	50
Evaluate and critique content, language and textual elements	4	4	3	75

At the end of the intervention, the post-test (Table 3) was conducted using the same texts and comprehension questions as the pre-test. The results showed an improvement in the learner’s understanding and use of inference skills. Evaluation skills, however, did not improve, as they were not taught explicitly.

The qualitative data

The study took a qualitative approach under the interpretivist paradigm and used a case study design to explore how the Grade 7 second language learner reacted to the teaching of the comprehension strategies conducted during an intervention programme. Interpretivism is a way of understanding that each person is different and views the world differently (Thomas 2013). Pathak, Jena and Kalra (2013) suggest that people's beliefs, experiences, interactions and attitudes are better understood through qualitative research. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2005) concur that qualitative approaches and interpretivist paradigms seek to construct knowledge through understanding human behaviour, their definitions and their understanding of situations. This augers well for the intervention process adopted in this study since “qualitative research is now recognised for its ability to add a new dimension to interventional studies that cannot be obtained through measurement of variables alone” (Pathak et al., 2013: 192).

This research project was conducted at a mainstream, non-fee-paying public school in a Grade 7 classroom with a learner roll of 43 in this particular class, of whom most were isiXhosa speaking. This Quintile 1 school is situated in a township area with a low socioeconomic status and mostly single-parent families.

A 13-year-old Grade 7 learner named Noni (a pseudonym) was purposively selected because she reflected many of the characteristics of the larger population struggling with comprehension skills, particularly inferencing, as well as two class teachers who had taught and worked with Noni in the previous year (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006). The learner’s home language is isiXhosa, and the language of instruction is English. Noni was from a less privileged family and community: the only place where she could be exposed to reading books was at school, which had a library that was not being used for its proper purpose. She was from a single-parent family, and her mother had to work two jobs to survive. This learner was unable to answer inferencing comprehension questions, and according to Table 2, the learner received a 75% error for inferencing on the pre-test score. The learner’s two Grade 6 teachers were part of the sample as they could verify that the

learner had attended English support lessons throughout the year but had not shown any improvement in reading and comprehension.

Since the participant was a learner in the researcher's class, data were collected using participant observations and semi-structured interviews. The observation schedule allowed the observer to gather first-hand information, which enabled inductive research, with the researcher observing issues participants are not always able to talk about freely (Thomas, 2013). The researcher chose participant observations to ensure that the participant behaved authentically, thereby limiting bias (Thomas, 2013). The use of other methods, such as semi-structured interviews, together with participant observation ensured "that what she thinks is being said, in fact, matches the understanding of the participant". Using these methods allowed the researcher to be objective, recognising biases that "may distort understanding and replace them with those that help him/her to be more objective" (Kawulich, 2020:19).

The Grade 7 learner was observed three times a week after school hours for 45 minutes per lesson in the researcher's classroom. Observation information was recorded, focusing on activities that had occurred and the learner's behaviours, interactions, actions and feelings. Observation information, which included observing the learner work with comprehension activities and answering questions, enabled the researcher to see how her understanding and use of inference skills evolved during the six-week IP.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the two language teachers to obtain greater clarity regarding some of the questions. The semi-structured interviews allowed for deeper probing into individual feelings, attitudes and beliefs about the teaching of inference skills in comprehension. Dakwa (2015) maintains that the researcher's experience with interviews can limit the focus required for an effective interview. Data were inductively analysed. A general reading of all the data, i.e., field notes of observations, interview transcriptions and pre- and post-test results, assisted in determining a "global impression" of the content (Henning et al., 2005: 104). Thereafter, several readings of the data led to the emergence of particular patterns, which were coded and developed into the following themes: Accessing learners' language repertoire to improve comprehension and Explicit teaching and comprehension. Through these themes, the researcher was able to answer the research question: How did the use of explicit teaching strategies enhance the comprehension skills of a Grade Seven learner?

Through the process of triangulation, all the data were analysed according to the themes, which "helped to produce a more comprehensive set of findings" (Noble & Smith, 2015:1). Kawulich (2020: 19) suggests that the use of participant observation in conjunction with other strategies, such as interviews is one way of increasing the validity of the study. Respondent validation, which included participants viewing the transcripts and commenting on adequate reflection and accuracy, was also conducted.

The researcher obtained consent from the Western Cape Department of Education and the institution at which the researcher was a student (EFEC 11-13/2019). The teachers, parent and principal of the school signed consent forms. Pseudonyms were used to protect all participants, the purpose of the study was explained to participants, and they were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any given time (Dakwa, 2015).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Our experiences with teachers have been that they don't teach learners how to answer questions because they think such strategies do not exist. In cases where they may be aware of the strategies, they have never been trained to teach them. As far as workshops conducted by regional education department officials are concerned, teachers often claim that workshops do not help because it is assumed that all teachers are equipped to teach reading strategies. Against this background, this specific case study aimed to explore explicit teaching strategies to enhance the higher-order comprehension thinking skills of Noni, a second language Grade 7 learner. Observations, two interview transcripts and pre- and post-tests were inductively analysed. The themes that emerged from the data were based on the explicit strategies used to enhance comprehension skills, particularly inferencing, namely accessing learners' language repertoire to improve comprehension and explicit teaching and comprehension.

Accessing learners' language repertoire to improve comprehension

Code-switching can be used as a tool to bridge the gap in communication for learners whose home language is not the language of teaching and learning; therefore, it should be seen as a valuable resource in the language classroom. Noni's home language was isiXhosa, and the language of teaching and learning is English. From the observations in the classroom, it became evident that Noni could not read satisfactorily without the use of code-switching. This difficulty was observed during the lesson when Noni continuously asked for assistance with the translation of certain words into her home language to make more sense of the questions.

This sentence says camouflage. I don't know what the word 'camouflage' means: *ndicela undicacisele ngesiXhosa hayi nge English.*

(Translation: Can you explain to me in isiXhosa not in English)

For the questions to be answered effectively, Noni had to decode the words, link the content to her own language experience and in her mind, translate what was occurring between English and isiXhosa and then express it in English. She experienced difficulty, and her teacher continued to encourage her. Ensar (2014: 35) indicates that the teacher needs to allow the lesson to be driven by the learner responses, with "suitable teacher support as learners build concepts, values, schemata and problem-solving abilities". He explains that in constructivist environments, children learn language by "producing hypotheses and testing them with the speaker in the environments".

Noni's ability to read plays an important role in how she understands and answers comprehension questions. Hungwe (2019: 5) states that "languages are fluid and have no boundaries ... there is no reason to insist on using one language for pedagogical purposes when meaning-making and understanding of texts can be achieved in any language at the student's disposal".

In her interview, Teacher 2 mentioned:

It is a problem to teach comprehension in English if learners don't understand the language. Most of the time[s] I have to teach English in Xhosa because the learners don't understand.

According to Hungwe (2019), the comprehension of texts can be improved by using code-switching as a pedagogical strategy, which should include the strategic, skilful and thoughtful use of different languages to assist comprehension. Similarly, Garcia's (2009: page?) findings from her study claim that bilingual learners are often neglected because their home language and language of instruction differ. She argues that code-switching should be viewed as a "potential resource rather than as a limitation or problem when compared with the abilities of English speakers".

Code-switching helped Noni link her home language to the medium of instruction at school (English), allowing her to construct knowledge through the integration of both languages. For example, whenever Noni had to say something in English, she would construct a mixed language sentence, e.g., "Fish is found in the sea and *mlanjeni*". In this case, the word *mlanjeni* means 'river' in English. Noni then asked to use a dictionary to find the word she needed to make an English-only sentence. This new knowledge was assimilated into Noni's background knowledge. Bormanaki and Khoshhal (2017: 1004) explain that this is an example of a "close relationship between schemata, critical thinking and comprehension processing". They define this background knowledge that is constantly being developed as "a bridge in establishing connections between thinking critically and text information processing". In this case, Noni's first language provided the scaffolding required and allowed for improved comprehension of the texts. She enjoyed the lessons because the code-switching increased her ability to comprehend the input from the teacher. She felt less stressed and more comfortable with the teaching and learning in the classroom. Modupeola (2013: page?) states that this kind of support in the classroom will make the learner more comfortable and encourage more speaking, thereby enhancing comprehension in English.

Explicit teaching and comprehension

In this research, the teacher used three explicit strategies to assist the learner in improving her comprehension skills, which included *Anticipation guides*, *My turn, your turn* and *Reader's Theater*.

Anticipation guides

The teacher used a fun text to initiate the *anticipation guide* in the classroom. The learners worked in groups of four. The learners were expected to read the text, followed by reading the statements. They had to agree or disagree with the statements and justify their answers.

One of the observations was how Noni responded when using the Anticipation Guide:

Noni was hesitant to agree or disagree with the first few statements in the anticipation guide. She would read and reread the statement but did not attempt an answer at all.

For the questions to be answered effectively, Noni needed to reflect on what she knew about the topic. The researcher assisted her through discussions relating to the story to guide her thoughts and harness her prior knowledge. Once the prior knowledge was activated, new knowledge from the provided text became much easier to comprehend because she could link it to her experiences. This gave Noni more opportunities to build curiosity about the text, anticipate answers and feel more confident in answering because of the safe space that was created through the role modelling by the researcher, as well as the discussions that guided her thought processes. As Noni became more familiar with the process, she started giving her opinion in the group. This scaffolding

assisted her with attempting (successfully) to answer higher-order questions correctly. According to Cambourne (2001), Roozkhoon and Samani (2013) and McKay (2008), this level of engagement, using different reading processes, sets the learning in motion.

My turn, Your turn

The researcher modelled the *my turn, your turn* strategy, guiding and assisting Noni with possible answers to the questions. The researcher specifically modelled inferential thinking during the strategy. Noni was provided with words that could assist with inferring character traits of the characters and predicting outcomes in the text.

The researcher observed the following: Noni was continuously engaged in the application of the *my turn, your turn* strategy and the teacher continued to guide Noni towards providing other possible answers. At first, it was intimidating for her, and she constantly code-switched to make sense of the information. Noni and the teacher struggled to translate certain words from isiXhosa to English and used Google to assist with translations. Only after the third lesson, it became easier for her to answer the prediction and inference questions. She engaged more spontaneously and seemed to enjoy the lesson. Hungwe (2019) expresses how significant the use of explicit teaching strategies has become if our learners are to improve comprehension skills. When Noni was allowed to use her “rich linguistic and cultural background to make meaning of the text” (Hungwe, 2019:5), she was able to comprehend at a much higher level.

Reader's Theatre

Garret and O'Connor (2010) found that students who were exposed to *Reader's Theatre* consistently over nine months increased their mean scores in reading comprehension by 0.9 years among 45 primary school special education students. Young, Durham, Miller, Rasinsky and Lane (2019) found that *Reader's Theatre* improved reading fluency, word decoding, vocabulary and comprehension. The most significant improvement was, however, in reading comprehension. Rasinski, Reutzel, Chard and Linan-Thompson (2011) agree that the student's reading comprehension is impacted by this strategy.

In this study, the class was organised into groups, and clear instructions were given to the learners for this task. Each group got their text and had to discuss and finally choose the characters they wished to portray. Enough time was set aside to practise.

Reader's Theatre was observed to be difficult for Noni at the beginning of the IP, but she grew more comfortable as she realised that language was a tool for communication. She also realised that to extend her language abilities, she needed to practise constantly (Hornberger & Link, 2012). While assisting her, the researcher made the following field notes:

Noni had a very limited English vocabulary and as a result she needed to discuss certain aspects of the story in isiXhosa for greater clarity. However, she participated fully with the brainstorming and the sequencing of the story. She was quite excited to portray her character in the story and this boosted her confidence.

In my observation of the sessions, I found that initially, she depended on code-switching, but soon, as her confidence and vocabulary increased, Noni's understanding improved remarkably. After the

group had performed their story and the teacher had questioned Noni about her experience, she said:

Ndandicinga isiNgesi ngesabantu abakhumushileyo, (I used to think that English is only for educated people) but am so happy because now I feel comfortable to say something in English without being shy...

During *Reader's Theatre*, Noni had to deliver a meaningful oral presentation of characters in the texts, which means Noni was expected to understand the overall meaning of the texts and the oral expressions that reflected the meaning. Noni was able to do this well after a few sessions. This is evidence that with each of the texts, Noni was able to comprehend the information and express those in her role play.

Role modelling by the teacher was employed in all of the strategies to explicitly teach higher-order thinking skills, such as predicting and inferencing in texts. Noni was provided with ample practice to ensure movement from the instructional level to the independent level (Treptow et al., 2007). During these activities, her interest was sustained, and her frustration diminished when scaffolding was used to teach her to understand a task using demonstrations and practice.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this interpretative case study was to identify successful strategies for teaching higher-order comprehension skills to a Grade 7 second language learner. The results of the study suggest that initially, Noni struggled to answer higher-order comprehension skills. Noni was able to answer explicitly stated questions but lacked the skills needed to answer the 'inference' and 'linking to the world' type questions. Through a process of scaffolding, the researcher explicitly taught the learner to use the following strategies: code-switching, anticipation guide, *my turn, your turn* and *Reader's Theatre* to improve her inferencing skills. Through code-switching, the learner became more comfortable with communication and slowly moved to text information processing, which enhanced comprehension.

The role modelling of the *anticipation guide, my turn, your turn* and *reader's theatre* strategies used concurrently with code-switching allowed the learner to access her full language repertoire, moving her from frustration level to independent level. Her confidence increased and Noni became more eager to participate in the lessons. Noni understood the value of her prior knowledge and connecting of ideas, which positively influenced her ability to make inferences. The results of this research project suggest that explicit teaching using instructional practices, such as *anticipation guide, my turn, your turn, reader's theatre* and code-switching, have notably improved Noni's ability to comprehend at a more critical level. Noni improved her ability to infer from texts, which shows improved comprehension skills, as the post-test demonstrated. The study bears evidence that students should be given opportunities to "access their entire linguistic repertoire" as they work with the explicit teaching strategies in contemplation of them fully demonstrating their ability to comprehend at a higher-order level of thinking, especially for the skill of inferencing (Shu-Sun Chu, 2017: 23).

The study suggests that further research is conducted in schools to find solutions for the literacy challenges experienced in classrooms. Particularly needed is specific training for teachers to teach comprehension skills in classrooms where the language of teaching and learning is English and where learners who attend the school speak a different language at home. This research was limited to one case study, and the results cannot be generalised. However, based on the South African statistics, it is clear that further research with much larger groups may impact how reading for meaning is taught in South Africa.

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