

Assessing the Effectiveness of Teaching Methods Used to Teach Indigenous Languages Reading to Grade One Learners in Bulawayo Central District in Zimbabwe

Patience Chikuni

Women's University in Africa

Abstract

This study evaluated the effectiveness of various teaching methods for teaching indigenous languages reading to grade one learners, including the phonic method, syllabic approach, and whole word method. The findings revealed that the syllabic approach was the most effective method, while the current methods used in Bulawayo central district were leading to grade one learner's failure. To address this, the researcher designed the Triple S model, which combines a syllabic approach, spellings, and sentences to teach indigenous languages reading. The study demonstrated the effectiveness of the Triple S model, showing that learners taught using this method mastered indigenous language reading skills faster. The study recommends the adoption of the Triple S model as the suitable method for teaching indigenous languages to grade one learners. This study highlights the need for training specialist teachers in areas with shortages of teachers who can speak the language of the province. The qualitative research method was employed, generating data through interviews, document analysis, and lesson observations. The findings and recommendations provide valuable insights for stakeholders, aiming to improve the teaching of indigenous languages to grade one learners.

Keywords: Methods of teaching, Indigenous languages, Reading, phonic method, syllabic approach, whole word approach.

Introduction

There are conflicting ideas regarding teaching of indigenous languages reading across the globe. Zimbabwe's education system recognizes the importance of indigenous languages. In the literature review, it is apparent that there are different ideologies and debates regarding the appropriate pedagogies that should be applied in the teaching of reading (Castles et al. 2018; Soler 2016). Ngema (2021) points out that, the diverse views have contributed to teachers' confusion regarding how they should effectively develop the reading ability of all African learners irrespective of their background. The debates and mixed ideas on teaching of reading are affecting teachers on the ground as the implementers (Soler 2016). The ongoing debates and conflicting perspectives on reading instruction have created confusion and uncertainty among teachers, which can negatively affect their teaching practices and ultimately, student learning outcomes, (Moats, 2018). The proponents of phonics instruction and whole-language instruction have been involved in what has been called the "Reading Wars" (Treiman 2018). De Graaff et al. (2009)

and Marima (2016) reported that phonic is the preferred method for teaching reading at the early childhood levels. A study by Cronje (2021) points out particulars about African languages that indicate the phonics approach to initial reading unsuitable for African children, while advocating the syllabic approach. Studies have revealed that the teaching methodologies used for teaching African languages are inappropriate but that the voices raised in these studies are seemingly not loud enough (du Plessis & Letshwene 2020; Cronje 2021). Trudell and Schroeder (2007) state that, the reading methodologies used for teaching reading in sub-Saharan Africa are typically borrowed from other linguistic environments and developed with foreign socio-educational goals in mind. Languages possess distinct linguistic structures, requiring tailored teaching approaches that acknowledge and respect these differences rather than adopting a one size fits all approach, (Banda, 2017). Teaching languages requires a nuanced understanding of their linguistic specifics, and a willingness to adapt instruction to meet the distinct needs of each language, (Hornberger, 2018). (Cronje, 1997) indicates that the main reason for the poor literacy levels must not be ascribed to the inability of African children to learn reading, or to teachers who cannot teach reading. Research has consistently shown that the major contributors to poor literacy levels are not the children's cognitive abilities or teacher quality, but rather the socio-economic conditions, such as poverty. The primary causes of low literacy rates are not related to the learners' intellectual capacity or teachers' instructional skills, but rather to structural factors such as inadequate educational infrastructure, limited access to books and technology, (Kruger, 2017). Cronje (2021) postulates that, a possible pedagogic cause for the failure to learn to read is that approaches to initial reading are used that are not suitable for African children learning African languages. She adds on to say, there is a second possible pedagogic cause for the failure to learn to read that is, the fact that children have to learn to read in two languages simultaneously, the home language and English language. Despite many interventions that have been implemented to address the challenges in teaching reading, few successes have been achieved (Ngema 2021). Numerous interventions have been implemented to improve reading outcomes, but the progress has been slow and uneven highlighting the complexity and depth of the challenges in teaching reading, (Sibanda, 2020). Research indicates that children who struggle with reading in the early years are more likely to experience ongoing literary difficulties, (Hattie 2009). There is a growing body of research, which highlights, the widespread concern about the inability of many children to acquire basic literacy skills in the early years of schooling, with this issue being a pressing concern in many countries around the world, (Hamilton, 2017). Research emphasizes that the foundation for reading proficiency is established in the early years of life through high-quality language and literacy experiences, which shape the child's phonological awareness, vocabulary and comprehension skills, (Dickson and Tabors, 2001). Learning to read is a unique process that involves the acquisition of a symbolic system (Writing) that represents the sounds, words, and grammar of spoken language, requiring children to develop a range of linguistic skills and knowledge, including phonological awareness, decoding fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, (Hammill and Swanson 2006). Before children can learn to read, they need to have a foundation in the vocabulary, grammar and sound system of oral language, as well as an understanding of how speech is represented by written symbols, (Dickson and Tabors, 2001)

Background of the study

Reading is a complex and multifaceted process that involves both perceptual and cognitive processes, requiring readers to construct meaning from written text through the integration of visual, linguistic, and cognitive skills, (Rayner, Doorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, & Seidenberg, 2001). Most children fail to learn to

read well and with understanding in both the Home Language (HL) and English Second Language (ESL) (Cronche 2021). Reading proficiency is a critical factor in children's academic success, as it is a necessary skill for learning in various subjects, including science, social studies and Mathematics, (Kuhn and Stahl, 2003). Reading is a fundamental life skill and an essential right for children, as it provides them with access to information, knowledge and opportunities for personal growth and development, (Krashen, 2004). Many scholars argue that the mother tongue plays a pivotal role in the learning of the second language and this might be true in the sense that some languages share similar sounds. When the child has learnt to read in her mother tongue, it becomes easy for her to learn to read in the second language, as she would be able to apply the same skills of phonic word attack (Krashen, 2005; and Afolayan, 2008). This is particularly relevant in the context of teaching Ndebele reading to children who speak English as their primary language and may not be fluent in Ndebele. By learning to read in their L1 (English), children can develop essential phonetic skills, such as word attack, which can then be transferred to learning to read in L2 (Ndebele). This transfer of skills can facilitate a smoother transition to reading in Ndebele even if they are not yet proficient in speaking Ndebele. This highlights the importance of first language based-literacy instruction in promoting bilingual reading proficiency. It is important that in Grade one, children develop a strong oral foundation in their additional language. Otherwise, they will not understand the words they are decoding in Grade two (Cronje 2021). Language development is a critical skill that children need to acquire through pre-formal learning, as it enables them to understand and use language accurately and expands their vocabulary and general expression, (Hart and Risley, 1995). Reading ability is a fundamental skill that affects not only individual academic but also a nation's economic growth and productivity, (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2009). Similarly, Krueger, (2010) agrees that, the ability to read is a fundamental skill that has far-reaching consequences, affecting not only individual educational outcomes but also a nation's economic growth, productivity, and social progress. Students who struggle with reading will likely encounter difficulties in comprehending and processing information presented in various textbooks, supporting materials, and other learning resources, which can hinder their academic process and overall learning experience, (Cunningham and Stanovich).

Children are often able to decode in their additional language, but unable to understand what they read (Cronje 2021). Most of these learners have very limited experience in phonemic awareness skills when they start formal school. Children who struggle with reading may have difficulty grasping basic concepts such as letter-sound relationships phonological awareness and rhyming, which are critical for reading development, (Nation and Newton, 1997). Cronje (2021) points out that, most African children struggle to remember the different sounds of the five vowels, which to them seem to sound very similar. She adds on to say, children can chant a, e, i, o, u but cannot read them when single or mixed. Phonological awareness and alphabetical coding skills are essential for reading development and deficits in these areas can lead to reading difficulties, (Nation and Newton, 1997). Teachers should be patient and supportive when working with struggling readers as building confidence and skills takes time and effort, (Moats, 2010). Learning to read is a critical goal, as it unlocks access to information, knowledge and opportunities for personal growth and development, (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998)

Decoding requires the integration of phonemic awareness, grapheme-phoneme correspondence and lexical access, (Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky and Seidenberg, 2001). Cronje (2021) says, some people even hold that, it is not necessary to teach the rules of phonics directly, as letter-sound connections will be learnt by the way. She adds on to say, research shows that phonics is also important and that combining the whole word approach and phonics is worth more than any one of the methods alone.

Reading well means all these components are managed rapidly. Rayner et al. (2002) asserted that the goal with whole word approach is to make reading fun, as it builds on experiences children have with language. The whole-language approach has the advantage of promoting rapid recognition of whole units, enabling children to read more fluently and similarly to skilled readers, rather than reading letter-by-letter. However this approach also carries the risk that learners may repeat reading without comprehending, (Pressley, 2002). Furthermore, whole-language instruction offers the benefit of rapid recognition of whole units, enabling children to read more fluently and similarly to skilled readers, rather than decoding letter by letter, but may also lead to a risk of superficial reading without comprehension (Goodman, 1996). A significant problem noticed is that learners just memorise and pretend to read. Cronje (2021) points out that, the whole word approach, combined with phonics, is prescribed in SA for Grade 1, as this is advantageous for reading automaticity (recognising words as wholes). She went on to say, it is indicated by research to be the best combination for reading European languages. Mwege, (2004) points out that, the syllabic method, sometimes referred to as the 'ba be bi bo' approach has been used to teach reading in African languages, focusing on consonant-vowel combinations such as 'ka ke ki ko and ku' to promote decoding skills. Similarly, Ajuwon, (2014) agrees that, the syllabic approach, also known as the 'ba be bi bo' method has been used to teach reading in African languages, focusing on consonant-vowel combinations such as 'ka ke ki ko and ku'. Spaul, Pretorius and Mohohlwane (2017) write that the 'Southern African Bantu languages' are agglutinating languages (morphemes are 'glued' together), with transparent orthographies (writing systems), letters being mapped to sounds one-to-one. The syllabic method also known as the 'ba be bi bo' approach been used to teach reading in African languages, focusing on consonant-vowel combinations such as 'ka ke ki ko and ku' to promote decoding skills, (Oller, 2000). Southern African Bantu languages are agglutinating languages (morphemes are glued together) with transparent orthographies (writing systems), letters being mapped to sounds one-to-one, (Spaul, Pretorius and Mohohlwane, 2017). Languages such as isiXhosa and Setswana have transparent orthographies, which means that they have a relatively phonetically consistent relationship between sounds and letters, (Du Plessis and Hendricks, 2011).

In African languages like IsiNdebele, the syllabic approach is more suitable for early reading instruction because of the language's phonological structure, where consonants are always accompanied by vowels, making it difficult to pronounce consonants in isolation, (Nkosi, 2018). Rayner et al. (2020) say, there are indications that the syllabic approach rather than phonics is best for initial reading in African languages. A language such as IsiNdebele has only five vowel sounds, meaning a Ndebele child can say the letter B, for example, in only five ways: *ba, be, bi, bo* and *bu*. The letter 'b' cannot be said, without adding a vowel and Europeans add the neutral vowel when they want to say B alone. However, African languages do not have the neutral vowel, and most children, and many teachers, cannot pronounce the letter B with the neutral vowel. Some teachers pronounce the English letter 'B' as 'bhu' or 'bhi' that can confuse grade one learners when they are trying to learn to read in their indigenous language, (Rayner et al, 2020).

Statement of the problem

The challenges experienced by grade one learners in the reading of indigenous languages indicate that there is a serious gap in the teaching of indigenous language reading. It is evident that some learners are not acquiring basic reading skills in the early childhood stage. There is an urgent need for research-based evidence on early interventions that will effectively improve early literacy competence. Cayir (2017) points out that, learning to read is an important step for a child's academic and social success. Mastering

reading skills is a critical milestone in a child's educational journey, laying the foundation for future academic achievement and social success, (Kirsch, 2018). Learners in Bulawayo Central District have a challenge with indigenous language (IsiNdebele) reading as compared to other subjects and this call for concern. Zimbabwe is a Multilingual country with a relatively less complex multicultural society compared to other African nations but it's national language policy continues to marginalize indigenous African languages in the education system, (Mlambo, 2015). Similarly, Ndhlovu (2017) states that, despite Zimbabwe's multilingualism, the national language policy has historically marginalized indigenous African languages in favour of English and Shona, perpetuating linguistic inequality in education. Moreover, Mufanechiya, (2014) says, the dominant of English in Zimbabwe's education system has resulted in the neglect and under valuing of indigenous languages, contributing to language shift and cultural erosion.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to find effective teaching methods used to teach indigenous languages reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central district. The study has an ultimate goal of equipping teachers with effective methods to improve the reading skills of grade one learners.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to find effective methods to teach indigenous language reading to Grade one learners.

- To assess the effectiveness of whole word method when teaching Indigenous languages reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central district.
- To examine how the phonic method affect the teaching of Indigenous languages reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District.
- To evaluate how the syllabic approach influences indigenous languages reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District.
- To identify the most effective strategies for teaching indigenous language reading,

Key Research Questions

The main research question for this study is:

How do the teaching methods influence the teaching and learning of indigenous languages reading to grade one learners?

- How does the whole word method affect the teaching of Indigenous languages reading to grade one learners?
- How does the phonic method affect the teaching of Indigenous languages reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District?
- How does the syllabic approach impact indigenous languages reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District?
- What strategies can be implemented to improve the methods of teaching indigenous languages reading to grade one learners?

Research Methodology

Research paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm was used to compile data. Creswell (2013) asserts that the interpretivist method of study acknowledges that reality is a relative concept with many features that are contingent upon the environment in which the individual interprets the truth. In support, Merriam (2009) points out that, the interpretivist paradigm recognizes that reality is constructed and subjective, and that individuals create meaning based on their experience and contexts, Merriam, 2009). The interpretivist approach holds that a given phenomenon always has several realities, and that there are multiple structured ways to reach those realities as well (Punch, 2009). From an interpretivist perspective, reality is seen as a complex and multifaceted construct, shaped by individual perspective and social contexts, (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Interpretivism as a research theory, that fits in well with the kind of data that was produced in this study. Thematic approach was used to analyze data. The researcher used member checking to ensure validity. The researcher shared the results with the participants and incorporated the participants' feedback into the analysis.

Research design

The researcher used a case study. A case study focuses on a single phenomenon in depth by interviewing a limited sample of participants and closely examining a bounded system (McMillan & Schumacher 2006). The case study investigates a particular event in its context and the researcher defines the case and its boundaries (Punch & Oancea 2014). The case in this study is, the teaching of indigenous language reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo central district. In order to come up with valuable insights that may contribute to the body of knowledge. The researcher chose a case study for a deeper understanding of what is causing grade one learners fail to read indigenous languages reading.

Sampling Technique

The researcher chose participants by using purposive sampling. Through deliberate sampling, the researcher was able to comprehend the teachers' reading instruction strategies on a deeper level. As noted by Gall, et al. (2007), purposive sampling can also increase variance and thus improve the validity of the findings. Six grade 1 teachers from two schools were interviewed. Creswell, (2013) agrees that, purposive sampling can enhance validity by selecting participants who are most knowledgeable or experienced in the phenomenon being studied

Data collection instruments

This study used multiple methods to data collection (Yin, 2016). One benefit of this is that the procedures reinforce each other, boosting the results. As a result, the researcher employed document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and lesson observation. Oral interviews usually allow respondents to speak in their own words thereby making the phenomenon clear (Gall et al., 2007). Respondents can express their views and attitudes to the benefit of the researcher (Berger, 2011). It is due to these advantages that the investigator used the interview method. Oral interviews typically provide participants the opportunity to express themselves clearly by using their own words (Gall et al., 2007). To assess suitable methods of teaching indigenous languages reading, the researcher grouped her class into three groups and taught grade one learners using three methods. The other group was taught reading using phonic method; other one was taught using syllabic approach whilst the other group was taught using whole word method.

Ethics considerations

Ethical considerations in research are a set of principles that guide research designs and practices (Bhandari, 2024). The researcher applied for permission from the ministry of education to carry out research in Bulawayo central district schools. Informed consent was obtained from participants through consent forms; they understood the research purpose, risks and benefits before engagement. Confidentiality and anonymity was observed by not collecting personal identifying information, participants were assigned unique codes. Responses from participants were kept confidential in a locker. The researcher observed ethics in carrying out this research.

How do teaching methods affect the teaching of indigenous language reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo central district?

Responding to the question, how do the teaching methods affect the teaching of Indigenous language reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District? One of the participants had this to say, *teaching methods can affect learners negatively or positively. I teach grade one learners using phonic method and sometimes I use whole word approach, but still the learners struggle to acquire reading skills. Instead, we are in term two but they cannot read IsiNdebele or spell Ndebele words. When reading Ndebele words they say the consonants sounds ignoring vowels. For example, geza they read as gz and they do the same when spelling. I believe it is because of the phonic method we are using to teach IsiNdebele. The whole word method enhances learners to memorize words. They can read words written on the board, but when they meet the words somewhere else they cannot recognize them. Some children they spell Ndebele words in English for example, ubaba as ufather. I feel they did not master the ba be bi bo bu methodology. Despite being multilingual, grade one learners in Bulawayo central district face barriers due to their limited proficiency in IsiNdebele. They speak English at school and at home, some speak Chishona, some Tonga, Some Nambya and Some Kalanga. This affects teaching strategies and methods because they do not understand the language. No matter how we try as teachers but it is difficult to teach reading to learners who are not fluent with the language.*

According to the above participant, it is evident that the methods used to teach indigenous language reading are not doing justice to the grade one learners, who as well cannot speak IsiNdebele. It is clear that, the grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District lack the *ba be bi bo bu* knowledge. It is evident that, the grade one learners in Bulawayo central district are intelligent and this is indicated by being able to spell Ndebele words in English, for example ubaba some were spelling as ufather. This shows that, if given a chance and taught the Ndebele syllables they can master IsiNdebele and be proficient Ndebele readers.

From interviews, lesson observation and document analysis, phonic method and whole word approach are not suitable for teaching indigenous languages reading. It is noticeable that, the methods used to teach indigenous languages reading in Bulawayo central district are ineffective and need revision. In support, Cronje (2021) points out that, particulars about African languages, indicate the phonics approach to initial reading unsuitable for African children, while advocating the syllabic approach. The belief that African home Languages can be taught using the same approaches as languages like English has probably contributed to the problems we have in the country (Trudell and Schroeder 2007). According to the data from the interviews, document analysis and lesson observations, it is evident that, teaching methods affect the learning of indigenous reading. The method chosen can affect children's phonological development

(Comaskey et al., 2009). Similarly, Nation and Newton (2011) state that, the approach used to teach reading can influence children's phonological awareness and development.

How does the whole word method affect the teaching of Indigenous languages reading to grade one learners?

One of the participants, answering a question on how the whole word method affect the teaching of indigenous languages reading had this to say; *the whole word method does not teach learners reading skills; instead, it teaches them to memorize words. It is important for grade one learners to be conversant with indigenous languages syllables first, then after that, they can make words with the syllables then make sentences with the words. English language reading can be taught using whole word approach and phonic method; however, with indigenous languages reading, there is a rule for teaching indigenous languages reading and it must be followed at grade one level before anything else, the ba be bi bo bu methodology. That is if teachers want to solve the equation of Ndebele reading challenges conclusively. I teach my grade one class by introducing syllables first. Indigenous language reading skills can easily be acquired through syllabic method. Whole word method is like rote learning of which it is not suitable for teaching indigenous languages reading to grade one learners. Foundation is laid at grade one level and teaching should be properly done.*

One of the participants add on to say: *sometimes I use the whole word method but I usually use it to teach Ndebele language not reading. Learners in Bulawayo central district are multilingual they cannot speak IsiNdebele therefore with whole word method it only makes grade one learners acquire the Ndebele language. With whole word method, we stick a word accompanied by a picture. When grade one learners see the picture and the word they memorize and know that a tree is isihlahla. However, some teachers they think whole word method is meant for teaching reading. If whole word method is used alone without another method grade one learners will lack indigenous language reading skills because with whole word method there is no a skill apart from memorizing words. I used to use whole word method when I was new in the teaching field but nothing was coming out of it except for language learning, until I discovered for myself the ineffectiveness of whole word method to teach indigenous language reading because of large numbers of non-readers I used to have. I then switched on to other teaching methods and I am now enjoying teaching indigenous language. Another reason why some grade one teachers use whole word method it is because of the Ndebele big words taught at grade one level. Some teachers they teach grade one learners using sight words. For example, words like 'makhalekukwini'. In future, the ministry of education should make sure the curriculum for grade one does not come with complex vocabulary in Ndebele. This may drive teachers to resort to rote learning rather than meaningful learning. The ministry of education should as well design a curriculum for teaching grade one learners, with clarity on objectives as well as effective methods for teaching.*

Effective teaching enables students to develop the skills and strategies necessary to read for meaning and to use reading as a tool for learning, (Pressly, 2002). This highlights the importance of teaching in reading development. The single most powerful factor influencing student-reading achievement is the teacher, (Allington, 2013). This emphasizes the crucial role of the teacher in student reading success.

From interviews, document analysis and classroom observation it is clear that, the whole word is ineffective to teach indigenous language reading and is designed to teach language in multilingual settings. The whole word approach which emphasizes recognition of whole words rather than phonemic awareness, has been criticized for it's limitations in teaching reading in languages such as isiNdebele, which has a

complex morphology and syntax, (McCarty, 2002). Similarly, Madiba, (2014) agrees that, the whole word approach has been criticised for its lack of attention to phonemic awareness, which is particularly problematic in languages with complex morphology and syntax, such as IsiNdebele.

How does the syllabic approach impact indigenous languages reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District?

To answer the question on, how does the syllabic approach influence indigenous languages reading to grade one learners, one of the participant said: *syllabic method is very effective because grade one learners should start by familiarizing with the syllables. Once they are familiar with the syllables, teaching of indigenous reading becomes easier. In my class, I have proficient readers when it comes to indigenous language. When they master the syllables, they make words using the syllables. I then introduce making of sentences. I find the syllabic method very effective as compared to other methods. Long back, I used to use whole word method and I used to have many non-readers until a colleague told me about syllabic method. The syllabic method is doing a wonderful job to me. Phonic method is suitable for English language because letters in English can have different sounds like 'ph' can sound as "f" "gh" can sound as "f" and sometimes as "g" and "C" sometimes sound as "si" and sometimes as "ki". In Ndebele "ba" sounds as "ba" "ge" sounds, as "ge" indigenous languages have consistency in sounds, making reading of indigenous languages easier and more predictable as compared to English. It is very important to make grade one learners master the ba be bi bo bu methodology. It is very easy for grade one learners to master reading of indigenous language as long as they grasp the concept of making Ndebele words. This can only be accomplished by introducing syllables first.*

From data collected, it is apparent that syllabic approach is effective to teach indigenous languages reading to grade one learners. Most of the participants believe that syllabic approach enables grade one learners to cement the reading foundation, by familiarizing with the indigenous language syllables. They also believe that grade one learners should be taught syllables first followed by making of words using syllables taught then introduction of sentence making. Syllabic method enhance proficient reading to grade one learners. In other words, the syllabic approach improves reading and this makes the syllabic approach more efficient to teach indigenous language reading to grade one learners.

A syllabic approach to reading instruction is particularly effective for African languages, as it allows learners to focus on the rhythmic and phonological patterns that are characteristic of these languages (Kiros, 2017). In support, Osuji, (2020) points out that, research has shown that a syllable-based approach is well suited for teaching reading in African languages, as it helps learners develop phonological awareness and decoding skills.

How does the phonic method affect the teaching of Indigenous languages reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District?

Responding to the question, how does the phonic method affect the teaching of indigenous languages reading, one of the participant had this to say: *when teaching grade one learners I teach using phonic method but the problem I am facing with these learners they read IsiNdebele as if they are reading English? They only read consonants ignoring vowels, for example, they can read the word faka as fk. They even spell Ndebele words ignoring vowels, for example they can spell ubaba as ubb. A big number of learners in my class have the same challenge. Only few learners can read indigenous language.*

It is clear that phonic method is not effective for teaching indigenous language reading. Instead, phonic method makes grade one learners read indigenous words as if they are reading English words. It is apparent that phonic method is more suitable for teaching English but not IsiNdebele. Indigenous languages reading requires a syllabic approach due to its unique vowel system and phonological characteristics.

Another teacher had this to say: *I try to teach reading of indigenous language using phonic method, but as much as I want to teach IsiNdebele reading; my problem is that, I cannot speak IsiNdebele. I even struggle to say the sounds like c, x in Ndebele. Another problem is that, I cannot differentiate between sounds with h and without h like ta and tha, ka and kha, pha and pa, ca and cha. This makes me lose interest of teaching IsiNdebele. In most cases, I teach isiNdebele in English. Though some of my colleagues do the same, because they say children in Bulawayo Central District, does not understand isiNdebele, since they speak English at home and at school.*

Ndamba, Madzanire, Mutumburanzou (2022) say, the Zimbabwe Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) enshrined in the 1987 Education Act (amended in 2006), allows the use of mother tongue in teaching. Contrary to the stated policy, primary school teachers continue to use English as the medium of instruction. Using the child's native language as the medium of instruction and the language of reading has been shown to accelerate learning and promote deeper understanding, as it allows the child to build on their existing language skills and knowledge (Baker, 2017). The study discovered that most teachers in Bulawayo Central District teach indigenous language (IsiNdebele) using English language. It is evident that, lack of teachers at teachers colleges who can speak IsiNdebele is killing the learning of indigenous language reading in Bulawayo. It is also evident that, the Zimbabwe national language policy that is not clear has to be blamed. Teachers in Bulawayo central district argue that they have teaching skills to teach indigenous language reading, but they often struggle to deliver lessons due to a language barrier. To ensure quality education, the government should train specialist teachers in provinces where there is shortage of educators who are proficient in the local language. Chikuni (2018) points out that, an emphasis on comprehensive specialized training in ECE needs to be done, just any teacher-training program cannot prepare them. Teachers are not proficient enough in the indigenous language for them to effectively communicate and teach. Partijem (2017) believe that early childhood reading activities will affect reading activities later. Children who do not understand reading in elementary school will have difficulty-learning subjects in the next class (Rahmawaty et al 2023). The phonics approach, which is widely used in teaching reading in English, may not be suitable for indigenous languages, (Kirkness, 2012). Similarly Neuman and Koskinen, (2014) agrees that, the phonics approach may not be effective in teaching reading in indigenous languages, as it may not address the specific needs of these languages and may even be counter productive.

What strategies can be done to improve the methods of teaching indigenous languages reading to grade one learners?

One of the participant had this to say, *it is very important to teach grade one learners reading gradually. They need to know syllables of indigenous language before they are taught spellings. When the grade one learners familiarize with the syllables they go to the level of making words using syllables. Spelling of words enhance reading skills. It is important to teach learners spellings because indigenous language spellings improve reading skills in indigenous languages. There after teachers can introduce making of sentences. This help teachers solve the problem of indigenous language reading. The Ministry of education should train specialist teachers who can fluently speak the indigenous language of the area. We have some*

teachers who have good teaching skills but they fail to deliver because of language barrier. The government should deploy teachers who can fluently speak the language of the area.

Teachers, need more education about reading difficulties, classroom strategies and practice (Moreau 2014). Furthermore, Vaughn et al (2017), say that, classroom teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge skills, and confidence to support students with reading difficulties, and this requires ongoing education and support.

Lagbela (2021) postulates that, teachers should during teaching and learning, be more eclectic in the use of the various methods of teaching reading in order to arouse the interest of learners in the process. Teachers should work individually and cooperatively with other teachers to better their understanding and classroom performance so that they are able to address some of the challenges, particularly those within their capacity (Tandika & Kumburu 2018).

To answer the question, What strategies can be done to improve the methods of teaching indigenous languages reading to grade one learners, *one of the teachers said; they is need to equip teachers with skills for teaching indigenous languages reading. We must keep on getting new ideas on how to teach reading. We might think that we know how to teach reading, with our old methods of teaching reading from college. Remember we are in a changing world, and we should always be kept updated with new methods. As teachers, we should be encouraged to enrol in institutions of higher learning that offer short courses in the teaching of reading.* By adopting these strategies, educators can help indigenous students develop a strong foundation in reading and literacy skills (UNESCO, 2017). In support, McKinley and Kaua (2017) say that, effective literacy instruction for indigenous students requires a focus on cultural relevance, language support and critical literacy skills.

Findings

The study found out syllabic method to be the effective method of teaching indigenous language reading to grade one learners. Some of the grade one teachers were using phonic method and whole word approach to teach indigenous language reading; however, most of the learners struggle to read IsiNdebele. Grade one teachers who were using syllabic approach to teach indigenous language reading had proficient readers. From document analysis, interviews and observation some of the grade one teachers use syllabic approach to teach indigenous language reading, they start by introducing syllables, then spellings and then sentences. The learners who were taught indigenous language reading in such a way, demonstrated improvement because of this teaching approach. Learners who were taught using whole word method sometimes called look and say method, were only able to read the words they were taught but were unable to read new words. They were also unable to identify words when placed on a different chart. Learners who were taught, using phonic method developed a problem of writing consonants without vowels for example the word *umama* they were writing it as *umm*. *ibhodo* they were writing as *ibodo* since *b* in English sounds as *bhi*. The study discovered that some learners cannot read because of the phonic method and whole word approach being used to teach multilingual grade one learners indigenous language reading in Bulawayo central district. Ineffective methods are hindering some grade one learners' ability to read. Some teachers could not teach the Indigenous language because they could not speak the Ndebele language. From the participants' response and lesson observation, it is apparent that some learners have attitude towards indigenous languages because they cannot speak and understand the language. Most of the learners are exposed to English language from birth and cannot speak indigenous languages. Some of the learner's, Ndebele is their L3 (third language). Most of the Grade one learners in Bulawayo Central

district are Multilingual. The researcher came up with a model to teach indigenous language reading to multilingual learners. The researcher termed the model Triple S meaning syllabic approach, spellings and sentences. Triple S model is going to improve the learning and teaching of indigenous language reading to grade one learners in Bulawayo central district.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Drawing from the data collection process, the study discovered that, syllabic approach is an effective method for teaching indigenous language reading to grade one learners. The teaching of indigenous language reading at grade one level should be taught using syllabic approach (ba be bi bo bu methodology) first, then second stage spellings then third stage sentences. The researcher designed a teaching model to teach indigenous languages reading. The researcher termed the model, Triple S meaning, syllabic approach, Spellings and Sentences (SSS). By adopting the Triple S model grade one learners can build a stronger foundation in isiNdebele and improve reading proficiency. The study also highlighted that the ministry should train specialist teachers to teach indigenous languages. The government should deploy teachers who can speak the language being used in the province, in this case Bulawayo, to teach ECD A up to grade two level, because some teachers may have teaching skills but failing to deliver, due to language barrier. Teachers should be encouraged to enrol in institutions of higher learning that offer short courses in the teaching of reading.

Further studies

While this study focused on grade one learners in a multilingual community where the learners could not speak the indigenous language being taught. Future studies could be carried out in a community where learners can speak the indigenous language being taught. This study focused on grade one learners, further studies can focus on other grades with a larger sample.

The teaching model for teaching indigenous language reading to grade one learners

Introducing the Syllabic approach, Spellings and Sentence making (Triple S) Model, is a revolutionary approach to teaching indigenous languages to Grade one learners in Bulawayo Central District. The Triple S model is a ground breaking teaching methodology designed to address the challenges of teaching Indigenous languages at the foundation level. This innovative approach has the potential to significantly improve language-learning outcomes for Grade one learners.

Stage 1: Syllabic Approach

(Syllables First)

Teachers introduce learners to the sounds and syllable structure of the Indigenous language using the "ba be bi bo" methodology.

- Gradual introduction of syllables from "ba be bi bo' bu" to "za ze zi zo zu".
- Daily reading practice of at least three syllables, at home and at school.
- Oral activities, songs, and games to develop phonological awareness.

Stage 2: Spellings

(Ndebele word building)

- Once learners are familiar with syllables, teachers introduce spelling patterns.
- Using word cards, teachers write and call out spellings, such as "bila".

- Grade one learners should have work cards with the syllables, 'ba be bi bo bu, la le li lo lu' for them to choose. The learners will read ba be bi and stop at bi and write down bi. For la they go to la and point at la then write la.
- Learners identify and write the corresponding syllables for example, "bi" + "la").
- Daily practice with visual aids to connect sounds to symbols.
- Playing games in groups making words with syllables. They will pick syllables, for example "vu+ka vuka, lu+ma luma."

Stage 3: Sentences

(Sentence making)

- Learners practice creating sentences using learnt syllables and spelling patterns.
- Starting with simple sentences, gradually increasing complexity.
- Encouraging learners to write sentences, such as "Bona ugogo" (grandmother), to develop Indigenous language (Ndebele) reading skills. As they make sentences teachers should encourage them to accompany sentences with drawings were possible.

The Triple S Model provides a comprehensive and structured approach to teaching Indigenous language, addressing the pressing issue of learning to read Indigenous languages. This model serves as a starting point for teaching Grade 1 learners, supporting their Indigenous language-reading journey and fostering a strong foundation in language learning.

Benefits of, Syllabic approach, Spellings and Sentence making in teaching indigenous languages reading are:

Improved phonological awareness

- Learners develop a strong foundation in indigenous language sounds and syllable structure.

Systematic literacy skills

- Learners learn to decode and encode words, building a strong foundation in indigenous reading and writing.

Structured language learning

- The systematic approach helps learners progress logically and confidently, acquiring indigenous language skills systematically.

Enhanced reading skills

- Learners will develop skills in Indigenous reading and pronouncing words, phrases, and sentences.

Foundational writing skills

- Learners learn to write sentences and short paragraphs, building writing confidence.

Building blocks for language learning

- The Triple S model provides a solid foundation for further language learning and literacy development.

Simple and easy to implement

- The model is straightforward and easy to understand, making it accessible for teachers and learners.

Focus on essential skills

- The Triple S model concentrates on fundamental literacy skills, ensuring learners master the basics.

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