

## Teaching strategies used by English First Additional Language teachers in teaching reading for comprehension

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**Abstract:** Reading is a fundamental skill essential for deep understanding and engagement across all subjects. This study explores Grade 6 teachers' perspectives on strategies for teaching reading comprehension in the Intermediate Phase of English First Additional Language (EFAL). Using a multiple-case study design, it provides an in-depth exploration from various participants' perspectives. The target population comprised Grade 6 EFAL teachers, with a purposeful sample of ten teachers from ten primary schools in the Nquthu circuit, uMzinyathi district, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Data collection methods included individual face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews and classroom observations, offering a comprehensive understanding of teachers' classroom practices and strategies. The study reveals a significant gap between teachers' reported strategies and their actual classroom practices. While teachers are aware of effective strategies such as guided reading, skimming and scanning, and the top-down approach, their implementation often reverts to traditional methods, highlighting the need for professional development. The findings emphasize the importance of aligning teaching practices with theoretical frameworks like Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development to support learners effectively. Integrating assessments into the reading process is crucial for activating prior knowledge and confirming comprehension. Additionally, the study identifies a gap between teachers' theoretical understanding and practical application of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity strategy. The study recommends bridging the gap between theory and practice through continuous professional development, practical training, and the availability of relevant resources to strengthen practices. Addressing these gaps can better foster reading comprehension skills, ultimately enhancing learners' academic performance.

**Keywords:** Directed reading thinking activity strategy, English first additional language, Reading for comprehension, Teaching strategies.

### 1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is vital for learners' success across all subjects. Every subject requires not only basic reading skills but also the ability to understand and interpret text. Consequently, many countries prioritise reading skills among learners. For instance, the Philippines implements various strategies to help learners acquire these skills (Reyes et al., 2023). Similarly, the Netherlands incorporates various reading strategies to enhance learners' reading abilities (Yapp et al., 2023). Peng et al. (2023) argues that teachers do not rely on a single reading strategy but instead use a combination of strategies to enhance reading comprehension. Learners come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, each with unique learning needs. Therefore, implementing a range of strategies ensures that all learners, regardless of their starting point, can develop strong reading comprehension skills. English teachers who prioritise different strategies provide learners with more opportunities to comprehend text at a deeper level.

For instance, in South Africa, English is often regarded as a first Additional Language in many schools. Many challenges persist regarding the teaching of reading especially as a first additional language. Thus, there is a specific need to strengthen learners' reading skills to read and comprehend various texts. Cweba (2015) highlights many difficulties teachers face in teaching reading and their need for ongoing support. As early as 1997, a study in Kenya by Okwach and George revealed that teachers struggled to implement effective teaching strategies for reading comprehension. More recently, Meidianti, Sukyadi, and Damayanti (2024) found that teachers still face challenges in nurturing reading comprehension among primary school learners.

Sumirat et al. (2023) suggest that English First Additional Language teachers lack effective approaches and strategies for teaching reading skills more especially in the lower grades. Reading competencies among learners remain a significant challenge, especially in developing countries like South Africa. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2021) revealed that 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read for meaning in any language, up from 78% in 2016 (Department of Basic Education, 2023). This implies that only 19% of Grade 4 learners can read for meaning in any language. Additionally, the National Reading Panel (2022) reported that 78% of Grade 4 learners in South African primary schools cannot read for meaning, and less than 40% of Grade 6 learners can read and make inferences. These statistics highlight the urgent need for more studies to explore the strategies used by English teachers to teach reading comprehension in primary schools, particularly in rural contexts.

Thus, understanding the specific challenges and effective strategies in these contexts can help develop targeted interventions to improve reading comprehension skills among learners. Teaching reading comprehension to First Additional Language learners is crucial for their academic success across their primary, secondary and tertiary journey. By implementing a variety of strategies and providing ongoing support to teachers, teachers can ensure that all learners develop the necessary skills to read and understand texts effectively. It is against this background this paper seeks to explore the strategies used by English First Additional Language teachers in teaching reading for comprehension.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholars have identified reading for comprehension as the main aim of every reading exercise (Pestana & Narváez, 2023). However, perceptions of reading for comprehension vary among scholars. For instance, Qutob (2020) views it as a process of simultaneous interaction and involvement with the written text. Similarly, Caga and Soya (2019) describe it as the ability to understand written text, where words and context have meaning. Furthermore, their study concludes that reading for comprehension involves making meaning from the text through cognitive and metacognitive strategies to understand the hidden meanings beyond individual words. This implies that learners engage their minds to comprehend the context of the text by conceptualising the words used. Thus, understanding the diverse perspectives on reading for comprehension is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies.

Given the importance of reading for comprehension, it is crucial to explore effective strategies that teachers can implement to enhance this skill among learners. Literature indicates that teachers (Khaliq, Tabassum, & Shaheen, 2022; Simanullang & Sinaga, 2019; Cao, 2023) employ various reading strategies to nurture learners' reading comprehension skills, such as guided reading, skimming and scanning, and the top-down reading strategy. These strategies provide a framework for teachers to support and improve learners' comprehension abilities. Guided reading is one such strategy that has gained significant support. Khaliq, Tabassum, and Shaheen (2022) define guided reading as "an instructional approach for supporting each learner's development of efficient reading for comprehending new text information." This suggests that teachers guide learners to acquire information through reading for comprehension. Additionally, Khaliq et al. (2022) acknowledge that the purpose of guided reading is to help learners acquire new information through small group sharing, enabling them to become independent readers. Essentially, teachers use this strategy to assist learners in comprehending text by sharing their understanding. Therefore, guided reading not only strengthens comprehension but also promotes independent learning.

The effectiveness of guided reading is further supported by Burkins and Croft (2023), who maintain that it promotes reading comprehension because learners work in small groups to make meaning of texts. This encourages teamwork and nurtures reading for understanding. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) outline key aspects for English First Additional Language teachers to consider when implementing guided reading: (i) work with small groups; (ii) group learners at similar reading levels; (iii) introduce the text and develop independent reading strategies; (iv) ensure each learner reads the whole text; (v) use increasingly complex reading material over time; and (vi) frequently regroup learners based on ongoing observation. Worthen (2021) also advocates for small groups, which help nurture learners' vocabulary and reading fluency. Sitepu, Siahaan, and Hutaaruk (2023) recommend guided reading as a viable strategy for teaching reading comprehension in narrative texts, especially in primary schools, enhancing learners' reading abilities. Thus, guided reading is a multifaceted approach that addresses various aspects of reading comprehension.

Another effective strategy is skimming and scanning. Simanullang and Sinaga (2019) define this strategy as one where learners read a text quickly to obtain specific information and grasp the main idea. Mambua (2020) posits that this strategy helps learners comprehend a text, get a general idea, and find detailed information through teacher guidance. Agustin, Wisudaningsih, and Fatmawati (2023) state that skimming and scanning aid learners in finding essential words to deduce the overall meaning of a text, facilitating faster interpretation and advancing the reading process. Their study revealed that learners taught using this strategy showed significant improvement in reading comprehension. Therefore, skimming and scanning are valuable techniques for enhancing reading efficiency and comprehension.

The top-down strategy is another valuable approach. Cao (2023) asserts that it is a psycholinguistic guessing game where learners predict text meaning based on their background knowledge. Teachers allow learners to make guesses to build understanding. Kakvand, Aliasin, and Mohammadi (2022) note that this process involves various linguistic signs, helping learners get the text's meaning. The top-down strategy emphasizes the importance of prior experiences and background knowledge in understanding a literary work (Nadea, 2021). Suraprajit (2019) suggests that learners activate their experience and background knowledge to understand the text. The study recommends that EFAL teachers activate learners' prior knowledge by allowing them to draw inferences about the text during pre-reading, reading, and post-reading activities, improving reading abilities. Thus, the top-down strategy leverages learners' existing knowledge to enhance comprehension.

Considering research findings, it is evident that guided reading, skimming and scanning, and top-down reading strategies are vital for teaching reading comprehension skills in primary schools. Implementing different strategy combinations can enhance learners' reading comprehension. Scholars such as Sinaga, Sinambela, and Gea (2020) agree that collaborative strategies help learners with diverse abilities acquire the main idea of comprehension passages. Therefore, a combination of these strategies can provide a comprehensive approach to improving reading comprehension among primary school learners.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This paper has adopted Social Constructivism theory as theoretical framework that is closely aligned to the pedagogical approaches envisaged in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011). Social constructivism is a theory of learning originally propounded by Lev Vygotsky in 1968 (Akpan, Igwe, Mpamah & Okoro 2020). Social constructivist theory is underpinned by two fundamental principles of Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Ruano, 2021). The first principle, scaffolding refers to a form of assistance that helps learners to solve problems which could have been beyond their achievement, (Buba, 2019). Notably, scaffolding refers to the assistance given by the teachers to facilitate learners learning during learning and teaching of reading for comprehension. The second principle, ZPD advocates that the learners should be assisted by the more knowledgeable other to achieve the objectives of the lesson (Vygotsky, 1978). In agreement, with Trumbull and Lash (2013) posited that ZPD helps to explain the space between the level at which a learner can handle a problem or complete a task independently, and the level at which the learner can

handle or complete the same task only with the assistance of a more competent other, such as a teacher. In the English First Additional Language (EFAL) classroom, the teacher provides learners with knowledge-based guidance when teaching reading for comprehension to ensure that learners understand the main ideas of the comprehension passage. Teachers and other more knowledgeable individuals which could be their peers or even their parents are therefore crucial in the learning process, scaffolding learning so that the learner can progress in their learning effort (Vygotsky, 1980). Thus, EFAL teachers play a critical role to assist learners to read for understanding during reading process in their classroom practices.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Research design and Methodology

The study adopted an interpretive qualitative approach to determine Grade 6 teachers' views on the strategies they use to teach reading for comprehension in the Intermediate Phase of English First Additional Language (EFAL). This qualitative approach enabled the researcher to understand, explore, discover, and clarify the situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of EFAL teachers (Kumar, 2014). It yielded detailed descriptions and an in-depth understanding of their views on the strategies employed to enhance reading comprehension skills. A multiple-case study research design was employed, allowing for a holistic and in-depth exploration of various aspects of the phenomenon under investigation from different participants' perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2014; Yahya, Arif & Awan, 2023).

### 4.2. Target Population and Sampling

The target population is defined as "the entire large group of people or objects that a researcher seeks to use in gathering information and drawing conclusions" (Rensburg, Alphaslan, Du Plooy, Gelderblom, Van Eeden & Wigston, 2010). In this study, the target population consisted of all teachers teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Grade 6 in the Intermediate Phase. The sample was drawn from a selection of EFAL Grade 6 teachers in a specific district, chosen from a small number of schools.

Purposeful sampling as a method used to select a sample with a specific purpose in mind (Kumar, 2014). Baghlaf (2023) further explains that purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on their potential to help answer the research questions. According to Dolan, Nowell, and Moules (2023), a large purposeful sample increases the credibility of the findings. This sampling technique was ideal for this study, as the researchers' sought participants who could provide in-depth answers to the research questions, possessing the necessary expertise and awareness of the phenomenon under investigation. A sample of ten Grade 6 teachers, specifically teaching EFAL, was selected from ten primary schools. These schools were chosen because they are located close to each other within the Nquthu circuit under the uMzinyathi district. The study purposefully selected these participants to explore the teaching strategies used specifically by Grade 6 EFAL teachers in teaching reading for comprehension skills within a rural context.

### 4.3. Data Collection Methods

Individual face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews and classroom observations were adopted as methods to collect data. EFAL teachers were observed while teaching English in Grade 6 to understand their classroom practices when implementing various strategies to teach reading for comprehension. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher the freedom to probe participants' responses extensively (Kumar, 2014), making the study interpretive in nature. These interviews are considered appropriate for gathering qualitative data because they enable participants to describe their experiences and feelings about the situation in their own words, providing a great deal of critical information (Kumar & Prabhu, 2020). During the interviews, many participants fully comprehended most of the research questions. The interviews lasted about 45-60 minutes, allowing teachers ample time to respond to questions. This method helped the researcher gather rich data through clarity-seeking questions. The interview schedule was organized into three sections which



allowed for a concentrated examination of specific aspects of teaching reading comprehension. The first section explored the strategies employed by English First Additional Language teachers to teach reading comprehension. The second section examined the challenges associated with teaching reading comprehension. The third section focused on the learner-teacher support materials (LTSM) used to aid reading comprehension.

Kumar (2011) posits that with non-participatory observation, the researcher is “not involved in the activities of the group but remains a passive observer, watching and listening to its activities and drawing conclusions from this.” Furthermore, Guntner, Meinecke, and Luders (2023) define observation as a tool used to collect data by watching behaviour, events, and physical characteristics in their natural setting. Therefore, this technique was used to closely observe the actual classroom practices of EFAL teachers. This approach enabled the researcher to observe purposefully, systematically, and selectively as interactions took place in the classroom between learners and teachers (Parry, Kumar, & Gallingane, 2024). This method allowed the researcher to establish which strategies were used and how they were implemented by EFAL teachers to enhance their teaching of reading for comprehension. Classroom observations also lasted about 45–60 minutes, and the researcher used an observation schedule with a set of questions. The classroom observation schedule was divided into five sections: the lesson plan, the steps of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) implemented, the assessment of learners’ reading, the challenges faced by the teachers, and the learner-teacher support materials (LTSM) used to facilitate reading comprehension through the DRTA strategy. Categorising the observations helped the researcher focus on specific elements of the lesson, capturing detailed and relevant information about each component, and provided a holistic view of the teaching and learning process.

#### 4.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis is often described as “an intellectual struggle” with the raw data gathered (Galdas, 2017). Scholars such as Theys and Schultz (2020) further affirm that data is analyzed by organizing it into categories based on themes. Therefore, thematic analysis was employed in this study to analyse the raw data. Individual face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, and these interviews were recorded to ensure data was stored for transcription. Notes were also taken to corroborate the voice recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Williams, 2020). The recorded information was transcribed, and five common themes were generated, guided by the research objectives of the broader study. However, since this is part of a larger study only three themes will be discussed in this paper addressing strategies used by English teachers to teach reading comprehension in primary schools, namely strategies used in teaching reading for comprehension skills, pedagogical practices in teaching reading for comprehension skills and the conceptualisation and implementation of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy for comprehension skills.

#### 4.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institution where the study was conducted. Additionally, permission to conduct the research was secured from the KwaZulu Natal Department of Basic Education and principals of the ten schools involved in the study. Subsequently, the teachers’ permission was also sought, and they signed consent forms, which were collected for safekeeping. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. They were informed about the confidentiality of their responses, and pseudonyms were used to report the findings of the study.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1. Strategies used in Teaching Reading for Comprehension Skills

This theme reveals findings from the participants during the individual face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant classroom observations. Many participants indicated that they use different reading strategies to develop learners’ reading comprehension skills, such as guided reading, skimming and scanning, and the top-down reading strategy. Participant A1 described using the guided reading strategy: “OK, the strategies that I use ... I use group guided reading strategy because it aims to improve learners’ reading and vocabulary. I also select the text according to the ATP or the CAPS documents. But

now we are saying it's an ATP. I ask the learners to predict the story, identify and discuss vocabulary with learners, and I also give them time to write new words and to use a dictionary. If there are pictures, we will talk about them before we read the comprehension. And I also make sure that I ask them if they have read any stories relating to the title and they have to tell me about it." It is evident from Teacher A1's response that she applied the guided reading strategy, which allows learners to predict the text's contents. This strategy helps learners cooperate to recognise new words and interpret textual graphics. Collaborating with peers in this manner increases their understanding of the material. This is confirmed by Yazdani and Mohammadi (2015), who reveals that the guided reading strategy effectively promotes learners' reading comprehension by enabling them to work collaboratively.

Teacher B2 reported using skimming and scanning to facilitate learners' reading comprehension skills: "Alright, Sir, um, here, I use skimming and scanning the text, whereby the learners have to skim and scan the text for important information. I use predictions: They have to predict the text or the story. I use questions and answers. I ask them questions and they answer to read aloud." It is evident that Teacher B2 employed questioning to help learners skim the text and used prediction to aid them in understanding the comprehension passage. Teacher B2 finds skimming and scanning effective in nurturing learners' comprehension skills. This technique is supported by Wahyuningsih (2018), who found that applying skimming and scanning strategies in teaching helps learners better understand the text. However, Fauzi (2018) suggests that these strategies improve learners' reading comprehension skills when properly guided.

In her classroom, Teacher C3 disclosed that she used the top-down strategy, although she referred to it as the "top to bottom" strategy: "OK, when I teach reading for comprehension skills, I normally use a top to bottom strategy. The top to bottom strategy ... I can briefly explain what it is. Top to bottom strategy, that is where I read, that is a reading strategy that aims to improve learner's ability. So in that strategy I ... follow processes, which is pre-reading, during reading and also after reading or post-reading. So, in 'during reading' I normally give learners copies of the comprehension and ... ask them to read the title or the topic of the comprehension and also to look at the visuals if that comprehension has some visuals. So, I will tell them to look at them. So, I ask them to predict the comprehension on what is going to be about? Looking at the topic and also looking at the visual if there are any visuals in that particular text."

It is evident from Teacher C3's response that she uses the top-down reading technique to support learners in developing reading skills. This technique allows learners to make assumptions based on images and deduce meaning from the text. Additionally, analysing images helps learners use their prior knowledge to build a deeper understanding of the text. If teachers adopt the top-down reading approach effectively, learners' understanding of the text might improve, and they would become proficient at making predictions. Predictive thinking enhances cognitive abilities both within and beyond the classroom. This is supported by Suraprajit (2019), who suggests that the top-down strategy is frequently used during pre-reading to help readers predict the contents of the text.

During classroom observations, it was noted that many teachers did not implement the strategies they mentioned during interviews. For example, although Teacher A1 said she used prediction, observations revealed that she simply gave learners the textbook with a comprehension passage and read it to them, after which they answered questions on their own. This strategy did not actively engage learners in reading or discussing the text. However, teachers may not have received adequate training on how to effectively implement interactive reading strategies. Moreover, limited classroom time can make it challenging for teachers to engage in more interactive, modern and time-consuming strategies. Thus, during the prediction phase the teacher could have started the lesson by asking the learners to predict the content of a text based on the title, headings, or images. Thus, for example, Teacher A1 could use a storybook cover to prompt learners to guess the storyline therefore this would engage learners' prior knowledge and sets a purpose for reading. Furthermore, during the reading phase the teacher can pause at strategic points to ask the learners to confirm or revise their predictions. Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) state that EFAL teachers should involve learners in reading texts to develop their comprehension skills.

Similar findings were observed in Teacher C3's classroom, where the teacher asked learners to open the book with the comprehension text, read it to them, and then read questions from the textbook. No

predictions were made by learners. Thus, managing large classes can make it difficult for teachers to facilitate interactive activities and ensure all learners are actively engaged. Furthermore, teachers tend to focus more on preparing learners for assessments rather than encouraging learners to engage deeper into comprehension activities. However, insufficient access to diverse and engaging reading materials may hinder the active learner engagement and effective implementation of different reading strategies. It was evident that what teachers claimed to do during interviews did not align with their classroom practices during lesson presentations which could be due to various contributory factors. The second principle of social constructivism theory, where the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) advocates that learner should be assisted by a more knowledgeable other to achieve lesson objectives (Vygotsky, 1978), was not effectively put into practice. Participants struggled to assist learners as required during classroom practice. Therefore, Teacher C3 could have read a passage aloud, pausing periodically to discuss with learners whether their initial predictions were accurate and asking them to explain their reasoning. This will ensure learners are actively involved and thinking critically about the text. Thus, after reading, the teacher could facilitate a discussion where learners are provided an opportunity to share their thoughts and insights about the text. For instance, Teacher C3 could have used group discussions to allow learners to compare their predictions with the actual content, fostering a deeper understanding and collaborative learning environment. Hence, by incorporating these simple steps, teachers can effectively use the DRTA strategy to effectively engage their learners in active reading and comprehension. These practical examples illustrate how scaffolding and ZPD can be effortlessly integrated into classroom practices, providing valuable guidance for teachers aiming to enhance their practice.

### 5.2. Pedagogical Practices for Teaching Reading Comprehension Skills

Pedagogical practices for teaching reading comprehension skills involve a variety of methods and strategies aimed at helping learners understand and interpret texts effectively. Effective teaching of reading comprehension requires both solid pedagogical practices and in-depth understanding. In their English First Additional Language (EFAL) classes, it was evident that teachers employ various methods to enhance reading comprehension. Teacher A1 described her use of guided reading: *"I use pre-reading, during reading, and after reading skills. I first analyse the comprehension at home to understand the characters, plot, and setting. In the classroom, I ensure learners read the comprehension while I read with them, emphasizing punctuation. After reading a sentence, I explain the story and ask learners to share their understanding. We read together, and I pause to ask questions to keep them engaged and identify those struggling. After finishing the story, I ask learners to retell it in their own words, highlighting the importance of reading and focusing."* Teacher A1's approach involves learners before, during, and after reading. She encourages independent and group reading, emphasizes punctuation, and asks questions to maintain engagement. This aligns with Yazdani and Mohammadi (2015), who proposes that group guided reading can improve comprehension skills if implemented correctly.

Teachers E5 and J10 described their use of skimming and scanning: Teacher E5: *"I ask learners to read the title and predict the comprehension's content as a pre-reading stage. If there are visuals, they predict based on those. During reading, learners read the entire comprehension to identify main ideas and moral lessons. I assist with pronunciation and vocabulary development. After reading, I pose questions to check their understanding."* Teacher J10: *"I ask learners to read the title and look at pictures, making predictions as pre-reading activities. I read the comprehension first, then ask them to read it as a class and individually, noting difficult words and using dictionaries, and during scanning, I verify their predictions by asking questions."* Both teachers are aware of pre-, during-, and post-reading activities. Teacher E5 keeps learners engaged and helps with pronunciation and vocabulary. Teacher J10 promotes independent reading through skimming and scanning, allowing learners to read individually and in groups. Wahyuningsih (2018) recommends that skimming and scanning facilitate text understanding, however emphasising the need for pedagogical expertise amongst teachers.

Teacher C3 explained her use of the top-down strategy: *"I use a top-to-bottom strategy, which involves pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading. During reading, I give learners copies of the comprehension and ask them to read the title and look at visuals. They predict the content based on these. After making guesses, I*

*elaborate on the title. During reading, learners read individually and as a class, and I ask questions. In the post-reading stage, learners summarize the text in their own words and complete activities.*" Teacher C3 engages learners by discussing the comprehension passage title and having the class read aloud. This peer interaction helps learners learn from each other. This is in line with Ardhani (2011), who posited that the top-down reading model equips learners with knowledge, comprehension, and language skills, since learners learn well from peers. Peers can significantly contribute to each other's understanding of the text's meaning through discussion.

From the observations made in Teacher A1, and C3 classrooms, although these teachers were able to articulate the theory of teaching reading for comprehension, they did not effectively implement these theories. This implies that what teachers say and what they practice is misaligned. Their articulations were not a true reflection of their practice in the classroom, which might prevent learners from developing reading for comprehension skills. Xu (2015) emphasised that EFAL teachers should have a deep content knowledge on reading strategies to develop learners' reading skills in the primary school. Teachers with strong pedagogical knowledge and diverse reading strategies can better support learners in reading for comprehension. The described practices include guided reading, skimming and scanning, predicting, interpreting visuals, and reading both individually and in groups. These strategies, when applied correctly, enhance learners' comprehension skills and promote independent reading.

The integration of assessment into teaching reading comprehension skills is crucial for developing learners' abilities. The findings indicate that teachers use baseline, oral, and written assessments to enhance these skills. Teachers employ baseline assessments as pre-reading activities to activate prior knowledge and engage students. For instance, Teacher D4 indicated that he integrates this by *"activating and using prior knowledge to make connections, I ask learners questions about what they already know before I explain and introduce the lesson. In predicting, learners predict what the story is about by looking at the pictures then they predict the story."* This method aligns with scholars like Hanan, Muhlisim, and Suadiyatno (2020), who highlight the importance of prediction in guiding learners through the text. During the reading activity, teachers like G7 and H8 use oral assessments to check learners' understanding. Teacher G7 assesses learners by *"asking questions based on the text after reading each paragraph,"* prompting them to reflect on what they have read. Similarly, Teacher H8 uses formative assessments during reading: *"this includes classroom activities, whereby I use this assessment to ask questions and also, it helps them to answer questions. This is used to capture the learners' understanding, to check if the learners are following others with me. Do they understand the comprehension elements that they are supposed to understand?"* Teachers like D4, G7, and H8 use these methods to create a more interactive and engaging learning environment. By integrating these assessments, they can better support students in developing their reading comprehension skills.

From the utterances by Teacher G7, it is evident that she assesses learners orally and intermittently while they read the text. She gets learners to reflect on what they have been reading by asking them questions while reading the text. Teacher H8 also asked questions and had learners answer orally in order to deepen their understanding. Thus, both Teachers G7 and H8 engaged learners in the reading task to develop their reading skills. This approach helps learners stay engaged and deepens their understanding of the text. Post-reading activities involve written assessments to confirm learners' comprehension. These assessments provide a way to evaluate whether students have understood the content of the text. By systematically integrating these assessment activities into their classroom practice, teachers enhance the formative value of assessments. This approach makes assessments more than just evaluative tools; they become integral to the learning process. As Fauzan et al. (2022) argue, involving learners during the reading process is essential for achieving learning objectives.

### 5.3. Conceptualisation and Implementation of the DRTA Strategy in Teaching Reading for Comprehension Skills

The findings indicate that most participants had some understanding of the DRTA strategy. Teachers E5, G7, and H8 expressed similar conceptualisations of the DRTA strategy, mentioning the key elements of prediction, reading the material, and proving or confirming the predictions. E5 said: *"Well, Sir, I've read about the Directed Reading Thinking Activity and I do understand that, It consists of, if I'm not mistaken, three steps, which are prediction, reading the material and proving. Learners predict, during reading*



... learners read material supplied by an educator, and then after reading ... learners prove their understanding.” (E5) “My understanding of the Directed Reading Thinking activity is [that it is] a strategy. I understand it, like, the reading strategy guides learners about asking questions about the texts they are reading. They also make the predictions and confirm and refute predictions. Also, it consists of three steps which is ... prediction, where they predict what they are given, maybe from the title they predict what will the story be about, reading the material and then proving or confirming what they have read.” (G7) “Yes, what I also understand about the strategy is that it ... enhances comprehension. Which means it’s a strategy that encourages learners to participate in class, to engage on the text, and to be thoughtful readers, because by making predictions, which means they have to think about the text before even reading the text, and even after reading the text ... [they] need to think about these things. What also I understand is that the Directed Reading Thinking strategy is a comprehension strategy that consists of three stages. The first step is the prediction, whereby learners predict, they also predict what they think the text is about, and also, they read the title and make predictions. The second one is reading the material, whereby they are provided with the text that they are going to engage. Then the third step is proving or confirming what they have read. So, which means they have now read the text, then they make confirmations whether those predictions are true or not.” (H8)

It is evident that the three teachers were aware of the three processes in the DRTA strategy, which aid learners in reading for comprehension. Each of the three teachers had a solid theoretical understanding of the DRTA strategy; they ought to have been able to guide learners on reading for comprehension. Lail (2020) emphasised that, for learners to read for comprehension, they should be able to make predictions prior to reading, read the material, and then confirm their predictions as the story progresses. Teacher A1 explained how she conceptualised the DRTA strategy: “Yeah, I do have the understanding of the DRTA strategy because now I know that it encourages learners to be active and thoughtful readers. I know that it can enhance their comprehension, and it also teaches students to monitor their understanding of the text as they are reading and helps them to strengthen everything in critical thinking skills.” Teacher A1 gave a very general explanation rather than explaining the three distinct steps of the strategy. This may imply that she had a limited or shallow understanding of it. Fauzan et al. (2022) points out that if teachers possess a deep understanding of the DRTA strategy, they will be able to assist learners to develop thinking skills to understand the text and draw conclusions from it.

However, it emerged during interviews that even among teachers who could conceptualise the strategy, implementation was lacking. Most teachers said that they had never implemented it in their classroom practice. Instead, they referred to pre, during, and post-reading concepts articulated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2011). However, these steps correlate well with the three DRTA strategy steps of prediction (pre-reading), reading the material supplied by the teacher (during reading), and confirming or proving (post-reading) as articulated in the DRTA strategy. Teacher C3 explained how she implemented steps articulated by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2011): “I’ve never used this strategy before, but when I relate to it, it’s the same as with the CAPS reading process, which is the pre-reading, during reading and after-reading [strategy] because the DRTA strategy has all these. I’ve read that it has the prediction, it has reading material and proving. It is the same thing I’m doing. So, in my lesson, during pre-reading, learners predict what is going to happen by looking at the topic... the visuals, so that is predicting before they actually read the passage. Then during reading, that is where learners ... actually read. I ask them to read that passage, or else I read to them, and also, in ‘after reading’ or the post-reading, learners have to prove or verify what they have read about and show their understanding about the topic in the post-reading.” (C3)

Based on the statements of Teacher C3, it is evident that although she was not able to articulate the three steps of the DRTA strategy, she was familiar with the steps from the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. Notably, she was also able to draw comparisons between the DRTA strategy and the processes she used. From her verbatim quotes, it was evident that she allowed learners to predict the text in order to build their understanding of it. Furthermore, she made learners aware of the value of visuals in predicting the main idea of the text, which they regarded as an important pre-reading step. In the DRTA strategy, this is referred to as prediction.

Furthermore, Teacher C3 read for learners to assist them in understanding the text, which complies with the DRTA step of reading material supplied by the teacher. Thereafter, it is evident that she allows

learners to suggest the main idea of the text to assess their understanding. It is also evident that learners are active, as they are required to summarise the comprehension passage on their own after reading it. This complies with the DRTA strategy of confirming or proving. This implies that the DRTA steps, although not named, are practised to some extent. This is in line with Fauzan et al. (2022), who supported the implementation of certain processes to encourage reading comprehension, i.e., pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading. In DRTA, these are known as prediction, reading the material, and proving. These steps concur with Apriliana (2022), who emphasised that the DRTA steps are important for comprehension, as they guide learners to make predictions about a text, read the text with enhanced understanding, and then confirm or refute their predictions.

It was discovered through classroom observations that most participants did not use the approach they had explained in their interviews. For instance, Teacher C3 provided learners with EFAL textbooks and read aloud for the learners. The critical first step of the DRTA, prediction, was not implemented, although Teacher C3 had claimed to use this during interviews. This implies that although Teacher C3 was able to articulate the steps, her teaching did not align with this. Fauzan et al. (2022) emphasise that the DRTA strategy stimulates learners' understanding of what they read if correctly practised by teachers. The findings emphasise the importance of integrating the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy into teaching reading comprehension skills. While most teachers demonstrated a theoretical understanding of the DRTA strategy, the practical implementation in classrooms was often lacking. Teachers E5, G7, and H8 showed awareness of the key elements of prediction, reading, and proving, which are crucial for enhancing learners' comprehension. However, the gap between conceptualisation and actual practice suggests a need for further professional development and support.

Moreover, the alignment between the DRTA strategy and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) highlights the potential for seamless integration into existing teaching frameworks. Teachers like C3, who could draw parallels between the DRTA steps and their current practices, indicate that with proper guidance, the DRTA strategy can be effectively implemented to foster active and thoughtful reading among learners. Therefore, while the theoretical understanding of the DRTA strategy is evident among teachers, there is a clear need for more consistent and practical application in the classroom. By bridging this gap, educators can better support learners in developing critical reading comprehension skills, ultimately enhancing their overall academic performance.

## 6. Conclusion

Reading is a fundamental skill that underpins all other learning. Thus, it is necessary that teachers adopt effective strategies to ensure that English First Additional Language learners develop strong reading skills in primary school which is essential for deep understanding and engaging with the content across all subjects in their schooling. Based on the findings from the individual face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews and classroom observations in this study, it is evident that while teachers are aware of various reading strategies to enhance learners' reading comprehension skills, there is a significant gap between their reported practices and actual classroom implementation. Teachers A1, B2, and C3 described using guided reading, skimming and scanning, and the top-down reading strategy, respectively. These strategies, supported by research (Khaliq, Tabassum, & Shaheen, 2022; Simanullang & Sinaga, 2019; Cao, 2023), are effective in promoting reading comprehension when applied correctly. However, classroom observations revealed inconsistencies between the teachers' reported strategies and their actual practices. Teachers often resorted to traditional methods, such as reading texts aloud and asking learners to answer questions independently, without actively engaging them in prediction, discussion, or collaborative learning. This discrepancy therefore suggests there is a need for professional development and support to help teachers effectively implement these strategies in their classrooms.

The findings highlight the importance of aligning teaching practices with theoretical frameworks, such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), to provide learners with the necessary support to achieve lesson objectives. Thus, this study recommends the need to bridge the gap between reported and actual practices, so that teachers can better foster learners' reading comprehension skills, ultimately enhancing their overall academic performance. Furthermore, the findings highlight the

importance of diverse pedagogical practices in teaching reading comprehension skills in EFAL classes. Teachers employ various strategies such as guided reading, skimming and scanning, and the top-down approach to engage learners before, during, and after reading. These methods, when implemented effectively, can significantly enhance learners' comprehension abilities and promote independent reading. However, once again there is a noticeable gap between teachers' theoretical knowledge and their practical application in the classroom. This misalignment necessitates the ongoing continuous professional development to ensure that teachers can effectively translate their understanding of reading strategies into practice. Moreover, integrating assessments into the reading process is crucial. Baseline, oral, and written assessments help activate prior knowledge, check understanding, and confirm comprehension, making them integral to the learning process rather than just evaluative tools. Overall, the findings stress the need for strong pedagogical knowledge and diverse reading strategies to support learners in developing their reading comprehension skills. Therefore, this study recommends by bridging the gap between theory and practice and effectively integrating assessments, teachers can create a more interactive and engaging learning environment that cultivates better comprehension outcomes.

Most teachers demonstrated a solid theoretical understanding of the DRTA strategy, recognizing its three key steps: prediction, reading the material, and proving or confirming predictions. This understanding aligns with the literature, which emphasizes the importance of these steps in enhancing reading comprehension. Despite their theoretical understanding, many teachers had not implemented the DRTA strategy in their classroom practice. Instead, they relied on the pre, during, and post-reading steps outlined in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). This suggests a gap between knowledge and practice, thus an implementation gap possibly due to a lack of practical training or resources. The steps in the DRTA strategy closely align with the pre, during, and post-reading steps in CAPS. Teachers who were familiar with CAPS were able to draw parallels between the two, indicating that the principles of DRTA are being applied, although under different terminology. Teachers like C3, who were able to relate their practices to the DRTA strategy, demonstrated an implicit understanding of its principles. This suggests that with proper training and support, teachers could effectively implement DRTA to enhance reading comprehension.

Finally, the study recommends bridging the gap between understanding and implementation, ongoing continuous teachers' professional development programmes should focus on practical training and implementation in the DRTA strategy and other effective reading strategies. Providing teachers with relevant resources and practical examples of successful implementation could also support this transition. While the theoretical understanding of DRTA and other reading strategies are evident among some teachers, there is a need for more practical and hands on activities support to ensure its effective implementation in classrooms. This could ultimately lead to improved reading comprehension skills among learners.

Therefore, to effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice in teaching reading for comprehension, several supportive measures can be implemented. Experienced teachers could mentor less experienced teachers, providing guidance, sharing best practices, and offering feedback on the implementation of reading strategies. This personalised support can boost teachers' confidence and competence in their instructional methods. Encouraging collaborative teaching practices, such as team teaching or peer observations, can foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement. By learning from each other's experiences and strategies, teachers can enhance their effectiveness in the classroom. Regular workshops and training sessions that include hands-on activities and practical examples of successful implementation of reading strategies can significantly enhance teachers' skills and practice. Additionally, providing teachers with a variety of resources, such as detailed lesson plans, instructional materials, and case studies of successful implementations, can support their efforts to integrate new strategies into their teaching of reading. Access to and availability of these resources can help teachers develop more effective reading comprehension lessons. By implementing these measures, EFAL teachers can be better equipped to apply effective reading strategies in their classrooms, leading to improved reading comprehension skills among learners. These recommendations thereby will enhance

teaching strategies used by English First Additional Language teachers, ensuring that theoretical knowledge is effectively translated into practical classroom practices.

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