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Fostering Decolonization, Reading and Multilingualism through Book Donation: A Case Study of One Primary School in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Despite the UNESCO declaration of literacy and access to primary education as a fundamental human right, many developing countries still face low literacy levels, limited access to reading material and poor reading culture. This can arguably be used to explain why children from developing countries are (according to large-scale studies such as Progress in International Reading Competency Study) performing below the expected standard compared to those from developed countries. While the low literacy levels are not solely attributed to limited access to reading material, the researchers argue that exploring the positive impacts of book donation will, in one way or the other, subvert the issue around low reading competency levels, and advance multilingualism as well as curriculum decolonization. This paper, therefore, discusses how decolonialism, reading and multilingualism are concurrently developed and realized through book donation. Using the decolonial thought theory as a lens, a qualitative design and case study approach were followed to explore how teachers used donated books to foster decolonization and advance reading as well as multilingualism in their classrooms. Three teachers from one rural primary school participated in the semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that the donated books written by university students empowered teachers to decolonize lesson presentations. In addition, the study found that the different languages in which the donated books were written promoted multilingualism. Finally, teachers reported learners' interest in reading the donated books written by university students. This study concluded that it is important to evaluate the practice of book donation considering the current debates around decolonization, low reading competencies and multilingualism.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a multifold concept, with varying definitions and scholarly understandings. Some scholars comprehend reading as a cognitive and constructive process of meaning-making wherein knowledge in texts is interpreted to construct meaning which is instrumental for cognitive development.[1] For other

[1] David A Kilpatrick, *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015); Jamie L Metsala et al., "What Is the Best Way to Characterise the Contributions of Oral Language to Reading Comprehension: Listening Comprehension or Individual Oral Language Skills?," *Journal of Research in Reading* 44, no. 3 (2021): 675–94.

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scholars, reading is conceptualized as both oral language and individual non-spoken cognitive activity through which knowledge is constructed.[2] Either way, reading is the skill of attaching meaning to texts, either by listening for understanding or by reading. Reading skills are developed in and from the early years of formal schooling, and it is often incorporated with writing, listening, and speaking skills. The three skills (writing, listening, and speaking) are equally important, however, reading is, according to Makena the skill upon which literacy and phonological awareness advance.[3]

Given the significance of developing reading skills (as outlined by the latter scholars), and the political as well as the colonial influences in South Africa, the question of how the colonialized curriculum is Africanized through the intellectualization of reading is and has been the center of numerous contemporary scholarly arguments.[4] Furthermore, reading is often incorporated and discussed in the context of literacy.[5] The question, again, of how it [reading] is uniquely developed through book donation, while simultaneously guaranteeing multilingualism and decolonization in and for the post-colonial generation is of paramount importance.

The reciprocity between reading and writing has been greatly discussed, and in the process, the variables through which each (or both) of them is (or are) realized have been (at least in contemporary scholarship) overlooked.[6] Reading for multilingualism and resource distribution (which entails book donation) are not discussed as prevalent determinants of developed reading and writing skills, particularly in rural schools. The arguments around "teaching reading for the development of literacy and phonological awareness" are predominant,[7] and (more often than not) desegregated from contextual factors (rurality, for example), diversity factors (multilingualism, for instance) and economic factors (availability and distribution of teaching and learning resources).

Reading and writing are two skills which are, according to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement developed congruently through literacy.[8] In this paper, however, the researchers argue that reading is developed in congruence to, but is not dependent on, the skill of writing. Hence, the article explores how multilingualism and decolonization are both dependent on the nature of the reading skill imparted. The article further argues that the donation of multilingual reading books subverts the dysfunctionality of the culture of reading in rural schools. This paper also uses scholarly literature and findings to discuss how the decolonization of the curriculum is identifiable through the reading of texts presented in different languages in rural primary schools in South Africa. The researchers acclaim the practice of donating books to rural schools for its significant role in what they have termed "African indigenous multilingualism".

The practice of donating books is, even though not sufficiently recognizable, the gesture through which literacy, as well as numeracy knowledge impartation and cognitive development are recognized.[9]

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[2] Nell K. Duke, Alessandra E. Ward, and P. David Pearson, "The Science of Reading Comprehension Instruction," *The Reading Teacher* 74, no. 6 (May 24, 2021): 663–72, https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1993.

[3] Bulelwa Makena, "The Influence of a Historically Disadvantaged Background on Reading Culture: A Case of Some Primary School Language Teaching Educators in Eastern Cape Province," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478)* 11, no. 6 (2022): 478–86.

[4] Zinhle Primrose Nkosi, "Non-Native IsiZulu Pre-Service Teachers' Views and Experiences on Learning IsiZulu as a Second Language at a South African KwaZulu-Natal University," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 55, no. 1 (2020): 95–110; M Phakeng, "Transforming the Academy Using African Languages," *Sunday Independent* 3 (2021); Nic Spaull and Elizabeth Pretorius, "Still Falling at the First Hurdle: Examining Early Grade Reading in South Africa," *South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality: A Study of the Present Situation and Future Possibilities*, 2019, 147–68.

[5] Kathleen Heugh, "Epistemologies in Multilingual Education: Translanguaging and Genre – Companions in Conversation with Policy and Practice," *Language and Education* 29, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 280–85, https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2014.994529; Bernadictus Plaatjies, "Investigating Principal Capacity in Literacy Instructional Leadership at Selected Primary Schools," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 10, no. 3 (2019): 136–60.

[6] Ofelia García and Li Wei, "Language, Bilingualism and Education," in *Translanguaging* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 46–62, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385765_4; Pinky Makoe and Carolyn McKinney, "Linguistic Ideologies in Multilingual South African Suburban Schools," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 35, no. 7 (2014): 658–73; Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook, "Disinventing Multilingualism: From Monological Multilingualism to Multilingua Francas," in *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* (Routledge, 2012), 451–65.

[7] Usha Naidoo, Karunanidhi Reddy, and Nirmala Dorasamy, "Reading Literacy in Primary Schools in South Africa: Educator Perspectives on Factors Affecting Reading Literacy and Strategies for Improvement," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2014): 155–67.

[8] Department of Basic Education, *National Curriculum Statement (NCS): Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)* (Pretoria: Department of Education, 2011).

[9] Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, "Literacy," *Our World in Data*, 2016.

The concept of the decolonization of the curriculum, on the other hand, has been discussed in the context of African storytelling, folklore, and African fictional story writing.[10] The question of how resources or books are distributed to respective schools to foster the decolonization of the curriculum remains significant, particularly in the academic era where scholarly debates are around insufficient economic means for resource distribution. This paper argues that book donation advocates for the decolonization of the curriculum and multilingualism. It further maintains that reading texts presented in different languages promotes multilingualism in mono-lingual classroom situations.

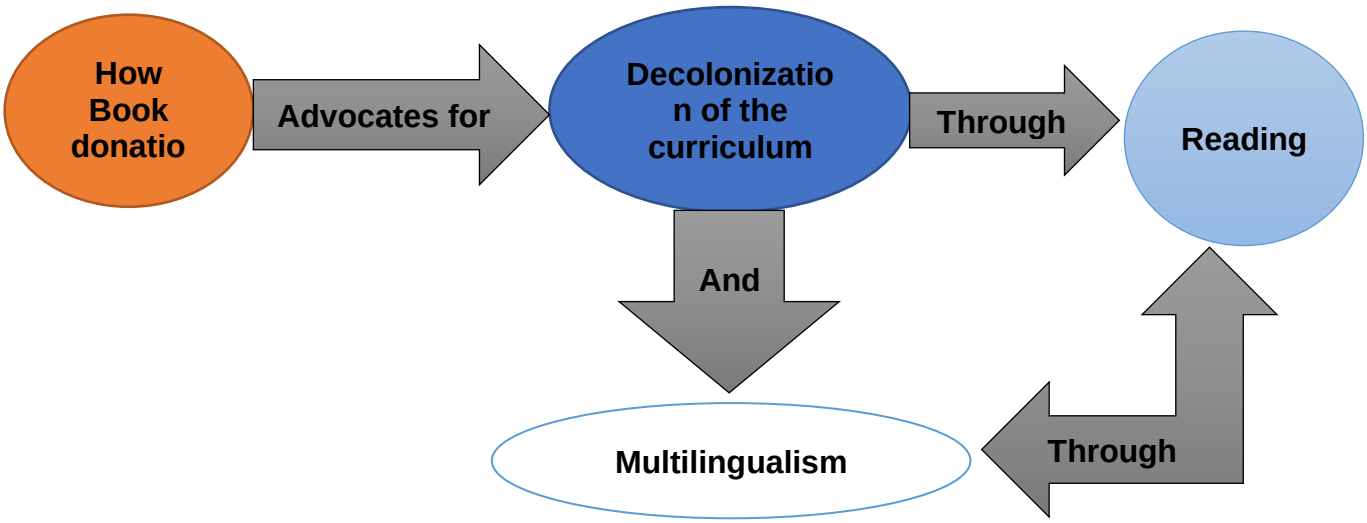

***Figure 1**: An illustration of how book donation advocates for curriculum decolonization and multilingualism through reading*

This paper seeks to discuss the state of reading in South African primary schools. It is through the literature review discussed in this paper that the substandard level of reading competencies in South Africa is revealed. Large-scale studies are critically reviewed to compare the reading competencies of South African primary school learners with the reading proficiencies in international elementary schools. Furthermore, contributory factors to lower reading competencies will be discussed by looking into the economic and contextual factors in South African primary schools. Book donation, both as the mitigating strategy to lower reading competencies and as a tool towards the advancement of decolonization and multilingualism will be suggested.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The State of Reading Competency in South Africa

Developing children's reading competency is considered by many scholars as the cornerstone for bettering educational outcomes.[11] As such, its implications are far-reaching and determine the subsequent learning process. Taylor et al., and Fleisch and Nomlomo argue that unless children master the skill of reading for understanding at an early age, they cannot develop more advanced skills and content knowledge that count

[10] Ashleigh May Harris and Nicklas Hållén, "African Street Literature: A Method for an Emergent Form beyond World Literature," *Research in African Literatures* 51, no. 2 (2020): 1–26; Huda Tufail and Asmat A. Sheikh, "Feminist Analysis of Tagore's Selected Short Stories: A Subaltern Study," *International Journal of Linguistics and Culture* 1, no. 1 (June 30, 2020): 67–82, https://doi.org/10.52700/ijlc.v1i1.11; Judith Inggs, "Weak or Wily? Girls' Voices in Tellings and Retellings of African Folktales for Children," *Children's Literature in Education* 52, no. 3 (2021): 342–56.

[11] N. Spaull and U. Hoadley, "Getting Reading Right," in *South African Child Gauge*, ed. L. Jamieson, L. Berry, and L. Lake (Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, 2017); Paul T Cirino et al., "Executive Function: Association with Multiple Reading Skills," *Reading and Writing* 32 (2019): 1819–46; Vuyokazi Nomlomo, "Democracy and Multilingualism in South African Primary Education: Implications for Early Literacy Development," *Challenging Democracy in Early Childhood Education: Engagement in Changing Global Contexts*, 2019, 75–89.

on the basic reading competency.[12] Nondalana's study authenticates the latter claim by revealing that writing and expressing phonological and morphological structures correctly for learners in senior phase grades in the Western Cape was, in fact, the echo of the sound learning and development of reading competencies from the foundation and intermediate phase.[13] In this light, the researchers argue that the substandard nature of reading competencies in South African secondary schools emanates from reading incompetencies from the foundation and intermediate phases. Even though the present paper is not contextualized within the foundation, the researchers believe that reading competencies are hierarchical, with foundation phase reading at the lower base of the hierarchy.

Large-scale studies reveal that more than seventy percent of learners in the foundation phase cannot read for understanding.[14] The question of what factors are attributed to lower reading competencies in South African primary schools has been bedevilling scholars for years. The perception of reading competencies as the cornerstone towards advanced learning is further strengthened by Spaull's argument on the fact that advanced mathematics itself is reliant on reading abilities because the understanding, interpretation and analysis of mathematical register are realized through reading competencies.[15] The focus of this paper is not to examine the controlling variables towards mathematical understanding. However, the fundamental role of reading comprehension and reading for understanding in the development of mathematical understanding strengthens the argument around the reading skill being central to and in the learning of all subjects.

Amongst the contributory factors to reading incompetencies in South Africa are the unavailability of libraries and insufficient distribution of reading materials in rural primary schools.[16] Different scholars convergingly argue that the unavailability of libraries and reading materials thereof emanate from the lack of educational infrastructures in rural black communities because of the apartheid government's Group Areas Act 41 of 1950.[17] The democratic government's attempts to build libraries and supply reading materials in previously disadvantaged black rural communities are noted in the scholarly works of Lonsdale, Pretorius and Ribbens.[18] Furthermore, about seven-tenth (seven out of ten) of learners from rural and township school demographics are struggling to read for meaning both in their home language and in additional languages. This makes the question of whether the school libraries are functional or not a worthwhile question.

Scholars such as Harts, Pretorius and Machet and indicate that about 7.2% of rural primary schools in South Africa have functional libraries, and 13.4% of those library establishments are without reading resources.[19] The researchers argue, however, that the indications made by the latter scholars are contradictory because the variable for measuring the functionality of libraries is the availability of reading resources. In this regard, the figure of 13.4% can, at least for the context of this study, be used as a benchmark for establishing and making arguments around the functionality of South African school libraries.

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[12] Stephen Taylor et al., "Improving Early Grade Reading in South Africa," *3rd Grantee Final Report. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation*, 2018; Nomlomo, "Democracy and Multilingualism in South African Primary Education: Implications for Early Literacy Development."

[13] N Nondalana, "7 Exploring Teachers' Perspectives on Effective Guidelines for a Grade 1 IsiXhosa Literacy," *Masixhase Abantwana Bakwazi Ukufunda Nokubhala: Let Us Enable Our Children to Read and Write*, 2020, 118.

[14] Sarah Howie et al., *PIRLS Literacy 2016: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2016: South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement* (Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA), Faculty of Education, University …, 2017); Trends in Mathematics and Science Study, 2019.

[15] N. Spaull, "Examining Early Reading Numeracy," *Taylor and Francis* 22, no. 22 (2016): 2.

[16] Genevieve Hart and Sandy Zinn, *The Conundrum of School Libraries in South Africa* (na, 2007); Margie Paton-Ash and Di Wilmot, "The State of School Libraries in South Africa," *Journal of Education* 57 (2013): 127–62; Maredi Samuel Mojapelo and Luyanda Dube, "Information Access in High School Libraries in Limpopo Province, South Africa," *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* 80, no. 2 (2014): 8–16.

[17] Christopher Merrett and Tony Hooper, "When Professional Ethics and Politics Collide: Libraries in a Time of Apartheid: Part One," *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa* 2021, no. 62 (2021): 16–32; Eric A Stewart, "Either They Don't Know or They Don't Care: Black Males and Negative Police Experiences," *Criminology & Pub. Pol'y* 6 (2007): 123.

[18] Michele Lonsdale, *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research.* (ERIC, 2003); Elizabeth Pretorius and Rita Ribbens, "Reading in a Disadvantaged High School: Issues of Accomplishment, Assessment and Accountability," *South African Journal of Education* 25, no. 3 (2005): 139–47.

[19] Genevieve Hart, "How School Libraries Improve Literacy: Some Evidence from the Trenches," *Mousaion* 31, no. 1 (2013): 47–60; Elizabeth J Pretorius and Myrna P Machet, "The Impact Of Storybook Reading On Emergent Literacy: Evidence From Poor Rural Areas In Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa.," *Mousaion* 26 (2008).

The findings from the survey which was conducted by Equal Education in 2011 display the distribution and availability of library establishments and reading resources according to different provinces. According to this survey, the Free State province had about 1390 schools which were without libraries and (or) reading materials. The Free State province was not the province with the greatest number of schools without libraries and (or) reading materials. As a matter of fact, KwaZulu-Natal Province (which had 5558 schools without libraries) and the Eastern Cape Province (which had 5502 schools without libraries and reading material, were the provinces with the largest statistical significance as far as the poor distribution of library resources and reading material(s) are concerned. Nonetheless, this does not nullify the need to address the problem of library and reading resource distribution in the Free State Province. Out of the 3032 schools in the province of the Free State, about 50% of them are without reading materials and libraries. This, calls for economic, political and academic interventions.

The survey, which was conducted by Equal Education in 2011 reveals (even though not ostensibly) the need for a paradigm shift from the one-faceted to the two-faceted contributory factor towards the reading incompetencies, i.e. dysfunctional libraries and the unavailability of reading resources. Therefore, there is a need for scholarly literature that focuses on the two aforementioned factors concurrently.

Arguably, the incompetency in reading for understanding, which has been the center of scholarly research for the past two decades, is not solely influenced by the government's failure to build libraries in rural schools. It is, nonetheless, also influenced by the teachers' and scholars' lack of enthusiasm in producing reading material, and in maintaining functional libraries, with ongoing reading tutorial sessions. Nkosi, in her examination of ongoing reading sessions as a variable towards improvement in reading for understanding in isiZulu classroom situations in the foundation phase, discovered that the availability of reading resources in primary schools is amongst the factors through which reading for understanding is catalyzed.[20] Parallel to Nkosi's findings is our argument that, to elevate reading competencies across all grades, there has to be sufficient availability of libraries, reading materials and ongoing reading tutorial sessions.[21] Through ongoing reading tutorial sessions, reading resources and libraries, learners' academic performance in subsequent grades is arguably elevated because children who do not learn reading at an early age risk falling further and further behind in later grades. This claim is further reinforced in Spaull and Taylor's analysis of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2021.[22] Data from the assessment of the PIRLS performance, around which Spaull and Taylor's analysis is centered, reveals that 78% of grade 4 learners do not meet the lowest benchmark.[23] In other words, close to 80% of grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning, and they cannot answer simple questions by retrieving information from the text. The reading incompetency emanates from the unavailability of reading resources, limited ongoing tutorials and the unavailability of libraries in most South African schools.

According to Howie et al., 2017, the reading competencies for grade 6 learners in rural English First Additional language schools were 11, 7 standard deviations lower than the reading skills of grade 6 learners in urban English home language schools. The economic factor is evidently (but not solely) a determinant for the unequal reading competencies in rural and urban. This study will discuss the economic factors at the later stage of the literature review. However, the library functionality and the availability of the reading resources thereof are (to some degree) tangled with economic factors.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study of 2021 reveals that only 19% of learners in the intermediate phase can read for meaning.[24] This means about 81% of learners in the intermediate phase cannot read for meaning. This makes the argument around the unavailability of reading materials, economic factors and the dysfunctionality of libraries being the causal factors for South African reading incompetencies more legitimate, particularly given the fact South Africa is a developing country, with

[20] Zinhle Primrose Nkosi, "Izinselelo Zabafundisi BesiZulu Ekufundiseni IsiZulu ENyuvesi YaKwaZulu-Natali," *South African Journal of African Languages* 38, no. 1 (2018): 61–72.
[21] Nkosi, "Izinselelo Zabafundisi BesiZulu Ekufundiseni IsiZulu ENyuvesi YaKwaZulu-Natali."
[22] N I C SPAULL and STEPHEN TAYLOR, "Impact or Scale? The Trade-Offs of Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Interventions in South Africa," *INTERVENTIONS*, n.d., 1.
[23] SPAULL and TAYLOR, "Impact or Scale? The Trade-Offs of Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Interventions in South Africa."
[24] Nic Spaull and Ursula Hoadley, "Getting Reading Right: Building Firm Foundations," *ChildGauge*, 2018, 201777; Howie et al., *PIRLS Literacy 2016: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2016: South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement*; Mastin Prinsloo and Lara-Stephanie Krause, "Translanguaging, Place and Complexity," *Language and Education* 33, no. 2 (2019): 159–73.

limited economic means and hence resource scarcity. The Progress in Reading Literacy Study of 2021 further reveals that South Africa came last in all 57 countries with the largest decline in reading competencies between 2016 and 2021. Scholars argue that the decline can be attributed to pedagogical factors.[25] The issues of teacher pedagogical and (or) content knowledge are contributory, however, they are, to a larger extent, intertwined with the limited distribution of reading resources in South African schools. Again, the fact that when South Africa was compared with developed countries, it came last with the largest decline in reading competencies is not aligned (at least, not to a greater degree) with pedagogical factors, but rather with economic factors and resource unavailability.

Howie et al. narrow the analyses of South African reading competencies across provinces.[26] Four provinces, according to Combrinck and Van Staden experienced declines of more than a full year of learning between 2016 and 2021.[27] Given that 40 points amount to one year of learning, the North-West Province experienced a decline of 2, 4 years in reading competencies, while the Free State province experienced a decline of 1, 6 years. In the Mpumalanga province, there was a decline of 1, 2 years while Limpopo experienced a decline of 1 year. The three coastal provinces (Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Eastern Cape) experienced the smallest declines with the Western Cape showing the smallest decline of 0, 4 years. Based on this analysis, rurality cannot be considered as a factor, however, resource availability and library functionality remain prominent factors.

The issue of the languages of Instruction in South Africa has been bedeviling scholars prior to and post the advent of democracy. In several studies, the issues of the languages of instruction are paralleled with socio-economic factors, with certain languages, especially those spoken by the previously economically and politically advantaged races, considered the languages of power.[28] Furthermore, the socio-economic factors continue to be central in discussions that pertain to reading competencies as the English and Afrikaans schools seem not to be experiencing a decline in reading competencies. The difference, for example, between 2016 and 2021 reading competencies for the English Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) schools is, according to the Progress in Reading Literacy Studies of 2016 and 2021, as analyzed by Howie et al and Combrinck & Van Staden, not statistically significant.[29] The difference between 2016 and 2021 PIRLS reading scores for the English Language of Learning and Teaching schools is 10, which is not a statistically significant number in this context. Furthermore, Venkat's analysis of the Early Grade Reading Study of 2021 reveals that the Brazilian grade 4's are 3 years ahead of South African grade 4's, with the average reading competence score in Brazil being 419 points compared to South Africa's 288 points.[30] This outlines that the average grade 4 child in South Africa is 3, 3 years behind the average Brazilian grade 4 child. In Brazil, 61% of grade 4's could read at the basic level (in 2021) compared to South Africa's 19% basic reading competency. The fact that in Brazil, learners are taught in the Portuguese language (which is their home language) throughout their formal schooling period makes the issue of home language instruction a pertinent one in the development of reading competencies. The argument around home language instruction and the importance thereof in the development of reading competencies is not the central argument for this present paper, however, multilingualism is.

[25] Sirak Tsegaye Yimer and Nosisi Nellie Feza, "Learners' Conceptual Knowledge Development and Attitudinal Change towards Calculus Using Jigsaw Co-Operative Learning Strategy Integrated with GeoGebra," *International Electronic Journal of Mathematics Education* 15, no. 1 (2019): em0554; VERONICA MCKAY and N I C SPAULL, "Changing the 'Grammar of Schooling'in South Africa: The Case of the DBE Workbooks," *INTERVENTIONS*, 2022, 25.

[26] Howie et al., *PIRLS Literacy 2016: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2016: South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement*.

[27] Sello Editor Moyo, Celeste Combrinck, and Surette Van Staden, "Evaluating the Impact of Formative Assessment Intervention and Experiences of the Standard 4 Teachers in Teaching Higher-Order-Thinking Skills in Mathematics," *Frontiers in Education* 7 (February 14, 2022), https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.771437.

[28] Russell Tytler, David Symington, and Craig Smith, "A Curriculum Innovation Framework for Science, Technology and Mathematics Education," *Research in Science Education* 41 (2011): 19–38; Lyn Webb and Paul Webb, "Introducing Discussion into Multilingual Mathematics Classrooms: An Issue of Code Switching?," *Pythagoras* 2008, no. 1 (2008): 26–32.

[29] Howie et al., *PIRLS Literacy 2016: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2016: South African Children's Reading Literacy Achievement*; Moyo, Combrinck, and Van Staden, "Evaluating the Impact of Formative Assessment Intervention and Experiences of the Standard 4 Teachers in Teaching Higher-Order-Thinking Skills in Mathematics."

[30] Hamsa Venkat, "Connecting Research and Mathematics Teacher Development through the Development of Boundary Objects," in *Research for Educational Change* (Routledge, 2016), 182–94.

In South Africa, there are 12 official languages, with nine of which being African indigenous languages. Given the variety of dialects in South African communities, reading for the advancement of multilingualism cannot be excluded in discussions that pertain to reading competencies. Furthermore, the officiation of the African indigenous languages as the Languages of Learning and Teaching in the foundation phase was (in one way or the other) an attempt towards the decolonization of the curriculum. Arguably, learners' ability to read texts for meaning and in different African languages works towards the development of multilingualism and the decolonization of the curriculum. The paper, therefore, seeks to investigate the mitigating factor towards resource scarcity (which is book donation), and the influence thereof in the development of multilingualism and curriculum decolonization.

Book Donation in the Context of Decolonisation, Multilingualism and Rurality

The quest to promote literacy among children is becoming a common practice in many African countries. The UNESCO declaration of literacy and access to primary education as a fundamental human right exacerbates the need to promote reading in developing countries like South Africa.[31] Because of the limited economic means in developing countries (like South Africa), the practice of donating books as a means towards the advancement of reading competency has been conventional, particularly in the democratic century. Many international donor agencies and organizations have come to the fore (through the donation of books) in elevating African reading competencies to the European standard. Book donation continues as one of the mechanisms for achieving elevated reading competency in South Africa and other African countries.[32]

According to Zell and Thierry, the two book donation organizations prevalent in the African continent are Biblionef and Ghana Book Trust.[33] These organizations have, for a couple of years, partnered with other book aid organizations, including the *International Book Bank, Books for Africa, and Book Dash.* Added to the major organizations are small-scale donor programs. Examples include *The Intra-African Book Support Scheme, ASA Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Awards, Friends of African Village Libraries, Lubuto Library Partners,* and *The African Poetry Book Fund*. In addition, donors donate new and second-hand books.[34]

There are two approaches to book donation-solicited and unsolicited. A solicited approach begins with a request from the recipient. For instance, the specific needs of the school library or learners inform the request made to the donor organization or agency. In this regard, UNESCO's *Book Donations for Development* document provides essential guidelines governing book donation programs. Among other things, it emphasizes the need for donor organizations to consider the economic environment of the receiving country. The cooperation between the donors and the beneficiaries of book donations is central to all the articles in the book donation charter. Such donor organizations include *Book Aid International, Biblionef, Sabre Foundation, International Book Bank,* and *the International Book Project*. In line with these guidelines, some donor organizations created online databases and computerized inventories to allow beneficiaries to select the books they need and deem suitable for their intention and readership.[35] On the other hand, unsolicited donations are donor-initiated. In this regard, the recipient's needs are completely ignored and assumed by the donor. In most cases, school libraries are not privy to the content of the books they receive.[36]

Whether solicited or not, Western countries donate their surplus books and educational materials to address what they deem as a 'book famine' in many African countries.[37] The concept of book famine refers to the lack of books and participation in any kind of reading activity. In a country like South Africa,

[31] UNESCO, "Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4," https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232, 2015.
[32] Mamotshabo J Boloka, "Sustainability of Book Clubs in a Rural Setting in Limpopo Province: A Case of Re-Atlegile Book Club.," *Mousaion* 38, no. 3 (2020).
[33] Hans M Zell and Raphaël Thierry, "Book Donation Programmes for Africa: Time for a Reappraisal? Two Perspectives," *African Research & Documentation. Journal of SCOLMA (the UK Libraries and Archives Group on Africa)* 127 (2015): 3–137.
[34] Zell and Thierry, "Book Donation Programmes for Africa: Time for a Reappraisal? Two Perspectives."
[35] Zell and Thierry, "Book Donation Programmes for Africa: Time for a Reappraisal? Two Perspectives."
[36] Johanna Anderson and Paul Matthews, "A Malawian School Library: Culture, Literacy and Reader Development," in *Aslib Proceedings*, vol. 62 (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2010), 570–84.
[37] Anderson and Matthews, "A Malawian School Library: Culture, Literacy and Reader Development"; Zell and Thierry, "Book Donation Programmes for Africa: Time for a Reappraisal? Two Perspectives."

the prevailing conditions of rurality create a fertile ground for the book donation practice to thrive. The lack of basic amenities such as school and community libraries intensifies the dire need for books from external sources. Mojapelo concur with the observation that less than 10 percent of school libraries are functional while the majority remain dysfunctional due to a lack of reading resources.[38] Their study, reveals that some rural school libraries lack books altogether, while others house outdated books that learners find irrelevant and unappealing to read.[39] So far, there have been several propositions and drafts of national policy on school libraries (Equal Education, 2010). These are followed by the National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services (DBE, 2012). However, the national policy on school libraries remains in the pipeline.[40] In the absence of such a policy, the challenges of providing relevant reading materials in school libraries also remain unabated.[41] Unsurprisingly, illiteracy levels among learners in rural primary and high schools remain high.[42]

The production of reading materials is another challenge exacerbating the need for book donations in rural communities. Zell and Thierry avow that international publishing companies dominate the publishing industry at the expense of local ones.[43] Although there is no authentic and verifiable data and documentation of book output from the African continent, it is plausible to conclude that Africa remains the main importer of reading materials from foreign publishers. Zell asserts that only a small number of donor organizations donate books published by local publishing houses.[44] The list includes *Biblionef, Read International, and The African Library Project,* among others. This situation is attributed to, among other things, the high costs of buying and producing textbooks in many African countries, including South Africa. Large-scale donations of such books written in local languages could promote confidence and improvement in learning.

This monopoly by foreign publishing houses has implications for decolonisation and multilingualism. There is a limited number of books written and published in South African indigenous languages, while the English language maintains the hegemony. Expressed in the donated books are the educational paradigms and epistemological hegemonies of the West. All these occur at the expense of indigenous ways of knowing. In other words, the indigenous epistemologies do not feature in the content of the donated books as the latter is often viewed with scepticism. asserts that decolonising knowledge production enhances learners' indigenous points of view. UNESCO (2012) recognises mother-tongue education as important for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The exclusive use of the English language in these books does little to promote multilingualism in South Africa.

In this paper, the researchers are not discarding the critical role of book donation practices and programs in promoting literacy and reading culture in rural communities. Rather, they echo the calls for *'correct donation'* (UNESCO, 2012). The current study reports on how teachers from one primary school used donated books to foster decolonization and multilingualism in their classrooms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Decoloniality Theory

The study is viewed through the decolonial lens to create a space for indigenous epistemes in the education system. As a theory, decoloniality owes its genesis to multiple other theories influenced by the Frankfurt School. This is evident in its relevance and active role in political, economic, discursive, and epistemic discourses.[45] The epistemological perspectives of decolonial theory continue to gain traction in educational contexts. This is particularly important in light of the view that without effective intervention, coloniality will likely continue thriving in social institutions such as universities and schools.[46] To guard against this, decoloniality takes a critical stance against the representation of Western epistemologies and

[38] Mojapelo and Dube, "Information Access in High School Libraries in Limpopo Province, South Africa."
[39] Nomlomo, "Democracy and Multilingualism in South African Primary Education: Implications for Early Literacy Development."
[40] Mojapelo and Dube, "Information Access in High School Libraries in Limpopo Province, South Africa."
[41] Mojapelo and Dube, "Information Access in High School Libraries in Limpopo Province, South Africa."
[42] Boloka, "Sustainability of Book Clubs in a Rural Setting in Limpopo Province: A Case of Re-Atlegile Book Club."
[43] Zell and Thierry, "Book Donation Programmes for Africa: Time for a Reappraisal? Two Perspectives."
[44] Hans M Zell, "Women in African Publishing & the Book Trade: A Series of Profiles–Series II," *The African Book Publishing Record* 48, no. 2 (2022): 112–53.
[45] Ashish Agrawal, Hilton Heydenrych, and Genevieve Harding, "Decolonising an Engineering Curriculum through a Community-Driven Design Project," *Southern Journal of Engineering Education* 1 (2022): 39–60.
[46] Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa* (African Books Collective, 2013).

interests. It also challenges the dominant power structures that compromise and undermine the efforts to transform knowledge production in the educational system.[47] It is achieved by embracing the process of Africanisation and indigenisation as opposed to Eurocentrism or neocolonialism in knowledge production.[48] In this quest for multiple epistemes,[49] the following critical questions are central to decoloniality: Who produces knowledge? Why is this kind of knowledge valued over another? Who consumes it?[50] These questions are relevant to ask in the context of this study in light of the view that decolonisation remains futile if the discussions do not start at the school level.

In addressing these questions, the books donated to the school under study are written by the students and donated by a rurally located university. This helps eliminate the foreign dependency syndrome that coloniality often perpetuates among marginalized people. Most importantly, the primary school learners for and with whom the knowledge is produced and shared can relate to the contents of the stories told. This approach makes them recognize and appreciate that tremendous and meaningful literature is not a Western and English phenomenon. In other words, their lived experiences, contexts, indigenous knowledge, and languages add value to the literary world and knowledge production. This view corroborates the assertion that decoloniality makes learners see value in themselves, their sociocultural ecologies and local knowledge. Besides knowledge production, decoloniality advocates multilingualism in the quest to decolonize African languages. This is significant considering the argument that English continues to under-develop indigenous languages. Finally, influenced by decolonial thought, view rural people and institutions as reservoirs of knowledge with systems that can sustain development. The Fundza Reading Project is one example of such a system.[51]

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

Fundza Reading Project

The Fundza Reading Project was a partnership between the Academy for Multilingualism, the Initiative for Creative African Narratives (iCAN) and the Department of Languages in Education within the University of the Free State. The project was funded by the Department of Higher Education (DHET). It was launched in October 2022 in two primary schools in QwaQwa and Bloemfontein. The selected schools were under-resourced and situated in rural and township settings. This project aimed to encourage and inculcate the culture of reading in primary school learners. The selected schools received sixty books each.

The books were anthologies of short stories written in English and other South African indigenous languages. What made this collection unique was that all the stories were written by students from the local university. These students share lived experiences with the beneficiaries and readers of these books-primary school learners. In other words, the stories are told from students' perspectives and in languages, contexts, and content that learners can easily understand and relate to. The current study was conducted in a rural primary school.

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to evaluate, through qualitative data, how primary school teachers used donated books to foster decolonisation and multilingualism in their classrooms. Three senior phase teachers, responsible for the teaching of English First Additional Language from one selected rural primary school in the Free State province were purposively selected. The selected participants have used university-donated books in their English First Additional language classrooms for two years.

Data was then collected through semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. It (data) was transcribed, carefully sifted, and thematically analysed to address the question of "how decolonisation and multilingualism were realized in the process of teaching-reading in the classrooms". Data was initially

[47] Bunmi Isaiah Omodan and Billey Addam, "Analysis of Transformational Teaching as a Philosophical Foundation for Effective Classrooms," *Journal Of Curriculum Studies Research* 4, no. 2 (2022): 15–29.
[48] Alexander Dunlap, "Toward an Anarchist Decolonization: A Few Notes," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 32, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 62–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2021.1879186.
[49] Chaka Chaka, "Skills, Competencies and Literacies Attributed to 4IR/Industry 4.0: Scoping Review," *IFLA Journal* 46, no. 4 (December 10, 2020): 369–99, https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035219896376.
[50] Omodan and Addam, "Analysis of Transformational Teaching as a Philosophical Foundation for Effective Classrooms."
[51] Stewart, "Either They Don't Know or They Don't Care: Black Males and Negative Police Experiences."

coded to observe patterns, and it was, thereafter, arranged according to different themes. These themes were then used as findings in the discussion and presentation of the results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Book Donation as a Resource towards Decolonized Pedagogical Approaches

The concept of the decolonization of the curriculum and its verb "decolonizing the curriculum" has grown exponentially among educators who teach at different levels. Many researchers have discussed the decolonization of the curriculum in the context of formerly colonized and (or) politically oppressed nations. Furthermore, different instructional, and pedagogical approaches have been used to theorize the decolonization of the curriculum, in an attempt to find ways through which curriculum can be decolonized through folktales, it was discovered that the oral presentation and the dramatization of folktales is a tool for decolonizing the curriculum in isiZulu classroom situations. Agbomeji and Buthelezi's findings, however, do not reveal how the reading of texts about ancient folktales is or can be perceived as an additional variable towards decolonized curricula.[52] The present study revealed that the books written by university students in different languages inspired intermediate-phase educators to transition to decolonized pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, the study found that integrating the reading and writing of folktales advanced and aided intermediate-phase educators in transforming to decolonized pedagogical practices. The short stories and folktales, for instance, which were contextualized around ancient storytelling and characterization transformed educators from perceiving the culture of reading and writing as a Western practice. One of the educators narrated that:

> *Letting my learners read a short story on folktales around ancient storytelling helped me to realize that, in fact, the culture of reading and writing is more African than Western. I have come to realize that the "baholo" are the first educators, and school educators are in fact, secondary educators. That is how instrumental the short stories and folktales have been. The Colonization made us recognize only the formal part of teaching. But teaching and learning start from home, that is where children are taught about their culture, and about their respective roles in the society. We call that (home teaching) socialization. Because we have adopted the Western culture so much, we even have forgotten that gender roles are an African curriculum. In my teaching practice, whenever I want children to relate to the content, I always refer to the short story. "Children learn better when they can relate"-that has since been my personal motto.*

One of the intermediate phase educators also indicated that, since she read some of the stories on the Basotho culture, she ensures that all her lesson preparations are centered around the importance of the African culture more than Western civilization. She narrated that all her teaching is (in one way or the other), centered around creating texts on folktales to develop reading and writing competencies.

Through the book donation practice, teachers have themselves realized the importance of simultaneously developing reading competencies and African culture. One of the educators indicated that his lessons have since been centered around African poetry. The educator indicated that although he teaches English First Additional Language, he urges his learners to write and recite poems about African nature and the African climate.

Using the Donated Books to Develop Reading Competencies in Different African Languages

As indicated in the literature above, the approaches toward the development of multilingualism in the South African context wherein there are twelve official languages are of paramount importance. The study revealed that educators developed reading competencies not only in one language but in different languages. The interview with the educators revealed that learners struggle with reading English texts for meaning. However, the donated books have helped them to mitigate poor reading competencies through code-switching. The question of whether educators switch the Sesotho and the English dialects was addressed by one educator's response:

> *One cannot (only) teach English reading competencies by explaining the meaning of sentences in a learner's home language. But different languages can also be used to give meaning to English*

[52] Ayinde Mojeed Agbomeji and Thabisile Makhosazana Buthelezi, "THEORISING THE INVITING PEDAGOGY MODEL FOR MULTICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS IN AFRICA," in *EDULEARN17 Proceedings* (IATED, 2017), 6749–51.

sentences. Learners are interested in learning other African languages. One thing about African languages is that they are related. I mean, you can derive the meaning of English sentences through one other language (which can be isiZulu or SeSwati). Since these books are written in almost three languages, I use that which learners learnt from those stories to give them the meaning of English sentences.

According to Setati et al and Maluleke, code-switching refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of languages.[53] This study, however, revealed that code-switching is not only the process of switching between two or more dialects, but it is also a process of giving the meaning of one dialect in the medium of any other "familiar" language. The reading resources that were provided to the school made it apparent that switching two or more codes does not only illuminate the meaning of a sentence or text presented in one dialect but also promotes multilingualism. Since there are twelve official languages in South Africa, the switching of codes can happen between any other African language and English. The Decolonial theory is the relevant lens because some texts presented in English can in fact be used as a tool for the intellectualization of African languages.

The donated books, according to educators, promoted individual reading competencies in the intermediate phase classrooms. The presentation of reading texts in different languages encouraged learners to read for meaning because each word and each sentence written in a different language encouraged learners to seek meaning and the use relevant use thereof of certain words and sentences. One of the educators alluded that:

I came to realize that learners seem to overlook the meaning and the pronunciation of words which they are familiar with. But, as soon as the word or sentence is written in a different language, they [learners] ask the meaning of that word. That, for me, developed their ability to read, not just for the sake of reading, but for making sense and for deriving meaning behind that which they have read. This also made me prepare thoroughly before going to class. Knowing that learners are not going to read for the sake of reading, but they will ask you for the meaning of the sentence or word which they have read makes you always prepared to answer any question. I can say, the books also helped me to re-evaluate the reading lesson preparation.

The donated books did not only positively affect educators' pedagogical practices, but also improved reading competencies for intermediate learners. It was through the donated books that educators observed the improvement in the reading competencies of their learners. The record of the reading competency level provided by one educator indicated that about 65% of learners showed improvement in reading skills.

A	30 (H = 13; L = 17)
B	25 (H = 11; L = 14)
C	23 (H = 16; L = 7)
D	48 (H = 20; L = 28)
E	54 (H = 26; L = 28)
F	56 (H = 22; L = 34)
G	50 (H = 18; L = 32)
H	48 (H = 23; L = 25)
I	54 (H = 24; L = 30)
J	46 (H = 19; L = 27)

[**H: high achievers in reading competency; L: Low achievers in reading competency**]

Figure 2: *The record of the reading competency level of learners as provided by one educator*

[53] Witness Maluleke and Siyanda Dlamini, "The Prevalence of Organised Cross-Border Crimes in South Africa: A Non-Empirical Statistical Data Analysis on Stock Theft and Hijacking of Motor Vehicles," *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies* 11, no. 1 (2019): 116–45; Mamokgethi Setati et al., "Incomplete Journeys: Code-Switching and Other Language Practices in Mathematics, Science and English Language Classrooms in South Africa," *Language and Education* 16, no. 2 (2002): 128–49.

Even though the number of high achievers is not statistically significant, according to educators, this illuminates the improvement in reading competencies since the donation of books.
As the Decolonial theory posits, the English language is not the only medium through which intelligence can be measured. Similarly, reading competencies cannot only be observed by measuring learners' English language competence. African indigenous languages can also be used to improve learners' abilities to read for meaning. The study provided a paradigm shift in terms of how reading competencies improve. Prevalent scholarly literature reveals in reading sessions, that learners ask for the meaning and denotation of the words and phrases presented in the English dialect. Contrarily, encouraging learners to read texts written in other African languages encourages them to ask for meaning.

Donation of Books Written by African Students as the Strategy for Developing the "Reverse Phonological Awareness"

The reading resources provided to one primary school were further used to develop what the researchers term "reverse phonological awareness". Phonological awareness is developed in the foundation phase, but it cements reading abilities throughout primary schooling.[54] The question of whether phonological awareness implies the reading and writing competencies in two languages only was addressed by the response which was given by one of the educators:

> *Learners only learn how to read and write in their home language in the foundation phase. In all other subsequent grades, the learner uses the reading and writing competencies in his or her language to learn the phonological structures of other languages. The donated books not only promote reading competencies in our learners' home language but also help them [learners] to learn other languages. You find that in one text, there is a sentence written in another language. Now, we as teachers have to teach the phonological structures of that language. I have done that in most of my reading classes, but the trick is that you have to actually take learners back to the foundation phase (while they are in the intermediate phase) to teach them how certain words are pronounced and written in other languages.*

This is in line with the ideas posited in the Decolonial theory. Indigenous languages can also be elevated by teaching reading, writing and phonological structures of African one language using the other. This challenges the idea that learners in the intermediate phase are to be encouraged to use their home language to learn English. Rather, their home language command can be used to help them learn other African languages.

Donated Books as Materials used for "Home-reading" Purposes

The study found that donated books were used for "home-reading" purposes. As the literature indicated, most rural and township households lack reading resources. This leads to learners' reading demotivation. Two educators affirmed that the books are given out to learners as home-reading materials. The influence of home-reading in this regard was apparently articulated. However, given the socio-economic constrain in rural and urban schools, it is only assumed that learners get to read for understanding even in their homes. Presumably, it can (in one way or the other) improve motivation to read for learners from economically disadvantaged households. The two educators alluded that:

> *We give out donated books to learners for home-reading purposes. We hope that their reading competencies will improve in this regard. We are not sure if they [learners] get the opportunity to read in their homes. With time, maybe the influence of giving out the reading material will be observed.*

Discussion Summary

The findings from this paper revealed that multilingualism can be promoted through the reading of books presented in different languages. Furthermore, the paper found that the donated books can be used both to mitigate the economic factors and the issues of insufficient distribution of reading resources in rural and

[54] Nosisi N Feza, "Black Students' Rich Mathematical Experiences: Mathematics Concepts and Xhosa Cultural Games for Reception Class," in *Early Childhood Education* (IntechOpen, 2018).

township schools. Educators, through donated books written in different languages, can, according to the findings of this study, transform to decolonized pedagogical approaches. Again, learners in the intermediate phase can use donated books written in African languages to develop the phonological awareness of other African languages while they are already in the intermediate phase-"reverse phonological awareness".

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend the distribution and the use of books written in different languages, particularly for South African primary schools situated in rural and urban ecology. Furthermore, the paper revealed the need to use donated books as opposed to books (or reading materials) which are purchased from profit-making institutions. Therefore, the researchers recommend that students at universities and other non-profits be equipped (by all possible means) to write and publish books in different languages both to elevate multilingualism and advance decolonization (and decolonized pedagogical practices) in rural and primary schools. It is further recommended that reading materials should be contextualized within the African culture so that learners will develop not only the reading competency but the knowledge and the recognition of the African as the tool towards reading for understanding.

CONCLUSION

The paper sought to explore the role and the practice of donating books which are written by university students in different languages in fostering decolonization and advancing multilingualism and reading competencies in the intermediate phase. The findings from the paper revealed the integral role of donated books in developing reading competencies and cultural knowledge for intermediate-phase learners. Furthermore, it was discovered that the books written by students foster decolonized pedagogical practices for educators and multilingualism in the intermediate phase. The researchers recommended the donation of books written in different languages for use in the intermediate phase for their three-fold roles in educators and learners, which are: fostering decolonization, promoting multilingualism and advancing reading competencies.

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