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The Relationship Between the Reader's Interest and Comprehension

A Research Report presented to the Faculty of Humanities

in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

Masters in Education by Coursework and Research Report

(Wits School of Education)

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Abstract

In South Africa, 78% of Grade Four learners cannot read for meaning (PIRLS, 2017). The purpose of this study was to understand this reading comprehension crisis through a different lens. This study aims to investigate whether interest in the text affects the learners' ability to understand what they are reading in a Grade 3 South African classroom. I will begin by analysing the most common graded readers learners in grade 3 public schools engage with, in order to establish their relevance to the learners. This analysis will be followed by a case study of Grade 3 learners' reading comprehension on two sets of readers of the same level. One set of readers will be selected from the Biff, Chip and Kipper (1986, Oxford Reading Tree) series which form part of their classroom guided readers library read at their school and the second set of readers will include books written by South African author, Niki Daly. I have chosen Niki Daly's books because he is well known for writing children's books which are contextually relevant to the South African child whereas the former are arguably not contextually relevant. This information will assist in understanding the relationship between the readers' interest and comprehension which I will gather through the comprehension tasks and interviews with the learners after they have read the books. Based on the results from the case study it was clear that interest does affect reading achievement. Learners who had an interest in the books they read received higher reading comprehension scores, showing higher reading competencies.

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Declaration of Original Work

I, **Gontse Busakwe,**

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Know and accept that plagiarism (i.e., to use another's work and to pretend that it is one's own) is dishonest.

Please confirm the following:

X	I declare that this Research Report entitled: **The Relationship Between the Reader's Interest and Comprehension**; and handed in on the date below is my own work.
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Date: **6 February 2022**

Supervisor: **Dr Alison Kearney**

Chapter One
Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

South African classrooms have diverse learners who are not only multicultural but are also multilingual. Some learners may speak more than two of the 11 official languages, while other learners also speak foreign languages because they are from different geographical areas. As educators, it is important to take all aspects of learner diversity into consideration to accommodate all learners in the classroom, especially because many learners attend schools in which the language of teaching and learning (LoLT) is different to their home language. Fleisch (2008, p. 118) states that most learners in South Africa attend primary schools that have language policies that are either "straight-for-English" (English is LoLT from the first grade) or "early transition to English" (gradual transition in FP classes in preparation for Grade Four). For many learners, these language policies create a major learning barrier, because they are not fluent in the LoLT as it may not be their home language. Broom's study (2004 as cited in Fleisch, 2008) shows the link between language and underachievement. This study investigated the reading achievement of 845 Grade Three learners in 20 schools in Gauteng (single district). All the schools reported a minimum of three home languages in each classroom. All the township schools only transitioned into English as the LoLT in Grade Four, in contrast to the former Model C schools where English was the LoLT from the Grade One. English oral and reading tests were used to assess language and performance. According to Broom (2004 as cited in Fleisch, 2008, p. 102):

> "The average score on the reading test for non-English speakers in ex-DET schools was 31,8% compared to the score of English home-language speakers in an English medium school of 87,8%. The results showed the difficulty second language learners are having reading grade-appropriate English texts".

These results show that learning in the second, or sometimes the third language (English) means that a learner struggles to master, or never masters, the knowledge or skills required by the school (Fleisch, 2008).

Difficulties in learning to read compound the problems of understanding what is read. Heugh (2006 as cited in Fleisch, 2008) states that the shift from learning to read to reading to learn is already difficult for English home language speakers who have the knowledge of approximately 7000 words and an adequate knowledge of the structure of the English language. Imagine the additional difficulties that English second-language speakers who enter the classroom with a limited vocabulary of approximately 500 words must face. These learners find it difficult to scaffold the cross-curricula learning in English because of their limited familiarity with the structures of this second language. In essence, the learning barriers that the learners incur in the Foundation phase (FP) particularly the language barriers the learners bring into the classroom contribute to the low literacy rates we are currently faced with as a country (Fleisch, 2008).

Added to the challenges of learning in a LOLT other than one's own home language, is that the texts that learners engage with are often out of date, and are written for English first language speakers. For example, the common reader in my relatively well resourced classroom is "Land of the Dinosaurs" (1999, Oxford Reading Tree). The theme of this book is dinosaurs which are extinct thus may not be relevant to the Grade 3 learners. Schools that are less well resourced and make use of older, or second hand readers still use the Kathy and Mark Basic Readers from 1970 (James Nisbet & Co Ltd). As a Millennial, I read Kathy and Mark readers as a Grade 3 student, yet the same books are read in 2021 by an entirely different generation- Generation Alpha.

Ketchum (2018) argues that readers comprehend texts more if they have a relationship with the content of the texts. This relationship is based on the reader's interest in what they are reading which is activated by connections or relevance to the reader and the background knowledge that is triggered in the text. When there is a disconnection between the reader's background knowledge and interests in the text, reading for comprehension is weakened. This idea relates to a key feature of decolonial theory that foregrounds the importance of relevance of the curriculum. Mbembe (2016) discusses Ngugi wa Thiong'o's description of decolonisation, from a liberating perspective, pointing out that Ngugi emphasises that decolonisation is an ongoing process of seeing ourselves clearly from a place of blindness. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1981 as cited in Mbembe, 2016) calls for decolonising where we focus on re-centering Africa, in which education for African children should be about ourselves,

about redefining ourselves, where things are seen from an African perspective. Ngugi was interested in writing about ourselves as Africans and teaching for the African child. Ngugi (1968) suggests putting Africa at the centre of learning, thereby enabling other forms of knowledge to be considered relative to our situation and how they contribute to us understanding ourselves as Africans. Therefore, it follows that not only should the books African learners read be relevant to the African child to activate their interest and thus strengthen reading for comprehension, relevance is also an important step towards decolonising the school curriculum. South African children need to read books that are contextually relevant, where characters represent them and enable them to see themselves clearly as emphasised by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

1.2 Problem statement

For reading comprehension to occur, the reader should be able to decode text and make connections between the text and their background knowledge, thus contextual relevance is crucial. Ketchum (2018) states that if the reader regards the text as being interesting, they often show persistence in decoding the text regardless of the level of difficulty.

There has been a lot of research showing how low South African learners' literacy rates are. Ketchum (2018) argues that readers comprehend texts more if they have a relationship with the content of the texts. Based on research by Ketchum (2018) and Wa Thiong'o (1968), my hypothesis is that if the books that learners are reading in the Foundation Phase classroom are relevant and interesting to the learners, they will be more motivated to read, and their literacy will improve.

1.3 Aim

This study aims to test Ketchum's statement within a decolonial framework, by investigating whether interest in the text affects the learners' ability to understand what they are reading in a Grade 3 South African classroom. I will begin by analysing the most common graded readers learners in grade 3 public schools engage with, in order to establish their relevance to the learners. This analysis will be followed by a case study of Grade 3 learners' reading comprehension on two sets of readers of the same level. One set of readers will be selected from the Biff, Chip and Kipper (Hunt, 1986, Oxford Reading Tree) series which form part of their classroom guided readers library read at their school and the second set of readers will include books written by South African author, Niki Daly. I have chosen Niki Daly's books

because he is well known for writing children's books which are contextually relevant to the South African child whereas the former are arguably not contextually relevant. This information will assist in understanding the relationship between the readers' interest and comprehension which I will gather through the comprehension tasks and interviews with the learners after they have read the books.

1.4 Research questions

1.4.1 Main research question:

In what ways does learners' interest in the text affect their reading comprehension?

1.4.2 Sub-research questions:

- What kinds of graded readers are available in the grade 3 public school classroom?
- What are the learners' stated reading interests?

1.5 Rationale of the study

The purpose of this study is to understand the reading comprehension crisis in South Africa through a different lens. Many studies focus on reading proficiency, rather than questioning the relevance of content to the reader, which either strengthens or hinders meaning making. My research study focuses on this relationship and actually engages learners about the kinds of texts they would be most interested to read. There is little research about how text relevance affects reading and decolonisation in Foundation Phase. Therefore, this research study will contribute to finding ways of increasing our literacy levels through addressing a gap in the research, as well as make an important contribution towards decolonising the Foundation Phase curriculum.

1.6 Outline of Chapters

This study begins with Chapter One where I provided an introduction to the study, describing the background to the study focusing on reading comprehension and reading interest. This research identifies the problem of contextually irrelevant books that South African learners are reading at school and my aim is to investigate whether this affects reading comprehension. Chapter Two comprises the literature review, where I explore research related to reading comprehension, the concept of interest and decolonial theories of relevance for learning. This is followed by Chapter Three in which I describe how decolonial theories

will be used as a theoretical framework to guide the research study. Chapter Four focuses on the research methodology, where I discuss in detail the research design, research sites and participants. I also describe the data gathering tool, research instruments and the ethical considerations for conducting the research. Chapter Six comprises the data interpretation and analysis, where a thematic content analysis method is used to answer the research questions. Lastly, Chapter Six concludes the research report and provides recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores existing literature on reading comprehension, providing a detailed account of how reading with meaning occurs and what knowledge and skills are required for comprehension to take place. The concept of interest is described to help us understand what factors activate the learners interest.

2.2 Reading Comprehension

Kusdemir (2020) defines reading comprehension as a mental skill which entails that the learner makes links between the content of the text and their prior knowledge. It is the ability to interpret and construct meaning of the information from a text. Fitria (2019) describes the prerequisite skills needed in order for reading comprehension to occur. These are cognitive capabilities such as attention and memory, interest in the content and different types of knowledge such as prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge (grammar and vocabulary knowledge). Prado and Plourde (2005 as cited in Harvey, 2012) emphasise how comprehension is a process which includes thinking, past experiences and knowledge. Teachers may teach learners comprehension strategies to assist them with reading with meaning, especially in the Foundation Phase. Teaching reading and reading for comprehension are skilled pedagogies in which teachers should equip learners with to help them access meaning from texts.

Burns (1984 as cited in Fitria, 2019) discusses the four levels of reading comprehension, namely literal, interpretative, critical and creative comprehension. Literal comprehension refers to attaining information that is explicitly stated in the text. It requires the reader to identify the main idea, sequence of events and to understand vocabulary. Interpretative comprehension includes inferences; deriving ideas from the text that are not explicitly stated. This level of reading comprehension comprises extrapolating main ideas, understanding cause and effect relationships and identifying the mood of text and drawing up conclusions. Fitria (2019) describes that critical comprehension entails evaluating the content of the text and comparing it to known standards, evaluating the accuracy and appropriateness of the text

by questioning based on facts and making judgements. Lastly, creative comprehension requires the reader to go beyond the critical comprehension level and create new ideas or solutions based on what they have read. Based on my six years of teaching Grade Three learners, within a South African context, learners should be able to achieve literal and interpretive reading comprehension levels. These two levels should be in place in order for readers to fully comprehend what they are reading. Learners should be able to draw information explicitly from a text but also be able to make inferences from things that are stated implicitly. However, once learners have successfully attained the first two levels, we encourage the critical comprehension level.

Reading comprehension is a massive literacy concern in South Africa, as the PIRLS 2016 study shows that 78% of Grade 4 learners cannot read with understanding (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, & McLeod Palane (2016). There are many reasons why learners struggle with reading with understanding. Woolly (2010 as cited in Harvey, 2012) describes this difficulty as a result of the reader using all of their cognitive ability to decode words, therefore not reading fluently resulting in little effort made to make meaning of the text. On the other hand, Jitendra and Gajria (2011 as cited in Harvey, 2012) state that poor reading comprehension is a result of low socio-economic environments as reading requires learners to activate their background or prior knowledge to understand the text but may have limited prior knowledge due to their socio-economic status. Activating a reader's past experiences helps them relate to the story and better make meaning of the text. This is another reason why it is important that learners read texts that have some relevance to their life worlds. Vocabulary is also crucial in reading. According to Yildirim, Yildiz and Ates (2011 as cited in Harvey, 2012) learners should know the definitions of 90-95% of words in a text in order to make meaning. Limited vocabulary hinders reading comprehension.

Research shows that when learners are taught reading comprehension strategies and use them effectively, there is an increase in their reading comprehension abilities (Ness, 2010 as cited in Harvey, 2012). Harvey (2012: 6) describes four reading comprehension strategies which are "visualization, summarization, making inferences and making connections to one's life and experiences". Visualisation refers to creating mental images while reading or pausing at different places in the story to create these visualisations. Learners can draw pictures, or the teacher can provide story cards until learners are able to independently visualise images in

their minds. Prado and Plourde (2005 as cited in Harvey, 2012) describe summarization as a reading comprehension strategy where students are taught how to summarise a story read independently. This strategy is taught through modelling and guidance of how to draw important information from a text and condensing these details. The teacher can also ask learners to share summaries of stories verbally to encourage summarization. Making inferences is a reading comprehension strategy that removes details from a text to encourage learners to make meaning based on the story's context. Prado and Plourde (2005 as cited in Harvey, 2012) mention that the teacher should guide the learners by asking them appropriate questions to help them find the details. Graphic organisers can also be used. Lastly, Prado and Plourde (2005 as cited in Harvey, 2012) describe making connections as a strategy used by teaching students to draw onto their prior knowledge and experiences to help them relate to the story as this relevance to text is crucial to meaning making. Reading comprehension strategies should be taught explicitly through modelling, demonstration and guidance to ensure that they are understood and implemented effectively for reading comprehension to occur.

2.3 The Concept of Interest

According to Schiefele (1991), research into the concept of 'interest' has been an ongoing process in psychology and can be traced all the way back to 1841, where it was argued that interest is important in education as it promotes effective learning and memory. Scholars such as Schiefele, Hausser and Schneider revived the concept of interest in 1979 by arguing against concepts of achievement motivation, which focuses on how the best form of motivation is when a learner strives for high academic performance thus ignoring the fact that students learn in the process of being engaged in specific content (Schiefele, 1991). Schiefele (1991) describes the characteristics of the concept of interest, showing that interest is not entirely the same as motivation. Firstly, interest is content-specific as it relates to specific topics and tasks. Secondly, interest is a directive force: it explains the learners' choices in areas which they strive in. Learners will read a book that they are capable of reading. Thirdly, interest is vital in explaining subjective theories of educators. In addition, the concept of interest consists of valences, intrinsic attractiveness, to a task or topic. Lastly, content-specific interest is likely to be changed by instruction compared to general motives (Schiefele, 1991). Often teachers provide text to learners to read, which is compulsory for educational reasons and thus the interest in the text is not the reader's choice but rather through the teacher's

instruction. In addition, Clark and Rumbold (2006) state that reading interest is concerned with people's preferences in particular genres, topics, activities and contexts. Interest and intrinsic reading motivation are related as intrinsic reading motivation refers to the level of engagement in a task which is based on one's personal interest in that particular task (Ryan and Deci, 2000 as cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006). It follows that readers who are intrinsically motivated will probably read books that interest them and are more likely to make meaning successfully. Intrinsic reading motivation results in "greater reading frequency and depth, reading enjoyment, increased retention of important information, greater persistence in coping with difficulties, mastering the required skills and becoming self-determined in reading tasks" (Hidi, 2000; Cox & Guthrie, 2001; Guthrie et al, 1998, Deci, 1982 as cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Intrinsic reading motivation affects reading comprehension due to the level of engagement with the text.

Hidi and Baird (1988 as cited in Schiefele, 1991) describe the differences between individual and situational interest. Individual interest is defined as the preference for specific topics, tasks or subject areas. On the other hand, situational interest is defined as stimulated by situational stimuli. For the purposes of my research study, I will focus on individual interest, which is further categorised into interest as a latent characteristic and as an actualized characteristic. According to Schiefele (1991), "interest as a latent characteristic can consist of feeling-related valences or value-related valences". Feeling related valences refer to feelings of enjoyment and engagement linked with a topic or task. Value-related valences refer to the personal significance attributed to a subject area or object. Learners may show interest in a particular book, for example, as it creates feelings of enjoyment or the story may have a personal meaning to them. Schiefele (1991) defines actualized interest as content-specific intrinsic motivation where a learner is interested in a particular topic, enjoys learning and improving their skills or content knowledge in this area.

Springer, Harris and Dole (2017) emphasise the importance of interest on cognitive and affective aspects of reading, as it affects how we feel and think about the text. Springer et al. (2017) describe an event of Daniel who uttered the following words to his Grade One teacher at the start of the year, "I don't want to learn how to read and no one can make me". Daniel's preschool teacher described him as difficult thus resulting in him making very little progress during Grade R. At some point in his Grade One year, his teacher noticed Daniel and a group of friends huddled in the corner of the classroom. As she approached the group, she noticed

something uncommon- the boys were focused and engaged in an Egyptian information book. This book stimulated their curiosity and the conversation they were having about the book was something the teacher had not observed before. This led her to supporting the interests of Daniel and his friends throughout the year by providing more informational texts and projects outlined in those texts. By the end of the year, Daniel was extremely motivated to read and achieved the grade reading level benchmark. Schiefele, Wild and Krapp (1995 as cited in Springer et al, 2017) state that learners who are interested in a text tend to have deeper comprehension, read strategically, retain information from text for longer and put cognitive effort into the reading process regardless of the text's complexity. Schiefele (as cited in Soemer and Schiefele, 2019) states that topic interest is a positive predictor of reading comprehension. Therefore reading interest does affect reading achievement (Gentilini & Greer, 2020). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000 as cited in Springer et al, 2017;43) state that "educators have two equally important reading goals: to teach students to read and to teach students to want to read". This statement speaks to the implications of my research- encouraging learners to engage in texts that are relevant to them, where they can see their stories narrated, where Thandi sees herself in the book titled, "I have Brown Skin and Curly Hair" by Karen Theunissen. When learners' experiences are captured in a book, they resonate with the story and are motivated to read this text as it speaks to them. Springer et al (2017) discusses four research-based principles that can assist teachers with building interest and reading in their learners. The first principle is cultivating individual interests which refers to teachers considering learners' personal interests which is often intrinsic and linked to self-directed reading (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010 as cited in Springer et al, 2017). Different learners' personal interests may come from their experiences. The teacher must know what topics his/her learners are interested in and can guide them to books that speak to their interests to encourage and improve their reading abilities. Schraw, Flowerday and Lehman (2001 as cited in Springer et al, 2017) describe the second principle as situational interest where the teacher creates a classroom environment where learners are excited to engage in a reading activity. Springer et al. (2017) share a scenario where a teacher created and placed bear footprints on the floor leading to a table that was full of bear books for the Grade 1 learners to read. Teachers are encouraged to make use of the catch and hold of interest strategy. Mitchell (1993 as cited in Springer et al, 2017) describes the catch stage as the initial stage where the teacher uses fun activities to create interest in content. This is basically the hook of the reading lesson. Hold is the second stage where the teacher moves beyond the initial interest and maintains the interest of learners in a meaningful way such as the Grade 1

learners who read bear books from the table. Springer et al. (2017) defines the third principle as selecting texts with interest-enhancing elements. This refers to the teacher choosing interesting texts based on design, organisation and storytelling traits. According to Schraw et al. (2001 as cited in Springer et al, 2017) there are three writing traits which make texts more interesting such as coherence, relevance and vividness. Coherence refers to how easily learners understand and link ideas in the text because of how well structured it is and accommodates the needs of readers. Relevance refers to how the text connects to the reader's experiences thus resulting in the text being significant to them. Lastly, vividness refers to exciting and vivid details described in the text which increase the reader's interest and retention of the story (Schraw et al., 2001 as cited in Springer et al, 2017). Teaching interest self-regulation strategies is the last principle described by Springer et al., (2017) which is about teaching learners what to do when they have to read text that they find not interesting. Children must learn how to read with comprehension, regardless of their interest in the text. Teaching learners how to regulate their interest in reading is crucial and should be modelled in the classroom. The aim of self regulation is to overcome uninteresting texts by maintaining effort and perseverance in the reading activity (Wolters, 2003 as cited in Springer et al, 2017).

Reading interest can be activated by teachers being aware of their learners' different interests. An Ofsted report (2004 as cited Clark and Rumbold, 2006) provided statistics that showed that schools that do not link to learners' reading interest and have a narrow range of readers for learners to read from limit learners' reading choices thereby reducing learners' motivation to read. Therefore, schools need to consult learners on their reading interests to ensure that they have adequate reading resources which represent the interests of all learners encouraging them to read. We do, however, need to be cognisant of the fact that South African schools are under-resourced and therefore purchasing interesting books is not a simple task. Schools can encourage older learners in the school to write stories for learners in younger grades, thus being an educational experience for everyone and also ensures that the stories remain contextually relevant.

2.4 Conclusion

Research shows that developing literacy is a step by step process, and that when learners are interested in what they read they become more motivated to learn to read, and are then able to move from learning to read, to reading for comprehension and reading to learn. In the

following chapter I will outline decolonial theories, and relate the concept of interest when learning to read to the need to transform curricula for social justice.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework which I will be using is the decolonial theory of relevance. As discussed in the previous chapter, reading interest is affected by the relevance of the text to the reader, which impacts on the engagement and meaning making of text. Decolonisation theories have contributed to the way we understand and view the notion of relevance. Although the focus is on decolonisation, it is important to first provide context to decolonial theories of relevance followed by an explanation of the importance of African literature and how contextual relevance may impact how learners engage with text.

Decolonial theories have emerged to address what decolonial thinkers regard as lacking in postcolonial theory. According to Subedi and Daza (2008) postcolonial studies in education question how legacies of colonialism, oppression and discrimination of others based on their race, sexuality, language etc. impact structures in education. They describe three themes pertinent to postcolonial practice, which include "discrepant identities, critical global perspectives and racialization and ethnic postcolonial discourse". Discrepant identities addresses the matter of recognising and appreciating diversity in cultural identities. Critical global perspectives refers to the decolonisation of global dominant knowledge and proposes that we rethink the ways in which global and local formations are displayed in educational research, the curriculum and pedagogical practice (Kumashiro, 2001 as cited in Subedi and Daza, 2008). Finally, racialization and ethnic postcolonial discourse focuses on the way racialisation is "a sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed (Omi & Winant as cited in Subedi and Daza, 2008:7). However, the postcolonial theory has been criticised for its use of complex language, how it includes and addresses multiple disciplines (Subedi & Daza, 2008).

Maldonado-Torres (2011) states that despite the so called contemporary decolonial turn in theory, decolonial thinking emerged in late 1400s and early 1500s, at the beginning of modern forms of colonization; with the first coloniser, there were already those who were calling for decolonisation. However a greater shift away from modernisation towards decoloniality is an incomplete project which took place in the 1900s and is still continuing to date. The events that led to this greater shift of decolonial theory are the disintegration of the

European Age in World Wars 1 and 2, the second wave of decolonisation in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean and other regions in the world such as was experienced at the Bandung Conference. Maldonado-Torres (2011) mentions how political consciousness raising movements played a crucial role in this decolonial solidification by increasing the consciousness of relationships between colonialism, racism, the formation of ethnic movements of empowerment and feminism and the entire appearance of decolonial theorizing. Decoloniality is an important, ongoing task that remains incomplete. Maldonado-Torres (2011) discusses how the decolonial turn took place in the Western academy by stating that it started after the decolonisation of Asia and Africa, the Civil Rights movement in the United States of America and New Zealand as well as other countries who had movements that fought for the recognition of indigenous languages. Decolonial theory emphasizes the need to build new concepts and critically amend all concepts and theories. Alcoff (as cited in Maldonado-Torres, 2011) states that we have to provide decolonial epistemology in order to create decolonial social change and ultimately transform the world. Furthermore, "for an epistemology to work for the revolution, it has to be seen differently than it is usually seen by specialists in the area; that is typically, as apolitical and acontextual, without reference to the concrete ways in which knowledge is produced and who produces it" Alcoff (as cited in Maldonado-Torres, 2011).

Literature on the decolonisation of curricula mainly focuses on decolonising tertiary institutions, thus creating a gap in thinking about decolonising the lower grades which my research aims to contribute to. Mbembe (2016) focuses on decolonising African universities, arguing that the lack of democratization of access to tertiary institutions is concerning and the university classroom remains a place where bureaucratic regimes redistribute and preserve westernized knowledge systems. Therefore, Mbembe (2016:30) calls for the

> "decolonization of the systems of access and management insofar as they have turned higher education into a marketable product, rated, bought and sold by standard units, measured, counted and reduced to staple equivalence by impersonal, mechanical tests and therefore readily subject to statistical consistency".

Universities need to be decolonized to enable students to continue their pursuit of African knowledge. Mbembe (2016) states that universities follow bureaucratic methodologies, steeped in the mechanisms of control of the Enlightenment in which the universities were

born. This is evident in the obsession of quantitative assessments; faculties evaluated based on evidence of productivity and on their performance based on student evaluations of lecturers. This bureaucratisation and obsession with quality and performance turns the university into a 'service provider' and the student into a customer. Therefore, to decolonise these institutions, one needs to break the cycles that result in making students consumers. As Mbembe (2016:32) points out, the problem with our institutions is that they are westernized, which he describes as a "Eurocentric epistemic canon". A Eurocentric canon refers to the western way of knowledge production. The Eurocentric canon has become the hegemonic, dominant way of knowledge production, evident in university discourse that limits or represses the articulation of anything outside of these oppressive frames of knowledge. Macaulay (1994 as cited in Shizha, 2013:9) states that colonial education aimed "to form a class of interpreters; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, in morals and in intellect". It is for important reasons such as this that led to the call for the decolonisation of education.

Mbembe (2016) points out how Ngugi wa Thiong'oemphasises that decolonisation is an ongoing process of seeing ourselves clearly from a place of blindness. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1981 as cited in Mbembe, 2016) calls for the decolonising of the African child's mind, where we focus on re-centering Africa, where education should be about ourselves, where relationships in the world are seen from an African perspective. Ngugi was interested in writing about ourselves as Africans and teaching for the African child.

Chilisa (2012 as cited in Le Grange, 2016) describes the process of decolonisation as consisting of five phases. The first phase is rediscovery and recovery, which refers to colonised people rediscovering their own identities by recovering their own history, languages, cultures and traditions. The second is mourning, which is a phase of grieving the oppression of colonisers over colonised people's identities and ways of living. The third phase is dreaming of colonised people entreating their history and imagining possibilities of a decolonised curriculum, what that would entail. Commitment is the fourth stage where students become activists of change and drive decolonisation by including the voices of colonisation in the transformation of curriculum.

Most literature about decolonisation focuses on decolonising tertiary education, thus little focus on the earlier years of school. The aim of my research is to contribute to this gap in literature by focusing on the Foundation Phase by working with Ngugi's theory of Afrocentricity. McLaren (1998) discusses Ngugi's notion of Afrocentricity which focuses on the redefining of ourselves as Africans. Asante (1987 as cited by McLaren, 1998) states that Afrocentricity is "placing African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviour". This is a significant statement as it encapsulates the need for putting African ideals at the centre of what students are exposed to. Although there is a place for other knowledge, African students should learn content and skills based on their context and what is relevant to them. Ngugi (1993 as cited by McLaren, 1998) describes how language is central to Afrocentricity. Language either provides or denies access to learning. English has become a universal language of power, where indigenous languages are inferior to English. If we want to encourage learners to read, we need to provide books that give them access to the content in a language they understand. Ngugi (1993 as cited by McLaren, 1998) calls for the equality of languages, where all languages are seen as equal. He even wrote some papers in Gikuyu in support of the equality of languages. Although this is the ideal, as a result of English being the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) from Grade 4 in South African schools, as per the Language Policy. At the very least, it is my hypothesis that learners should be exposed to books in English that are relevant to them.

Ngugi (1968) emphasises the issue of languages when he called for the abolition of the English department. He stated that we should put Africa at the centre and other things should be seen in relation to our circumstances and how other ways of knowing contribute to how we understand ourselves. Therefore, eurocentric ways of knowing should be understood based on their relevance to Africa and not be the dominant way of knowing. Ngugi (1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019) describes his essay titled "The Quest of Relevance" as a call to have African languages and cultures as part of academic discourse to ensure that we maintain African experience for the African child. He emphasises the importance of African experiences being central to literature studies in schools. In his essay, Ngugi (1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019) states how Western literature and language has hardly any relevance to African experiences and often relegates African culture and languages as inferior and unimportant which results in African learners losing their roots. As a primary school student, I remember teachers telling my friends and I that we were at an English school and therefore were not allowed to speak our native languages amongst ourselves. Many of us were alienated from

our roots, based on language restrictions. Thus reiterating Ngugi's point of the colonial education system purposefully creating a challenge for African students to recognise the core of their cultures. As a result, African students experience and view the world in an Eurocentric manner, this creating issues of identity (Ngugi, 1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019).

Ngugi (1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019) states that the mission for the "Quest of Relevance" is to put Africa at the centre to withstand the dominance of Western literature and in doing so, interpret the world from an African perspective. By putting Africa at the centre, we are able to "radiate outwards and discover people and the world around us… at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures" Ngugi (1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019:2). Therefore, it is crucial that African experiences and languages are central to the literature that students are exposed to. A book titled "Mr Hare Meets Mr Mandela" by Chris van Wyk uses words like 'Bra Tsotsi' which refers to a criminal in South African language. In Niki Daly's book titled, "Not So Fast Songololo" uses the word 'songololo' which refers to a millipede in South African language. Both these books are written by South African authors, within a South African context thus allowing the reader an opportunity to relate and experience the world from an African perspective.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe my research design, research sites and research participants. I also explain the data gathering methods, and research instruments used to gather the data. I then discuss the methods used to analyse the data. Finally, I consider the ethical implications of my research, and outline what I have done to mitigate any ethical issues.

4.2 Research design

In this project I used a qualitative research design. McMillan & Schumacher (2010) states that qualitative research designs aim to understand and explain human perceptions, actions, attitudes and values within a social context. As part of the qualitative research design, I did a content analysis of the guided readers that are available in the classroom, in order to understand what readers the learners are exposed to, I also did a case study with a group of six Grade 3 learners from the average reading ability group. The average reading group comprises learners who read at the class' median rate determined by the teacher based on reading ability assessments. The teacher chose learners who are part of the middle, average reading group, thus not the strong or weaker reading ability learners for more fair results. The rationale for using a case study on the six readers is due to the bounded system of case study, where I can focus on a set of learners bounded in time and place to show an issue (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010. Each learner read two readers independently: from the Biff, Chip and Kipper (1986, Oxford Reading Tree) series and the second reader was a book written by a South African author, Niki Daly. Niki Daly books represent characters of all ages, genders and racial groups. The learners were able to choose two out of eight books. The reason for giving children a choice of books to read is to activate motivation. Krashen (1993 as cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006) states that learners who choose what to read are more motivated, read more, show increased literacy development and achievement regardless of the difficulty of the book. Therefore, choice motivates learners to read. Each learner completed a comprehension task based on both readers. This was followed by interviews which aimed to measure the interests of the books the learners enjoy reading.

4.3 Research sites

My research site includes one Grade 3 class in a public school located in the Ekurhuleni district, Johannesburg. It is a former model C, co-education school which represents a good cross section of society in its diversity of middle class learners. The Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) is English. The reason for choosing this school is due to the socio-demographics of the learners that attend this school. The learners come from low to middle economic status households and represent different languages and races. The LOLT of the school is English and the books chosen for the research were written in English. I did not want language barriers to interfere with the results thus providing accurate and reliable results. The reason for selecting Grade 3 is because it is the last grade of the foundation phase and learners should transition from learning how to read to reading to learn in this grade.

4.4 Research participants

The research participants in this study are six Grade 3 learners from an average reading ability group. The reason for focusing on Grade 3 learners is because reading for meaning is crucial in this year as they transition into Grade 4. The average reading ability group is a choice of selection so that reading accuracy and fluency does not hinder the reading comprehension results for the purposes of this research. The six learners were three girls and three boys, representing diverse South African racial groups. Thus providing an unbiased sample group which represents the socio demographics of our country.

4.5 Data gathering methods and research instruments

I used a content analysis form that I developed (see Appendix 1) to gather information about the kinds of readers available in the classroom. I also used comprehension tasks to understand the understanding level of the different texts read. Each learner completed a written comprehension after reading a book (from the same reading level as classroom books). Lastly, I conducted interviews with the six learners individually in order to ascertain more information about their reading interests.

The first research tool I completed to gather data was a content analysis form (see Appendix 1), which examined the kinds of readers that are available in the classroom and the demographics of the learners. The content analysis tool focused on the guided readers available in the classroom, which form part of the classroom library in which books are taken

from for homework and group guided reading. This tool assisted with recording the title of each book, publisher's details, reading level of each book, topic or theme and main characters in the book. The rationale for recording the publisher's details for each book provides the publishing company, author, date and time of publishing which gives us an idea of the relevance of time, contextual relevance of author and stories written which may or may not resonate with the South African reader thus affecting reading interest and comprehension. Analysing the topics and/or themes of each reader gave me information of the topics of books and readers interest based on the case study interviews I conducted with my six Grade 3 research participants. This tool also focused on the main characters, analysing the number of human beings, animals or insects as well as the race and gender representation which gives us insight on the relevance of characters to learners based on representation.

The second research tool I used to gather data were comprehension activities (see Appendix 2) that I designed. These were administered by me for validity reasons. The teacher first introduced me to the six learners and I explained the research project and went through the assent forms with them. After receiving assent from the learners and collecting all their consent forms we went to sit under a quiet tree with chairs and benches outside. I explained how the choosing of books would take place and that they would complete a comprehension after reading each of their two chosen books. Each learner read two books and completed two comprehension activities based on the books read to help me measure comprehension levels of the readers.

The last research tool is interviews (see Appendix 3) with each of the six learners that were voice recorded where learners were asked questions about their reading interests. The interviews were recorded to ensure all data is captured. The teacher was present throughout as an observer and to make the learners comfortable as they are still minors.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approaches in my research protected the rights, interests and the dignity of all my involved participants and kept them from harm (Scott & Morrison, 2005). I had a number of ethical considerations as I worked with minors. As the researcher, I ensured protection and privacy based on two practices which are anonymity (no link between data and participants) and confidentiality (only researcher has access to participant's names and data). These two

practices ensured that access to data, including both paper copies and electronic forms, are stored safely and can only be accessed by the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Pseudonyms (student numbers) will be used throughout the report to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants and research sites. The teacher and I knew the research participants as the teacher was present during the data collection process, however the results of data collection were not shared with the teacher and identities of the research participants were kept anonymous in this report. It was crucial to consider issues of trustworthiness throughout the research process. Participants were asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research began. Their responses were treated confidentially. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study. All research data will be destroyed within either (a) two (2) years of the publication of the research findings, or (b) six (6) years, if no publications arise from this research. Furthermore, I received ethics clearance from the WITS Ethics Committee. My ethical clearance number is 2021ECE00M.

I provided information sheets and consent forms to all my research participants including the principal, teacher, and the parents of the learners. The learners were given assent forms (see Appendix 4). Participants were told that their participation in the study is voluntary and they could withdraw from the research at any point in the research process.

Limitations of the study included the sample size which could affect the validity and reliability of my results. All six learners were people of colour, non-white, which limits my research in terms of relevance. A variety of all races would have given me greater results for analysing relevance to books based on racial representation, however there is only one white learner out of a class of 38 learners, which happened to be absent on the day I was on site. Delimitations of the study was this research being conducted within a confined, localised boundary of space and time, focusing on six Grade 3 learners from one class in one school.

In the next two chapters, I will be discussing the interpretation of the data collected and analysing the data using a thematic content analysis. In addition to the data analysis I will

provide a conclusion which summarises my findings and share recommendations for further studies.

Chapter Five

Data Interpretation and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected and an analysis of the findings thereof. This research aimed to investigate whether or not content and interest affect reading comprehension. I explored whether interest in the text affects the learners' ability to understand what they are reading in a Grade 3 South African classroom. I also explored how interest, in terms of relevance and the relationship to the text, affects reading comprehension.

5.2 Thematic Content Analysis

My data interpretation and analysis was underpinned by the Thematic Content Analysis design which provides techniques used to analyse raw data and identify themes. "Key characteristics are the systematic coding process, examining meaning and the provision of social reality through the creation of themes" (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turumen & Snelgrove, 2016:100-101). A theme refers to the main product of data analysis which arises from a group of repeating ideas from the raw data requiring interpretation.

5.3 Table of Operational Definitions

Key Terms	Operational Definitions
Graded Readers	Books written at different levels which form part of the classroom library. These readers introduce and reinforce vocabulary to assist learners with reading fluency and comprehension.
Adventure	Is a genre that includes fantasy, science-fiction and supernatural adventure (including magic).
People of colour	Refers to non-white racial groups, mainly black, indian, coloured and asian people.

5.4 Content Analysis of Guided Readers

5.4.1 Top Three Publishers

From the content analysis of guided readers form, I decided to focus on the top three publishers of the guided readers. These publishers are Oxford University Press, Collins and Key Links which make up the majority of the published books in the classroom library (see figure 1).

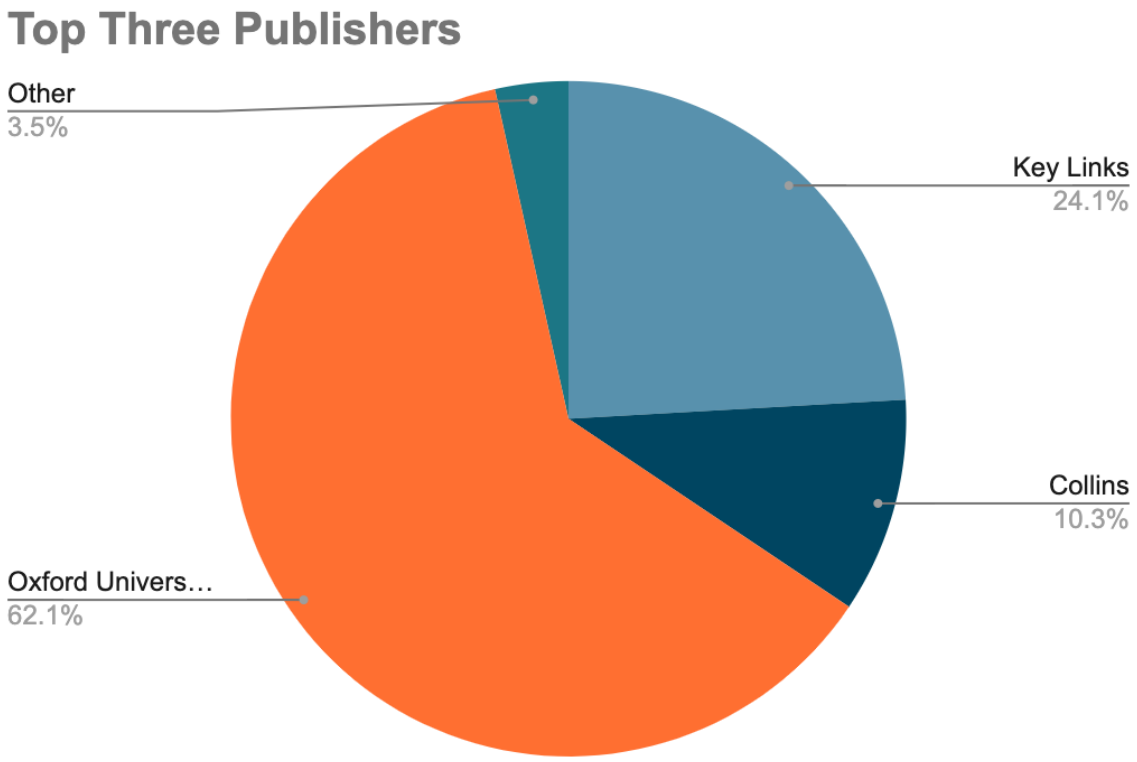


FIGURE 1: Pie chart showing the top 3 publishers of the graded readers available in the classroom library.

Oxford University Press graded readers are published in New York and have multiple authors, however the main authors are Adam Coleman, Paul Shipton, Susan Gates and Nick Warburton. Oxford University Press is the largest tertiary press in the world, with books written in seventy languages and publishing in 190 countries worldwide (Oxford University Press, 2022). Collins readers are published in the United Kingdom and are written by multiple authors. Key Links has one author who is Jill Eggleton, which is based in New Zealand. None of the readers, including publishers that were not part of the top three, were published in South Africa. The books that were analysed were published from 1988-2010 (see figure 2).

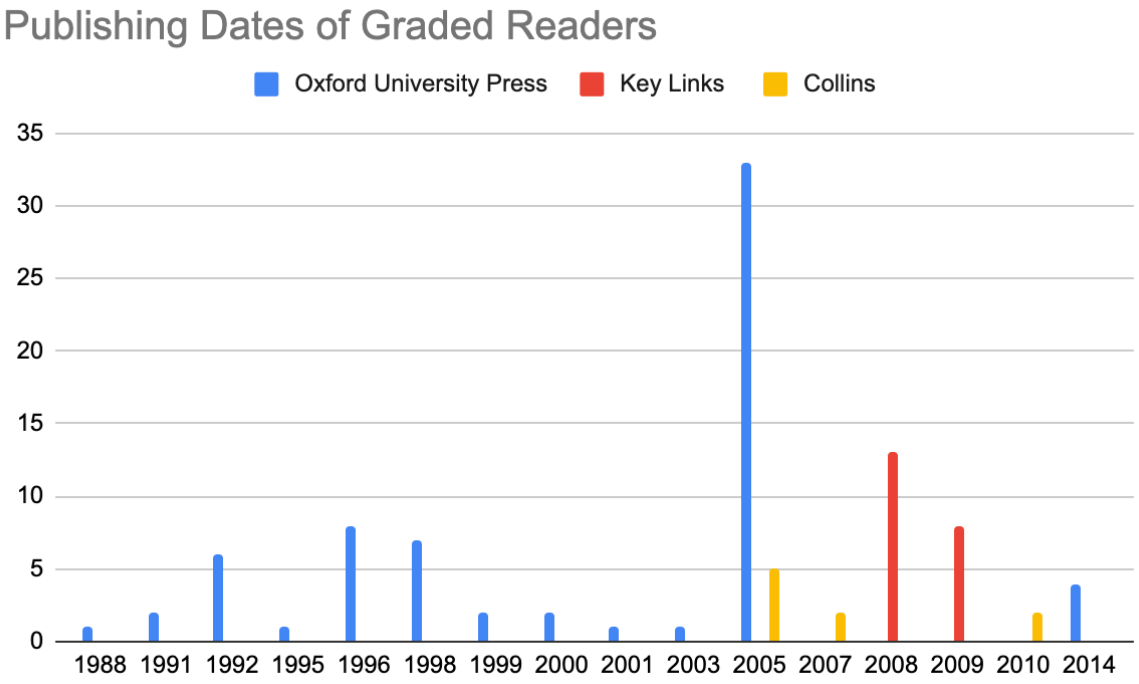


FIGURE 2: Chart showing the publishing dates of the graded readers in the classroom library.

Based on figure 2, we can see that the most recent book available in the classroom library was published in 2014 by Oxford Press University, yet still read in 2021 by learners. The oldest book was also published by Oxford University Press in 1988. There are thirty three books that were published in 2005. Key Links books were published in 2008 and 2009 by the same author. Collins published books in 2005, 2007 and 2010.

5.4.2 Themes of books

There was a vast variety of different themes and genres of the books which were age appropriate for Grade 3 learners in terms of reading levels (see figure 3). The most popular theme is adventure which includes fantasy, science-fiction and supernatural adventure (including magic). This means that this theme contributed to the majority of books analysed. 28,7% of the 87 books were adventure books. The least popular themes are money, music and history with 1,1% each.

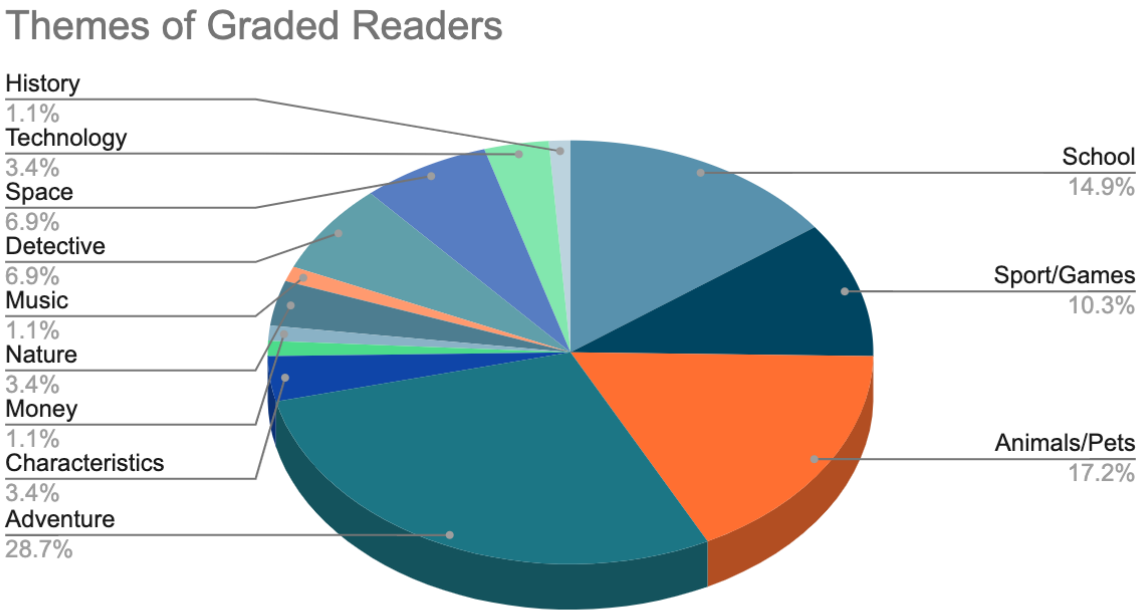


FIGURE 3: This chart shows the themes of all eighty seven graded readers.

5.4.3. Main Characters of Top Three Publishers' Graded Readers

For purposes of this research, I only focused on human beings with Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981 as cited in Mbembe, 2016) in mind who emphasises that in order to decolonise education in Africa, we focus on re-centering Africa, where education should be about ourselves, where things are seen from an African perspective. Ngugi was interested in writing about ourselves as Africans and teaching for the African child. For this reason, I focused on the main characters that were human beings and not animals for relevance to the reader. When analysing the data, I focused on racial groups and gender of the main characters. The racial groups are white or people of colour (black, South African coloureds, indian and asian). I have deliberately grouped the racial groups in this way as it is difficult to decipher which racial group is represented in brown-coloured book characters. The dominant racial group, in terms of number of book characters is white (see figure 4).

	Oxford University Press	Key Links	Collins
Number of humans	115	31	16
White	105	25	14
People of Colour	10	6	2
Male	34	11	8
Female	8	7	1
Mix	73	13	7

FIGURE 4: Table showing the main characters racial groups and genders.

In the Grade 3 class that I took my sample size from, I was informed by the teacher that there are 38 learners in total, in which 1 of them is white and the rest are learners of colour. This means that 97% of the learners in this class belong to the people of colour racial group, yet 89% of the characters in the books are white. How do learners relate to stories that only represent 3% of the classroom population? The reader's interest is sparked by how they relate to the story and yet even the representation of racial groups shows the minority racial group of the learners thus bringing me to the question of, who are these stories for and whose narrative is told and knowledge is reproduced. How do we ensure that we see ourselves clearly when the books that learners are exposed to do not even represent the majority? The experiences of the minority racial group are being reproduced which could affect the reader's contextual connection to the stories. Many readers had a mix of genders, where both male and female genders were represented. Ngugi (1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019) urges schools to have African languages and cultures as part of academic discourse to ensure that we maintain African experience for the African child. He emphasises the importance of African experiences being central to literature studies in schools. The top three themes of these books as discussed in the previous section are adventure, animals/ pets and school, which may relate to the experiences of learners such as school.

5.5 The Readers' Stated Reading Interests

Interviews were conducted with the six learners that formed part of the case study. These interviews were used to obtain more information about the learner's stated reading interests and also to understand the correlations between learners' interest in the texts and their comprehension competencies based on the comprehension task results.

5.6.1 Question 9

Participants were asked "*if you could choose books that are interesting to read, what would they be about?"* Figure 5 shows the responses to this question. The most popular theme stated was educational. Adventure books were not one of the stated reading interests, yet 28,7% of the graded readers available in the classroom library were adventure books. One of the learners stated that he enjoyed reading National Geographic books, which I grouped with educational books.

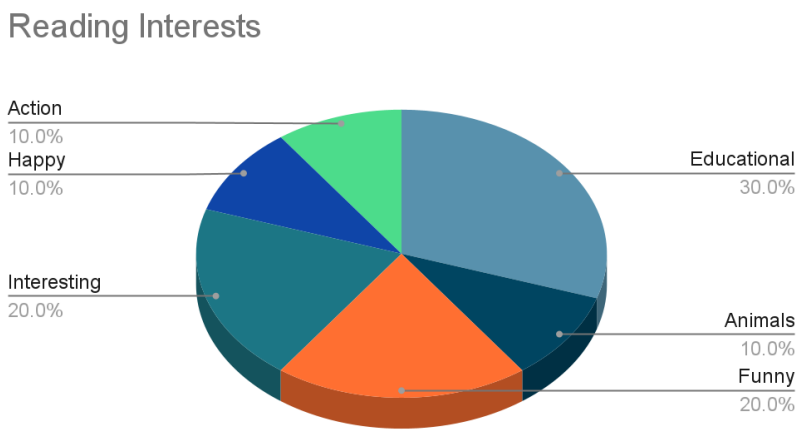


FIGURE 5: This pie chart represents the learners' stated reading interests.

5.6 Correlations Between Readers' Interest and Comprehension Competencies

In this section of the analysis, I will analyse each of the six learners' interview responses to the comprehension tasks and I will also analyse their comprehension competencies, in the form of results based on their stated interests. I will only focus on five interview questions. Pseudonyms were given to the learners to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

5.6.1 Caylene

Caylene is female, nine years old and is South African Coloured. Her interview responses were as follows:

1. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the most, why?**

   The Outing because they went on lots of adventures.

2. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the least, why?**

   The Long Trousers because they kept on shortening his pants.

3. **Which book did you find easier to understand, why?**

   The Outing because they just went on adventures.

4. **Which book was more difficult to understand, why?**

Long Trousers because they had a bit of difficult spelling.

5. **Which comprehension questions were easier to answer, the questions about the first book or second book, why?**

   The Outing because I understood the book more than Long Trousers.

Caylene got 10/10 for The Outing comprehension which suggests that she enjoyed the book and that she understood the questions more than those of Long Trousers. The Outing is a graded reader published by Oxford University Press in 2003. The Long Trousers was published by Jacana Media in 2008 in South Africa. Schiefele (1991) describes the characteristics of the concept of interest, showing that interest is not entirely the same as motivation. She states that interest is content-specific as it relates to specific topics and tasks. In Caylene's case, she enjoyed The Outing as it had lots of adventures. The content of the book drew her interest. In contrast, she found The Long Trousers to be difficult to understand due to the difficult vocabulary in the book. Schiefele (as cited in Soemer and Schiefele, 2019) states that topic interest is a positive predictor of reading comprehension. This is evident in Caylene's case where she got 9/10 for The Long Trousers comprehension, which is less than the results of The Outing which was a more interesting book for her. A further issue may be that The Outing has been written as a graded reader, while The Long Trousers has not been graded.

5.6.2 Thabang

Thabang is a nine year old, South African Black male. His interview responses were as follows:

1. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the most, why?**

   'Where's Jamela?' In the end, she liked the new house.

2. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the least, why?**

   In the Garden because they eat dad's strawberries.

3. **Which book did you find easier to understand, why?**

   Jamela, even though you don't want to move, there are things you like about the house.

4. **Which book was more difficult to understand, why?**

   In the Garden, I didn't understand why they had to go into the magic house.

5. **Which comprehension questions were easier to answer, the questions about the first book or second book, why?**

   Jamela, because I understand what happened in the book.

   Thabang got 9/10 for both the comprehension tasks. 90% shows good reading comprehension competency. He understood booth books because his responses for which books he enjoyed reading the most and least were based on the context of the book thus showing comprehension of both texts. Schiefele, Wild and Krapp (1995 as cited in Springer et al, 2017) state that learners who are interested in a text tend to have deeper comprehension, read strategically, retain information from text for longer and put cognitive effort into the reading process regardless of the text's complexity. Although he achieved the same comprehension marks for both tasks, his interest in Where's Jamela? enabled reading comprehension. His interest may also contribute to motivation to read more, which is an important aspect of developing literacy.

5.6.3 Bongani

Bongani is an eight year old, South African Black male. His interview response were as follows:

1. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the most, why?**

   Robin Hood, interesting words and had a very good man.

2. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the least, why?**

   Mr Mandela, there were lots of words that I didn't understand.

3. **Which book did you find easier to understand, why?**

   Robin Hood, it didn't have many pages.

4. **Which book was more difficult to understand, why?**

   Mr Mandela, it had difficult words.

5. **Which comprehension questions were easier to answer, the questions about the first book or second book, why?**

   Robin Hood, it didn't have many questions and the book had a few pages.

Bongani received 8/10 for Robin Hood which was the easier book to understand as it did not have many pages and it was the most enjoyable because of the interesting use of vocabulary and Robin Hood's good character. On the other hand, he received 5/10 for 'Mr Hare Meets Mr Mandela' (South African author and publisher). Bongani did not enjoy this book because

of it's difficult vocabulary. Schraw et al. (2001 as cited in Springer et al, 2017) describes coherence as a writing trait of the author which makes texts more interesting to the reader. Coherence refers to how easily learners understand and link ideas in the text because of how well structured it is and accommodates the needs of readers. In light of this, Bongani's understanding of Mr Hare Meets Mr Mandela may have been affected by coherence as the text had difficult vocabulary which required increased decoding thus affecting comprehension.

5.6.4 Rethabile

Rethabile is female, nine years old and is South African Black. Her interview responses were as follows:

1. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the most, why?**

   Kipper and the Giant. It's funny and Kipper told the giant that the villagers won't like him if he keeps being rude.

2. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the least, why?**

   Enjoyed both of them.

3. **Which book did you find easier to understand, why?**

   Kipper and Giant because he was helping the villagers and taught Giant a lesson.

4. **Which book was more difficult to understand, why?**

   Songololo, I didn't understand why Gogo called the boy a songololo.

5. **Which comprehension questions were easier to answer, the questions about the first book or second book, why?**

   I understood a lot of things and learnt a lot of things.

Rethabile stated that she enjoyed both the books equally however scored 80% for 'Kipper and the Giant' and 70% for 'Not So Fast Songololo'. She further stated that she found it difficult to understand 'Not So Fast Songololo' because she did not understand why gogo called the boy a 'songololo'. This lower mark could be a result of coherence as Rethabile does not understand and link the idea of 'songololo' being used in the text. This could be a result of the spelling of 'songololo' not matching the pronunciation (shon-go-lo-lo) thus the child not understanding this metaphor.

5.6.5 Lebo

Lebo is an eleven year old, South African Black female. She is the oldest learner in this group and is two years older than the average Grade 3 learner. Her interview responses were as follows:

1. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the most, why?**

   Long Trousers, it was funny and interesting.

2. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the least, why?**

   The Outing, it wasn't interesting- it was boring.

3. **Which book did you find easier to understand, why?**

   Long Trousers because I once had long trousers.

4. **Which book was more difficult to understand, why?**

   The Outing; it had difficult words in it.

5. **Which comprehension questions were easier to answer, the questions about the first book or second book, why?**

   Long Trousers because I could answer questions quickly and the book was easy to read.

Although Lebo scored 70% for both comprehensions, she stated that she enjoyed reading The Long Trousers because it was funny and interesting. She also found the questions easier to understand because she could answer the questions quickly as it was an easy story to read. Schiefele (1991) describes interest as a directive force, which explains the learners' choices in areas which they strive in. Learners will read a book that they are capable of reading. Lebo enjoyed reading The Long Trousers because she found it easy to read, thus striving in her reading comprehension.

5.6.6 Yusuf

Yusuf is an eight year old, South African Indian male. His interview response were as follows:

1. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the most, why?**

   Mr Mandela, showing the Big 5.

2. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the least, why?**

   Kipper, it wasn't exciting.

3. **Which book did you find easier to understand, why?**

   Mr Mandela because it is about the Big 5 and the president so I know what it is about.

4. **Which book was more difficult to understand, why?**

   Kipper, it was not so adventurous.

5. **Which comprehension questions were easier to answer, the questions about the first book or second book, why?**

   Mr Mandela because he is the president of South Africa.

Yusuf scored 6/10 for Kipper and the Giant and 7/10 for Mr Mandela Meets Mr Hare. He stated that he found Kipper and the Giant difficult to understand because it was not so adventurous and that he did not enjoy it because it was not exciting. However, he found Mr Mandela Meets Mr Hare easier to read because he recognised the Big Five and the president (although not current president), hence the higher comprehension mark than Kipper and the Giant published by Oxford University Press. Schraw et al (2001 as cited in Springer et al, 2017) states that relevance in the text, activates reading interest and increases comprehension, Relevance refers to how the text connects to the reader's experiences thus resulting in the text being significant to them. Ngugi (1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019) describes his essay titled "The Quest of Relevance" as a call to have African languages and cultures as part of academic discourse to ensure that we maintain African experience for the African child. He emphasises the importance of African experiences being central to literature studies in schools. Literature is essential in driving this narrative and education in Africa should provide knowledge about ourselves, ensuring it is relevant and shares the authentic experience of the African child.

While the results of the questions show that some learners like the proscribed graded readers more than the books by South African authors, which are about South African themes, the results corroborate that reading comprehension has improved when reading texts the Reading interest plays a crucial part in reading comprehension and thus it is crucial for learners to have a variety of books that activate their interest. As Schiefele (as cited in Soemer and Schiefele, 2019) emphasises, reading interest is a positive predictor of reading comprehension.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

The results of the PIRLS Literacy Grade 4 study (Howie et al, 2016) show that South Africa is the lowest performing country out of 50 countries with a mean score of 320 points. These results show that 78% of our learners cannot read for comprehension and may be six years behind the top performing countries. Research shows that reading interest affects reading comprehension, for example, Schiefele, Wild and Krapp (1995 as cited in Springer et al, 2017) state that learners who are interested in a text tend to have deeper comprehension, read strategically, retain information from text for longer and put cognitive effort into the reading process regardless of the text's complexity. Schiefele (as cited in Soemer and Schiefele, 2019) further argues that interest in a topic is a positive predictor of reading comprehension. Despite the research that shows that interest is linked to comprehension, many studies focus on reading proficiency, rather than questioning the relevance of content to the reader, which either strengthens or hinders meaning making. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to address the reading comprehension crisis in South Africa through a different lens. Based on the results from this qualitative case study with six learners, it is clear that interest does affect reading achievement. Learners who had an interest in the books they read received higher comprehension scores in the comprehension tasks, showing higher reading competencies.

In Ngugi's (1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019) "Quest of Relevance", he calls for African languages and cultures to form an integral part of academic discourse to ensure that we maintain African experience for the African child. He emphasises the importance of African experiences being central to literature studies in schools. In his essay, Ngugi (1992 as cited in Zobaer, 2019) states how Western literature and language has hardly any relevance to African experiences and often relegates African culture and languages as inferior and unimportant which results in African learners losing their roots. Exposure to books by South African authors such as Niki Daly allow readers to reconnect to their experiences thus stimulating their engagement in the text, resulting in reading comprehension. It is interesting however, that the learners did not always prefer the books by South African authors, showing that we should not impose our ideas about what is relevant to learners on to them.

The kinds of graded readers available in the classroom library lacked relevance to the African child. The books lacked representation as 91% of the characters in the books had white characters but the class population comprised 97% children of colour. None of the graded readers were written by South African authors, where 62,1% of the total books were published by Oxford University Press. The oldest graded reader was published in 1988 and the most recent in 2014 by Oxford University Press. The most popular theme of the readers was adventure with 28,7% with money, history and music being the least favourite themes (1,1%). Based on the interviews, the most popular theme was educational books with 30% and the least popular was action, animals and happy books with 10%. However, these results may not be an accurate reflection of the whole class population due to the limited sample size of six research participants. There were correlations between reading interest and comprehension results. There was a positive relationship between interest and comprehension, the books the learners enjoyed the most, resulted in higher comprehension scores than the least enjoyed book. The learners enjoyed both the guided-type readers and the South African authored books. The common reason for enjoying the South African books was relevance, in contrast, the learners that did not enjoy these books mentioned the reading demand required for the books, such as difficult vocabulary and many pages.

6.2. Recommendations

The findings of this research can be expanded upon by using an increased sample size to provide more accurate, reliable results. Based on my research findings, I would suggest that schools should provide books that are relevant to their contexts to stimulate reading interest. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000 as cited in Springer et al, 2017;43) state that “educators have two equally important reading goals: to teach students to read and to teach students to want to read". Learners should also be taught reading comprehension strategies to equip them with the tools to understand texts. Due to the under-resourced reality of many of our South African schools, books written by South African authors may not be easily purchased however, a suggestion is that learners in higher grades can write books for learners in the Foundation Phase to read thus ensuring that relevance and cultural context remains and is achieved. Another great resource for schools is Nal’ibali is a national reading for pleasure campaign which has a website full of stories written in a range of African languages. This resource encourages multilingualism and enables access to reading, regardless of the LOLT of the school. Ngugi (1993 as cited by McLaren, 1998) describes how language is central to

Afrocentricity. Language either provides or denies access to learning. English has become a universal language of power, where indigenous languages are inferior to English. If we want to encourage learners to read, we need to provide books that give them access to the content in a language they understand. Ngugi (1993 as cited by McLaren, 1998) calls for the equality of languages, where all languages are seen as equal. Nal'ibali ensures that cultural relevance of South Africans is encouraged through literature. These books transcend the classroom and can be assessed at home allowing parents to access reading resources and use their agency to contribute to their children's literacy development. Nal'ibali also has audiobooks which caters for the auditory learner, thus catering for different learners' needs.

Reading interest can be activated by teachers being aware of their learners' different interests. An Ofsted report (2004 as cited Clark and Rumbold, 2006) provided statistics that showed that schools that do not link to learners' reading interest and have a narrow range of readers for learners to read from limit learners' reading choices thereby reducing learners' motivation to read. Teachers and schools are encouraged to gather information about their learner's reading interests and use resources available online. The Covid 19 pandemic forced education to happen differently where teachers were forced to use technology and everyday resources such as WhatsApp for teaching and learning to take place. Reading resources online can be shared on WhatsApp to parents for homework reading. Teachers are encouraged to think of creative ways and use resources out there to develop a love for reading in our learners, which all begins which triggers that interest in every South African reader.

With the South African child in mind, their literacy needs and importance of decolonisation in the Foundation Phase, we can unlock the reading interests of our learners and contribute to the literacy development of our country, one book at a time.

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Appendix 1: Content Analysis of Guided Readers

General information:

Total number of reader sets	Number of readers in each set
87	between 2-3 books

Analysis of each reading set:

Title of book	Publisher details			Reading level	Topic/theme	Characters			
	Publisher	Author	Date & Place			No. of human beings	No. of animals/ insects	Race representation	Gender representation
Tricky Aliens	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglet on	2008 ; New Zeal and	yellow	aliens	4 (aliens[1])	0	Purple, blue, orange, brown.	Mixed (male and female)
The Store Cutter	Collins	Sean Taylor	2005 ; UK	band 7	money	5	1	white	male
First Day	Collins	Kes Gray	2007 ; UK	band 6	school	3	1	white	mixed
Morris Plays Hide & Seek	Collins	Vivian French	2005 ; UK	band 6	sports/games	0	4	colourful cats	mixed
Cool Sails	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglet on	2008 ; New Zeal and	yellow	adventure	5	1	2 black[2] 3 white	male
Crazy Cat Helps Out	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglet on	2008 ; New Zeal and	yellow	animals/pets	5	2	white	mixed

[1] Aliens are referred to as extraterrestrial beings which are beings from outside the earth or atmosphere.
[2] Black refers to people of colour in the following racial groups: African, Indian, Coloured (mixed race) and Asian. It is difficult to differentiate the specific racial group characters belong to in the books.

Blackbones Saves the Day	Oxford University Press	Allan McDonald	2005; New York	stage 11	school	teacher and class of learners	0	mix	mixed
The King's Ride	Key Links Literacy	Jill Eggleton	2008; New Zealand	yellow	adventure	1	0	white	male
William and the Mouse	Oxford University Press	Mike Poulton	1998; New York	stage 11	animals/pets	2	1	black, white	male
William and the Spell	Oxford University Press	Adam Coleman	1998; New York	stage 9	adventure	5	0	white	mixed
The Holiday	Oxford University Press	Roderick Hunt	1988; New York	stage 10	adventure	4	0	black	mixed
The Village Show	Oxford University Press	Mike Poulton	2001; New York	stage 9	nature	4	0	white	mixed
Sam Sorts It Out	Oxford University Press	Gillian Cross	2005; New York	stage 6	characteristics	3	0	white	mixed
Bugs!	Collins	Sam McBratney	2010; NY	band 6	nature	0	7	N/A	N/A
Mrs Spatt and Spider	Key Links Literacy	Jill Eggleton	2009; New Zealand	yellow	animals/pets	1	1	white	female
Octopus is a Friend	Key Links Literacy	Jill Eggleton	2008; New Zealand	yellow	animals/pets	0	1	N/A	N/A

Toad Swims for his Life!	Oxford University Press	Jill Atkins	2005; UK	level 7	sport/games	0	5	N/A	N/A
Let's Go to Mars!	Collins	Janice Marriot	2005; London	band 8	nature	2	0	white	male
Hector and the Cello	Collins	Ros Asquith	2005; London	band 8	music	0	1	N/A	N/A
Shelley Holmes Ace Detective	Oxford University Press	Michaela Morgan	2005; NY	stage 12	detective	2	1	white	mixed
Hamper's Great Escape	Oxford University Press	Pippa Goodhart	1996; NY	stage 1	animals/pets	2	1	white	mixed
Captain Comet and the Purple Planet	Oxford University Press	Jonathan Emmett	2014; NY	stage 9	adventure	2	0	white	male
The Lowboy Next Door	Oxford University Press	Paul Shipton	2014; UK	stage 9	sport/games	4	0	2 white; 2 black	mixed
Cat and Fish	Key Links Literacy	Jill Eggleton	2008; New Zealand	yellow	animals/pets	0	4	N/A	N/A
Jakes Job	Key Links Literacy	Jill Eggleton	2008; New Zealand	yellow	technology	0	0	N/A	N/A
TJ's Cars	Key Links Literacy	Jill Eggleton	2008; New Zealand	yellow	technology	1	0	white	male
The Wanderer	Thomas Learning Australia	Alan Trussell-Cullen	2005; Australia		adventures	3	0	white	mixed

What on Earth?	Mammoth	Hazel Townson	1995; London	Yellow	nature	4	1	white	mixed
Something So Big	Oxford University Press	Martin Waddell	2005; UK	level 6	animals/pets	1	4	white	female
Eddy's Boots	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglleton	2009; New Zealand	blue	sport/games	1	0	white	male
Hippo's Eggs	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglleton	2008; New Zealand	yellow	animals/pets	0	3	N/A	N/A
Sailor Sid is Clever	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglleton	2009; New Zealand	blue	adventure	5	1	2 black 3 white	male
A Job for Suzee Sing	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglleton	2009; New Zealand	blue	detective	2	1	white	mixed
The Aliens Go Shopping	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglleton	2008; New Zealand	yellow	adventure	3 (aliens)	0	N/A	N/A
Lazy Lily	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglleton	2009; New Zealand	blue	school	2	1	white	female
Bigboots the Spider	Oxford University Press	Angela McAllisier	2004; UK	level 7	adventure	0	1	N/A	N/A
Buzz and Bingo in the Monster Maze	Collins	Alan Durant	2005; London	band 8	adventure	1	1	black	male

Harry the Clever Spider at School	Collins	Julia Jarman	2005; Lond	band 7	adventure	1	1	white	female
The Jigsaw Puzzle	Oxford University Press	Roderick Hunt	2008; UK	stage 7	adventure	5	0	white	mixed
A Possum in the House	Key Links Literacy	Jill Eggleton	2009; New Zealand	blue	animals/pets	5	1	white	mixed
Amy the Hedgehog Girl	Oxford University Press	John Coldwell	1995; New York	stage 11	detective	3	1	white	mixed
Kelly the Rescue Dog	Oxford University Press	Tessa Krailing	2003; New York	stage 13	animals/pets	3	1	white	male
Coming Clean	Oxford University Press	Nick Warburton	1999; New York	stage 11	school	5	0	white	mixed
Going for a Drive	Collins	Wendy Cope	2010; London	band 7	adventure	4	1	3 white; 1 black	mixed
Ghost Tricks	Oxford University Press	Adam Coleman	1991; UK	stage 10	school	3	0	white	female
The Sandwich That Jack Made	Oxford University Press	Elspeth Graham	2004; UK	level 5	adventure	1	0	white	male
The Snow Storm	Oxford University Press	Adam Cole	2004; UK	stage 11	adventure	3	0	white	mixed
The Island	Oxford University Press	Adam Cole	1998; UK	stage 11	adventure	2	0	white	mixed
The Chimney Sweep	Oxford University Press	Adam Cole	1992; UK	stage 11	history	1	0	white	male

Monkey Business	Oxford University Press	Adam Cole	1992; UK	stage 10	animal/pets	1	multiple	white	male
The Playroom	Oxford University Press	Adam Cole	1992; UK	stage 10	adventure	1	0	white	female
The School Trip	Oxford University Press	Alison Mould	2004; UK	stage 5	school	2	0	black; white	male
Robber Cat	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglet on	2008; New Zeal and	blue	animal/pets	1	1	black	female
Big Bull	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglet on	2008; New Zeal and	yellow	school	1	1	white	female
Big Bull Gets Bored	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglet on	2009; New Zeal and	blue	adventure	0	1	N/A	N/A
Greedy Rabbit	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglet on	2008; New Zeal and	yellow	animal/pets	0	1	N/A	N/A
Green Feathers	Key Links Literacy	Jill Egglet on	2009; New Zeal and	blue	characteristi cs	1	1	brown	female
The Wrong Letter	Oxford University Press	Alan McDo nald	2005; New York	stage 11	competition	3	0	white	mixed
Stupid Trousers	Oxford University Press	Susan Gates	2005; New York	stage 10	characteristi cs	4	0	white	mixed
Jellyfish Shoes	Oxford University Press	Susan Gates	2005;	stage	nature	2	0	white	mixed

			New York						
The Big Chance	Oxford University Press	John Coldwell	2005; New York	stage 11	sport/games	5	0	white	mixed
Snooty Prune	Oxford University Press	Pippa Goodhart	2005; New York	stage 12	school	2	0	white	mixed
Cool Clive and the Little Pest	Oxford University Press	Michaela Morgan	2005; New York	stage 12	school	2	0	black	mixed
Here Comes Trouble	Oxford University Press	Tessa Krailing	2005; New York	stage 12	school	1	0	white	female
Billy's Luck	Oxford University Press	Paul Shipton	2005; New York	stage 12	sport/games	3	0	white	male
An Odd Job for Bob and Benny	Oxford University Press	Nick Warburton	2005; New York	stage 11	animals/pets	2	1	white	male
Pet Squad	Oxford University Press	Paul Shipton	1998; New York	stage 13	animals/pets	0	many	N/A	N/A
The Personality Potion	Oxford University Press	Alan McDonald	1996; New York	stage 13	adventure	1	0	white	male
Okay, Spanner, You	Oxford University Press	David Clayton	1996; New York	stage 14	sport/games	1	0	white	male
Climbing in the Dark	Oxford University Press	Nick Warburton	1996; New York	stage 14	adventure	4	0	white	mix

Grace the Pirate	Oxford University Press	James Riordan	1996; New York	stage 14	adventure	1	0	white	female
Air Raid	Oxford University Press	Jean May	2005; New York	stage 14	animal/pets	2	0	white	male
Never Wash Your Hair	Oxford University Press	Margaret McAllister	2005; New York	stage 14	characteristics	2	0	white	mix
Petey	Oxford University Press	Paul Shipton	2005; New York	stage 14	adventure	2	1	white	male
Five Children and IT	Oxford University Press	E Nesbit	2008; New York	stage 14	adventure	5	1	white	mix
Sing for your Supper	Oxford University Press	Nick Warburton	2005; New York	stage 14	adventure	1	0	white	male
The Three Musketeers	Oxford University Press	Alexandre Dumas	2008; New York	stage 14	adventure	3	0	white	male
The Canterville	Oxford University Press	Oscar Wilde	2008; New York	stage 14	adventure	1	0	white	male
The Secret Garden	Oxford University Press	Frances Hodgson Burnett	2008; New York	stage 14	adventure	1	0	white	female
The Terrible Power of House Rabbit	Oxford University Press	Susan Gates	2005; New York	stage 14	animals/pets	1	0	white	male
White Fang	Oxford University Press	Jack London	2008; New York	stage 14	animals/pets	0	1	N/A	N/A

Trapped	Oxford University Press	Malachy Doyle	2005; New York	stage 14	animals/pets	1	1	white	male
The Night of the Tickles	Oxford University Press	Paul Shipton	1996; New York	stage 14	adventure	2	0	white	mix
Danny's Secret Fox	Oxford University Press	Susan Gates	2005; New York	stage 14	adventure	1	1	white	male
The Ghosts of Bracken Hill	Oxford University Press	Anne Mackintosh	2005; New York	stage 15	school	3	0	white	mix
Real Guts	Chill Out	Jenny Pausacker	2005; New York	stage 15	characteristics	2	0	white	mix

Appendix 2: Comprehension tasks

Comprehension 1.1 student number:_____

Kipper and the Giant (Oxford Reading Tree- Stage 6) Comprehension task

1. What television programme was Kipper watching?

2. Did the people in the village like the giant, why?

3. How did Kipper get to the giant's gate?

4. Why did Kipper start crying?

5. What did Kipper do to help the villagers?

6. How did the giant feel when he saw Kipper, why?

7. Why did Kipper put a bandage on the giant's head?

8. Why did the villagers have a party with the giant?

9. When did Kipper leave the village?

10. What lesson does this story teach us?

Comprehension 1.2: student number:_____

The Outing (Oxford Reading Tree- Stage 6) Comprehension task

1. Where were the children going?

2. What was the teacher's name?

3. Why did the bus stop on the way?

4. What happened to Wilf's shoe?

5. Why did they end up going to the museum?

6. Which animal did they learn about at the museum?

7. Why was Mrs May impressed with Nadim?

8. What were the children doing in Chips' room?

9. Why did the magic key begin to glow?

10. Who do you think enjoyed the outing the most? Why?

Comprehension 1.3: student number:_____

In the Garden (Oxford Reading Tree- Stage 6) Comprehension task

1. Where did the magic key glow?

2. Who was playing in the garden?

3. Why did the children get smaller and smaller?

4. How did Chip feel about being in the jungle?

5. What looked like a desert?

6. What did the children do with the toy car?

7. How did they end up in the bottle?

8. Why did Kipper and Chip feel sick?

9. Why did the children hide under the flowerpot?

10. Why does dad think that there are slugs in the garden?

Comprehension 1.4 student number:_____

Robin Hood (Oxford Reading Tree- Stage 6) Comprehension task

1. What show did the children watch at the pantomime?

2. Why did people like Robin Hood but not Sheriff?

3. What musical instruments did they play when singing?

4. Why was Biff angry at Kipper?

5. Where was the adventure?

6. What did Robin Hood do when he saw the children?

7. What did the Sheriff's men do?

8. How did Kipper save everyone?

9. How do you think Kipper felt when the magic key began to glow?

10. If you could be a character in this story, who would you be? Why?

Comprehension 2.1: student number:_____

Comprehension task: Where's Jamela? By Niki Daly

1. What was Jamela's mother excited about?

2. Why wasn't Jamela happy about her mother's plans?

3. What musical instrument do you think Gogo played?

4. List 5 things that Jamela packed in her box.

5. Why did Jamela climb into the box?

6. When did mama realise that Jamela was missing?

7. What did the policeman see in the truck?

8. Why did everyone start singing and dancing?

9. Describe the new house.

10. Do you think that Jamela likes the new house? Explain.

Comprehension 2.2: student number:_____

Comprehension task: Not so Fast Songololo By Niki Daly

1. What is a songololo?

2. Who was Mr Motiki's dog braking at?

3. Where is Shepherd and Gogo going?

4. Why are they standing in the bus?

5. Name 3 car brands that Shepherd named on the street.

6. Where does Gogo keep her money?

7. Why does Gogo call Shepherd Songololo?

8. Why did Gogo buy shoes for Shepherd?

9. What changed in the way Shepherd walked now?

10. Did you enjoy the story? If yes, why? If not, why?

Comprehension 2.3: student number:_____

Comprehension task: The Long Trousers by Maryanne Bester

1. Why was Gaps the Nguni calf excited?

2. What was wrong with the new trousers?

3. Why couldn't Mama Nguni Cow help him?

4. Who was getting married? What evidence from the story tells you this?

5. What happened the next morning to Gaps trousers?

6. What did Gaps notice about his pants when he got dressed for the wedding?

7. How was the weather at the wedding?

8. Do you think that Gaps was grateful for his short pants now?

9. Whose hooves kicked the highest of all? Why?

10. What was your favourite part of the story, why?

Comprehension 2.4: student number:_____

Comprehension task: Mr Hare meets Mr Mandela

1. Who is Mr Mandela?

2. What did Mr Hare find on his doormat?

3. Why did Mr Hare ask Ms Secretary Bird to call the animals?

4. Why did Mr Hare want to go to the city?

5. How did the animals react to Mr Hare's plan on going to the city?

6. What did Bra Tsotsi do with Mr Hare's money?

7. Why did Mr Hare's R200 note keep changing?

8. What directions did the driver give to find Mr Mandela's house?

9. How did Mr Mandela feel when Mr Hare gave him the note?

10. At the end of the story, Mr Hare finds another R200 note on his doorstep and returns it to Mr Mandela again. What lesson does this story teach us?

Appendix 3: Interviews

General information:

Student number	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Reading Ability Group
					Average[3]

1. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the most, why?**

2. **Which of the two books did you enjoy the least, why?**

3. **Which book did you find easier to understand, why?**

4. **Which book was more difficult to understand, why?**

5. **Which comprehension questions were easier to answer, the questions about the first book or second book, why?**

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6. **Do you enjoy reading books, even in your spare time? If yes, which kind of books do you enjoy reading? If not, why do you not enjoy reading?**

7. **Which kinds of books or topics do you enjoy reading about? For example, car books etc.**

8. **Do you enjoy the books that you read at school?**

9. **If you could choose the books that are interesting to read, what would they be about?**

10. **What is your favourite book or the best book you have read? What was it about?**

[3] The teacher was asked to select learners from the average reading group, therefore, this is average based on the class overall reading abilities.