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Exploration of Challenges Faced by English First Additional Language Teachers in Teaching Short Stories in Bochum Circuit, South Africa

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Abstract

Teaching of literature is a daunting task to teachers, more especially the teaching of short stories. Thus, the study seeks to explore challenges faced by English First Additional Language (EFAL) teachers in teaching short stories. The study employed phenomenological case study research design that allowed for the focus of the nature of a particular phenomenon. Six EFAL teachers from Mathew Phosa Secondary School, in Bochum Circuit, Capricorn North District were purposely selected. The study adopted focus group interview and teachers shared their experiences on how these challenges can be mitigated. Data was analysed thematically using thematic data analysis. The findings reveal that teachers are struggling with the interpretation of figurative and literal language used in the short stories. Therefore, this study recommends that teachers should be supported in a form of workshops and seminars that focuses specifically on teaching of short stories. They should be supplied with teaching resources such as videos of the prescribed short stories and the techniques on how to interpret literary language. Lastly, the Department of Basic Education should change the old short stories and consider prescribing new ones that this new generation can relate on; which will grasp their attention and make the teaching and learning of short stories enjoyable.

Keywords

Short stories, Literary devices, Literary and figurative language, English First Additional Language

INTRODUCTION

Short stories are crucial in English Language teaching and learning as they are widely acknowledged as a vital source of authentic content for language development (Kaowiwattanakull, 2021). They offer many benefits to teachers and learners in acquiring English, such as providing rich language input for learners to express themselves, motivating them to learn, catering to them with varying learning styles, and exposing them to creative writing and figurative language (Bist 2018 cited in Nawi & Nor, 2023). They benefit learners by leading and allowing their imagination to live fully, thoroughly, richly, and with increased awareness; enrich them with vocabulary, develop their analytical and interpretive skills (Ashrafuzzaman, Ahmed & Begum, 2021). Again, the Department of Basic Education in CAPS (2011) indicates that the main reason for reading short stories in the classroom is to develop learners' sensitivity to a special use of language that is more refined, literary, figurative, symbolic, and deeply meaningful than much of what else they may read.

Unfortunately, teachers and learners find it difficult to teach and learn the meta-language in short stories. Nawi and Nor (2023) state that learning of English is challenging to learners, however, the difficulty increases when studying literature in English more especially studying short stories. According to the Languages Diagnostic reports (2020-2022), learners have never performed above 55% in literature. The overall performance in literature in 2020 is 46% with short stories at 50%, in 2021 is 50% with short stories at 50% again, and 2022 is 53% with short stories at 49% (NCS Diagnostic Report, 2020-2022). These three years record of underperformance of literature clearly shows that learners are

struggling with short stories. Learners find it difficult to answer questions mostly on figurative language, themes and characterisation.

A study conducted in Nigeria by Ugwu (2022) found that the inability of learners to read, grasp the themes and the whole content of the prescribed short stories implies that teachers are unable to teach or analyse the prescribed texts. Teachers resort to download summary notes of the short stories from the internet and give them to learners and this affect the quality of literature in English lessons (Ugwu, 2022). Furthermore, the minister of education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, stated that there are areas of concern identified in past diagnostic reports and they are still highlighted as concerns in the 2022 NSC Examination that is learners lack the reading and comprehension skills of the prescribed texts.

It was noted that many learners do not understand the vocabulary used in questions, extracts and comprehension texts. She encourages District and schools to initiate reading projects or reading periods or vocabulary exercises to expand their learners' vocabulary. Teachers are encouraged to expose learners to a wide array of texts to build their vocabulary, improve their comprehension skills and sharpen their critical thinking skills. But for teacher to do as expected, they should be trained and skilled through literature workshops. Numerous studies argue that teachers lack the knowledge of pedagogical methods and creativity because they have never been trained on how to teach literature (Affendi and Aziz, 2020; Dar, Kamran and Asad, 2021; Yulnetri, 2018). Yulnetri (2018) further argues that teachers are not supported on literature teaching and there are unavailable supporting tools at schools. Thus, this study explores the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching short stories.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aims to explore the challenges faced by English First Additional Language teachers in teaching short stories, and the strategies that will mitigate the challenges.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study focused on teachers of EFAL at a secondary school in Bochum circuit, Limpopo province. The EFAL teachers in the selected school speak African languages such as Sepedi, Setswana, Xitsonga and IsiZulu. But most of them speak Sepedi and is a home language offered at school. The school is situated in an area where learners only speak English during the lessons. Sepedi is the dominant language at school and at home.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative research methodology to explore the experiences of teachers in teaching short stories in the EFAL classrooms. This methodology is relevant to this study as it seeks to understand and explore rather than to explain and manipulate variables (Nassaji 2020). It allowed the researchers to have a deep understanding of the challenges teachers face in teaching short stories and describe and interpret their challenges systematically from the point of view of the teachers. The researchers had a face-to-face contact with participants through focus group interview to answer the following research questions:

- What are the challenges faced by teachers in teaching short stories?
- What can be done to mitigate the challenges faced by teachers?

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study are EFAL teachers whose home languages include Sepedi, Setswana, Xitsonga and IsiZulu. The six EFAL teachers were purposely sampled and participated effectively in this study. All of these participants have experience in teaching EFAL.

DATA COLLECTION

The study employed focus group interview which is qualitative data collection tool. The researchers compiled a list of open-ended questions, set around a table with teachers for 30 minutes and asked those questions. The participants were given time to express their experiences or challenges in teaching short stories and their ideas on what they think should be done to mitigate their challenges. The data was recorded using a tape record which later allowed the researchers to analyse it and identify the emerging themes. The researchers aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges faced by teachers in teaching short stories?
- What can be done to mitigate the challenges faced by teachers?

DATA ANALYSIS

The thematic data analysis was employed to analyse data collected using focus group interview. This qualitative data analysis method enabled the researchers to systematically organise and analyse data by identifying themes through careful reading and re-reading of the transcribed data. The method also helped the researchers to produce insightful and trustworthy findings that clearly indicates the challenges faced by teachers in teaching short stories.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will help the Department of Basic Education to see the need to change short stories and prescribe the new ones that will instil the love of literature in learners and those that learners will be able to relate. It will also assist them to

organise workshops that focuses mainly on teaching of short stories, specifically the interpretation of literary devices, the literal and figurative language. Teachers will be able to creatively teach short stories and improve the performance of literature in South Africa and other countries. The study will also assist future researchers to further research about effective ways to teach short stories.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by EFAL teachers in teaching short stories. The data was analysed and the following themes emerged:

The challenges faced by teachers in teaching short stories

There are various challenges faced by teachers in teaching short stories in the EFAL classrooms such as time constraint, learners' attitudes, literary texts selection; Lack of training and guidance; teachers that have low proficiency (Fikray & Habil 2022; Ukat & Ismail 2022; Motlhaka and Jore, 2022). The qualified English FAL teachers need to be trained on how to creatively and effectively teach learners short stories. They encounter many challenges and tend to blame learners for failing to grasp the content delivered to them. Below is what the teachers highlighted when they were asked about the challenges they face when teaching short stories:

Teacher 1

Interpretation of themes, analysis of a plot, making learners appreciate the genre, limited contact time, teachers and learners not finishing the set work, complex language structures and figurative language, teaching techniques, low language proficiency, and heavy workload.

Teacher 2

Most learners cannot relate to the kind of language used by different authors. Learners don't read for entertainment. As a result, they don't find most of the genres interesting. This generation of learners would rather watch them from screens than read as almost all of their lives revolve around social media and technology.

Teacher 3

Literature is a very complex text which needs to be understood. I have a challenge of shortage of textbooks. Interpretation of language used both literal and figurative. Learners have low language proficiency. No teaching aids such as films for short stories, and workload.

Teacher 4

The challenges that I face with short stories are time management. Having to read line by line with learners and explain from now and then every paragraph takes time. Because you have to explain what is really said, characterisation now and then figures of speech and sometimes settings can change for example, while the story is taking place in a train, suddenly the characters are now at home.

Teacher 5

I think is that they don't have interest in these genres. Some feel like it's a waste of time, normally our genres are outdated. So they constantly question the relevancy. And I also think the issue of interpretation of meaning and its literary jargon becomes a problem as well.

Teacher 6

Learners find it difficult to grasp meaning of figures of speech hence they fail to grasp the meaning of certain ideas in short stories or poems that they will be reading. Learners fail to relate what they read to real life situations. They fail to establish the themes evident in the stories.

According to the Department of Education (CAPS, 2011), literary interpretation should be taught to enable learners to know how the text is being created, manipulated to clarify and emphasise what is being expressed. The choice of words to create imagery and the use of symbols, sounds should be taught. Learners should analyse texts line-by-line. But teacher one, three and four complain about time and work load. They indicate that teaching of literatures consumes time and there is not enough time to finish teaching and assessing it. The above argument is supported by Harun and Samat (2021) and Tayib and Hassan 2020) who found that teaching short stories in the classroom is time consuming and there is insufficient time to do so.

Again, it is evident from the above that teachers have a lack of knowledge on how to interpret literal and figurative meaning of poems and short stories. They have limited knowledge of literary devices and techniques on how to teach and make the lessons more enjoyable for learners. This is stipulated by teacher one, three, and four. According to Omar (2017), teachers are untrained and incompetent to teach short stories and they have limited knowledge of methods to creatively teach short stories, thus learners fail to comprehend and enjoy short stories. But teacher two and six blame learners. They indicate that learners cannot relate to figurative language. But the reality is that the problem starts with

teachers' inability to teach learners how to interpret figurative language and literal language in short stories. Again, teacher five states that the short stories prescribed at school are outdated thus learners do not enjoy learning them. This is supported by Hashim and Talib (2019) who indicated that the selection of short stories used in schools are not suitable as they have difficult language level and unfamiliar contents.

Strategies to mitigate the challenges faced by teachers

The Department of Basic Education expects teachers to motivate learners to read literary texts and incorporate the whole text in interpretative, creative, personal, and exploratory practices (The Department of Basic Education in CAPS 2011). However, teachers struggle to teach learners the literary texts. They require to be trained on the delivery of short story teaching and learning in the classrooms and also about the interpretation of literary and figurative language. Below is what teachers stated about ways to be assisted to teach short stories in the EFAL classroom.

Teacher 2

Host workshops where teachers can share their strategies on how to make literature lessons fun in class.

Teacher 3

Be provided with advanced study materials, workshops, build up the English language in the school, and build libraries in schools.

Teacher 5

If possible; I think to change such genres from the old to the new. Perhaps 'relevancy' may develop some sort of interest. And then again, sometimes it's hard to make one interested. That is why in some schools, one teacher teaches one paper across FET or GET grades to avoid one paper not being taught.

Teacher 6

Teachers should be trained on how to deal with the prescribed genres before they go to class. Collaborative teaching should be promoted so that teachers teach genres they are comfortable with. Where possible, videos of the genres should be made available to teachers to get a better understanding of them. Critical thinking questions should be discussed in the teacher forums, so that teachers can promote them in the classrooms.

Most of the teachers in this study propose that the department organise workshops in which the prescribed literature is discussed and teachers are provided with recent resources such as videos to teach. They believe that the use of videos would evoke in the learners the interest of learning short stories because nowadays, learners prefer technology rather than teacher narrating the short stories to them. Omar (2017) supports this notion by stating that teachers should be trained to become competent to teach literature in schools. Again, teacher four points that if possible these old genres could be changed because learners struggle to relate to them. In support of the above, Hashim and Talib (2019) maintain that the Department of Basic Education prescribes literary texts that are not suitable as they contain difficult language level and foreign contents. This becomes a challenge for teachers to creatively teach and it discourages learners to learn the short stories. Thus, it is crucial for the department to consider changing the genres or support teachers in teaching the prescribed genres. Concurrently, Pardede (2011) maintains that when choosing short stories, the Department of Basic Education should consider the needs and abilities of the learners; the linguistic and stylistic level of the text and the amount of background information required for a true appreciation of the material. Moreover, when teachers are supported, they will be able to use various approaches to teach and equip learners with the love of literature, and this will help them to become writers that create stories and poems that have ideas, thoughts, issues, principles, ideologies and beliefs that they most want to share with or reveal to their prospective readers. Learners will be able to create pictures by use of words.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to explore the challenges faced by EFAL teachers in teaching short stories. The study revealed that participants lack knowledge of the literary devices and to interpret literacy and figurative language used in the short stories. Thus they face difficulties to teach and instil the love of short stories in learners. The findings of this study suggest that it is vital that the Department of Basic Education organise workshops in which EFAL teachers are skilled on how to interpret literal and figurative language and to effectively teach and plan their lessons in such a way that instil the love of literature in learners. The findings of the study also encourage the EFAL curriculum advisers to prepare and provide teachers with recent techniques and resources to teach short stories.

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