

## EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PARENTS READING TO THEIR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA

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### Abstract

Situated within the broader context of South Africa's literacy crisis, this study sought to gain insight into parents' reading experiences and practices with their preschool children. It further examined whether parents<sup>1</sup> exposed their children to stories or literature in languages other than their mother tongue (first language), as well as the ways in which children's interest in reading or literature in additional languages could be identified or described. This focus aligns with the Language-in-Education Policy, which introduces English as a language of learning and teaching from Grade 1 or Grade 4. The study followed a qualitative case study design, and participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling methods, targeting literate non-native English-speaking parents of preschool-aged children who engage in some form of reading with their children. The participant interviews were analysed using the six steps outlined in Braun and Clarke's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis method. Cross-case analysis revealed several themes, including survival-driven reading practices, outdoor play as a competing activity, television as a tool for learning English, shifts toward digital newspaper platforms, and the perception that reading and learning are primarily school-based responsibilities. Additional themes included the (in)accessibility of libraries, the creative potential of oral storytelling, and the influence of parental modelling on children's reading behaviours.

**Keywords:** Literacy, non-native English-speaking parents, parent-child reading experiences, parent-child reading practices, preschool-aged children

### Introduction

Reading to children from a young age has positive implications for school readiness and scholastic performance, e.g. neurological development, imagination and communication/language development. Allowing children to learn in their first language (mother tongue, or home language) (L1) is also beneficial. Situated in the literacy crisis in South Africa, the research reported in this paper provides insights into non-native English-speaking parents' experiences and practices linked to reading with their preschool-aged children in the South African context. This includes insight into social values/attitudes towards reading, parental struggles and influence, and other ways that children learn English (possibly to prepare them to engage with it as a language of learning and teaching (LOLT)).

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, 'parents' and 'caregivers' are treated as equivalent concepts, both referring to those who play a primary role in a child's upbringing.

### **Benefits of Reading and Sharing Stories with Children at Home**

It is vital to explore the importance of, and exposure to, books for children that first occurs in the home (Le Roux, 2020; Vos & Fouché, 2021). Parents are responsible for selecting appropriate books for their children because their participation fosters children's interest in books and they will associate the idea of reading with enjoyment (Robertson, 2017, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021). Furthermore, such participation broadens the children's worldview (Reach Out & Read, 2015, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021).

Reading books aloud to children when they are younger (i.e., by parents, or later teachers or more skilled peers) also encourages confidence in the children's reading as they mature (Vos & Fouché, 2021). Books have been noted as a solid foundation for later scholastic achievement (e.g. see Brown et al., 2022; Leech et al., 2022; Rey-Guerra et al., 2022; Turnbull et al., 2022); children often lag academically when they start preschool if they have not had early exposure to books (French Cully & Navsaria, 2022). Added to this, "foundational literacy skills developed in one language often transfer to a second language" (Cardenas-Hagan et al., 2007, as cited in Brown, 2014, p. 45). Therefore, reading can be an activity they can enjoy and use as a springboard for learning from and enjoying in their L2 (second or non-native English language). Hutton et al. (2015, p. 474) conducted a quantitative study using magnetic resonance and found a link between the "home reading environment and activation of specific brain regions supporting emergent literacy during the prekindergarten period". Children who had experienced listening to stories at home showed stimulation in the left side of their brain, which is linked to "mental imagery", "semantic processing" and "oral language", which over time is combined with the 'reading network' (Karunanayaka et al., 2007, Schmithorst et al., 2006, as cited in Hutton et al., 2015).

Oral narration is also an important consideration in the sphere of stories. Research shows that parents use storytelling and singing to teach their children about parts of the body, counting, and colours (Singh et al., 2015, as cited in Boit et al., 2020). Oral stories can be seen as a medium of teaching and imparting information because "oral language and storytelling are valued and common practices within the home of refugee children" (Boit et al., 2020, p. 689). Research by Cochrane (2023) in Malawi revealed that storytelling can teach morals and help one understand one's place in society. Makgamatha (1993) shared insight into oral stories (*dinonwane*) in Northern Sotho. These stories carry a moral lesson, i.e., dynamics between leaders or the government and citizens, and outwitting or tricking being done by various characters. Thus, oral stories can be seen to play an important role in teaching knowledge, as mentioned earlier, as well as morals, and upholding cultural beliefs and societal awareness.

### **Arguments Concerning the Language of Learning and Teaching**

Keeping in mind the aforementioned LOLT, a local influencing factor to consider with regard to learning is the phenomenon of children switching to English as the LOLT in Grade 4 (Henning & Dampier, 2012; Mweli, 2018; Vos & Fouché, 2021). Although the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 (see Department of Education, 1997, as cited in Madiba, 2012) encourages multilingualism or additive bilingualism (continuing with L1 and learning a minimum of one L2 of English or Afrikaans after minimum three years), the South African Schools Act of 1996 states that "the school governing bodies have the power to decide which language should be used as the tuition medium in their

schools, with the result that in some schools English is used as the only medium of instruction from Grade 1” (South African Schools Act of 1996, as cited in Madiba, 2012, p. 20; see also Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004, Probyn et al., 2002, Webb, 2002, as cited in Posel & Zeller, 2011). Kosi et al (2024) state that “[s]tudies have shown that children taught in their mother tongue for at least the first six years of school tend to have better cognitive development, improved literacy, and higher overall academic achievement (see Bamgbose, 2000, 2004, Fafunwa et al., 1989, as cited in the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR), 2016; see also Adeyemo & Dangbégnon, 2019, on educating parents’ perspectives of L1 learning, and culture; and Mabela & Ditsele 2024, on intellectualising the L1 for increased prestige and usage). That is, while English is generally the LOLT from Grade 4 onwards, one must not discredit or forget the importance of the L1 in learning, both before and after starting primary school, in order to lay a helpful and appropriate base, linguistically and cognitively, on which to build other languages (Ball, 2010, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021; Madiba, 2012), as well as to develop communication skills, reading skills, and more difficult academic skills and concepts that learners can take into their L2 (Prinsloo, 2007, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2006, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021) and, can be said, literacy and numeracy skills (e.g., GEMR, 2016).

Learning in one’s L1 also helps with understanding of content, providing a firm base for future success in academics (such as developing critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, cognitive skills, and success in other languages later), improving self-esteem and confidence, developing awareness of diversity and inclusivity (Sundararajan, 2024; see also Henning & Dampier, 2012; MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017, as cited in Dewaele & Li, 2020) and cultural identity (Kosi et al, 2024). (See also local successful L1/L2 curriculum work done with learners (Mndende, 2020; GEMR, 2016)). Other research has revealed that children who are introduced to English as the LOLT in all subjects as early as possible in the primary school years feel more confident in their learning and test-taking (Henning & Dampier, 2012). However, it is often the case that without the proper scaffolding of learning in English, learners will not be able to keep up in class as they cannot understand what is being taught (Mweli, 2018). Linked to this idea, this “early-exit” of bilingualism “rather than the additive or late-exit bilingualism” does not allow learners who have African languages as their L1 to build a helpful foundation of their academic language (e.g. English); or literacy skills (Heugh, 2011, p. 153, as cited in Madiba, 2012, p. 20; Mweli, 2018). This is because English as an L2, usually only taught for three years, is not enough to prepare them to learn in it later (e.g. Sibanda, 2017, as cited in Mweli, 2018).

The use of English as the LOLT in the classroom also brings many current and historical complexities (Mweli, 2018; Setati, 2002). Since “languages are tied up with cultural values and worldviews” (Batibo, 2015, as cited in Mweli, 2018, p. 42), English as the LOLT for African learners can be viewed as the language of colonial power, oppression, and domination, which eliminates opportunities for children to draw upon their own African identities, cultures, and local points of reference to make meaning in the classroom (Adams & Estrda-Villalta, 2017, as cited in Mweli, 2018; Mweli, 2018).

However, the current reality is that English is the language of business, education, and social mobility in South Africa (Bourdieu, 1991, as cited in Setati, 2002; see also Kosi et al., 2024), and as a result, some teachers introduced or “ ‘smuggled’ English into their

pedagogy in the foundation phase, because they regard it as a passport to a better life for the children” (Mashiya, 2011, as cited in Henning & Dampier, 2012, p. 102). Sundararajan (2024) suggests that, in the context of India (which can be arguably applied to the South African context), “implementing mother tongue education effectively requires a concerted effort” (see also Kosi et al., 2024; Mabela & Ditsele, 2024).

### **Exploring Reasons for Low Literacy Rates in South Africa**

Considering the implications that the positive promotion of reading has on scholastic performance (see for example Brown et al., 2022; Leech et al., 2022; Rey-Guerra et al., 2022; Turnbull et al., 2022) (and later employment opportunities), situated in the context of the LOLT and the literacy crisis, the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) Overview of Key Findings has shown that South Africa has a low literacy rate and that 81% of children in Grade 4 are unable to read for meaning; “up from 78% in 2016” (Spaull, 2023, p. 1). The pandemic is considered a factor in the discrepancy between the results of the 2016 and 2021 studies, and African language schools have been worst affected, “highlighting that the pandemic increased inequality between no-fee and fee-charging schools” (Spaull, 2023, p.1). Linked to this, work by Thage et al. (2021) revealed that no time is allocated in the syllabus in the high school years to help learners who are struggling with comprehension and reading. This is because learners are expected to have acquired the skills necessary for comprehension and reading in their primary school career in order to manage text information sources in their subjects (Thage et al., 2021).

Some of the reasons for illiteracy (and can be said, low reading-for-meaning rates), are low literacy rates of adults/parents and older generations (Aitchison, 2018; Train, 2007, as cited in Le Roux, 2020), an absent reading culture (Aitchison, 2018; Mulgrew, 2012, as cited in Le Roux, 2020), or children “growing up in print poor environments” (Nassimbeni & Desmond, 2011, p. 95), adults not promoting a reading culture (see for example, Aitchison, 2018), as they believe it is the school’s responsibility (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006, as cited in Le Roux, 2020), a lack of quality (reading) teaching in schools (Aitchison, 2018), insufficient numbers of school libraries (Aitchison, 2018), limited books available in readers’ home languages (Aitchison, 2018) or books lacking cultural relevance (Morris, 2007, as cited in Fleischack & Meehan, 2014; Pretorius & Machet, 2008, as cited in Le Roux, 2020), and the high price of books, (Aitchison, 2018) linked to the issue of poverty and breakdown in family structures, which leads parents to prioritise other matters in the home (Rama & Richter, 2007, as cited in Le Roux, 2020).

### **Addressing the Low Literacy Rates at Government and NGO Levels**

Considering the importance of reading, LOLT realities, and reasons for low literacy rates, the government has been involved with “reading strategies” such as the National Reading Strategy (NRS), the Read to Lead Campaign, and the Shine Literacy Hour (Department of Education, Republic of South Africa, 2008, Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2014, Hickman, 2018, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021, S3). The NRS was founded on the Millennium Development Goals and is linked to UNESCO’s Literacy Decade 2003 to 2013 and Education for All, whose plans were to raise literacy rates by 50% by 2015 (DoE, RSA, 2008, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021).

The NRS recognises that reading skills should go into high school and further (Vos & Fouché, 2021). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) understood that in order for the NRS to be successful, it needed, among other elements, to oversee the “teaching of reading” and provide materials to promote researching reading (DoE, RSA, 2008, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021, S3). The Read to Lead Campaign was the DBE’s follow-up plan and was implemented between 2015 and 2019 (DBE, RSA, 2014, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021). Libraries should operate well and house technology (Vos & Fouché, 2021). Key partners, besides the DBE who are involved in this goal, are community organisations such as spiritual spaces, as well as caretakers, parents, and schools (Vos & Fouché, 2021).

The Read to Lead website contains helpful practical tips for how to introduce and sustain reading in the home, as well as how to cultivate a relationship with books with one’s child/ren (DBE, 2021). Lastly, the Shine Literacy Hour, which began in 2000, is aimed at helping Grade 2 and 3 learners in some “disadvantaged primary schools” with their skills in speaking, writing, and reading (Hickman, 2018, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021, S4). The Shine Literacy Hour also founded the Khanyisa Programme, which provides more reading opportunities for enjoyment for Grade 2 learners, the sessions for which are “delivered by unemployed, trained matriculants who work alongside Grade 2 teachers” (Vos & Fouché, 2021, S4).

There are also a number of NGOs that aim to improve learners’ literacy: the Family Literacy Project, based in rural southern KwaZulu-Natal, aims, among other things, to help adults improve their reading levels and encourages reading with parents and their children (Popular Education South Africa, 2022)); the LEARN Project (2021), (‘Let’s Educate a Rainbow Nation’), based in KZN, sets up libraries and reading corners in schools; the Read and Play at Home Programme (Do More Foundation, 2024) aims to “empower parents and caregivers with the knowledge and tools needed to enhance their children’s development through reading and play at home”; the Puku Foundation (2023) hosts storytellers, provides workshops for those interested in writing and illustrating books, and provides accessible books to the community; the Otto Foundation (n.d.) (based in the Western Cape) is involved in setting up libraries and generally provides relevant reading material to children; Book Dash (n.d.) looks at providing cost-free books to children, and aims to supply 100 books to each child before they turn 5 years old; Ethnikids (2023) provides books to children that “feature characters of colour in various South African languages”; Funda Wandé (n.d.) focuses on literacy and numeracy interventions that help children “read for meaning and calculate with confidence” by the time they are 10 years old and Nal’iBali (n.d.a.), (translated as ‘Here’s the story’, a nation-wide reading campaign aiming to set up reading programmes in communities, schools, and homes and provide reading material in a variety of languages through various platforms) (see also Block, 2015, as cited in Le Roux, 2020).

### **Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study and Linking to Early Childhood Reading**

Considering the developmental stage of the children involved, Erikson’s theory – specifically the *initiative versus guilt* stage – provides a meaningful framework for understanding their emerging autonomy and social engagement. At this stage, children are interested in attempting experiences and activities without much of a “fear of failure”

if they get it wrong; making mistakes translates into re-attempts, which allows for them to find direction (Cherry, 2022). Imagination and play are salient at this age, and children become excited when they have some control over their actions. On the other hand, children feel guilty and embarrassed when they are unable to execute a task successfully, because they sense that they are annoying the adults around them. Thus, it is important that children are able to feel a sense of power and control with completing tasks and addressing challenges; it is important that “caregivers encourage exploration and help children make appropriate choices” by enacting the behaviour that they would like their children to follow (Cherry, 2022).

Regarding this idea of modelling behaviour, it is also important to consider that the concept of imitation is powerful (Botha, 2023). If parents wish to set reading as a constructive and fruitful habit for their children to develop, they are encouraged to model this behaviour for them.

Considering the abovementioned developmental stage, it is important to highlight the key concepts of ‘scaffolding’ and ‘mediation’ that are connected to Vygotsky’s social constructivism and social learning, and how they can inform thinking about reading between parents/caregivers and children. Vygotsky “places more emphasis on the social environment as a facilitator of development and learning” (Tudge & Scrimsher, 2003, as cited in Schunk, 2011, p. 240) and how it can influence consciousness (Schunk, 2011). Thus, through environmental interaction, considering individual cultural, social and historical elements (e.g. Tudge & Scrimser, 2003, as cited in Schunk, 2011), children can experience growth in their cognition, and stimulation in their development (Schunk, 2011).

In this way, children learning to read, and parents and children reading together, can be seen as a contextually relevant social activity to help guide children to start learning sounds and symbols, (and by extension, to help them develop a relationship with books). Connected to this phenomenon is the idea of scaffolding which can be defined as “those who know more or are more skilled share that knowledge and skill to accomplish a task with those who know less” (Bruner, 1984, as cited in Schunk, 2011, p. 244). In this case it can be seen as the parents, who know how to read, reading and imparting reading skills to their children who are still learning. One of the tools linked to cognition is language<sup>2</sup> (e.g. Karpo & Haywood, 1998, as cited in Schunk, 2011), which is helpful within the act of reading because one needs to use language in order to understand or read a story. Another important concept linked to reading and scaffolding is the idea of mediation, which is when tools, such as language, are taught to children through adults in a “joint (collaborative) activity” (Karpo & Haywood, 1998, p. 27, as cited in Schunk, 2011, p. 242). Children then internalise these tools that “function as the mediators of the children’s more advanced psychological processes” (Karpo & Haywood, 1998, p. 27, as cited in Schunk, 2011, p. 242).

The context discussed above clearly highlights that it is essential to gain authentic insight into non-native English-speaking parents’ reading experiences and practices with their preschool children. The importance of early childhood reading for school readiness,

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<sup>2</sup> Language also links to the idea of symbolic play (play being noted in ‘the initiative versus guilt’ phase), as Bloch (2006, p. 12) proposes that “[r]esearch into symbolic play suggests that it underpins and precedes the understanding of written language”. This is because “symbolic representation in play is essentially a particular form of speech at an earlier stage, one which leads directly to written language” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 111, as cited in Bloch, 2006, p. 13) and thus the preschool years are suggested as the best time to bring in “written language” (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Bloch, 2006, p. 13).

the high levels of lack of reading-for-meaning, the arguments around the L1/L2 LOLT, the theoretical underpinning of initiative versus guilt, and scaffolding and mediation with regard to reading are aspects that require attention.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the form of an instrumental case study. This was done through the use of vignettes, cartoons and related interview questions, all of which were intended to provide insight into beliefs and attitudes of the participants about their experiences and practices of reading with their preschool children. The study aimed to gain meaningful insight into the reading practices and experiences shared among parents and their children. The participant group had various language backgrounds.

Purposive sampling was used for this study, specifically focusing on non-native English-speaking participants. The participants were parents who were literate and read with their preschool-aged children. A further aim was to understand possible practices and experiences of reading in English for school readiness and gaining insight into access to resources. The study included four participants, each representing diverse linguistic and demographic backgrounds. Participant 1 was a female isiXhosa speaker whose child was six years old at the time of the study. Participant 2, a male Sepedi speaker, had a five-year-old child who was approaching six. Participant 3 was a female Afrikaans speaker with a four-year-old child nearing the age of five. Lastly, Participant 4 was a female isiXhosa speaker whose child was five years old and turning six.

This range of participants provided a varied perspective on the experiences of parents with preschool-aged children. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Five cartoons<sup>3</sup> were used that represented reading in some way, such as families reading together, children reading alone, or general thoughts on and benefits of reading, with related questions. This would provide valuable insight into reading trends, societal attitudes toward reading, and parents' experiences and practices when reading with their children. The six phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis were used to analyse the transcribed interview content (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

### **Findings**

The following cross-case findings offer insight into the experiences and reading practices of non-native English-speaking parents supporting their preschool-aged children's reading development.

#### ***Reading and Survival Mode and Household Chores***

The idea of survival mode was noted by all the participants. One participant mentioned that some parents only have the capacity to focus on activities that keep everyone physically healthy, suggesting that this may not include the act of reading. Another mentioned that in some families, essential items (e.g. clothing and groceries) take preference over reading if there are budget constraints; another mentioned prioritising items in the household, and thus, buying books would not be one of these priorities (see Le Roux, 2020) in some families. It is thus logical to infer prioritising essential items, especially if the value of including books in the development of children is not fully understood or a natural part of everyday life, due to historical factors (Amoateng & Richter, 2003, as cited in Le Roux, 2020; Le Roux, 2020; Mqgwashu, 2009). Others

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<sup>3</sup> Cartoons used as interview prompts were collected from publicly-accessible online sources.

mentioned that in some families, children have to do household chores and are thus unable to do homework at home, as confirmed by a personal experience shared by a participant.

### ***Playing Outside and Reading***

One participant commented that children are not reading if they are playing outside, which suggested that a reading culture is thus not understood or prioritised. Another participant declared that play is the main way that children relax, and that reading, or investing in reading material, is not a priority because the value of reading is not understood. However, it is important to note that imagination and play are important developmental experiences for preschool-aged children (see Cherry, 2022).

### ***Oral Stories Create Space for Creativity and Imagination***

All participants noted that oral stories had positive benefits. They shared various reflections on this, including that oral storytelling creates space for creativity and enjoyment. Several participants recalled imagining the unfolding story as children — engaging their imagination and stimulating creative cognitive processes while listening. The idea of imagination links to the developmental stage of *initiative versus guilt*, as play and imagination are important experiences during this age (Cherry, 2022).

### ***Children Imitating their Parents Reading***

Another finding linked to family and home practices is that children copy the behaviours of their parents. For example, a participant shared that if children see their parents reading, they will want to do the same, as opposed to being on a phone (see also Bloch, 2006); this idea of imitating reading was shared by another participant. It is thus important for caregivers to enact appropriate behaviour for their children to follow at this developmental age, and to “encourage exploration and help children make appropriate choices” (links to Cherry, 2022; see also Botha, 2023; French Cully & Navsaria, 2022).

### ***Television Contributes to Learning English***

All the participants mentioned that television (TV) is a good way to learn English. One participant suggested that learning could happen when watching YouTube videos, and in ways other than reading. One of the participants noted that oral stories listened to in childhood have been replaced by TV. Another participant mentioned the ubiquitous access to TV in homes and that they know many people who watch educational shows. A participant shared that their child’s English proficiency had improved from watching English cartoons, but they were concerned about how much time some children spend watching TV. The researcher also reflected on the idea that reading encourages creativity and imagination, but learning can happen in ways other than through books, for example visual learning platforms or educational shows. This idea was also noted by a participant. However, it was stressed that reading and learning should not be replaced but rather, supplemented by, e.g. educational shows/watching YouTube/TV, and should be accompanied with appropriate adult management and supervision.

### ***Newspaper Reading Trends and the Move to Digital Platforms***

Discussions around newspaper reading trends also revealed reasons for changing to digital platforms. The convenience of accessing literature digitally, and free access to online newspapers were noted, some participants revealed that the elderly still read newspapers. Nowadays most news is accessible on online platforms on TV and devices (and on social media platforms) negating the need to buy the newspaper. The idea of gendered differences in reading the newspaper was also broached: men usually read the newspaper while women are expected to spend time performing housekeeping tasks.

### ***Reading and Gender Roles***

Some contradictory thoughts linked to reading and gender roles emerged in some of the participants' narratives. One participant suggested that it is uncommon to see men read to their children because they are often absent from their children's lives, whilst another shared that men are more involved in, for example, reading to their children than previously and that it is becoming the norm. Another participant argued that even if both parents are in the home, it is often the mother's responsibility to see to reading and learning development, and that reading with fathers is not common.

### ***Reading and Learning are Sometimes Left for the School Space***

All participants indicated that promoting reading is primarily viewed by some parents as the school's responsibility. One participant explained that reading is sometimes left to teachers because parents find it unenjoyable and exhausting and they are distracted. Another participant mentioned that parents are often not involved in their children's learning and do not check homework because they think it is not their responsibility but the teacher's and the school's, and that reading at school is sufficient. Another participant noted that while some parents invest in their children's education to support their future success, others only read to their children when required by the school. This participant added that they continue to read as a family even during holidays.

### ***In/accessibility of Libraries***

The participants provided varying responses linked to perceptions of library access. One perspective is that community members destroy libraries, and libraries are not easily accessible. Another participant seconded the idea of the inaccessibility of libraries, and also mentioned that, in their community, books are only available at school. Another said that there is a local library in most communities. Another shared that in their community, parents did not have access to libraries, so it is not an obvious option. This participant had to walk far to access a library growing up, showing that library access depends on where one lives.

### ***Reading can Become a Lifestyle***

One participant likened reading to an addictive series to those who have been exposed to books and a reading culture. Another participant suggested that people seek out books if they make reading a habit as it is like a lifestyle.

### **Discussion of the Findings; Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings of the study, various recommendations can be made for practice. These are in the spheres of parental/home focus, school, and policies in education, as discussed below.

*For parents:* Parents can draw on locally-produced reading-related resources (some of which are free) to overcome challenges of lack of library access and financial concerns (e.g. Nal'iBali, n.d.b.; Book Dash, n.d.). Further recommendations for parents relate to reading other sources of literature, e.g. newspapers/flyers (a participant suggestion), and engaging in oral stories, which provides opportunities for imagination (e.g. Cherry, 2022), communication, supporting a child's natural curiosity, scaffolding learning, teaching morals (Cochrane, 2023; Makgamatha, 1993) and knowledge (Singh et al., 2015 as cited in Boit et al., 2020), and preserving culture and promoting identity formation (Cochrane, 2023).

*For schools:* It is recommended that collaboration in literacy programmes be encouraged between teachers and parents (e.g. Do More Foundation, 2024; Wasik & Hermann 2004, as cited in Le Roux, 2022) with positive benefits, such as possibly encouraging more reading at home, linked to scholastic achievement and employment opportunities (e.g. Nal'iBali, n.d.b.), improving parents' literacy skills, increasing parents' confidence in reading to their children, and highlighting resources in the community (Le Roux, 2022). Schools could also offer after-hours literacy classes for parents, and encourage parental support with their child's homework, which would allow children to feel supported and encouraged in their work. In the classroom, teachers can stimulate children's interest in stories in their L1, and L2, and the children can take the books home (Kell et al., 2023); the L1 stories also allow children to discover the cultural relevance of stories (Morris, 2007, as cited in Fleischack & Meehan, 2014; Pretorius & Machet, 2008, as cited in Le Roux, 2020) and thus identify with books. It is suggested that teachers and learners can write texts together on topics of interest (Kell et al., 2023). Teachers can use everyday texts in the classroom to further engage with reading, e.g. recipes (as a move away from the technicist approaches to teaching reading that are currently being taught in schools) (Kell et al., 2023). Teachers can be encouraged to incorporate oral storytelling in the classroom to support learning — building on practices established in the home (e.g., Singh et al., 2015, as cited in Boit et al., 2020; Boit et al., 2020) — and to help preserve cultural heritage (Cochrane, 2023).

*For policies in education:* Research shows that children learn best if they can learn in their L1 for as long as possible and when they can build a solid foundation in their L1 to take into their L2 (Circular No. 10 of 2020 as cited in Mndende, 2020; GEMR, 2016; Bamgbose, 2000, 2004, Fafunwa et al., 1989, as cited in GEMR, 2016; Guzula, 2019; Heugh, 1995b, as cited in Broom, 2004; Prinsloo, 2007, UNESCO, 2006, as cited in Vos & Fouché, 2021). Policy reconstruction for having the L1 as the LOLT for as long as possible should be considered, as it includes positive learning impacts and opportunities, such as set works being introduced in the L1 to make stories more meaningful and engaging to the learners (Morris, 2007, as cited in Fleischack & Meehan, 2014; Pretorius & Machet, 2008, as cited in Le Roux, 2020). Extended time with the L1 at school can afford more opportunities for oral stories to feature in the classroom, which can increase cultural preservation and create opportunities to engage in cultural identity exploration (Cochrane, 2023). If learners are introduced to English L2 as the LOLT in all subjects early in their primary school years (adding positive benefits such as generating more confidence in their learning and test-taking (Henning & Dampier, 2012)), this should be done with appropriate and sufficient scaffolding, otherwise learners will be unable to keep up in class as they will not understand what is being taught to them (e.g. Mweli, 2018). The research did not yield much data on the ways that parents can prepare their children for the English L2 LOLT (in response to the Language-in-Education Policy). It is suggested that this could be a focus for future research, together with what access to resources parents have, such as books, and how awareness can be created about where and how to access these resources.

## **Conclusion**

Considering the literacy crisis our country is facing, this research assisted in gaining a sense of how parents are engaging with reading, preparing their children for L2 LOLT

learning, and what some of the hindrances and allowances are to access books in general. In examining the cross-case findings discussed here, considering modern-day busy and demanding lifestyles, inconvenient access to libraries at times, absent fathers, and gender role expectations, it is understandable that it is not always convenient or easy to find time and space to read in the home even if reading is prioritised as a social value or understood as being important. TV was also noted as a platform for learning English; as well as moves to digital newspaper platforms (i.e. different/cheaper platforms/ways to access knowledge).

However, if families regard reading as important, and if they have access to appropriate and suitable knowledge about how to access relevant literature, there are many platforms that provide convenient and free resources and stories in many local languages. It was encouraging to learn of the developmentally beneficial and appropriate role of an oral story relationship, as well as the idea of carers and teachers being role models for children with regard to reading (links to Cherry, 2022; see also Botha, 2023; French Cully & Navsaria, 2022). It remains essential to consistently emphasise to parents the value of reading and the advantages of early exposure to books for children's development.

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