

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7369415>

POCKETS OF EXCELLENCE FROM TEXT COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Comprehending with texts has since been an integral aspect in learning languages. Further than that, learning a language not familiar with has been noted to overwhelm most learners. For successful schooling, text comprehension needs to be regarded as a prerequisite when interrogating an additional language. It is for this reason that this paper aims to identify whether post the pandemic era resulting from COVID 19 effects, comprehending with text is still regarded as bringing about excellence in language learning. This paper identified a gap that little is distinguished by literature in relation to time allocated at interrogating texts during online collaborations. For this quantitative inquiry, a questionnaire was used to collect data from five purposefully nominated respondents. These were teachers offering English language in a rurally located university in one of the Eastern Cape Provinces. Respondent responses assisted at attaining valuable data as questions allowed closed-ended responses. The main findings uncovered that (i) Cultural Background and (ii) Geographical teaching location posed great challenges towards additional language learning. This paper therefore recommends that as organisations of learning are held in technological transformation, it seems eminent for engagement strategies to be altered, irrespective of the rurality of the learning environment. As concluded by this study, for enhanced throughput in language learning there is a need for digital variations to be addressed.

Keywords: Comprehension, Reading, Vocabulary, Online learning, Additional language.

INTRODUCTION

The emergent introduction of digital learning systems in schools has resulted in infused learning approaches encompassed by selection of technologies for instruction in a schooling environment (Al-Samarraie & Saeed, 2018). Language learning is held in predicaments of the emergent application of online learning for a South African perspective whose learning environment norm was the previous face-to-face interactions (Crawford, 2021; Cushing, 2020a; Johnson & Johnson, 2015). English language, as an additional language in the university where this inquiry was conducted, has diverse aspects inclusive of, but not limited to, vocabulary, listening, spelling, speaking, reading, fluency and writing (Grainger & Jones, 2013). These necessary aspects are efficiently attained when learners are exposed at comprehending texts. When texts are interrogated, learners are exposed at attaining emergent vocabulary, spelling of new words and improved pronunciation. For language learning to be conducted in an online manner, pockets of excellence from text comprehension are not effectively loaded (Irina, Novikova, Polina, Bychkova

& Alexey, 2022). It is for this reason that this paper identified a gap that little is distinguished by literature concerning lack of text interrogation when learning an unfamiliar language is conducted in an online learning pedagogy.

As perceived by teachers considered respondents to this inquiry, none of the learners consumed English as their home language (Byfield, 2019). Additionally, although learner home-language was mostly isiXhosa, the same cohort of learners express themselves in varying dialects because they emanate from diverse constituencies with linguistic, social and cultural diversified complexities (Aguayo, 2020). For most of the learners in the studied site, English is administered as an additional language. It is worth to mention that these learners experience challenges in reading, writing and speaking English throughout their school careers, with limited improvement in English proficiency as they progress to higher levels (Bacon, 2017). Apparently it is assumed that poor English acquisition is a result of mere limited exposure to analysing and interrogating text comprehension as against the methods which were used by English language teachers when the previous face-to-face mode was the talk of the schooling environment (Madimabe & Omodan, 2021).

Accordingly, all subjects learnt in the studied university have texts to be comprehended. Be that as it may, some teachers perceive this practise to be the task of teachers allocated to offer languages. This really raises some alarm bells to note that there are reported cases of decline and underperformance when English language progression results are scrutinised. In line with these reported findings, Dube (2020) in line with Rosa and Flores (2017) proclaim that learners from affluent countries attain better achievement levels in reading, writing and language as compared to those from emerging and underdeveloped countries.

Underpinning this inquiry is the Theory of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (Cummins, 1984). The theory proposes that for social collaborations, basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) are core necessary skills intended to facilitate day-to-day communication. Surface skills identified by the theory include speaking, reading and writing as acquired by home language speakers. Educationally, this therefore implies that language proficiency comprises of both an oral and a written component, meaning, the amount of comprehended text is related to English language academic achievement. This suggests that the greater the interrogation of English language texts by non-mother tongue learners, the better their academic achievement in the target language would be (Work, 2022).

In light of the above discussions and because English is an additional, yet a commonly regarded language of communication nationally and internationally, there is essence that learners at this level are acquisitioned at interrogating texts, thus leading to academic attainment coupled with employability traits. At this stage it is uncertain if English teaching practices contribute meaningfully to the improvement of English language in rural schools (Naz, & Murad, 2017). It was therefore imperative that inquiries be administered to identify the possible challenges of lower than benchmarked text comprehension in rurally located institutions of learning (Putri, Tenku, Abdul, Fariza & Noor, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This quantitative inquiry collected numerical data and statistics (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001). Quantitative research helped to identify causes that lead to the lower than benchmarked levels of comprehending English language texts prior the COVID 19 pandemic error (Pillay, 2021; Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020) thereby leading to a decline in English language proficiency among learners. Embedded in this quantitative inquiry is a survey as a research design used to select samples of respondents before administering the questionnaires to collect information about their ideas, demographics and perceptions (Nesbary, 2000). For data collection procedures, questionnaires were used to collect data. The likert scale contained closed-ended statements for respondents to share how they perceived text comprehension with regards to the emergent online learning (Neuman, 2000). These types of questions helped at generating frank responses from respondents more so that permission, consent and the right to withdraw were guaranteed even before respondents embarked on the study (Mertens, 2003). As this study comprises of the entire language teachers in the investigated site, for this quantitative inquiry, five English language teachers were purposefully sampled as respondents (Plano & Creswell, 2008). This group of teachers were perceived by this study as the most relevant as they had been offering English language tuition even before the drastic emergence of online teaching and learning came into existence (Freedmam, 2014).

Findings and Discussions

This is the section where analysed data is displayed. Corresponding and similar responses were categorised to form themes (Flick, 2014). Divulged themes discussed as findings are: Geographical teaching location and Learner-cultural background.

Geographical Teaching Location

With regards to the location of the institution where this investigation was conducted, it emerged that rural location of the site investigated led to some of the experienced challenges in language development. The geographical location of the university indicates that 95% of respondents reported challenges of insufficient time to engage in text comprehension due to teaching and learning trajectories which have been overruled by online engagements (Schaefer, Fabian & Kopp, 2020). Glitches of network connectivity made these teachers to subside other language aspects as load shedding would forcefully cut off most contact sessions even before allocated time had lapsed. Rural areas are areas that are not urbanized, underdeveloped, and had been under the homeland system. Such areas are characterised by lack of access to developmental resources. This hinders economic development for most sectors, inclusive of education diversity. Further than that, respondents reported that it becomes a fruitless exercise to instruct learners to connect for contact sessions while at their places of living. Most learners would complain that their homes are located in rural areas where online learning gadgets were not easily available and accessible, let alone network challenges. Below is the table to this effect:

Table 1: Learner Home-Location

Location	Frequency	Percentage
Deep rural	5	25.0
Rural	14	70.0
Semi-urban	1	5.0
Total	20	100.0

The environment in which one teaches can be a hindering factor in the acquisition of English language proficiency (Azhari & Ming, 2015; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). In addition, there are socio-economic factors that were noted to be posing some challenges to English language proficiency among learners. These includes distance from rural areas to town, where resource centres like libraries and reading-writing centres are located. These are centres well renown to have easy access of online learning gadgets for all users (Abdeldayem, Aldulaimi & Abdulrazaq, 2020).

Cultural Background

This aspect on cultural background also emerged as another challenging factor yet having influence on English language acquisition among learners whose home language is not English.

Table 2: Communication Logistics

Item / Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		TO TA L
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Learners show interest when teachers communicate in English language with them, even though their home languages have varying dialects.	3	15	11	55	3	15	3	15	—	—	20
Some learners are shy to expose their lack of English proficiency on occasions where they are expected to express themselves in English language.	9	45	8	40	1	5	2	10	—	—	20

This encounter is normally visible when learners' home language differs from the additional language administered. Above is a table, as reported by respondents, indicating challenges experienced by learners emanating from a cultural background not speaking English language as their dialect. Majority learners as perceived by respondents, indicate some interest to communicate with their teachers (Adukaite, Van Zyl, Er & Cantoni, 2017). Nonetheless, this positive attitude

might be hindered by linguistic factors such as the dominating *isiXhosa* dialect, thereby negatively impacting on English proficiency.

In contradiction, reports like 45% ‘agreeing’ and 40% ‘strongly agreeing’, totalling up to 85% for learners displaying some reluctance to expose their lack of English language proficiency could indicate a low degree of confidence among learners due to cultural linguistic factors (Rundel & Salemink, 2021). As displayed by the table above, there is sufficient ground to suspect that cultural background does contribute to the decline in English language proficiency. Socio-economic factors and a homogenous linguistic population are also contributors to language proficiency imperatives (Cliff, Walji, Jancic Mogliacci, Morris & Ivancheva, 2022).

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Findings discussed in this paper are in line with the underpinning Theory of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills by Cummins (1984). The aim for this paper was to investigate whether online learning has any significant impact on learning an unfamiliar language, with special focus on text comprehension towards learning English as an additional language. It was revealed by the findings that geographical teaching location and cultural background of learners were major challenges to English language development. In conclusion, for future research as a way of closing digital variations in rural and urban settlements; and for English language to be sustained, this paper recommends some revised teaching and learning strategies to suit online learning pedagogies. Language as a subject has its underlying dynamics due to diverse intertwining aspects. For this inquiry to be conducted in one institution of higher learning, this poses a limitation challenge, as such, findings of this investigation could not be generalised.

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