

Enhancing the Capability of Teachers to Teach Foundation Phasing Learners' Reading Literacy

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Abstract

Teachers have a big influence on the lives of children who are young. Reading is one of the most demanding aspects of instruction, requiring more time and effort from the instructors. Teaching reading to Foundation Phase learners is a challenge for primary school teachers in South Africa. In the foundation phase, most learners are still having difficulty mastering reading skills. As a result, it is essential that teachers employ a range of techniques to help learners become effective readers. It is still difficult to educate learners who have learning difficulties to read, even after CAPS guidelines were created to introduce teachers to a range of successful reading techniques. It is vital to find ways to help teachers manage their stress and abilities. The study's objectives were to determine whether the strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers in rural and township areas to teach reading to learners with learning barriers achieved their objectives and to suggest resources that could be used to help teachers in the future to meet the needs of specific learners. The study was qualitative in character and used phenomenology within an interpretive framework. Twenty Foundation Phase teachers (N = 20) were specifically selected to take part from South African rural elementary schools. Semi-structured focus group interviews were employed to collect data. Within the theoretical frameworks, constructivist and social constructivist learning theories were utilized. Open coding was used to thematically analyze the interviews. The results showed that teachers in foundation classrooms were not equipped with the skills and strategies needed to teach reading. The study found that Ntataise and Matima Lenyora can be used as tools to help teachers become more proficient at teaching reading and provide learners with the resources they need to succeed. These resources are intended to assist teachers in overcoming this challenge by providing some useful guidance. This implies that to teach and assess learners who have difficulty reading, teachers must receive training in a variety of established and modern methods.

Keywords: Enhancing, Teachers' Ability, Foundation Phase Learners, Teaching Methods, Poor Reading Skills

Introduction

Reading is fundamental to almost all formal learning (Spaull, Van der Berg, Wills, Gustafsson & Kotzé, 2016). It is a skill that cannot be acquired naturally and requires systematic and well-informed instruction (Department of Education, 2017). Rule and Land (2017:2) state that "most South African children do not learn to read well." In addition, Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, and McLeod Palane (2017:2) emphasized that the South African primary schools, reading instruction is frequently challenging. The difficulties Foundation Phase teachers encounter in meeting the needs of the learners in inclusive classrooms have been extensively studied. Research indicates that teachers find it difficult to teach reading to Foundation Phase learners. The challenge of teaching diverse learners to master reading still exists, even after CAPS guidelines were introduced to expose teachers to a range of explicit tactics in reading instruction.

Realizing the value of reading at the foundation phase level, in his June 2019 State of the Nation Address, President Cyril Ramaphosa alluded to the fact that one of the government's "five fundamental goals for the next decade" is for all children to be able to read for meaning by the time they are ten years old. President Cyril Ramaphosa underlined that scaffolding for learners with reading issues cannot be successful until teachers change the way they assist learners that they educate. Only if teachers receive support will this be attainable. This suggests that teachers should invest more time and effort in teaching reading, which is one of the most challenging subjects in the school's curriculum. Agbofa's (2023) failure to develop reading skills at a lower grade may consequently affect a learner as they proceed to the upper grades. Determining whether the techniques employed by Foundation Phase teachers in rural areas to teach reading to children with learning barriers met their goals and proposing resources that could be used to assist teachers in the future in meeting the needs of learners were the goals of the study. Giving teachers the resources they need to assist learners in becoming better readers at an early age is an essential principle of increasing educational results. Improving educational outcomes is based on the basic idea of providing teachers with the resources they need to assist students in becoming better readers at an early age.

Literature Review*Why Teaching Reading in the Foundation Phase is Necessary*

"Reading is the quintessential skill required, and without it, learners are doomed to struggle through school and drop out when they are unable to master it adequately" (Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018, p. 10) is supported by evidence from the literature. According to Hill (2015), children who struggle with reading are less likely to finish their education. Language arts and reading instruction should be prioritized from a young age since they are critical to children's success in the early grades, according to Dreyer (2018). In terms of the inability to read, learning how to read is a process that begins early in a child's life (Pretorius et al., 2016; Jackson, McKay, Murray & Spaull, 2016). Reading plays a major role in all subjects. The inability to read affects learners' learning. Sampson and Condy (2016) attest that reading may seem like something that comes about naturally, but it is a struggle for some learners to acquire reading skills. As a result, many of them are forced to repeat an academic year because of their poor performance, and some of them drop out of school because they develop a negative attitude towards school. Ulla and Winitkun (2017) support the idea that failure to read at the required grade level could be caused by various factors, such as the

language or dialect used to teach reading, especially if it is different from the learner's home language, or the classroom approach that does not cater to individual needs or use only one method to teach reading needs. Ulla and Winitkun (2017) assert that learners' literacy achievement is determined by the quality of literacy instruction offered by the classroom teacher.

Reading strategies are the key in developing reading skills for learners in the primary grades. Researchers point out that effective reading instruction in the lower grades is essential in laying down the basic literacy skills required in learners (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019; Donohue & Bornman, 2015; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). Researchers (DeVos, Van der Merwe & Van der Mescht, 2018) attest that failure to develop reading skills in the lower grades may seriously affect learners as they proceed to the upper grades. Reading strategies for primary learners, particularly in the Foundation Phase, should focus on the acquisition of letter names and sounds and then syllable blending to enable learners to master the code (Bradley, Crawford, Hannant, Johnson, Thompson, 2017:29).

Instructional Activity and Subject Matter Understanding

In accordance with research (De Witt & Lessing, 2016; Rule & Land, 2017), many South African teachers exhibit insufficient teaching of reading skills. Teachers in the Foundation Phase tend to apply a single teaching approach when teaching reading, which might not meet all learners' educational needs. They most likely were not pleased with the modifications and the addition of extra instruction (DBE, 2008), nor did they come up with any ideas for how to improve learners reading abilities. As reported by Rule and Land (2017), teachers only employed a few reading strategies when instructing learners. In addition to this shortcoming, teachers frequently lack the skills required to help learners become literate. The fact that many South African instructors teach reading using bottom-up reading methods, like phonics, and limited techniques, like the sounds of the alphabet, was also highlighted by Rule and Land (2017); they were only using these that they knew or were already familiar with. Researchers like Adamu, Tsigas, and Zuilkowski (2022); DBE (2008); and Rule & Land (2017) highlighted that teachers were not providing comprehension-based reading instruction at the same time, and they were not aware of the specifics of how they could assist learners to improve their reading skills. It could be said that teachers use the same teaching method for all learners in a classroom, regardless of whether one is a good or poor reader. All the necessary materials could be in place, but this would not help to improve the skills of poor readers if the teacher, who is the key person in this whole process, is not competent enough to help the poor readers (Spear Swerling, 2016.). It was found that most of them lack the necessary knowledge and skills to teach literacy skills, and as a result, many learners cannot read at an early grade. These differences warrant teachers to acquire basic knowledge and practical skills to meet the needs of all the learners in the classroom through ongoing workshops. Teachers must be continuously supported through coaching in the implementation of programs. Teachers must be encouraged to work together to adapt programs to local conditions.

Regarding the studies conducted on professional knowledge, to educate effectively, teachers must possess thorough awareness of various teaching approaches, as well as specialized knowledge of the subject matter they teach. requirements for specialized knowledge in the BEd (Foundation Phase Teaching) content set (DBE, 2020). Teachers applying to teach the Foundation Phase programs must be prepared to educate learners in grades R–3.

Furthermore, teachers in the Foundation Phase must possess the qualifications necessary to instruct learners in Grades 1 through 3 in all three subjects—literacy, numeracy, and life skills—using a broad range of specialized knowledge. They need to have a thorough knowledge about early childhood education to teach reading, writing, and numeracy as well as to develop the core concepts and skills that serve as the foundation for subsequent learning. Foundation Phase teachers must be competent at identifying and addressing early learning challenges as well as curriculum-related issues. The study intends to provide several strategies for dealing with the difficulties teachers have when teaching reading. 2.3 Factors contributing to teachers' stress

To increase teachers' ability to teach Foundation Phase learners the basics of reading, several measures have been put into place. To help introduce Foundation Phase teachers to a variety of explicit reading teaching strategies, one of them, the CAPS document, was recently made public. Unfortunately, most teachers still struggle to encourage reading in the classroom because they lack the tools, lack understanding of this method, can't adapt their teaching and learning strategies, and aren't trained to work with Foundation Phase pupils. Teachers are stressed out by this. This causes stress for teachers. According to Wolomasi, Asaloei & Werang (2019), a major contributing element to teacher stress is the incapacity to handle work-related stress, which eventually causes many teachers to quit their jobs or fail to assist learners that struggle with learning. In accordance with the study, teachers who find it difficult to handle work-related stress report much fewer feelings of satisfaction with their work than those who manage the workload. As stated by Prilleltensky, Neff & Bessell (2016), governments must start spending more time and funds on assisting teachers in recognizing and implementing good coping strategies. There have been major differences regarding the goals of a reading program and the approaches to be used, even though there is a significant amount of national and international research that emphasizes improving teachers' capacity to teach reading to Foundation Phase students.

Many children find it difficult to learn to read, even though it is essential for their present and future well-being (National Reading Panel, 2000). According to recent studies by international scholars, producing support teachers with the necessary training is currently a major concern for South Africa. Since most teachers in South Africa have been licensed to teach in secondary schools, they are not specifically educated to instruct Foundation Phase learners. Additionally, they lack the qualifications to instruct diverse classes. The Ministry of Education and Training's quick fix for the shortage of competent teachers in primary schools has been to employ high school teachers without the necessary teaching credentials, according to Dupriez, Delvaux & Lothaire (2016). Given this, one could contend that most of the nation's elementary schools have difficulty recruiting and retaining suitable teachers for inclusive learning. Thus, it is critical to find strategies to support teachers' stress management skills and talents.

Methodology

The study employed phenomenology within an interpretive framework and was qualitative in nature to determine whether the strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers in rural and township regions to teach reading to learners with learning challenges achieved their objectives; interpretive methods were recommended. The research provided participants the opportunity to understand, explain, explore, discover, and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences (Kumar, 2019:132) and yielded detailed descriptions

and in-depth understanding of their views about the techniques employed by the teachers in terms of improving reading abilities of learners with learning barriers, whether the techniques really improve the reading abilities of learners with learning barriers, and which techniques teachers can use to assist learners with learning barriers to improve their reading skills.

Participants and Data Collection

Twenty Foundation Phase teachers (N = 20) from rural primary schools in South Africa were specifically chosen to participate. To gather information, semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted. Yin (2016) defines a focus group as a form of data collection whereby the researcher convenes a small group of people having similar attributes, experiences, or focuses and leads the group in a nondirective manner. Five Foundation Phase teachers who were conveniently chosen for each group participated in the focus group interview. The researcher repeated this procedure in each of the four primary schools. The duration of the four focus group interviews was 45 minutes each. Because only individuals who were present at the schools on the day of the interviews answered the interview questions, the participants were conveniently included in the study. Interviews were recorded, and notes were drafted. The table below illustrates the biographic information of four primary school’ teachers who participated in the study.

Table 1
Biographic information of teachers

School	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Grade teaching	Highest qualification	Teaching experiences	Teaching subjects	Race	Residential areas
School A	T1	Female	35 years	2	JPTD	14 years	Numeracy	Black	Botshabelo
	T2	Female	35 years	1	Hons	13 years	Sesotho	Black	Botshabelo
	T3	Female	45 years	3	JPTD	20 years	Life Skills	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	T4	Female	50 years	3	ACE	35 years	English	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	H1	Female						Black	
School B	T1	Female	49 years	1	Hons	21 years	Numeracy	White	Bloemfontein
	T2	Female	42 years	3	JPTD	15 years	Sesotho	White	Botshabelo
	T3	Female	45 years	2	JPTD	10 years	Life Skills	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	T4	Female	42 years	3	JPTD	20 years	English	White	Botshabelo
	H2	Female	25 years	3	Hons	8 years		Black	Botshabelo
School C	H3	Female	58 years	1	ACE	31 years	Numeracy	Black	Botshabelo
	T	Female	55 years	2	JPTD	25 years	Sesotho	Black	Botshabelo
	T2	Female	42 years	1	JPTD	11 years	Life Skills	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	T3	Female	57 years	3	PTC	35 years	English	Black	Thaba-Nchu
	T4	Female	25 years	1	JPTD	10 years			Botshabelo

School D	T1	Female	45 years	3	JPTD	15 years	Numeracy	Black	Bloemfontein
	T2	Female	33 years	2	JPTD	5 years	Sesotho	Black	Botshabelo
	T3	Female	40 years	1	Hons	10 years	Life Skills	Black	Bothabelo
	T4	Female	27 years	2	Hons	15 years	English	Black	Bloemfontein
	H4	Female	28 years	1	Hons			Black	Thaba-Nchu
School A	ST1	Female	35 years	3	JPTD	5 years	Numeracy	Black	Bloemfontein
School B	ST2	Female	35 years	4	Hons	8 years	Sesotho	Black	Botshabelo
School C	ST3	Female	45 years	1	JPTD	20 years		Black	Thaba-Nchu
School D	ST4	Female	42 years	3	ACE	35 years		Black	Botshabelo

Data Analysis

Data was gathered using thematic analysis. Teachers in the Foundation Phase had their data transcribed. The six processes listed below were used for data analysis: data preparation, organization, repeated reading, code classification, categorization, and interpretation. Next, group the data into themes that correspond to the study's research question. Following the research questions, the data were thematically coded under the following themes: 1) Reading instruction methodologies, 2) reading skill improvement strategies, and 3) reading skill improvement strategies. These steps ensured that the data analysis was carried out in a manner that did not leave chunks of information outside the presentation (Nieuwenhuis, 2019). The figure below illustrates six steps used to analyse data.

Step 1: Preparing data	Step 2: Organising data	Step 3: Reading through data	Step 4: Coding data	Step 5: Categorising data	Step 6: Interpreting data
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Figure 1: Steps used to analyze data

Results

The study's aim was to ascertain whether the strategies employed by Foundation Phase teachers in rural and township areas to teach reading to learners with learning barriers met their goals. Three research questions were addressed. The main and sub-research questions arose, based on the research study:

- i. What techniques do teachers in the Foundation Phase employ to improve the reading abilities of learners who face learning barriers?
- ii. How significantly do these techniques really improve the reading abilities of learners who face learning barriers?
- iii. Which techniques can teachers in the Foundation Phase use to assist learners with learning barriers to improve their reading skills?

Research question 1: What techniques do teachers in the Foundation Phase employ to improve the reading abilities of learners who face learning barriers?

According to the transcripts of the participants' remarks, teachers need to be able to use a variety of teaching strategies that could aid them in developing their reading instruction if they want to increase the reading abilities of Foundation Phase learners. Teachers have received training in teaching reading skills, including how to pronounce words correctly, how to read fluently, and how to help students who may struggle with reading. A range of reading strategies, including guided reading, shared reading, and group reading, are used to help students improve as readers. These techniques may aid pupils in developing into fluent, highly comprehensible readers. A few acknowledged that they had participated in the workshops. While some thought that giving learners tools would help them become proficient readers, these might consist of the following assertions, for instance:

"I've gone to workshops on teaching reading and other topics." (Teacher 3, School D).

"I've participated in reading workshops in the past, including spell reading, group reading, and shared reading" (Teacher 2, C School).

"It was found that giving learners a vocabulary list before introducing a new topic significantly improves their comprehension of documents and context, so I think it's especially beneficial to do so." (Teacher 4, School A).

"To make words more than just words, pair written sources with images to help associate phrases and vocabulary with visual elements." (Teacher 1, School B).

"Normally I read the text out loud to learners, then let them repeat after me." (School D, Teacher 3).

The findings make it abundantly evident that some participants are unable to modify their teaching methods to accommodate each individual learner. Among the basic letter sounds that learners need to learn are vowels and consonants. For young learners, word pronunciation and spelling are crucial. If teachers are not familiar with the curriculum, learners who have learning disabilities will struggle academically, lag, or never learn to read. This illustrates how important it is for teachers to have enough pedagogical and subject-matter expertise to help kids improve their reading abilities.

Research question 2: How significantly do these techniques really improve the reading abilities of learners who face learning barriers?

This study demonstrated how learners' success in inclusive classrooms may be hampered by teachers' inadequate understanding of the subject. The participants acknowledged that they were unsure of how to identify learners that were struggling academically. Because of the teachers' ignorance, which hindered the way learners learned, they found it difficult to acquire reading skills. This can be demonstrated by the following statement:

Since some learners still have trouble reading, I think the techniques I've employed aren't working. It serves as an obstacle. (Student 2, School A).

"I could tell the learner was struggling with reading when they were having trouble pronouncing the letters during oral reading" (Teacher 1, School A).

"There are those who guess the words because they can't read them." (School Teacher 4, School A; Teacher 3, School).

"Some of them struggle to understand the sentence because they struggle with reading. They have trouble reading" (Teacher 1, School C).

"Finding learners who struggle academically has proven to be a challenging task for me. After

finishing Grades 1 and 2, students discover they are illiterate. Since I teach third grade, I am aware of how difficult it is to identify people at this level. You'll discover that the student is being tricked in some way. Despite being in Grade 3, the youngster is illiterate" (Teacher 3, School B).

"I can't tell who has learning difficulties because some of them are illiterate." (Teacher 3, School D).

The comments indicate that teachers lack the information necessary to enhance reading skills, which has a negative impact on the department's and school management's need for help. According to the comments, the methods they have utilized have also led to learners' academic performance deteriorating. This shows that teachers must possess sufficient subject-matter and pedagogical knowledge to assist learners in becoming proficient readers.

Research question 3: Which techniques can teachers in the Foundation Phase use to assist learners with learning barriers improve their reading skills?

"I believe that one of the best strategies teachers can use is to choose various teaching resources that are appropriate for the age and interests of learners and use them throughout instructional activities." (School D, Teacher 3). These might be the most effective tactics educators can employ to help themselves and their pupils: "By staying with students who are having learning challenges after class in order to support them." (School B, Teacher 1). "I propose that if the management team could give us adequate resources, we could produce our own materials." (School A, Teacher 4).

The participants concur that if they were provided with sufficient resources, they could better address each learner's unique needs. It implies that educators need to adjust their teaching strategies and improve the reading skills of their younger learners.

Discussion

The results showed that the way foundation phase teachers prepared to help learners with reading in their classrooms was the reason why South African learners are unable to grasp reading abilities. Teachers struggle to put the reading strategies into practice though they received training. Failure to implement the best strategy may not be used because the CAPS document fails to describe exactly these abilities that should be instructed, allowing teachers to choose whatever techniques they believe are most suitable for teaching reading. According to Pretorius et al. (2016), it was discovered that teachers lacked the necessary skills to differentiate their reading instruction, especially when it came to teaching in the home language. This indicates that teacher professional development regarding how to instruct and assist students who struggle with reading remains a challenge. Teachers were not well-versed in reading education and were only acquainted with the traditional approaches to teaching reading, which involve having learners repeat the text after the teacher. This finding supports previous studies by Desta (2020) and Rule and Land (2017), which argue that low reading competency in learners is caused by most South African primary school teachers' lack of proper preparation in reading instruction. According to De Witt & Lessing (2016), a lack of knowledge about reading instruction is the reason for the high rates of illiteracy and school dropouts in several South African provinces. based on the discussions.

Despite attending reading workshops to enhance their teaching methods, some teachers reported that learners continue to face learning obstacles like guessing words and mispronouncing letter sounds when reading Sesotho. To enhance their teaching methods and raise students' academic achievement, teachers listed a variety of tactics, among others, to choose various teaching resources that are appropriate for the age and interests of learners and use them throughout instructional activities. Stay with LWLB after class and design their own material. Notwithstanding these difficulties, this study demonstrated the advantages of using Ntataise and Matima Lenyora as strategies to help teachers enhance teaching Sesotho as a home language in the foundation phase: Sesotho and give learners the skills they require to succeed based on grade level. The materials below (see Figure 1) are designed to assist teachers in overcoming this challenge by providing some useful guidance. Lesson preparation could also be done with ICT technology. Teachers-in-training should be equipped with the abilities needed to teach learners how to read for comprehension, according to Klapwijk & Pretorius et al. (2016).

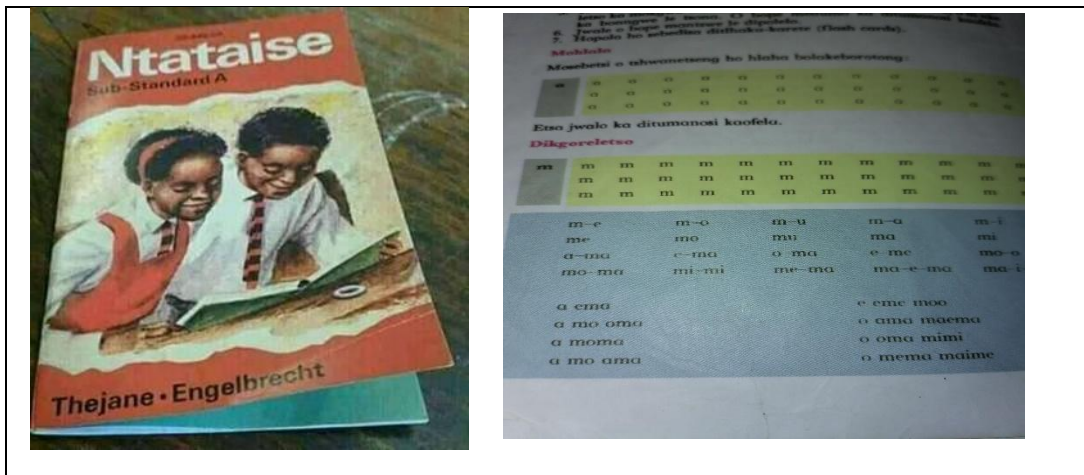


Figure 1: Recommended book to teach reading

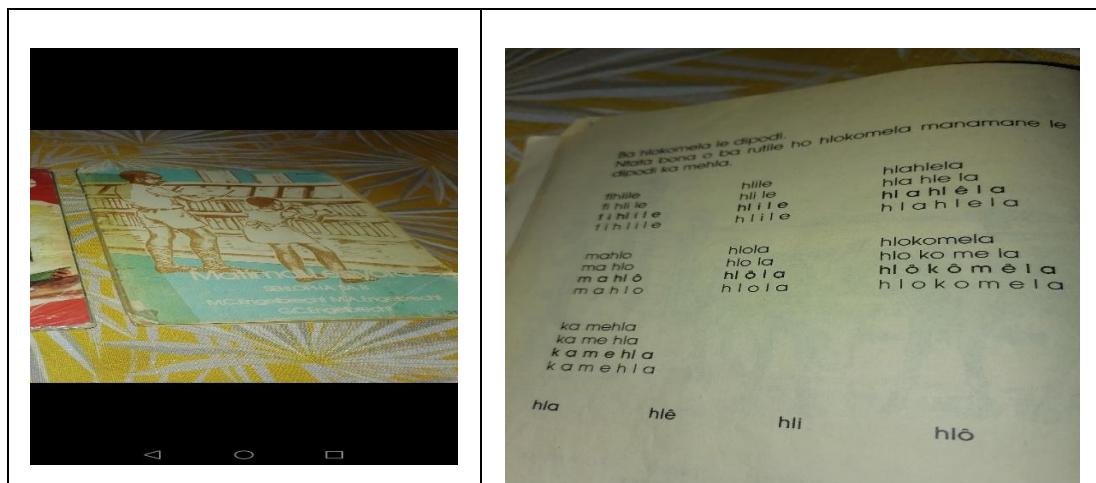


Figure 2: Recommended book to teach reading

Conclusion

Determining if the tactics used by Foundation Phase teachers in rural and township settings to instruct learners who have learning challenges met their goals and offering resources that could assist teachers in meeting the requirements of learners in the future were the two main

objectives of the study. According to the results, teachers still have difficulty figuring out how to best satisfy the needs of the students they educate. However, they have gone to reading-related trainings. They have trouble putting the best teaching techniques into practice to help learners become more proficient readers. In other words, they don't know much to assist learners become proficient readers. There are still those that use teacher-centered methods that are counterproductive and prevent learners from achieving academic success. It was also shown that most teachers are aware that they require additional resources to help learners become better readers. This research recommends that the Department of Education educate teachers to support reading skills and integrate technology with traditional resources such as Ntataise and Matimalenyora. A guidance is provided in Figures 1 and 2. The current study is deemed important because it provides guidance to the Department of Education, school administration, and teachers on how to minimize and eliminate the difficulties that Foundation Phase learners with reading difficulties encounter when preparing Sesotho as a subject for young learners using outdated materials and technology.

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