
Teachers' Perspectives and Roles of Guided Reading in Motivating Grade 7 English First Additional Learners: An Investigative Study

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Abstract: This paper explores teachers' perspectives on the role of guided reading in motivating Grade 7 English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners. Reading is a fundamental lifelong skill, yet many learners struggle with comprehension and intrinsic motivation, particularly in second-language contexts. Guided reading has been identified as a strategy to enhance reading proficiency and engagement by supporting decoding, comprehension, and exposure to diverse texts. Using a phenomenological design, four EFAL teachers from an Afrikaans secondary school were purposively sampled, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed three key findings: guided reading fosters independent reading habits and comprehension skills; teachers' instructional strategies, including discussion and contextualized vocabulary support, enhance learner motivation; and parental involvement plays a significant role in cultivating reading interest. Additionally, the influence of social media on reading engagement emerged as both a challenge and a potential avenue for motivation. The study concludes that guided reading, combined with supportive teaching practices and home engagement, can effectively promote reading motivation and proficiency among EFAL learners.

Keywords: guided reading; independent reading; reading motivation; reading proficiency; social media

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Introduction

Developing proficient readers is a central aim of education, particularly for learners studying English as a First Additional Language (EFAL). Reading not only supports academic success but also cultivates critical thinking, comprehension, and cultural understanding (Cole et al., 2022; Mak & Fancourt, 2019). However, many young learners in South Africa demonstrate low intrinsic motivation to read, even when resources are available (Kula, 2021; Scholes et al., 2020). Research shows that learners with high reading motivation perform better academically and approach texts with genuine engagement, rather than seeing reading as a task (Em, 2022; Kheang et al., 2024).

Reading proficiency encompasses both decoding and comprehension, skills that must be explicitly taught (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018; Namazi et al., 2022). Guided reading—a structured approach that supports learners' reading through scaffolded instruction—has been

recommended by the South African Department of Basic Education as an effective strategy for developing both skills (DBE, 2011; Kim et al., 2021b). Teachers play a pivotal role in motivating learners, as their instructional strategies, feedback, and classroom practices influence learner engagement and reading achievement (Duke et al., 2021; Allington & McGill-Franzen., 2021; Grimes, 2021).

Despite these strategies, challenges persist. Many South African teachers are inadequately prepared to implement reading interventions effectively, and curriculum constraints often emphasize content coverage over reading strategies (Orkin et al., 2018; OECD, 2021). Moreover, the increasing use of digital media, such as social networking platforms and streaming services, competes with learners' attention, potentially affecting reading motivation, fluency, and comprehension (Liao, 2024). Consequently, understanding how teachers perceive guided reading and its impact on learner motivation is critical for designing practical interventions in EFAL classrooms.

Sociocultural and expectancy value theories

This study is underpinned by Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky & Souberman, 1978) and Expectancy-Value Theory (Atkinson, 1957; Wang & Xue, 2022). Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process. Learner's construct meaning through interaction with more knowledgeable others, including teachers, peers, and family members, within their cultural and social contexts (Vygotsky & Souberman, 1978; Lestari et al., 2023). Guided reading exemplifies this process by providing scaffolded support where teachers model strategies, facilitate discussion, and connect new knowledge to learners' prior experiences (McLeod, 2024). The theory also highlights the importance of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which learners can perform beyond their independent capabilities with appropriate guidance, thereby enhancing reading proficiency and motivation.

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) focuses on learners' beliefs about their ability to succeed and the value they place on a task (Atkinson, 1957; Anderman, 2020). Applied to reading, EVT suggests that learners' motivation depends on their confidence in completing reading tasks and the perceived relevance of reading to their personal goals or interests (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023). If learners perceive reading as valuable and attainable, they are more likely to engage persistently and develop stronger comprehension skills.

By integrating these frameworks, guided reading can be conceptualized as a dual intervention which scaffolds learners' reading skills through social interaction (Sociocultural Theory) and enhances motivation by increasing perceived competence and task value (Expectancy-Value Theory). Both theories complement each other, highlighting the role of teachers, peers, family, and cultural context in shaping reading development and motivation. This framework guided the study's exploration of teacher perspectives on guided reading in Grade 7 EFAL classrooms.

Materials and methods

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design, which aims to capture the lived experiences and insights of participants regarding guided reading and reading motivation (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2021; Smith, 2018). Phenomenology emphasises understanding phenomena through participants' perspectives, allowing for in-depth exploration of experiences (Hoffding & Martiny, 2016). In this context, the design enabled an in-depth exploration of how teachers perceive the effectiveness of guided reading in promoting learner motivation and reading development.

In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the use of guided reading as a strategy to motivate EFAL learners to read. The phenomenological design allowed the researcher to explore how teachers perceive guided reading, how they implement it in their classrooms, and how they interpret its impact on learners' reading motivation and literacy development.

The choice of phenomenology was also informed by the study's focus on teachers' professional experiences and reflections. Teachers are directly involved in the teaching and facilitation of reading, making them valuable informants in understanding how guided reading practices operate within classroom contexts. By eliciting detailed descriptions of their experiences, the study aimed to uncover patterns and shared meanings regarding the effectiveness of guided reading in fostering learner engagement with reading.

Furthermore, the phenomenological design aligns with the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, namely Sociocultural Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory. Sociocultural Theory emphasises the importance of social

interaction and guided support in learning processes, while Expectancy-Value Theory focuses on learners' motivation and perceptions of task value. Investigating teachers' lived experiences with guided reading provided an opportunity to examine how these theoretical principles manifest in real classroom practices (Castles, 2018.). For example, teachers' descriptions of scaffolding strategies, classroom discussions, and collaborative learning activities illustrate how guided reading creates opportunities for social interaction and knowledge construction. At the same time, teachers' observations of learners' attitudes towards reading offer insight into how instructional practices influence learners' perceptions of reading as a meaningful and attainable activity.

Participants were purposively and conveniently sampled based on their expertise and experience in teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) at the senior/FET phase of an Afrikaans secondary school.

Convenience sampling was considered appropriate because the researcher had practical access to participants within the research site. Time, cost, and institutional arrangements further influenced this decision (Patton, 2015). Importantly, accessibility did not override relevance; only participants who had personally encountered the phenomenon were considered for inclusion (Gallagher & Schmicking, 2010). The school's English subject group comprises fourteen (14) participants, including the researcher. These respondents were former colleagues of the researcher. Their teaching experience varied in the sense that one teacher was a novice teacher with twelve months of experience, eight had less than ten (10) years of experience, and the five had over twenty-five (25) years of experience and served as the head of the EFAL department.

Convenience sampling was used for practical access, while ensuring participants had relevant experience with the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015; Gallagher & Schmicking, 2010). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for a balance of consistency and flexibility (Petitmengin et al., 2019). Interviews were conducted after school, transcribed verbatim, and participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain anonymity and ethical compliance.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following an inductive approach (Smith, 2018; Creswell, 2014). Codes were generated from participants' responses and grouped into overarching themes. A total of fifteen codes were identified and categorized into three main themes: 1) independent reading habits among EFAL learners, 2) implementation of reading strategies, and 3) teachers' observations of learners' value of reading and reading development. To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher engaged in bracketing, reflecting on personal assumptions to minimize bias (Van Manen, 2016). Triangulation was employed through careful transcription, cross-referencing of themes, and continuous referral to the original data.

Findings and discussion

Verbatim transcriptions were meticulously analysed to develop codes representing distinct and specific ideas. A total of fifteen codes were identified from the individual contributions of the four respondents. These codes were further grouped into three overarching themes that encapsulate the experiences of high school EFAL teachers regarding learners' motivation to read: independent reading habits among EFAL learners, the application of reading strategies, and the perceived value of reading both for teachers and their observations of learners' attitudes towards reading. In addition, during the analysis, overlapping codes were also recognized and appropriately categorized, taking into consideration un-coded segments of the data. The researcher continuously referred back to the transcriptions throughout this process, which culminated in the creation of tables aimed at refining the categories with greater precision. Summarily, the findings of the data analysis were presented and discussed within the framework of the aforementioned themes, providing a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and perspectives of EFAL teachers on learners' motivation to read.

EFAL learners' independent reading proficiencies

Teachers noted that learners' motivation to read independently is influenced by access to materials, cognitive readiness, and home environment. Limited exposure to written texts, competing interests in social media, and varying parental support were highlighted as key factors affecting reading motivation. For example:

The following excerpt depicts the interviews between the researcher and three participants:

Teacher F: I dare to express my concerns about learners' lack of motivation to read because they are constantly exposed to visual content on social media, which often lacks proper quality and substantive reading material.

Teacher E: I suggested that learners' lack of sufficient exposure to written texts and find reading more challenging than watching movies, attributing this difficulty to fatigue from sustained concentration.

Teacher D: I tend to liken the brain to a muscle, suggesting that children become intelligent through exercising this mental "muscle."

Teachers emphasised that guided reading fosters independent reading by developing decoding skills, comprehension, and familiarity with diverse text types. Access to graded reading materials, audiobooks, and short texts like magazines was identified as strategies to sustain interest.

Moreover, the respondents emphasised the importance of learners' access to reading materials, including their ability to decode texts and the variety of content available to them. They also highlighted challenges that hinder independent reading, such as a lack of exposure and varying levels of cognitive development. The respondents also noted that learners' motivation to read in English First Additional Language (EFAL) is influenced by parental encouragement and the home environment. This is attested by the following extrapolation of an interview:

Teacher A: Parental influence on reading material can either positively or negatively impact a learner's interest in reading.

Teacher C: I observed that reading habits learned at home greatly vary among learners.

Teacher B: I noted that some learners bring books from home, showing more motivation to read than others.

Regarding strategies to facilitate reading, three respondents discussed different sources used in EFAL classrooms. Teacher B encouraged learners with short reading materials like newspaper articles and magazines to maintain interest and expand vocabulary. Teacher E mentioned using audiobooks, which learners enjoy, but expressed concern that the curriculum focuses more on content than on teaching strategies. Teacher B highlighted how audiobooks help learners visualise stories.

All respondents acknowledged that reading is challenging. They discussed components of the Essential Focused Teaching model (EVT), particularly how learners' fluency impacts comprehension. Teachers noted that while most learners read fluently, some struggle with decoding words, stressing the importance of context in understanding. Furthermore, teachers emphasised the ability to discern comprehension issues through learners' tone, while also highlighting the challenges in fluency and comprehension among Grade 8 learners.

Regarding intrinsic motivation to read, all respondents agreed that it is essential for independent reading in EFAL and Further Education and Training (FET) phases. They suggested using incentives like awards and implementing guided reading tailored to learners' interests. Conversely, the limited availability of diverse reading materials in the curriculum poses challenges. Only one teacher mentioned using magazines as additional reading sources, underscoring the potential negative impact of academic content on learners' motivation when not supplemented with more engaging materials. The nexus between sub-themes overarching in relation to independent reading is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Independent Reading Responses

Sub-Theme	Responses	Remarks
Learning materials and accessibility to learning materials	57%	8 respondents out of 14 indicated the significance of adequate learning materials in schools, hence the suggestions of varied materials ranging from audio to written texts.
Additional graded learning materials	36%	5 respondents out of 14 opined that relevant materials, which aid rather than serve as a buttress to reading, are required in schools. These materials include printed tabloids such as magazines, newspapers, etc.
Physical and/or infrastructural resources	7%	1 responded out of 14 reiterated the integral part or role facilitated by physical and/or infrastructural resources such as libraries, laboratories, and reading clubs within communities.

Implementation of reading strategies

Collaborative work was also valued for promoting dialogue, comprehension, and social learning, though participation varied with class size and learner engagement. Discussion-based strategies allowed teachers to adjust instructions in real time and foster deeper understanding.

The following verbatim transcription highlights these assertions in line with the depiction from Table 1:

Teacher G: Normally, I encourage learners to independently break down words they find difficult and clarify meanings when they appear confused.

Teacher H: I advise learners to understand words in context, facilitating comprehension during reading.

Teacher J: During the teaching of reading, I stop to explain difficult words and encourage learners to identify and understand unfamiliar terms on their own.

Teacher I: It is important to promote the use of Google Dictionary for learners to look up and understand words independently, emphasising the importance of active vocabulary learning.

While some educators directly provide word definitions, teacher G empowers learners to discover meanings through dictionaries and report back, fostering independent learning processes. Discussion plays a significant role in all respondents' teaching methods, used both before and during reading lessons. In contrast, teacher I adjusts instructions based on feedback gathered through discussions, while teacher J engages learners in question-answer sessions to deepen understanding, particularly with older learners focused on performance of the examination. Finally, teacher H employs reading analyses after initial readings, using methods like drawing and highlighting to enhance comprehension and engagement.

Regarding group work, participants derived invaluable insights and value attached to this collaborative work. The following extract characterises the premised nuances deduced from it:

Teacher I: I really find it valuable for fostering dialogue and understanding among learners.

Teacher N: We must appreciate social learning and its benefits despite challenges with large class sizes.

Teacher F: I note variability in learners' participation but recognize its real-life application.

All respondents agreed on the importance of vocabulary for reading comprehension, though only one teacher uses explicit instruction to teach strategies for learners to define words themselves. Discussion emerges as an effective tool for engaging learners and enhancing comprehension, provided linguistic assessment matches cognitive demands.

Observation of learners' value to reading and reading development

When discussing the value of reading, all respondents acknowledged its importance as a life skill, though efforts to increase its value among learners vary. The following excerpt depicts the interaction between the principal researcher and participants:

Teacher L: I feel uncertain about motivating learners to read, because the majority of learners do not derive the will and motive to read.

Teacher M: I always emphasise the broader impact of language skills on communication, which is why learners need to express themselves about the challenges they have with reading. This would indicate their significant love and passion for reading and assistance for reading development.

Teacher N: I do notice that learners' tendency to avoid reading unless tied to academic goals, which highlights learners' poor fluency and the exam-driven curriculum's impact on their attitudes towards reading.

Despite these challenges, other participants demonstrated a zealous determination towards improving the value of reading for both learners and teachers. Thus, the following extract posits the critical nuances pertinent to the value of reading and reading development:

Teacher A: I aim to teach critical reading skills beyond mere content knowledge, emphasizing real-life application. If only one teacher can incorporate external reading sources to complement prescribed curriculum materials, I believe tangible progress can be attained towards reading successes and values. And this must not be done during reading periods only.

Teacher C: Normally, learners generally show more enthusiasm post-discussions and engage despite initial reluctance.

Teacher H: The learners enjoy reading periods, often discussing characters actively, and these exercises negate the assertion that reading is not adequately valued.

First and foremost nuance deduced from these excerpts is that varying perspectives of reading values are perceived in a light note of motivation from both learners and teachers. In addition, it propagates that if reading is done for the primary purposes of interest and fun rather than academic or instructional purposes, learners tend not to accord due diligence to reading (Alderson et al, 2015). In contrast, the second excerpt indicates a rather fascinating trend of perspectives wherein teachers endeavour to encourage learners to value reading. Evidential attempts or exercises that are geared towards leveraging reading, such as discussion posts after reading and utilising external sources or materials, have a significant impact on learners' motivation. In brief, there is a direct link between external sources utilised, the discussion engaged in, and teachers' involvement.

An intrinsic motivator for reading, shown in Figure 1, characterizes the fluctuating trends of reading proficiencies or skills derived from different sources or platforms such as social media platforms (Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter and Instagram). One of the key factors of reading proficiency is interest, which is intricately interwoven with attention span. According to Figure 1, 10 (77%) of participants attained an incredibly high level of interest in relation to watching movies, surfing on social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram. These are the critical sources or materials that seem to have a seamless transition of optimally impacting learners' reading motivation positively. Concisely, Figure 1 showcases variances and similarities of figures and percentages about intrinsic motivators in correlation with reading proficiencies.

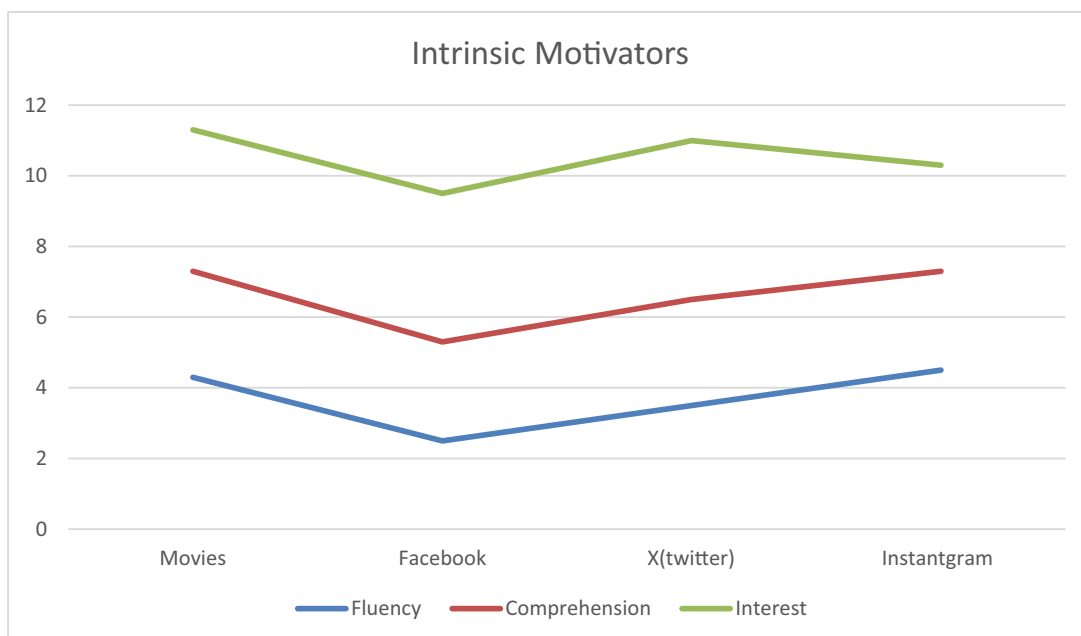


Figure 1. Intrinsic Motivators

Figure 2 illustrates the cyclical relationship between social media and reading motivation, highlighting the continuous interaction between these processes. Despite strategies such as guided and independent reading,

literacy remains a complex phenomenon at the forefront of educational development (Hassing-Das et al., 2020). Learners' reading proficiency extends beyond comprehension alone, encompassing variations in motivation shaped by: (1) independent reading practices, (2) reading strategies, and (3) perceived value of reading involvement and development. Findings suggest that independent reading skills are reinforced by access to relevant materials, which stimulate critical thinking and enhance motivation. Parental involvement further strengthens persistence, as learners often model caregivers' reading behaviours. Here, parents serve as primary external motivators, while relevant reading content aligned with learners' cognitive development provides secondary motivation. Together, these factors form an intersectional framework linking parental support, reading material relevance, and cognitive developmental stage.

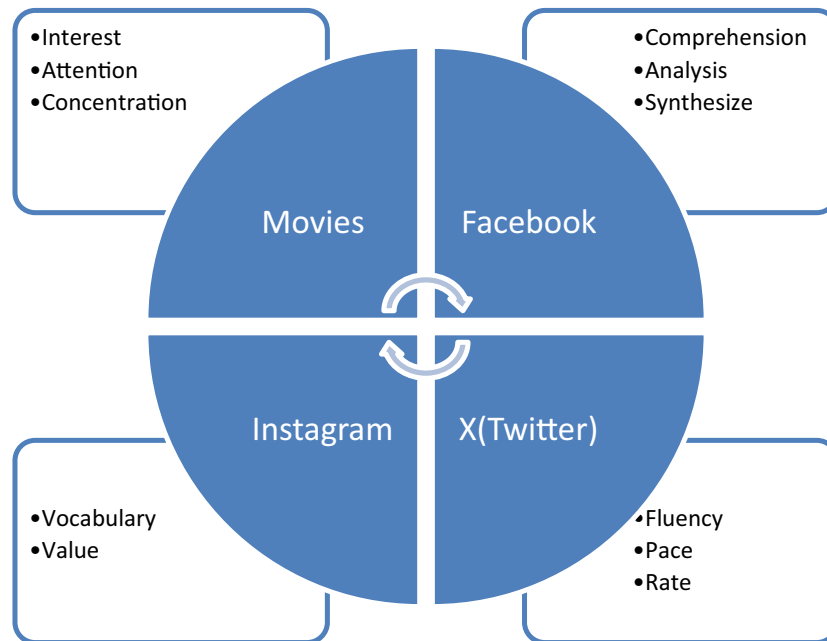


Figure 2. Relationship Between Social Media and Reading Motivation

Independent and guided reading are core strategies employed by the South African Department of Basic Education to address literacy challenges. However, these approaches may sometimes impede meaningful reading engagement, positioning reading motivation as a critical factor. Effective implementation should prioritize learners' encoding and decoding skills to enhance comprehension and intrinsic motivation. Classroom discussions also support comprehension and motivation, suggesting that encoding, decoding, and discussion collectively serve as key strategies to promote reading proficiency.

Teachers report generally low levels of reading motivation, attributed to limited emphasis on fostering a reading culture among both learners and educators (Liao, 2024). Additionally, many teachers lack strategies to effectively acculturate learners into valuing reading. Concurrently, social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and streaming media compete for learners' attention, contributing to declining reading proficiency and motivation (Cremin, 2022). Future research should investigate the direct impact of social media on literacy development, as current evidence indicates negative effects on vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation.

The emergent role of social media in reading motivation

In addition to traditional reading materials, social media has emerged as a significant influence on EFAL learners' engagement with text. Participants in this study highlighted that platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram compete for learners' attention, offering immediate gratification through visual and interactive content. While social media can divert learners from sustained reading, it also presents mechanisms that can be leveraged to foster reading motivation

Exposure to Authentic Texts: Social media provides learners with frequent exposure to written language in real-life contexts, such as captions, comments, blogs, and micro-articles. These texts often employ contemporary

vocabulary and colloquial usage, which can enhance learners' understanding of English in authentic, socially relevant contexts.

Interactive Engagement and Feedback Loops: Platforms allow learners to interact through likes, comments, shares, and discussions. This interactivity can replicate aspects of classroom discussion and peer scaffolding, reinforcing comprehension and motivating learners to read to participate meaningfully.

Multimodal Scaffolding: Social media content often integrates text with images, videos, and hyperlinks, providing a multimodal scaffold that supports comprehension, particularly for EFAL learners who may struggle with dense or abstract written texts. By connecting visuals and text, learners can construct meaning more effectively and enjoy a more engaging reading experience.

In summary, social media emerges as a double-edged mechanism in EFAL reading motivation: it can undermine attention and persistence if left unchecked, yet it offers authentic, interactive, and self-directed learning opportunities that, when strategically integrated, can enhance learners' reading engagement, comprehension, and intrinsic motivation.

Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted with a small sample of four teachers from a single secondary school, which limits the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. While qualitative research seeks depth rather than broad generalisation, the limited sample size restricts the diversity of perspectives represented in the study. Second, the use of convenience sampling may have introduced sampling bias, as participants were selected based on accessibility rather than representativeness.

Additionally, the participants were colleagues of the researcher, which may have influenced the openness of responses despite efforts to maintain reflexivity and minimise bias through bracketing. Third, the study relied solely on teacher interviews as the primary data source. The inclusion of additional data sources, such as classroom observations, learner perspectives, or document analysis, could have strengthened the findings through methodological triangulation. Future research should therefore consider larger and more diverse samples across multiple schools, as well as incorporating learners' perspectives, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of guided reading practices and reading motivation in EFAL classrooms.

Conclusion

This paper explored teachers' perspectives on the role of guided reading in motivating Grade 7 EFAL learners. The findings indicate that guided reading not only fosters reading motivation but also enhances a range of literacy proficiencies, including encoding, decoding, discussion, and the promotion of reading values and development. Moreover, parental involvement in guided reading significantly contributes to intrinsic motivation and cultivates learners' sense of responsibility for independent reading. Cognitive development considerations must be integrated into relevant and engaging reading materials, which balance informative and entertaining elements to support comprehension and motivation.

The study further highlights the intrinsic relationship between guided reading and reading motivation: guided reading stimulates critical engagement, while reading motivation generates interest and desire to read. The effectiveness of guided reading, however, depends largely on teachers' ability to implement structured strategies rather than merely modelling reading behaviours. Consequently, future research should examine how guided reading shapes teaching pedagogy and how pedagogy, in turn, influences reading motivation. In summary, guided reading performs a dual role: (1) motivating independent reading and (2) equipping learners with decoding and inferential skills, which are fundamental to reading comprehension.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach by drawing on insights from literature, linguistics, and education. By integrating perspectives from these fields, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the topic and highlights the interconnected nature of language, literacy, and literary studies. Such an approach enriches the analysis and broadens the relevance of the findings across multiple academic disciplines.

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