



**Assessing grade six second language learners: English Home Language
teachers' experiences**

By

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Abstract

Since the end of apartheid and the birth of a new democratic South Africa, learners of different races have been at liberty to attend any school of choice. With South Africa having eleven official languages, children attend schools where English as the language of teaching and learning (LoLT) is not the same as children's mother tongue language (e.g. isiZulu). While the current Curriculum of Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) caters for second language speaking learners' needs in the provision of English as a First Additional Language (EFAL), many second language speaking learners are forced to learn in English as a Home Language (EHL) because of the schools they attend. As a result, teachers are tasked with teaching and assessing comprehension in EHL to second language English speaking learners who have limited exposure to English, at Home Language level. This study sought to explore the experiences of EHL teachers assessing comprehension of grade six second language learners, as well as the strategies they employ to assess the learners.

This study employed the qualitative approach, located within the interpretivist paradigm, to explore the experiences of EHL teachers assessing comprehension of grade six second language speaking learners. A case study methodology was used. Three participants were purposefully selected from three primary schools in the Durban South area, KwaZulu-Natal. The instrument used to generate data was a semi-structured telephonic interview, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Data was then transcribed verbatim, analysed and presented thematically.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) was used to frame this study. It explained teachers' experiences assessing comprehension from what learners could do on their own (Actual knowledge) to what they could do with assistance from the teacher (Zone of Potential Development- ZPD). The ZPD components, such as scaffolding and mediation, were used to explain how EHL teachers assessed comprehension to grade six second language learners.

From the teachers' responses, multiple experiences were reported that comprised of constructive experiences of learners increasing their vocabulary, becoming confident, and showing enthusiasm and interest during comprehension assessments. As well as adverse experiences that involved learners experiencing a language barrier as their mother tongue was not the same as the LoLT. Other factors that affected EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension were EHL teachers not English language specialist teachers, and lacking in-

service training and support from internal structures (HODs), and from external structures, such as the Department of Education (DoE), subject advisors and parents. Lack of resources and infrastructure, learner indiscipline, and the Covid-19 pandemic also influenced experiences of assessing comprehension to second language learners. The study also found that grade six second language learners could not complete comprehension tasks successfully on their own without the aid of their EHL teachers and the well thought out strategies used.

The findings of this study are useful to the DoE and workshops can be designed to assist and develop EHL teachers in teaching and assessing second language learners in schools. Universities can also benefit as courses can be improved to prepare teachers on how to teach and assess comprehension to second language learners in these contexts. Recommendations emanating from this study call for a more active role by the DoE and parents so that teachers are supported in their teaching roles. This is because EHL teachers need ongoing support from the various stakeholders to teach and assess comprehension to second language English speaking learners successfully.

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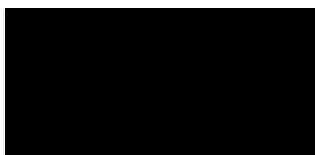
To my friends, family and colleagues who provided support and care during this study, thank you.

Lastly, to the participants who have participated in this research study, your participation is greatly appreciated.

Declaration

I, Bianca Jade Ragavan, hereby declare that:

- i. the research conducted in this study is my original work, unless indicated otherwise, and that appropriate acknowledgements were provided,
- ii. texts, tables and diagrams used in this study, used in their original form or adapted, were appropriately and specifically acknowledged, with the source appropriately stipulated in the text and in the reference section of this dissertation,
- iii. I have familiarized myself with, and abided by, the University's Code of Conduct,
- iv. data generated in this study has complied with the University's ethical requirements,
- v. this dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree or at any other university for examination,
- vi. this dissertation does not possess another's writing, unless specifically and appropriately acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a. their words have been re-written and paraphrased but the general information attributed to them has been referenced
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Signature of researcher

29/06/2022

Date

Supervisors Endorsement

As the candidate's supervisor I agree/do not agree to the submission of this thesis.

Signed: _____

List of abbreviations and acronyms

Language of learning and teaching	LOLT
Progress in International Reading Literacy Study	PIRLS
Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement	CAPS
Further Education Training	FET
Department of Education	DoE
Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality	SACMEQ
English Home Language	EHL
English First Additional Language	EFAL
Zone of Proximal Development	ZPD
Socio-Economic Status	SES
National School Effectiveness Study	NSES
Post graduate certificate in education	PCGE
Head of Department	HOD
Annual Teaching Plan	ATP
Junior Primary	JP

Table of contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Declaration.....	v
Supervisors Endorsement	vi
List of abbreviations and acronyms	vii
Chapter one: Introduction and background to the study	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Background of the study	1
1.3. Problem statement.....	3
1.4. Focus of this study	4
1.5. Location of the study	4
1.6. Rationale.....	5
1.6.1. Contextual Motivation.....	5
1.6.2. Personal Motivation.....	5
1.7. The objectives of the study.....	6
1.8. The research questions.....	6
1.9. Research Methodology	7
1.9.1. Research Paradigm.....	7
1.9.2. Qualitative approach.....	7
1.9.3. Research methodology	7
1.9.4. Sampling.....	7
1.10. Data generation methods	8
1.10.1. Semi-structured interviews.....	8
1.10.2. Data analysis	8
1.11. Trustworthiness	9
1.11.1. Credibility	9

1.11.2. Transferability	9
1.11.3. Dependability	9
1.11.4. Confirmability.....	10
1.12. Ethical issues	10
1.13. Limitations of the study	10
1.14. Outline of the study	11
1.15. Conclusion	11
Chapter Two: Literature Review	12
2.1. Introduction	12
2.2. Conceptualizing Reading and Listening comprehension.....	12
2.2.1. Understanding listening comprehension	13
2.2.2. Understanding Reading comprehension	13
2.3 Teacher’s role in the teaching and assessing of comprehension	13
2.4. The importance of assessment and assessment in comprehension	14
2.4.1. Forms of assessment in comprehension.....	15
2.4.1.1. Summative assessment in comprehension	15
2.4.1.2. Formative assessment in comprehension.....	15
2.5. The connection between teaching and assessment in comprehension	15
2.6. Useful assessment strategies when assessing second language learners in comprehension	16
2.6.1. The Prediction strategy	17
2.6.2. The Thinking Aloud Strategy	17
2.6.3. The Summarizing strategy.....	18
2.6.4. The Questioning strategy	19
2.7. Teachers’ experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners	19
2.7.1. Influence of teachers’ experiences on assessing comprehension	22

2.8. Teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension: An international context.....	22
2.8.1. Inadequate training of English teachers.....	23
2.8.1.1. The influence of teacher confidence and positive attitudes on teaching and assessing comprehension.....	23
2.8.1.2. Lack of qualified teachers teaching comprehension to second language learners	24
2.8.1.3. Limited knowledge of assessment strategies used to assess comprehension to second language learners	25
2.9. An Assumption that decoding words will lead to understanding	26
2.10. Teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension: A South African context.....	28
2.10.1. The impact of heterogeneous schooling systems in South Africa on comprehension	28
2.10.2. Uncertainty of English teachers' teaching and assessment of comprehension ..	29
2.10.3. Lack of preservice and in-service training for English teachers.....	32
2.11. Challenges in assessing comprehension in South Africa	33
2.11.1. English teachers race against the clock	34
2.11.2. The focus on teaching content to assess learners	34
2.11.3. Overcrowding of learners in classrooms	35
2.12. Theoretical framework	36
2.12.1. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).....	36
2.12.2. Scaffolding	37
2.12.3. Mediation.....	38
2.13. Conclusion.....	40
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	42
3.1. Introduction	42
3.2. The Interpretivist Paradigm.....	43

3.3. Qualitative Research	44
3.4. Research methodology: A Case study.....	45
3.5. Location of the study	46
3.6. Sampling.....	47
3.7. Data generation methods	48
3.7.1. Interviews	48
3.7.1.1. Semi-structured interviews.....	48
3.8. Data analysis	49
3.9. Trustworthiness	51
3.9.1. Credibility.....	51
3.9.2. Transferability	52
3.9.3. Dependability	52
3.9.4. Confirmability.....	52
3.9. Ethical issues	53
3.10. Limitations of the study	53
Chapter Four: Presentation of data	56
4.1. Introduction	56
4.2. Biographical profile of participants.....	56
4.3. EHL teachers' understanding of comprehension and of assessing comprehension...	58
4.4. Multiplicity of EHL teachers' experiences when assessing second language learners in comprehension.....	60
4.4.1. Constructive experiences of EHL teachers when assessing second language learners in comprehension.....	60
4.4.1.1. Increasing learner vocabulary skills and confidence when assessing comprehension.....	61
4.4.1.2. Cultivating positive learner attitudes of interest and enthusiasm towards comprehension.....	62

4.4.2. Adverse experiences by EHL teachers when assessing grade six second language learners	64
4.4.2.1. Language as a barrier to learning: Assessing comprehension to second language learners in EHL	64
4.4.2.2. Language barrier as a negative influence to assessing comprehension	66
4.5. Factors influencing EHL teachers’ experiences of teaching, learning and assessing of EHL comprehension	67
4.5.1. The lack of resources on teaching, learning and assessing comprehension	67
4.5.1.1. Lack of library resources at schools.....	67
4.5.1.2. The effects of poor infrastructure and overcrowding on assessing comprehension.....	68
4.5.2. Discipline issues and negative learner attitudes towards comprehension.....	69
4.5.3. Effects of Covid-19 on assessing comprehension: Lack of access to public libraries and peer learning	71
4.5.4. Absence of parental involvement in learners’ learning of comprehension	72
4.5.5. The teaching of EHL comprehension by non-specialist teachers	74
4.5.6. EHL teachers lack in-service training	75
4.5.7. Lack of support in teaching and assessing comprehension from stakeholders and Head of Departments	76
4.5.7.1. Lack of support and guidance from DoE in assessing comprehension of second language learners.....	77
4.5.7.2. Lack of support and guidance from subject advisors when assessing second language learners in comprehension	78
4.5.7.3. Support from Head of Department (HoD), staff and school clusters for EHL teachers for assessing comprehension	80
4.6. EHL teachers envisioning to improve assessing second language learners in comprehension in the future.....	82
4.6.1. Greater support from internal and external support structures	82

4.6.2. Call for the use of teacher assistants as translators when teaching and assessing comprehension of second language learners	83
4.7. Multiple strategies used by EHL teachers to assess comprehension of second language learners	85
4.7.1. Structuring and aligning comprehension assessment activities to the EHL CAPS document	86
4.7.2. Using synonyms to make questions in comprehension assessment activities understandable	87
4.7.3. Using useful comprehension assessment strategies: The Thinking aloud strategy and the Summarizing strategy	88
4.7.4. Using visual aids to promote learner understanding of the comprehension text... ..	89
4.7.5. Simulating and developing healthy reading habits to assist second language learners with comprehension tasks	90
4.8. The successes of teacher assessment strategies on learners' performance in comprehension	91
4.9. Drawbacks of EHL teachers' strategies on learners' performance in comprehension	92
4.10. The relation of Vygotsky's ZPD to the study	93
4.10.1. Vygotsky's ZPD	93
4.10.2. Scaffolding.....	94
4.10.3. Mediation.....	94
4.11. The effect of scaffolding and mediation on assessing EHL comprehension.....	95
4.12. Conclusion	95
Chapter Five: Conclusion, Summary and Recommendations.....	97
5.1. Introduction	97
5.2. Overview of study	97
5.2.1. Chapter one	97
5.2.2. Chapter two.....	97

5.2.3. Chapter three	98
5.2.4. Chapter four.....	98
5.3. Summary of key findings	98
5.3.1. Research question one: What are the experiences of EHL teachers in assessing comprehension of second language learners in grade six?	99
5.3.2. Research question two: What strategies do EHL teachers use to assess comprehension of second language learners in grade six?	101
5.3.3. Key findings in relation to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development	102
5.4. Recommendations for the study	103
5.5. Suggestions for further studies.....	106
5.6 Conclusion	106
References.....	108
Figures and tables	
Figure 1:The movement of learners through their ZPD from learners' Actual Development to Potential Development through the aid of a capable other, using Scaffolding techniques and Mediation Tools. Adapted from (Christmas, Kudzai & Josiah, 2012, p.2).....	39

Chapter one: Introduction and background to the study

1.1. Introduction

South Africa has eleven official languages that render it a diverse nation. During the apartheid era, educational provision was racially divided. With the advent of democracy, these divisions were removed through the integrated or ‘mixed’ schools (Ncoko, Osman & Cockcroft, 2000). Currently, South African children across racial and cultural backgrounds have access to equal education. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996a) states that every child has the right to learn in their mother tongue. However, learners often study where the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), or the language of instruction, is English (Kotzé, Van der Westhuizen, & Barnard, 2017). There is a perceived strong association between mother tongue and academic achievement (DBE, 2010). Therefore, when learners enter schools where the LoLT is not the same as their mother tongue, they find learning difficult, and ultimately, underachieve (NEEDU, 2013). When learners do not speak the language of instruction, authentic teaching and learning does not occur (DBE, 2010). This creates a learning barrier that leads to school ineffectiveness, poor academic achievement, and to teachers struggling with implementing the curriculum effectively.

This study explores English Home Language (EHL) teachers’ experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language English learners. This chapter introduces the study by providing the background, purpose, motivation, critical research questions, and objectives of the study. It also provides a brief outline of the research methodology of the study.

1.2. Background of the study

South Africa’s poor academic achievement is manifest in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016 results where 78% of South African grade four learners were unable to read and understand basic text in any of the eleven South African languages (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena & Palane, 2017). Furthermore, the PIRLS results revealed that South African learners had the lowest performance in reading comprehension across all 50 participating countries (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). The results showed grade four South African learners’ extremely poor literacy rate and inability to ‘read to learn’. The learners could not understand, think and derive meaning from what they read. An adequate comprehension level is important in determining a learner’s overall learning achievement (Palane & Howie,

2019). The ability to comprehend is crucial as it determines success in the education system, not only in the EHL learning area, but also in all other learning areas. If the learner is unable to read and understand a text, they would not be able to understand the content in other learning areas, and learning will not take place. This then results in underachievement in schools and eventually, unemployment. Oakhill, Cain and Elbro (2014) say comprehension is vital in daily life, be it employment or social life (emails, house leases, instructions). One therefore, needs to be able to read and understand to get through everyday life. The PIRLS (2016) tests show that English comprehension is a major crisis that needs attention in South African schools, a concern also raised by Pretorius and Lephhalala as far back as 2011 (Pretorius & Lephhalala, 2011).

The Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS), the current curriculum used in South African schools, is a structured and rigid content-driven policy with specifics on teaching reading, writing and numeracy concepts (Hoadley, 2017). Each grade in all phases (Foundation phase, Intermediate Phase, Senior Phase and Further Education Training (FET) has policy documents for each subject prescribing specific content, concepts and skills to be taught. In the EHL Intermediate Phase CAPS document, four language skills are taught and assessed. These are Listening and Speaking, Reading and Viewing, Writing and Presenting, and Language Structures and Conventions. Comprehension is taught and assessed in Listening and Speaking, and Reading and Viewing. Hence, both listening comprehension, (Hogan, Adolf & Alonzo, 2014) and reading comprehension (Keene, 2006) are taught and assessed in the CAPS curriculum. Therefore, the two forms of comprehension are taught to second language speaking learners by English teachers.

The English CAPS curriculum has two levels of language proficiency; Home Language (HL) level and First Additional Language (FAL) level. According to the Department of Education (DoE) (2011), HL and FAL refers to the language level proficiency at which English is to be taught, and not the actual native (Home Language) or acquired language (First Additional Language) that learners speak. The Home Language level offers language proficiency that “reflects the basic interpersonal communication skills required in social situations and the cognitive academic skills essential for learning across the curriculum” (DoE, 2011, p.8). The Home Language proficiency level provides learners with language fluency and the ability to understand the curriculum. The First Additional Language level is a language proficiency level that refers to a language that is not the mother tongue, but is still used as the LoLT from grade

four onwards (DoE, 2011). Therefore, it is at a lower proficiency level of English compared to the Home Language level, but is still at a level whereby second language learners can communicate and function in society in the English language.

Not all learners are privileged to be taught in their mother tongue language from the beginning of their schooling careers. Most are forced to learn English as a Home Language (Childs, 2016). The EHL teachers then have to teach and assess this high proficiency level of English to learners who have limited exposure to the English language. This study looks at teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to learners whose mother tongue (isiZulu) is different from the LoLT (English) at their schools, and who are learning at the Home Language proficiency level.

1.3. Problem statement

The PIRLS (2016) tests proved that South African learners struggle to comprehend texts in their mother tongue as well as their second languages. With over three quarters of the grade four learners unable to make meaning from texts, comprehension and meaning-making is a major challenge in the education system (Spaull, 2016). The increasing number of second language English learners entering English medium schools has no option but to learn English at the Home Language level. Classrooms now consist of learners with different mother tongues, learning levels, and of different learning paces. Second language learners are at a disadvantage as they have smaller vocabularies, insufficient background knowledge relevant to the texts they encounter at school, and less familiarity with the mainstream discourse patterns than English-only readers (August, Francis, Hsu & Snow, 2006). Van Staden, Bosker and Bergbauer (2016) state that second language learners' limited exposure to English can lead to qualitatively weaker word representations and slower/less accurate reading. Therefore, second language learners experience more difficulty in EHL, and learn at a lower rate than English-only speaking learners.

While it is difficult for second language learners to learn in a language of instruction that is not their home language, EHL teachers also face difficulty in teaching second language learners. Kotze et al. (2017) state that it is the teacher's role and function to accommodate the diverse needs of learners. Therefore, teachers are accountable for ensuring that their learners learn effectively, attain good results, and move to the next grade, by providing adequate support. However, the current EHL CAPS does not make it simple for EHL teachers to provide support to second language learners. Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel and Tlale (2015) explain that, with the

current CAPS curriculum's strict time allocation to complete content and assessments, teachers tend to focus more on teaching content and completing syllabus rather than diversifying instructions to meet a range of learners' needs. The policy requirements restrict EHL teachers in their teaching and assessment of the learners in different classroom contexts.

Spaull and Pretorius (2019) say literacy and understanding should be the 'core business' of primary schools. Other scholars (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016) argue that comprehension is neglected in the classroom and teachers spend more time developing reading skills and completing the syllabus. Therefore, with the growing number of second language learners entering schools where the LoLT is not their mother tongue, and with the strict guidelines put in place by CAPS for teachers to follow, one wonders how EHL teachers experience assessing comprehension to second language learners, especially when understanding is the crux of learning.

1.4. Focus of this study

The present study explored how EHL teachers experienced assessing comprehension to second language English speaking learners, and the strategies they used to assess second language learners in grade six. This study focused on both listening and reading comprehension during formative assessment.

1.5. Location of the study

This study was conducted in three primary schools in the Durban South area in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The three schools are situated in a middle-class urban area servicing a low socio-economic community in informal settlements in the Durban South area.

The study looked at EHL teachers teaching second language English speaking learners (whose mother tongue is isiZulu) in grade six at three primary schools in the Durban South area, KwaZulu-Natal. These primary schools were chosen because the second language English learners residing in the informal settlement in Durban South, attended these schools. They were previously exclusive to the Indian community during the apartheid era, but at the time of the study, the majority of the teachers were non-isiZulu speaking. The three schools served the community of the informal settlements, hence, many of the learners attending these schools were isiZulu speaking. The schools were chosen to see how non-isiZulu speaking teachers assessed EHL comprehension to grade six second language English learners.

1.6. Rationale

This section discusses the researcher's motivation for conducting this study. It is divided into the contextual motivation of the study and the researcher's personal motivation for conducting the study. The contextual motivation is discussed below.

1.6.1. Contextual Motivation

Over the last two decades, both international and national literary assessments have pointed to the poor literary performance of South African learners. The Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) assessed numeracy and literacy at grade 6 in 2000 and 2007, and pointed to the underperformance of South African learners (Spaull, 2013). Although in 2000 South Africa ranked eighth out of fifteen countries in reading and tenth position out of fifteen in reading in 2007, the reading achievement scores were below the SACMEQ average of 500 in both years (Spaull, 2013). This is over and above the evidence from PIRLS discussed earlier. Therefore, South African learners read without meaning in their home languages and additional languages. Since the majority of learners cannot comprehend in their mother tongue languages but are expected to learn in an additional language, one may ask how EHL teachers cope with assessing their comprehension in the language of instruction that is not even learners mother tongue language. With grade six being the exit grade of the Intermediate Phase, I was interested in knowing the experiences of EHL teachers assessing comprehension before learners enter grade seven. Studies (Moyo, Beukes & Van Rensburg, 2010; Monyai, 2012; Govender & Hugo, 2018; Williams, 2019) have explored the teaching of EHL to second language learners in South Africa, but there is not much on experiences of assessing comprehension in EHL to South African second language learners. Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of EHL teachers in assessing grade six second language English learners, as well as the strategies they use to assess these learners.

1.6.2. Personal Motivation

As a grade six EHL teacher, I experienced many challenges assessing second language English learners in EHL. Being an English language speaker, I was challenged when communicating with learners because of the language barrier. Learners whose mother tongue is not the same as the language of instruction will not understand when their teacher is teaching or giving instructions (DBE, 2010). Whenever I taught or read a text during Reading and Viewing or Listening and Speaking, I noticed that many of the learners did not understand, and often asked one another in isiZulu what they should do and how. I also found that second language English

learners did not understand the instructions, the comprehension texts or the questions; and sometimes left some questions blank or copied answers word-for-word out of the comprehension text. This showed that second language English learners did not understand the texts, as they were unable to provide explanations in their own words. As a result, I often requested learners fluent in both English and isiZulu to translate parts of texts, questions and instructions of both class activities and assessment tasks to those who struggled with understanding English. This way, learners performed better and got higher marks in comprehension assessments than when there were no translations.

My personal motivation for conducting this study was to explore the experiences of other EHL teachers as they assessed comprehension to second language English learners in grade six, and the strategies they used when assessing comprehension in their classrooms. I aimed to understand if other EHL teachers had the same experiences or challenges or if they experienced assessment of comprehension differently. This study benefits EHL teachers in teaching and assessing comprehension to second language English learners. It is also beneficial to universities where courses and programmes are developed to prepare teachers in training on how to teach and assess second language learners in schools. This study might also inform the Department of Education and Subject Advisors in terms of workshops that can be designed to assist and develop EHL teachers in teaching and assessing second English language learners in schools.

1.7. The objectives of the study

1. To explore the experiences of EHL teachers in assessing grade six second language learners in comprehension.
2. To explore the strategies that EHL teachers used to assess grade six second language learners in comprehension.

1.8. The research questions

1. What are the experiences of EHL teachers in assessing comprehension of second language learners in grade six?
2. What strategies do EHL teachers use to assess comprehension of second language learners in grade six?

1.9. Research Methodology

This section provides a brief description of the research paradigm and approach, research methodology used in this study. The sampling, instruments used to generate data, and data analysis chosen is briefly discussed. Furthermore, the trustworthiness, ethical considerations and limitations of this study are also discussed. An outline of this study is then provided and discussed briefly.

1.9.1. Research Paradigm

The paradigm chosen to guide this study was the interpretivist paradigm as this study aimed to explore EHL teachers' experiences. Okeke and Van Wyk (2016) state that the interpretivist paradigm is ideal when a researcher seeks to obtain in-depth understanding of what occurs in the field. To answer the research questions and gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, data was generated on the lived experiences of teachers assessing comprehension in EHL to second language English learners in grade six.

1.9.2. Qualitative approach

Qualitative research is concerned with the nature, understanding and explanation of phenomena (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2009). In this study, qualitative data was generated to gain in-depth insight into the phenomenon of participants' different experiences (many realities in interpretive paradigm) in conducting comprehension assessment and the assessment strategies they employed.

1.9.3. Research methodology

The methodology chosen for this study was a case study. A case study focuses on a single case to provide insight into the issue (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). In this study, a case study methodology was chosen as it was most suited methodology for generating qualitative data in a natural setting. This study used a case study to explore EHL teacher experiences (Phenomenon). This study was a case of understanding the experiences of EHL teachers assessing comprehension of isiZulu speaking learners where English is the Home language.

1.9.4. Sampling

Sampling is the selection of specific data sources to meet the research objectives (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). It is selecting a portion of the population that will

represent the whole (Landreneau & Creek, 2009). The sampling method used was purposive sampling, which is the deliberate choice of participants due to the qualities they possess (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The source of data for this study were teachers teaching EHL in grade six. These teachers had second language English learners in their grade six English classrooms, and had at least five years' experience in teaching EHL. The criteria were so that teachers could give a more detailed description of their experiences and provide a variety of teaching strategies used over the last few years.

1.10. Data generation methods

The data generation method this study used was one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted telephonically because of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

1.10.1. Semi-structured interviews

According to Ryan et al. (2009), a semi-structured interview allows for a more flexible interview process as it enables the interviewer to ask open-ended questions that allow for spontaneous and in-depth responses from participants. This data generation instrument involves the interviewer preparing a list of predetermined questions that will unfold in a conversational manner, offering participants the opportunity to explore issues they deem important (Longhurst, 2003). This method was appropriate for answering critical questions and providing insight into the lived experiences of EHL teachers assessing second language learners. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

1.10.2. Data analysis

After the semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, the data were analysed using thematic analysis, a technique for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into themes across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It provided a flexible and useful research tool that potentially provided a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It involved six steps which, according to Braun and Clarke (2012) are: Familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

1.11. Trustworthiness

In research, a study must be trustworthy to ensure that the data generated is credible and transferable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to trustworthiness as how the researcher persuades the readers that the findings of the study are “worth paying attention to” (p. 290). Trustworthiness in qualitative studies can be addressed through honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, an honest, in-depth and rich description of data was provided to allow the reader to see that research findings are described in as much detail as possible (Curtin & Fossey, 2007).

1.11.1. Credibility

To ensure credibility, Elo, Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utriainen and Kyngas (2014) say that those participants in the study must be identified and described accurately. Therefore, purposive sampling was used so that teachers in the study were purposefully selected and fitted with the criteria of this study. Participants were EHL teachers with at least five years’ experience teaching grade six second language learners. ‘Member checks’ was also used to feedback data, interpretations and conclusions back to participants to strengthen the data as the participants and researcher looks at and interprets the data with ‘different eyes’ (Korstjens & Moser, 2018)

1.11.2. Transferability

Transferability is another criterion used to ensure the trustworthiness of a study. Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen and Kyngäs (2014) describe transferability as “the potential for extrapolation and it relies on the reasoning that findings can be generalized or transferred to other settings or groups” (p.2). For a study to be transferable, the researcher has to provide a thick and detailed description that will allow the reader to transfer the findings to another setting (Polit & Beck, 2010). In this study, I provided a detailed, descriptive and in-depth account of the phenomenon, context, location and data collection methods.

1.11.3. Dependability

Dependability is the stability of data over time under different conditions (Elo et al., 2014). If a researcher wants to address dependability in his/her study, the process of the study must be reported in detail to enable future researchers to repeat the study in a different setting or gain similar results (Shenton, 2004). This study discusses the methodology in-depth so that it can

be replicated by other researchers. Doing so would inform the reader or future researcher of the extent to which proper research practices were followed. An audit trail must be given to ensure transparency by describing the research process from the beginning of the research project to the development of the study, to the reporting of the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Such transparency would enable future researchers to develop a thorough understanding of the process and methods of research. Detailed and descriptive information about context, phenomena, research methods as well as research records were provided in this study to ensure dependability.

1.11.4. Confirmability

Confirmability is “concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination, but are clearly derived from the data” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). Therefore, to ensure that findings are based on participants responses and not on the researchers’ preconceptions, the transcribed interviews were checked by participants.

1.12. Ethical issues

Ethical issues refer to principles that avoid harm when conducting research (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Ethics involves receiving ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board to ensure that the researcher abides by the principles of confidentiality, nonmaleficence, and respect (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). In this study, I ensured that no harm was done to any participant. I applied for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee. Once approval was granted, I sought and received permission from the Department of Education to conduct the study in schools. I then sought and received permission from schools selected in this study. I also obtained informed consent from participants (Wolfensberger, 1967). The participants selected for this study were given consent forms to ensure participation was voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw whenever they desired to. The participants were also assured that their identities would be kept anonymous and confidential using pseudonyms.

1.13. Limitations of the study

Limitations are occurrences that arise out of a study that a researcher cannot control (Simon & Goes, 2013). The limitation that arose from this study included my biased opinions as an EHL

teacher teaching grade six second language learners. To remove these preconceived ideas, the I allowed participants to review the interview transcriptions to note if what they said was reflected in the transcription. Another limitation I foresaw was the unavailability of participants.

1.14. Outline of the study

Chapter one described the background, purpose as well as motivation of the study; both contextual and personal. It also covered the critical research questions and objectives of the study. The research methodology, data collection methods, data analysis, sampling, trustworthiness, ethical issues and limitations were also briefly discussed in this chapter.

Chapter two, the literature review, discusses the theoretical framework that frames this study will also be discussed.

Chapter three is the research methodology of the study. The research design, methods of collecting data, and research instruments are discussed.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis and interpretation of data collected through semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the main findings of this study and draws conclusions based on the research questions. This chapter includes the recommendations for this study.

1.15. Conclusion

This chapter introduced this study that explores EHL teachers' experiences of assessing grade six second language English learners. In this chapter, a synopsis of the background, purpose, motivation, critical research questions and objectives of this study was given. The research methodology was briefly outlined to give insight into how the research unfolded. The next chapter discusses the literature review and theoretical framework of this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of literature relevant to EHL teachers' experiences in assessing grade six second language English learners. A literature review is an objective, thorough summary of relevant research that brings the reader up to date with current literature on a topic (Cronin, Ryan & Coughlan, 2008). It differentiates between what has been learnt about the topic and what still needs to be learnt and accomplished about the topic (Boote & Biele, 2005). Rowley and Slack (2004) posit that reviewing earlier and recent literature makes it possible to identify areas in which further research is needed.

This chapter reviews literature related to English teachers' experiences in assessing comprehension to second language learners. This chapter begins with a discussion of scholars' conceptualization of comprehension, assessment and the connection between teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension. Thereafter, useful strategies that EHL teachers can use to assess comprehension to second language learners are provided. The literature review then takes on a thematic approach as the following themes are presented; English teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners internationally, English teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners nationally and factors influencing comprehension assessment. Finally, this chapter discusses the theoretical framework underpinning this study: which is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

2.2. Conceptualizing Reading and Listening comprehension

To understand English teachers' experiences in assessing comprehension to second language learners, the concept of comprehension (both reading and listening) must first be understood. Acosta (2019) conceptualizes comprehension as the ability to draw meaning from the text. Texts can refer to anything that must be understood (Snow, 2002). A text is a piece of information a learner will engage in and seek to understand. According to Pardo (2004), comprehension occurs when one interacts with a text, constructs meaning by combining prior knowledge, previous experiences, text information and the stance one take concerning the text. When a learner engages with a text, they simultaneously extract and construct meaning while being involved and interacting with language (Snow, 2002). Learners make meaning of the text through merging their thinking with the text and extending their thinking beyond a simple

understanding of text to become thoughtful and insightful thinkers (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Comprehension enables learners to think critically, and look at the text at a deeper level rather than strive for a simple understanding (Assaly & Smadi, 2015). In the South African CAPS EHL curriculum, comprehension takes place through listening and reading. The discussion of what listening comprehension and reading comprehension entails are discussed below.

2.2.1. Understanding listening comprehension

Listening comprehension is an active process whereby one focuses on certain aspects of aural input, construct meaning from what they heard, and relate it to what they already know (O'Malley, Chamot & Küpper, 1989). In other words, listening comprehension is the ability to understand the text heard (Hogan, Adolf & Alonzo, 2014). During listening comprehension, learners attempt to understand spoken language by breaking down the language into sounds to form words (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). These words link together to form phrases, which then form sentences, and then create a complete text (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Once the text is formed, its meaning is constructed by the listener, and the listener understands, remembers, and retells it in their own words (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Therefore, in listening comprehension, meaning is made through hearing. Meaning can also be made through reading texts.

2.2.2. Understanding Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to make meaning from written texts (Woolley, 2011). It can occur orally or silently (Elgart, 1978). Reading comprehension is important as without comprehension, reading would just be the mimicking of sounds of language (Paris & Hamilton, 2014). Reading comprehension is central to the teaching and learning process in all learning areas because learners cannot understand any subject if they cannot read proficiently and critically (Assaly & Smadi, 2015). Teachers' role in teaching, learning and assessing comprehension is pivotal in developing comprehension skills in learners. Thus, the next theme discusses the teacher's role in the teaching and assessing of comprehension.

2.3. Teacher's role in the teaching and assessing of comprehension

Teachers play an important role in teaching and learning of comprehension. The teacher's role is to accommodate for the diverse needs his/her learners during the teaching and learning

process (Kotze et al., 2017). English teachers must use their knowledge and expertise to effectively help learners develop the abilities to fully understand texts (Pardo, 2004). Caldwell (2008) states that comprehension is a process that cannot be examined directly as a teacher cannot physically see how a learner comprehends when engaging a text. However, through the process of assessment, a teacher can identify the extent to which a learner has comprehended a text. Comprehension assessment is therefore a key concept for this study.

2.4. The importance of assessment and assessment in comprehension

Assessment plays a pivotal role in education (Stodberg, 2012), since it provides teachers not only information about their learners' performance but also assists teachers in modifying their teaching and learning activities (Black, Harrison, Lee & Wiliam, 2004). According to Yorke (2003) assessment can take place formally whereby assessments take place in a specific stipulated curriculum design and is usually undertaken by academic staff. Assessment can also take place informally which means assessments are not specifically stipulated in the curriculum design and occurs casually (Yorke, 2003). Assessment activities are conducted using various strategies such as: traditional tests or written examinations where a learner is stimulated to make written responses or oral assessment where the teacher asks the learner to respond verbally (Black & Wiliam, 2004). Black and Wiliam (2018) state that assessment is about making inferences about learners learning. If these inferences relate to the status or future potential of the learner, then it functions as summative (Black & Wiliam, 2018). If the inferences relate to actions that would best help the student learn, then the assessment is functioning formatively (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Having said that, this study defines assessment using Cizek (1997) definition which is a "planned process of gathering and synthesizing information relevant to the purposes of discovering and documenting students' strengths and weaknesses; planning and enhancing instruction; or evaluating and making decisions about students" (p. 10).

The EHL teachers can collect information on how second language learners are learning from the assessment, and make decisions to enhance teaching instruction and improve learning. By collecting information about how second language learners understand given texts from assessments, EHL teachers get to see how learning occurs in the classroom (Jabbarifar, 2009). This study focuses specifically on understanding experiences of English teachers when assessing second language learners in comprehension.

2.4.1. Forms of assessment in comprehension

Comprehension can be assessed in two ways; for certification (summative assessment) and helping the learning process (formative assessment) (Boud, 2000). These two forms of assessment are discussed in the sub-themes below.

2.4.1.1. Summative assessment in comprehension

According to Garrett (2008), summative assessment refers to assessments given at a particular point in time to show what learners know or do not know. Therefore, summative assessments in EHL comprehension evaluate learners learning at the end of a term or semester, and evaluate what learners know (Boud, 2008). They are referred to as assessments of learning (Boud, 2008), as they evaluate what learners understood from the comprehension test at the end of a given time. However, this study focuses on comprehension during formative assessment explained in the sub-theme below.

2.4.1.2. Formative assessment in comprehension

Formative assessments are assessments embedded within the teaching process, and provide feedback to teachers so that teaching and learning can be improved (Garrett, 2008). Formative assessment is commonly referred to as assessment for learning, as it provides teachers and their learners with the information they require to move learning forward (Heritage, 2007). During formative assessments of comprehension, EHL teachers can identify the strengths and weaknesses of their learners and use that information to address problems and improve learning. It allows teachers to see how much learners understood a text so that they can see if their teaching and assessment strategies are effective, and where they need to improve. The relationship between teaching and formative assessment is explained below.

2.5. The connection between teaching and assessment in comprehension

There is a strong connection between teaching and formative assessment as one cannot occur without the other (Heritage, 2007). Assessment leads to good instruction and good instruction leads to good learner achievement (Pantiwati, 2013). Oakleaf (2009) explains that as teachers reflect on learners' formative assessment results, they work towards improving their instruction. When they implement this new and improved instruction to increase learners' learning, they improve their pedagogical skills in the process, and produce knowledgeable

learners (Oakleaf, 2009). Teaching comprehension and assessing comprehension should not be considered in isolation, but be strongly connected. Wiliam (2011) advises that assessment be embedded in the teaching and learning process. This is because when learners know that they are going to be assessed, they become more interested in the activity, and increase their participation (Gallo, Sheehy, Patton & Griffin, 2006). This interest in learning leads to second language learners becoming more active and directing their attention to comprehension.

In mainstream, multilingual schools, English teachers must use their knowledge and expertise to inform classroom practices and help learners develop the abilities to comprehend text (Pardo, 2004). They must use different comprehension assessment strategies that will improve second language learners' comprehension and enhance second language English learners' success in comprehension. Assessment strategies are then pivotal when assessing comprehension.

2.6. Useful assessment strategies when assessing second language learners in comprehension

There is no denying that assessment is vital in the teaching and learning process. Teachers use assessment as a tool to see how much knowledge learners have attained, and use that information to enhance teaching and learning. Nagowah and Nagowah (2009) state that, to enhance learners' success, teachers must make use of different assessment strategies or a combination of assessment strategies to promote effective learning. Strategies are actions that enacted in the classroom to improve learners' performance (Graesser, 2007). Teachers' use of various appropriate strategies in the classroom may be the key to improving learners' performance in comprehension (McNamara, 2007). This study discusses four important strategies that can be used to improve learners' comprehension of texts effectively and, in turn, improve their results, using formative comprehension assessments. The strategies are; prediction, thinking aloud, summarizing, and questioning (Duke & Pearson, 2009). These comprehension assessment strategies help second language learners make sense of texts and helps them to become purposeful and active readers and listeners. They can be used for pre-reading, during reading or after-reading to increase comprehension (Keene, 2006). The strategies are discussed below.

2.6.1. The Prediction strategy

Prediction is one of the strategies used to improve comprehension in second language learners (Block & Israel, 2005). The prediction strategy can be used during formal and informal assessment as teachers instruct learners to predict or envisage what the passage is going to be about, and thereafter, learners read the passage to see how the passage turns out (Duke & Pearson, 2009). Before a teacher or learner can read what the passage is about, the teacher must instruct learners to look at the task's title or picture in front of them and guess what they think the passage is going to be about. Predictions are made so that learners' prior knowledge is activated (Keene, 2006). What learners predict or envision will be in the passage of the text will be based on their prior knowledge. Therefore, learners will generate expectations of what the character will do based on their own experiences of similar situations (Duke & Pearson, 2009). By activating prior knowledge, learners become actively involved in the learning process as they link what they know about what they are reading. They begin to think actively and critically, which in turn, will help them to understand the passage better.

Furthermore, using the prediction strategy creates a purpose for reading in learners and strike curiosity in learners (Bord, 2021). According to Awada and Plana (2018) when learners predict what is going to happen in the text, and anticipate the coming events of the passage, it gives them purpose for reading. The prediction strategy can be used during formative assessment so that learners can become motivated to read texts as they anticipate the discovery of whether their initial prediction was correct, keeping their interest levels high (Mistar, Zuhairi & Yanti, 2016). In other words, teachers can use predictions to actively engage the learner in the reading process during comprehension tests. Prediction arouses interest in learners, which draws learners towards reading or listening to the text to find out if their initial thoughts of the passage are correct. The anticipation of discovering if their predictions are correct, eliminates boredom **and gets learners actively involved in the activity.**

2.6.2. The Thinking Aloud Strategy

Another strategy that can be used to assess comprehension is the Thinking Aloud strategy. It is an assessment strategy that involves the learner monitoring their own thinking when reading or listening to a text (Keene, 2006). In this strategy, the learner monitors their thinking by verbally expressing their thoughts when engaged with a text (Al-Qahtani, 2020). It requires learners to say aloud or write down what they are thinking during the reading or listening

process. Wang (2016) explains that in this strategy, the learner reads and during intervals stops and reports their thoughts on the text to their teacher. During these intervals, learners report their thinking process and display how they construct meaning (Wang, 2016). Therefore, the Thinking Aloud strategy gives teachers insight into what learners are thinking and whether they understand the text.

The Thinking Aloud strategy can be used to assess second language learners formally and informally as thinking aloud allows teachers to identify learners' weaknesses during their verbal reports, and allow learners to become aware of their comprehension process (Sonmez & Sulak, 2018). This strategy works well when teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners as it allows English teachers to gain insight into how these learners construct meaning and understanding when interacting with a text. Walker (2005) states that this strategy makes the internal process observable. Since one cannot see how comprehension occurs inside a person's head (Caldwell, 2008), this strategy allows English teachers to see where problems occur in learners so that the teacher can guide learners back on track when they begin to go off track. The thinking aloud strategy thus, improves comprehension in second language learners.

2.6.3. The Summarizing strategy

Teaching learners to summarize is another way of improving learners' overall comprehension of text (Duke & Pearson, 2009). Summarizing information requires readers to sift through large chunks of text (Zafani & Kabgani, 2014). Thereafter, the reader must synthesize the texts and identify the important information, as well as

the main idea of a text, so that the text can be understood better and recall the information (Khoshsima & Nia, 2014). Summarizing can be used to assess learners during formative assessment to improve learners' comprehension as learners write a condensed version of the original text after reading the text.

English teachers should use summarizing as a strategy during a formal and informal assessment to improve comprehension in their second language learners. However, Duke and Pearson (2009) state that summarization can be difficult for learners and therefore, instruction is necessary for them to produce good summaries of texts. Hence, teachers can instruct learners to summarize a text by identifying the main ideas, connecting the main ideas and eliminating

redundant and unnecessary information. This helps learners, particularly second language learners, to organize the ideas even when engaging in long reading passages, which can be daunting to second language learners (Küçüköğlu, 2013). Summarizing reduces confusion when learners engage in long passages of text as learners eliminate the unnecessary information from the important ideas in the text to produce good summaries that show good understanding.

Pressley (2002) posits that when teachers instruct learners to summarize what they read, their understanding and memory of text improves. This is because, when they engage in summary writing, they begin to express the text in their own words and make connections between the new material and learners' existing knowledge, and in turn, meaning is automatically constructed (King, 1992). Zafarani and Kabgani (2014) advise that summarizing should be taught in schools as, through it, learners' memory of what is read improves and they can recall the information for free recall or to answer questions. They recall information from the text rather than just memorizing important details from the text. They learn actively rather than passively, and apply what they learnt to other aspects (such as other subjects) rather than just for answering questions on the text. Deeper learning and understanding is constructed and writing is improved when summarizing. Summarizing improves learners' overall comprehension of text content (Duke & Pearson, 2009).

2.6.4. The Questioning strategy

Another comprehension strategy used in classrooms is questioning. It is when a learner answers questions posed by the teacher and is given feedback on the response correctness (National Reading Panel, 2000). English teachers usually opt for using the questioning strategy to assess learners in comprehension as they are either not trained or unaware/unsure of how to assess or teach comprehension (Klapwijk, 2015). During formal and informal assessment, the majority of questions used are literal questionings (Klapwijk, 2015, Munoz-Marin, 2009; Oakley, 2011; Nel, 2011; Mzila, 2016). According to Zhao' Pandian and Singh (2016), literal questioning asks for recognition or recalling of factual information. However, literal questions do not get to the heart of comprehension or depict how much a learner has understood from the text. Caldwell (2008) states that a learner may correctly answer a multiple-choice or true/false question through a good guess without really understanding what was read. Learners have a 50% chance of being correct based on general knowledge that learners know without understanding the text. Duke and Pearson (2009) argue that setting such questions shapes

learners' behaviors such that when they encounter a text, they would focus on factual information and surface details, rather than a deeper understanding.

However, inferential and self-questioning questions can display what a learner understands. Inferential questions ask learners to look at the hidden concepts and go beyond what is explicitly stated to deduce what is unstated (Awada & Plana (2018). These types of questions project an understanding that learners have as they incorporate their experiences and work out ways to solve problems. Teachers are then able to see how much of the text learners understood and applied themselves rather than simply using clever guesswork. According to the National Reading Panel, self-questioning is one of the most effective comprehension strategies based on its size for comprehension gains (Mostow & Chen, 2009).

Self-questioning is another type of questioning that can improve comprehension. In self-questioning, the learner generates questions by asking himself/herself what, when, where, why, what will happen, how, and who questions (National Reading Panel, 2000). Learners comprehend a text by posing and generating questions about that text they are reading (Thohir, 2017). Keene (2006) states that when learners purposefully generate questions before, during and after reading, they completely comprehend what they are reading. By using self-questioning, learners are testing themselves and monitoring their understanding. Furthermore, they can 'think out of the box' or look deeper into the text and comprehend the text better. Msaddek (2020) states that self-questioning can alert learners to the message underlying the text. It allows learners to look beyond the surface meaning of the text and into its deeper meaning, to understand the text better. This way, learners actively construct the meaning of the text and become independent in creating meaning. The self-questioning strategy can be used to assess second language learners and improve their comprehension of texts.

Questioning can be used to assess learners in formative comprehension and during informal assessment, as learners can answer questions verbally or written. However, the questions used to assess learners should, not only be literal or recall questions, but also activate learners' different cognitive domains (Assaly & Smadi, 2015). The EHL CAPS strictly stipulates that when English teachers set assessments in comprehension, it should adhere to a variety of questions that caters to different cognitive levels.

Barrett's Taxonomy of comprehension comprises of five levels of questioning which are: literal, reorganization, inferential, evaluation and appreciation (Aqeel & Farrah, 2019). Literal

level questions refer to thoughts that are easily identifiable in the texts whereas reorganization level questions allow for learners to use information from different segments and make connections (Aqeel & Farrah, 2019). Inferential level questioning requires learners to be imaginative and read between the lines of the text (Aqeel & Farrah, 2019). Evaluation level questions requires learners to make judgements on certain ideas and appreciation level questions requires learners to provide personal and emotional responses (Aqeel & Farrah, 2019). The literal and reorganization level of questioning is considered lower order questions and should comprise of forty percent of the assessment of comprehension, inferential level questions are referred to as middle order questions and should also comprise of forty percent of the assessment and evaluation and appreciation level questions are considered as higher order questions and should make up twenty percent of the assessment (DoE, 2011). Therefore, EHL teacher should create formative comprehension assessment using Barrett's Taxonomy as it gives learners a variety of questions to answer, questions that ask learners to recall as well as challenge learners to think critically and deepen understanding of texts.

The next section reviews past literature around the research phenomenon of this study, that specifically looks at teachers experiences of teaching assessing comprehension of second language learners, and what strategies teachers used to assess comprehension to second language learners, nationally and internationally.

2.7. Teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners

Experience is commonly defined as one's participation in events or activities and developing certain feelings in the process (Roth & Jornet, 2014). In this study, experience is defined and described using Dewey's (1934) definition of experience. Dewey (1934) defines experience as a continuous process as people interact with their environments in their daily lives. Simpson (2006) agrees with Dewey's definition and define experience as the interaction between one and their environment in a continuous process of living and learning. Teacher experience refers to teachers' continuous interaction with second language learners as they assess comprehension in EHL.

Exploring EHL teachers' experiences is important for many reasons. Teacher experiences provide insights within the actual teaching setting (Dawson, 2006). Understanding teacher experiences provides insight on how teaching and learning occur in the real-life classroom and

what teachers undergo when they teach and assess comprehension to second language learners in their different contexts. According to Roth and Jornet (2014), teachers' experience is directly related to learning. In fact, exploring their experiences can provide insight as to why learners underperform (Borg, 2013). It explains poor performance and ultimately, creates a change in what teachers do (Borg, 2013). Since, Pretorius and Spaul (2016) give evidence (from PIRLS), that learners perform poorly in comprehension in South African schools, exploring EHL teacher' experiences in assessing comprehension can provide reasons why learners are underperforming and, make advancements that will bring about a change in English teachers' teachings and assessment strategies. The next sub-theme discusses the influence teachers' **experiences have on assessing comprehension.**

2.7.1. Influence of teachers' experiences on assessing comprehension

This section discusses the influence teachers' experiences has on assessment in comprehension. Schachter, Strang and Piasta (2017) posit that teachers administer assessments and use the data from the assessments to make decisions about their teaching instruction and assessment strategies. Experiences gained improve their assessment practices. Rice (2010) posits that over time, teachers' experiences of assessing enhances their knowledge, skills, and productivity as they reflect on their past experiences and use that information to enhance their practice and learners' understanding. In the same light, teachers can use their experiences of assessment to identify the assessment strategies that have proven to be successful or unsuccessful in the classroom. The next section discusses past studies on teacher experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension in the international context.

2.8. Teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension: An international context

This section discusses experiences of teachers of assessing comprehension to second language learners internationally. This section presents the following themes from international teachers' experiences; inadequate training of English teachers, limited knowledge of assessment strategies, and the assumption that decoding words will lead to understanding.

2.8.1. Inadequate training of English teachers

This section discusses the inadequate training EHL teachers received during both preservice and in-service teacher training. According to Lucas, Villegas and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008), most mainstream classroom teachers have had little or no preparation for providing the types of assistance that second language learners require to successfully learn academic content and skills in English, while developing proficiency in the language. Teachers of English therefore, experience inadequacy when teaching and assessing second language learners.

In a quantitative study, conducted by Brumen and Cagran (2011), on how teachers perceived assessment on young foreign language learners in three European countries (Czech Republic, Slovenia and Croatia), the study found that teachers experienced lack of preparation to, not only teach, but also assess foreign learners. They needed more professional training. English teachers in Croatia felt inadequate because the National Curriculum Guidelines for Assessing Foreign Learners did not stipulate how English teachers should implement assessment. In Slovenia and Czech Republic, insufficient methods and guidelines were stipulated in the National Curriculum Guidelines for Assessing Foreign Learners. Because English teachers follow the assessment guidelines, teachers believed they needed more training formally (Preservice) and additionally (in-service) (Bruman & Cagran, 2011). Furthermore, the majority of the English teachers in all three countries who taught and assessed second language learners were young teachers with less than five years' teaching experience and lacked confidence in implementing assessment. This sub-theme is further sub-divided into two more sub-themes. The sub- theme below discusses the influence of teacher confidence and positive attitudes on teaching and assessing comprehension in the classroom.

2.8.1.1.The influence of teacher confidence and positive attitudes on teaching and assessing comprehension

Teacher attitudes can influence the way assessment in comprehension is implemented because attitudes affect teachers' motivation to engage with second language learners, which in turn, translate into higher learner motivation and performance (Karabenick & Noda, 2004). Thus, English teachers must have confidence and positive attitudes towards teaching and assessment in order to motivate learners so that learners can improve their performance. Moskovsky, Khalid, Paolini and Ratcheva (2003) posit that motivated learners are successful at learning a second language than less motivated learners. Oakley (2011) conducted a qualitative study in

Australia, on the assessment practices teachers used to assess reading comprehension cognitive strategies of ten to twelve-year-old children. The study found that teachers lacked confidence in implementing comprehension assessment on second language learners. These English language teachers had less years teaching experience. The study found that six percent of new Australian teachers, twenty-three percent of teachers with three-five years' experience and twenty-seven percent of teachers with six- ten years' experience, felt that they were 'not confident' in assessing comprehension (Oakley, 2011).

In a mixed method study on the relationship between general and special educators who were co-teaching in Hawaii, Cramer and Nevin (2006) found that teachers who had more years of experience had a higher confidence level than those with less experience. Thus, English teachers who have less years teaching experiences felt inadequate and not confident enough to implement English assessment to second language learners, unlike more experienced teachers. Therefore, more experienced English teachers should be employed to motivate learners and increase their success in comprehension. However, in some schools, English teachers lacked confidence to teach and assess comprehension because they did not possess proper teaching qualifications that would have equipped them to teach and assess effectively. The lack of qualified teachers teaching comprehension to second language learners is explored further in the sub-theme below.

2.8.1.2. Lack of qualified teachers teaching comprehension to second language learners

Teachers of English also felt inadequately prepared to teach and assess second language learners because they did not possess a teaching qualification. In a survey quantitative study in several Arab countries such as Jordan, the West Bank, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Fareh (2010) found that English language teachers were not qualified to teach and assess second language learners. While some English language teachers may have possessed a degree, the teachers did not have a teaching certificate that would qualify them for teaching, nor did they take any course in teaching English as foreign language (Fareh, 2010). Thus, the teachers of English did not have proper training to teach or assess second language learners in English, and so did not know various strategies and methods to teach or assess comprehension. Fareh (2010) found that English assessment required learners to explicitly state information, infer meaning, engage in problem solving and critical thinking, which were neglected in both teaching and assessing. Therefore, teachers of English lack of expertise in assessment creates a real challenge for teachers to ensure quality classroom

assessment (Brumen and Cagran, 2011). The next sub-theme discusses the limited knowledge of assessment strategies teachers possess to assess comprehension to second language learners.

2.8.1.3. Limited knowledge of assessment strategies used to assess comprehension to second language learners

Studies (Munoz Marin, 2009, Oakley, 2011, Songbatumis, 2017) show that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of assessment strategies that can be used to improve comprehension in second language learners. In a qualitative study conducted in Colombia by Munoz Marin (2009), exploring teachers' practices for assessing reading comprehension in English First Additional Language at a University, the study found that English First additional language teachers experienced lack of familiarity with alternative comprehension strategies and relied on traditional strategies. Traditional assessment strategies include true-false statements, multiple choice tests, and short questions (Nasab, 2015). English teachers in the study used quizzes and multiple-choice tests as a common comprehension assessment procedure because they did not know various assessment strategies (Munoz Marin, 2009). The study also found that teachers tended to focus on verifying the achievement of learning goals using traditional methods. They focused on the product of comprehension rather than the process as quizzes and tests showed precise proof of what learners were learning (Munoz Marin, 2009).

Songbatumis (2017) used in-depth interviews in a qualitative study to find out the challenges English teachers faced when teaching English to second language learners in Taliwong, Indonesia. The most common comment from all four of the participants in the study was that the participants felt their teaching and assessment was monotonous as the participants employed limited teaching methods such as repeating teaching styles of explaining content and encouraging formations of study groups (Songbatumis, 2017). The teachers in the study believed that their methods of teaching and assessment were repetitive and uninteresting as teachers would enter class, teach and close the lesson by suggesting that learners join a study group (Songbatumis, 2017).

A mixed method study conducted in Australia by Oakley (2011) on the assessment practices teachers used to assess reading comprehension to ten to twelve year old children, found that out of ninety-three teachers surveyed, seventeen percent relied on questioning as a method of assessing comprehension, and almost all teachers stated that when they assessed comprehension, they assessed the product rather than the process. EFAL teachers relied on

standardized questioning and tests to assess comprehension, focusing on the correct answers rather than how the learners arrived at the answer.

Fiene and McMahon (2007) say teachers must look at a variety of ways to assess comprehension because, whilst traditional assessment strategies provide important information, they do not enable the teacher to get to the heart of comprehension, which is to understand learners' constructed meaning. Traditional strategies such as using quizzes, true and false questions, recall questions, and multiple-choice questions, do not give adequate information that brings out the desired response from learners (Haynie III, 1994). They require learners to display a basic understanding of what they have learnt, and do not conjure critical or creative thinking from learners. Oakley (2011) states that for teachers to use various strategies, teachers need a very deep understanding of how learners are learning. Examining the process of how learners arrive to their answers shows English teachers how learners construct meaning when they engage in texts. Thus, it can be concluded that, because the English teachers are not equipped with the skills or knowledge to teach and assess comprehension efficiently, they use traditional strategies that focus on the correct answers (product) rather than on the way second language learners arrive to the answer (process) (Oakley, 2011). Furthermore, English teachers lack skills and knowledge to teach and assess comprehension causing them to rely on reading or decoding words hoping that learners would be able to understand the texts automatically.

2.9. An Assumption that decoding words will lead to understanding

For many years, teachers relied on comprehension occurring naturally as learners decoded and recognized word (Lipson, 2003). Decoding refers to “the ability to exploit regularities in the mappings between words and their alphabetic representations” (Shankweiler, Lundquist & Katz, Stuebing., Fletcher, Brady & Shaywitz, 1999, p. 71). It is the use of letter-sounds to pronounce words. Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016), state that comprehension is neglected in schools because English teachers tend to focus on reading and pronouncing words rather than understanding what is written in a text. It is assumed by teachers that if learners can recognise words and decode, then they will be able to understand what the text entails.

Pressley (2002) argues that there is an assumption teachers have that if their learners continuously read or are continuously tested, they would automatically be able to comprehend texts. They believe that as learners read and are tested, they become self-regulated readers who

are able to use various comprehension strategies on their own to understand a text. However, Pressley (2002) says if this statement is true, then using comprehension strategies to teach learners how to understand a text would not improve learners' comprehension skills because comprehension instruction would not be useful if learners can understand a text. In other words, there would be no need to teach learners how to understand a text because comprehension will occur naturally.

Teaching comprehension strategies is vital as Walker (2005) posits that sometimes learners can read a text but not be able to construct meaning. Second language learners may be able to identify and decode the words, but unable to understand the meaning of the text, infer and integrate with what the learner already knows. Therefore, for learners to comprehend a text, teachers must use various strategies over and above focusing on decoding and identifying words in a text.

The above theme looked at teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension in the international context. Studies (Brumen & Cagran, 2011; Oakley, 2011; Fareh, 2010; Munoz Marin, 2009; Oakley, 2011; Songbatumis, 2017) from countries such as Australia, Indonesia, Jordan, the West Bank, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Morocco, Saudi Arabia the United Arab Emirates, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Croatia and Colombia were provided to depict the realities of English teachers as they taught and assessed second language learners.

Emerging from the literature was that English teachers were inadequately trained at both in-service and preservice levels, lacked confidence to teach and assess comprehension because they possessed limited years of teaching experience, did not possess a proper teaching qualification, possessed limited knowledge of comprehension assessment strategies, and relied on decoding words to automatically provoke understanding. More adequately trained and qualified English teachers who are confident and well equipped with the knowledge of comprehension assessment strategies need to be employed. This way, comprehension can be appropriately taught and assessed so that second language learners successful understand texts. The next theme looks at teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension in the South African context.

2.10. Teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension: A South African context

This component of the research explores the experiences of teachers implementing comprehension assessment to second language learners in the South African context. According to Pretorius and Spaull (2016), the poor literacy performance in South Africa points to comprehension as a neglected area. Furthermore, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) posit that the abysmal comprehension levels in both EHL and EFAL even at the literal understanding level, show that English teachers are not effectively developing learners' basic reading skills that support comprehension. This theme is divided into three sub-themes, which are: the impact of heterogeneous schooling systems in South Africa on comprehension, uncertainty of English teachers' teaching and assessment of comprehension, and the lack of preservice and in-service training for English teachers.

2.10.1. The impact of heterogeneous schooling systems in South Africa on comprehension

Differences in schooling conditions that exist in South Africa impact learner achievement (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). According to Coetzee (2014), the South African school system is heterogeneous based on the lingering effects of the previous apartheid system. Even though South Africa is now a democratic country and learners of any race can attend any school of choice, there is still a high degree of inequality between schools because of the legacy of historical educational inequality (Van De Berg, 2006). Zimmerman and Smit (2014) posit that learner characteristics such as 'Socio-Economic Status (SES), language, school resources and the schooling environment' (p. 6), differentiate schooling conditions in South Africa. Therefore, learners with higher SES attend richer schools (predominately historically white schools) with better resources and learners with the low SES (predominately historically black schools) attend poorer schools with less resources (Van De Berg, 2006).

The type of school conditions influences learner performance (Coetzee, 2014). Based on the National School Effectiveness Study (NSES) standardized tests testing learners' skills in English and mathematics, it was found that black learners in historically white schools performed better in numeracy and literacy standardized tests compared to black learners attending historically black schools (Coetzee, 2014). Learners in historically white schools outperformed learners in historically black schools, showing that teaching and learning are more effective in historically white schools than historically black schools. Thus, different

schooling conditions influence teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing comprehension. According to Seobi and Wood (2016), teachers in poorly resourced schools struggle to provide quality teaching and learning experiences because they work in socioeconomically challenged communities, have large classroom sizes, and teach in poor school infrastructure which contributes to the poor learner and teacher performance. The heterogeneity of the conditions of South African schools influences how teachers teach and assess comprehension at schools as studies (as seen in Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016) show. Teachers in high performing schools implement comprehension assessment strategies effectively as they spend more time on meaning-making because they have the means (smaller classroom sizes, have full support from DoE, staff and parents and are fully resourced) to do so. Studies (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Mzila, 2016; Mudzielwana, 2014) show that teachers from lower-performing schools pay less attention to meaning-making and more on recalling information because teachers struggle with poor conditions of their classroom contexts. Seobi and Wood (2016) claim that teachers in poorly resourced and underperforming schools experience poor initial teacher preparation and insufficient ongoing professional development opportunities that contribute to their negligence of meaning-making during comprehension. The next theme discusses the lack of preservice and in-service training.

2.10.2. Uncertainty of English teachers' teaching and assessment of comprehension

This sub-theme reveals that English teachers are uncertain of their teaching and assessment strategies when teaching and assessing comprehension in the classroom. In addition to Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) statement that comprehension instructions are neglected in South African classrooms, Zimmerman and Smit (2014) conducted a case study that presented data from grade four workbook analysis, teacher interviews and classroom interviews from six schools. Three of the schools had an average performance above the PIRLS international benchmarks and the other three schools had an average performance below the PIRLS international benchmarks. The study found that teachers in the high performing schools focused on specific comprehension strategies that focused on learners' understanding, and exposed learners to questions that required retrieval of information, inference and interpretation. These schools performed successfully in PIRLS (2006). Teachers in low performing schools had very little depth in their understanding of comprehension development as they focused more on information recall and less on higher-order thinking questions. Furthermore, during classroom observations, it was found that teachers focused more on oral comprehension rather than on

written comprehension, and there were fewer comprehension activities done. Zimmerman and Smit (2014) concluded that teachers in low performing schools were uncertain on how to develop comprehension in learners, and may not have understood that comprehension involves more than literal answers and information recall, but more critical thinking.

In a qualitative study conducted by Mzila (2016) on teachers' experiences teaching grade seven reading comprehension in isiZulu Home Language in three under-resourced schools in KwaZulu-Natal, all six teachers who participated in the study relied on asking questions as a comprehension assessment strategy. IsiZulu First Additional Language teachers did not know how to teach or assess reading comprehension, but focused on decoding words. The teachers would ask learners questions before reading (prediction of pictures on the text), during reading and after reading. However, the researcher found that teachers would only ask low and middle-order questions (what and how) and neglect higher order questions (why and give reasons) (Mzila, 2016). These questioning techniques were not in line with the CAPS policy, and teachers did not use techniques that developed comprehension skills or constructed meaning. IsiZulu First Additional Language teachers also did not teach comprehension skills but rather, focused more on decoding words. The study found that isiZulu teachers had a good understanding of reading strategies but not of comprehension strategy, and therefore, showed no use of comprehension strategies in their instructions (Mzila, 2016). They assumed that teaching reading was sufficient and comprehension would occur automatically.

In South Africa, many language teachers are still unsure about how to teach and assess comprehension because they do not have a good understanding of comprehension strategies and how to implement them. As shown in Zimmerman and Smit's (2014) and Mzila's (2016) study, teachers in low performing schools did not understand how to develop comprehension in their learners, nor did they understand that comprehension entails more than information recall, which resulted in their learners performing poorly. Teachers generally 'teach' comprehension through compiling literal questions based on the text (Klapwijk, 2015).

While teachers used comprehension strategies such as prediction of texts, they neglected the use of higher-order questions as they assumed that information recall was sufficient for effective comprehension instruction. Furthermore, teachers believed that learners' continuous reading would result in an automatic understanding of texts. Therefore, teachers of English do not know how to teach comprehension to learners let alone, assess comprehension (Klapwijk, 2012).

Whilst studies (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Mzila, 2016) show that teachers do not know how to effectively implement comprehension strategies in the classrooms, some teachers assumed that they taught comprehension effectively. However, learners' results proved otherwise (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). In a quantitative study, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) aimed to find out if English teachers taught comprehension the way they claimed to be, in their classrooms. The study involved 159 teachers from mostly the intermediate phase (Grade 4-6) in three provinces Gauteng, the Western Cape and Mpumalanga. The schools that English teachers in the study taught in varied from private schools, Quantile 1-3 schools, Quantile 4-5 schools and special schools. The schools with the lower quantiles serve the poorest communities and thus receive the most support from the DoE than the higher quantile schools. Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) discovered through questionnaires that when it came to using comprehension strategies, English teachers claimed to be using strategies such as summarizing, predicting, inferencing, vocabulary development, monitoring understanding etc., to enhance reading comprehension (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). However, the schools' literacy results showed poor performance (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) projected that if teachers had taught comprehension using comprehension strategies, learners' results in PIRLS 2006 and 2011 would not depict such low performances in comprehension (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). The study concluded that English teachers' understanding of the methodologies and concepts needed for effective reading comprehension instruction did not match the requirements for effectively teaching reading comprehension. The strategies teachers thought they were using to teach comprehension, were not used correctly because learners still performed poorly in reading comprehension assessments (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016).

In a qualitative study conducted by Mudzielwana (2014) on Foundation Phase teachers' understanding of teaching reading comprehension, the study found that the six Tshivenda teachers in three under-resourced schools understood the concept of comprehension and the importance of comprehension. However, Mudzielwana (2014) found, through classroom observations, that there was no correlation between what the teachers claimed and what they practised in classrooms. Reading comprehension was taught haphazardly and "teachers spent more time in asking questions than in teaching reading comprehension" (p. 6). Thus, the Tshivenda teachers may have known what comprehension entailed and its importance, but not apply their knowledge to their classrooms. Therefore, the above studies (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Mudzielwana, 2014) show that even though language teachers may understand

comprehension concepts and the importance of comprehension, they were uncertain of how to implement the comprehension strategies effectively.

Although language teachers may understand comprehension strategies, teachers are failed to teach and assess comprehension effectively because of the different school conditions (fully resourced and under-resourced schools) and uneven distribution of resources across schools. The next sub-theme discusses the impact of heterogeneous schooling systems in South Africa on comprehension.

2.10.3. Lack of preservice and in-service training for English teachers

English teachers also experience insufficient training to teach and assess second language learners. Farah, Fauzee and Daud (2016) state that the success of any education system is established on the quality of teachers and quality teacher training. Improving teacher education will improve learner performance. However, in a qualitative study done by Okoye (2012) on the use of languages in mainstream schools in grade four in South Africa, it was found that teachers experienced teaching grade four EFAL challenging, as learners were taught in their mother tongue language in the Foundation Phase (from grade 1-3). Learners did not have the necessary grammar and vocabulary developed in their Foundation Phase. The teachers experienced challenges as learners who performed poorly in assessments rarely participated in class and had difficulty communicating with teachers. The teachers in the study indicated that they were unprepared to teach second language learners as they did not receive enough training and skills to transition from their home language to learning English successfully. Teachers believed that they were not properly trained by their training colleges and by the DoE to assist learners in their English acquisition.

When looking at how prepared pre-service teachers trained at colleges were concerning reading comprehension assessment practices, Nel (2011) found that preservice they had inadequate knowledge and skills about reading comprehension assessment. The assessments preservice teachers gave learners entailed literal comprehension questions as they lacked the knowledge and skills to administer various reading comprehension assessments (Nel, 2011). Furthermore, the preservice teachers also did not know how to use the assessment data from learners' assessments to inform their instruction. They focused more on the learners answering correctly in assessments rather than using information from assessments to improve teaching and learning (Nel, 2011). The study concluded that pre-service teachers were not adequately or

properly prepared in their universities and training colleges to teach and assess reading comprehension as they did not possess the knowledge and skills required to teach and assess comprehension (Nel, 2011). Thus, teacher training did not prepare teachers for the reality of the classroom because managing classrooms, designing lessons and implementing lessons, accurately assessing learners' understanding, and adjusting to learners' needs are complex tasks for teachers (Kaufmann, Johnson, Kardos, Liu & Peske, 2002). As a result, English teachers relied on literal questions (such as identifying false sentences, multiple-choice questions, questions and answers 'who, what, when, where, why, how?') as an effective comprehension strategy. Apart from teacher training, support from the DoE in the form of ongoing teacher development, workshops and training programs are also important for teachers.

Maharaj, Nkosi and Mkize (2016 p. 384) note that "proper training of teachers, ongoing support from the DoE, and the provision of resources are essential in ensuring smooth curriculum implementation. Subject advisors need to lead the training by facilitating regular workshops". This suggests that assistance from DoE and subject advisors will help English teachers implement the curriculum for comprehension in a way that improves the way second language learners understand texts such that they would engage in the text critically and deepen their thinking. Spaul (2015) argues that Foundation Phase teachers should receive training by literacy experts so that second language learners can engage with the curriculum efficiently before entering the Intermediate Phase. English teachers must not only understand and support the principles of CAPS but also be equipped with appropriate pedagogic tools to implement those principles effectively in comprehension (Green & Condy, 2016).

Various studies (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Mudzielwana, 2014, Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Mzila, 2016, Okoye, 2012, Nel, 2011) focus on teachers' experiences in EFAL isiZulu and Tshivenda in the Foundation Phase (grades one, two, three) and the Intermediate Phase (four, five and six) and grade seven. However, this study explored the experiences of EHL teachers in assessing comprehension to second language learners in grade six, and the strategies EHL teachers used to assess second language learners in comprehension.

2.11. Challenges in assessing comprehension in South Africa

This section discusses the challenges English teachers face when assessing comprehension in South African classrooms. The challenges are presented thematically below. The sub-themes

are English teachers' race against the clock, the focus on teaching to assess learners, and overcrowding of learners in classrooms.

2.11.1. English teachers race against the clock

English teachers are often faced with the challenge of time management when assessing comprehension in South Africa. This is because the CAPS curriculum sets out the content to be covered in detail within an allocated time (Hoadley, 2017). This means that each day has a specific set of work to be completed, with a description of how it should be taught so that learners can be well prepared for assessments (du Plessis & Marias, 2015). However, because CAPS is strict and rigid, it does not accommodate uncontrolled circumstances such as teacher or learner absenteeism. As a result, teachers end up skipping or rushing through topics as there is no time to recover the content lost (du Plessis & Marias, 2015). Learning gaps are created as content is not being recovered (du Plessis & Marias, 2015). Moreover, learners are left behind with confusion and lack of understanding as they miss out on learning pieces of work. Learners then become ill-prepared for assessments. The policy requirements restrict English teachers and they cannot be flexible in their teaching and assessment of comprehension to meet the needs of the second language learners as they have to focus on completing the syllabus in a specified timeframe to prepare learners for assessments. Consequently, if a learner has trouble understanding a text, it is difficult for the teacher to go back and assist the learner as the teacher is restricted by time.

2.11.2. The focus on teaching content to assess learners

As noted in the theme 'Teachers race against the clock', teachers are under strict time constraints to complete the syllabus on time with regards to CAPS. As a result of trying to be at par with CAPS, teachers tend to focus on aspects of content that will pertain to assessments, rather than on whether learners are understanding the content. Nel (2011) points out that in many schools, teachers tend to focus on teaching content to learners, regardless of the information that they gain about the learners' needs from assessments. Hence, EHL teachers focus more on completing the syllabus, meeting learning objectives, and preparing learners for passing assessments, rather than using the information they gain from the learners' assessments to improve their comprehension skills.

The CAPS curriculum is structured and rigid. Hoadley (2017) states that the curriculum does not assume that the teacher can develop his/her own programme of learning as it sets out what is to be taught explicitly. Thus, EHL teachers are forced to comply with the CAPS policy, which limits them from being creative in teaching and assessing to improve teaching and learning. Ramatlapana and Makonye (2012) found that teachers complained that the CAPS policy forces them to teach to test, and that CAPS encouraged drilling and memorization without understanding. Teachers felt CAPS violated their professional beliefs. Therefore, because of the time constraints of CAPS, teachers tend to focus more upon whether they are assessing the learning objectives stated in policies rather than focusing on learners' understanding the text. As a result, EHL teachers continue to move on with completing the syllabus whilst learners are left lagging behind simply because they did not understand.

2.11.3. Overcrowding of learners in classrooms

Another challenge that EHL teachers face when assessing second language learners is overcrowding in classrooms. An overcrowded classroom is one in which the number of learners exceed the optimal level and causes interruptions in the teaching and learning process (Khan & Iqbal, 2012). In some public schools in South Africa, there are far too many learners in one classroom (Marais, 2016). This is a challenge for EHL teachers as teaching in overcrowded classrooms makes it difficult to create a productive learning environment where effective teaching and assessment strategies are crucial (Marais, 2016). In overcrowded classrooms, EHL teachers cannot implement a variety of methods, such as higher-order questioning and active learning approaches (Marais, 2016). It is difficult for teachers to cultivate critical thinking and deep understanding in learners due to the high numbers of learners in the classroom. Therefore, having a large number of learners in class compromises the teacher's ability to give extra attention to the weak learners (Khan & Iqbal, 2012).

Furthermore, EHL teachers, not only have to deal with the difficult task of helping second language learners to understand a comprehension text that is not in their mother tongue, but also have to manage the discipline that comes from having too many learners in one classroom. Matsepe, Malukele and Cross (2019) posit that overcrowded classrooms are complex as learners become disruptive by bullying, not paying attention, throwing objects, teasing and using vulgar language. Thus, teachers spend more time disciplining learners instead of teaching and learning. Therefore, implementing comprehension strategies and assessing comprehension in overcrowded classrooms proves a challenge for learners.

This section of the literature review discussed the challenges EHL teachers face when teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners in South Africa. The next section discusses the various assessment strategies EHL teachers can use to enhance comprehension in second language learners.

2.12. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that frames this study is Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD). The ZPD is linked to the Social Cultural Theory which explains that one's social and cultural context influences the development of conscious intellectual activity (Wass & Golding, 2014).

2.12.1. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The ZPD is central to enhancing instruction and bring about classroom change (Christmas, Kudzai & Josiah, 2012). It is a tool that provides teachers with an understanding of how learning occurs in learners and how to enable learning in learners (Vygotsky, 1978; Chaiklin, 2003; Wass & Golding, 2014). Vygotsky (1978) says that the ZPD is the distance between actual development and potential development and how learners require social support and guidance to reach potential development as they are unable to reach it on their own (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky claims that two developmental levels must be determined if we are to find out the actual relations of the developmental process to learning capabilities, which are, the actual developmental level and the level of potential development (Vygotsky, 1978). The actual developmental level refers to already established and matured mental functions in which learners can competently complete tasks without assistance (Vygotsky, 1978; Khaliliaqdam, 2014). The level of potential development refers to mental functions that have not yet matured yet but are in the process of maturation, they will mature but are currently in an embryonic state (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, it is the functions that learners can perform with assistance (Khaliliaqdam, 2014). In essence, the ZPD is the zone between the level of actual development and potential development, where a learner is given a task or a problem and, with mediated assistance from a capable other, is able to reach the level of potential development and perform better in the task than they would have unassisted (Khaliliaqdam, 2014). Vygotsky (1978) further says that what a learner can do today with assistance is what he/she can do tomorrow independently. The teachers' goal is to move learners through their so that learners can competently do the task on their own by taking learners from what they know (actual

development level) to what they need to know (potential development level) with teachers' assistance (Chaiklin, 2003). Case in point, the goal is for EHL teachers to move their second language English learners through their ZPDs until they reach their potential development level, which is to understand comprehension texts and successfully complete comprehension assessments on their own.

Siyepu (2013) states that teachers must create classroom activities that start with what learners already know and can do independently, then link them with knowledge learners can only attain through assistance. Thus, when learners engage in the learning process with the assistance of a teacher, cognitive development emerges within the social interaction (Kinginger, 2002). This happens as the knowledge is transferred from the teacher to the learner as the teacher identifies the learner's current state of knowledge concerning the task and provides new knowledge to the learner so that he/she can move from his or her actual developmental level to his or her potential developmental level (Khaliliaqdam, 2014). Learners then continue to practice the tasks and then can do the tasks independently without any assistance (Siyepu, 2013). The idea of the ZPD is that learners learn best when working in collaboration with a teacher because, through collaboration, learners learn and internalize new concepts, knowledge and skills that they would not gain on their own. Teachers provide a support mechanism known as scaffolding to move learners through the ZPD.

2.12.2. Scaffolding

The ZPD has become associated with the more competent individual 'scaffolding' learners (Guk & Kellogg, 2007). According to Verenikina (2008), scaffolding is a metaphor, although it was not used by Vygotsky but proposed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1978), to capture the nature of support and guidance in learning. Scaffolding is used to describe the kinds of support that teachers give learners to move them towards new knowledge, skills and understanding (Maybin, Mercer, & Stierer, 1992). It occurs within the ZPD. The teacher provides assistance and guidance to the learner to take them from what is known to what is unknown. Hence, scaffolding is used to continuously move the learner towards the next step of development. This gradual movement of learners to higher mental constructs requires the assistance of a competent other for the learner to complete the task (Amerian & Mehri, 2014).

Wass and Golding (2014) state that scaffolding techniques examples include providing textbooks or texts that contain background information which learners can use to better

understand the tasks they face, heuristics that guide learners to follow steps in problem-solving, or graphic presentations like Venn diagrams that would help learners compare and contrast. Scaffolding techniques provide learners with assistance for the task, and as the learner's confidence grows when doing the task, the scaffolding can be slowly removed until the learner can perform the task on their own (Wilson & Devereux, 2014). Therefore, scaffolding technique is a support mechanism used to help learners complete a task starting with assistance, and gradually removing that assistance until learners can accomplish the task on their own. During scaffolding, teachers can also provide tools that would further provide development and help learners through their ZPDs. These tools are known as Mediation.

2.12.3. Mediation

According to Vygotsky (1978), a learner's development within a ZPD involves social interaction, dialogue, and mediated activity between learners and their teachers. Teachers use mediation to facilitate learning. Mediation refers to the interaction between individuals and their worlds using cultural artefacts, symbols and tools (Thompson, 2013). These mediation objects may be physical such as computers, pens, worksheets etc, or psychological tools such as language (Thompson, 2013). According to Shrestha and Coffin (2012), the mediation tools that teachers use provide opportunities for learners' development in the ZPD. They allow the teacher to collaborate with the learner more closely on an assessment task. Mediation allows the teacher to move the learner to the next level of their ZPDs (Shrestha & Coffin, 2012). When mediation occurs between teacher and learner, learners develop a higher mental process as what is communicated is converted from a social level to a personal level, and as a result, meaning and understanding is constructed. From socially interacting with a knowledgeable other (teacher), learners construct meaning, understanding and can complete the tasks individually (McLeod, 2014).

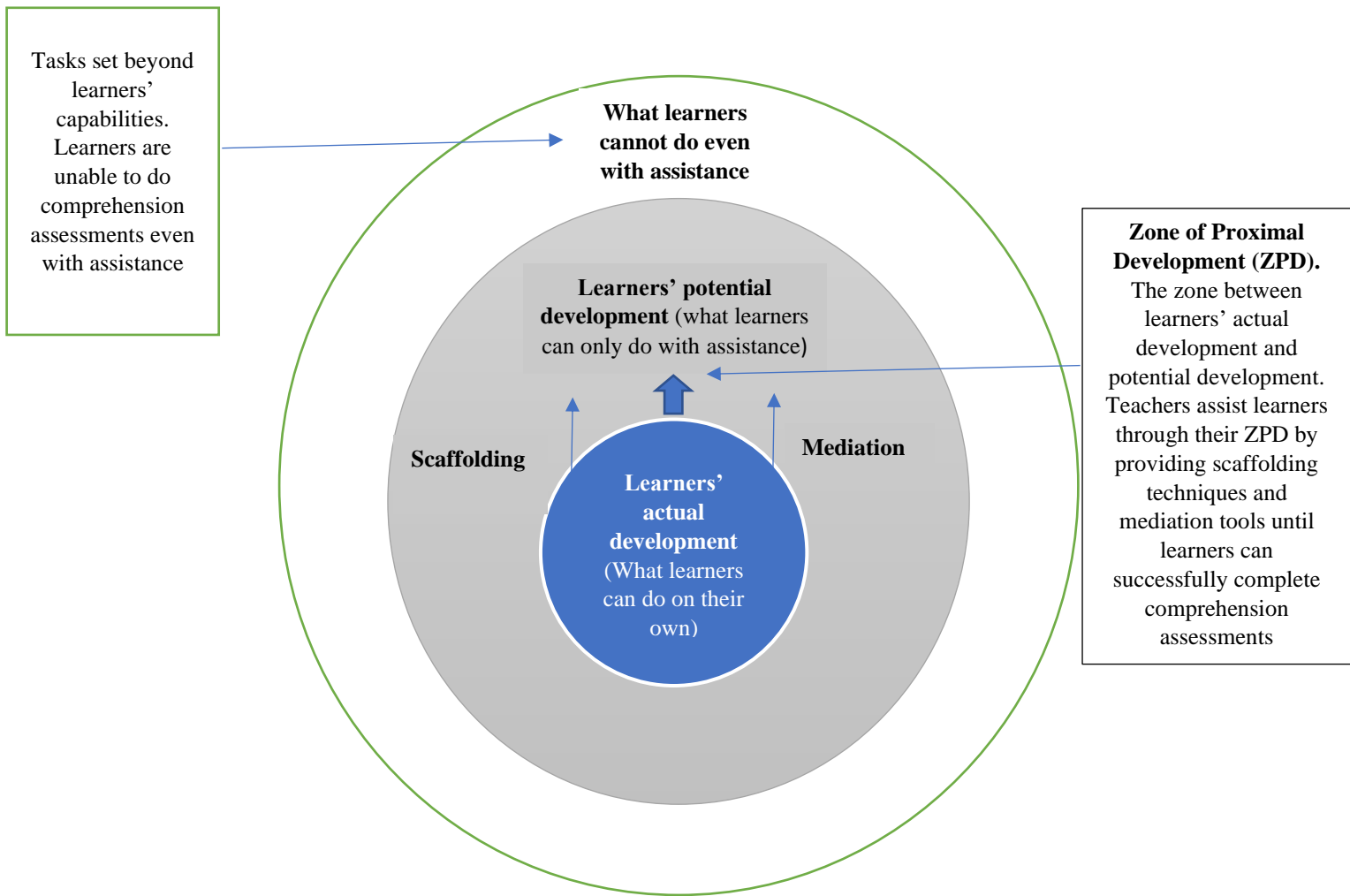


Figure 1: The movement of learners through their ZPD from learners' Actual Development to Potential Development through the aid of a capable other, using Scaffolding techniques and Mediation Tools. Adapted from (Christmas, Kudzai & Josiah, 2012, p.2)

Figure 1 is a diagram of how learners move through their ZPDs with the assistance of their teachers. Wass and Golding (2014) say that before learners are taught, they are able to do some tasks, whilst other tasks are beyond them. Learners may be able to read comprehension texts, but not understand what the text is about. Therefore, at the centre (blue circle), lies the circle that represents learners 'actual development' level which is the level in which learners can competently complete tasks on their own, such as read a text. However, to increase learners' potential and expand what learners can do (help learners gain an understanding of the text and successfully complete comprehension assessments), teachers must set tasks within learners' ZPD which is the zone (grey circle) learners can complete a task with teachers' assistance. This zone is the active learning zone (Christmas et al., 2012). Wass and Golding (2014) state that if learners work on tasks within their ZPD, with assistance from their teachers, then they will eventually learn to do these tasks on their own. However, for learners to reach their ZPDs and

maximum potential, teachers must assist them with scaffolding techniques to guide learners' thinking process and mediation tools to mediate the learning task. As learners master each aspect of the task, the teacher can then gradually remove the scaffolding support and pass more control to the learner (Harland, 2003). Roosevelt (2008) posits that the aim of education from the Vygotskian perspective is developing learners' cognitive processes until it reaches a high level and learners can competently take on tasks independently. However, if teachers set tasks that lie out of the learners' ZPD (white circle), the learners would not be able to complete the task, even with assistance (Siyepu, 2013). This occurs when tasks are set beyond learners' capabilities such as a second language learner who cannot read or write English proficiently but is expected to answer a comprehension assessment in EHL. Even with the assistance of the teacher, the learner would not be able to do the task as it is set beyond what the learner can realistically do. Therefore, tasks must be set in accordance with learners' capabilities in order for learners to move through their ZPDs and reach their maximum potential.

The ZPD can be used to explore the experiences EHL teachers have when using assessment strategies to assess second language learners. This is because it allows for EHL teachers to observe how successful their teaching and assessment strategies are on learners' understanding of a comprehension text. This framework also allows EHL teachers to reflect on their teaching and assessment practices as they guide learners from the point of 'actual knowledge' to the point of 'potential knowledge'. It allows EHL teachers to view the impact of their teaching and assessment strategies and, when necessary, make improvements to these strategies through mediation and scaffolding techniques for second language learners to successfully understand a text and complete tasks on their own. Thus, the rationale for selecting this framework is that it helps to understand the way EHL teachers experience assessment of second language learners as they reflect on the strategies they use as they move second language learners through the ZPD, using scaffolding techniques and mediation tools, so that comprehension can be successful.

2.13. Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of literature and past studies on EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension of second language learners. It showed that assessment of comprehension is not given the attention it deserves in the classroom. In this literature review, comprehension was conceptualized as well as assessment and teacher experiences related to teaching and assessing comprehension. This literature review viewed past studies, both national

and international, on teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to second language learners. The past studies presented revealed that teachers, both internationally and nationally, felt inadequately prepared to teach and assess comprehension to second language learners as they had no in-service or preservice training. Teachers desired to be adequately trained so that they could successfully implement assessments in comprehension. The past studies presented also revealed that EHL teachers did not feel confident enough to implement teaching and assessment strategies in comprehension to second language learners because of their lack of knowledge of teaching and comprehension strategies. As a result, teachers relied on literal questions in assessments rather than fostering deep, critical thinking.

This literature review also presented the various challenges that EHL teachers faced in South Africa when teaching and assessing second language learners, which were time, teaching to assess, insufficient teacher training, and overcrowded classrooms. This literature review also presented the various assessment strategies such as predicting, questioning, summarizing and thinking aloud strategies that EHL teachers can use to assist second language learners in understanding texts. These strategies can help second language learners gain a deeper understanding of texts, broaden their intellect and think critically.

Furthermore, this chapter presented Vygotsky's ZPD as the theoretical framework that framed this study. This framework explained how EHL teachers move second language learners from their 'actual development to 'potential development' through mediation and scaffolding techniques. Thus, as they move through the ZPD, EHL teachers can reflect on their experiences of teaching and assessing, and improve their strategies to improve second language learners' comprehension. The following chapter focuses on the research design and methodology used in this study to explore EHL teachers' experiences assessing grade six second language learners in comprehension in South Africa.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented literature review that explored EHL teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing second language learners' comprehension. The literature conceptualized comprehension, assessment and discussed various assessment strategies EHL teachers use to improve comprehension in second language learners. The literature review also reviewed past studies of teachers' experiences in teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners in both international and national contexts; discussed the challenges English teachers face when assessing comprehension in South Africa; and discussed the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's ZPD. This chapter explains the scope, relevance and limitations of the methodology used in this study, and the paradigm chosen. The study then presents the location of the research sites, the sampling methods, data generation tools, and method of data analysis. Thereafter, the concerns of trustworthiness, ethical considerations and limitations of this study, are discussed.

This chapter makes an in-depth discussion on the research methodology employed to respond to the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of EHL teachers in assessing comprehension of second language learners in grade six?
2. What strategies do EHL teachers use to assess comprehension of second language learners in grade six?

To provide answers to the above research questions, this qualitative study was located within the interpretivist paradigm, and adopted a case study methodology. Moreover, this study employed the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted through telephonic interviews. The participants of this study were selected purposefully, and data generated from participants was analysed thematically. The analysed data was then presented into themes to understand EHL teachers' experiences of assessing grade six second language learners in comprehension.

This study sought a deep understanding of the realities of EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners, through participants' reflections. To 'get into the heads' of the participants, to understand what they were thinking,

and the meaning they construct in their contexts, the study was located in the interpretivist paradigm (Kivunja, & Kuyini, 2017).

3.2. The Interpretivist Paradigm

A research paradigm is a worldview about how the world is perceived, which acts as a framework to guide the behaviour of the researcher when conducting research (Wahyuni, 2012). This worldview is the perspective, thinking, school of thought or set of shared beliefs that inform the meaning or interpretation of research data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In other words, a paradigm is a worldview of how a researcher should conduct their research. It guides the researcher in how to answer the study's research questions. This study was located within the interpretivist paradigm. In the interpretivist paradigm, the aim is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). It considers individuals' different backgrounds, beliefs and experiences, and constructs their multiple realities in their social context (Wahyuni, 2012).

The paradigm was appropriate as I aimed to explore, understand and describe the experiences and many realities of EHL teachers in assessing grade six second language learners. This paradigm allowed me to view the world of the participants as they expressed their emotions, attitudes and perceptions about teaching and assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. This provided me with in-depth understanding of how EHL teachers felt when teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners and the reasons for the experiences. The interpretivist paradigm was fitting as I could understand and explore participants' subjective experiences, many realities, attitudes, beliefs and views.

A research paradigm comprises philosophies such as ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). According to Taylor and Medina (2011), ontology refers to the view of ones' reality; epistemology, to the type of knowledge that can be generated; and methodology, to the disciplined approach to generating that knowledge.

In the interpretivist paradigm, ontology refers one's specific constructed subjective reality, these can be multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1994); (Wahyuni, 2012). Thus, ontology in this interpretivist study is concerned with exploring the multiple realities of EHL teachers, that is, their experiences when assessing second language learners in comprehension within their diverse classroom contexts.

Epistemology refers to how one acquires knowledge (Mack, 2010). It is the relationship between what is to be known and the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1994), and the way knowledge is generated, understood and interpreted in a way that is acceptable and valid (Wahyuni, 2012). In the interpretivist paradigm, knowledge is established through meanings attached to the phenomena studied (Krauss, 2005). Thanh and Thanh (2015) state that the researcher who follows the interpretive paradigm uses participants' experiences to construct and interpret his/her understanding. In this study, epistemology is the researcher's interpretation of EHL teachers' experiences based on the meanings constructed by participants in this study. To capture the meanings constructed by participants, a qualitative approach was adopted.

3.3. Qualitative Research

A qualitative approach concerns itself with understanding "human beings' richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences" (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p. 22). This study adopted the qualitative approach because the study was concerned with understanding EHL teachers' authentic experiences of assessing grade six second language learners' comprehension. According to Flick, von Kardoff and Steinke (2004), qualitative research describes lifeworlds 'from the inside out' and considers the participants' points of view to get a better understanding of EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. The purpose of using the qualitative approach is to understand the participants' reality of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. Using the qualitative approach permitted me to gain in-depth insight of the phenomenon.

According to Flick (2004), using the qualitative approach provides a study with precise and thick descriptions of phenomenon. The qualitative approach utilizes the "unusual and unexpected as a source of light and mirrors whose reflection makes the unknown perceptible in the known, and the known perceptible in the unknown, thereby opening up further possibilities for recognition" (Flick, 2004, p. 3). This study used the qualitative approach to understand the unusual and unexpected experiences of EHL teachers as they assessed comprehension to grade six second language learners. Furthermore, the reflections from the participants' experiences made what was unknown about EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners, understood and known.

Cresswell and Poth (2016) posit that, in the qualitative approach, researchers collect data in a natural setting sensitive to the participants and analyse data that is inductive and produces patterns or themes. According to Eyisi (2016), the qualitative approach uses instruments such as observations, in-depth interviews, open-ended questions and field notes to collect textual data from participants in their natural settings, to gain a full description of the research. This study used in-depth interviews in the form of semi-structured interviews to get a full detailed, descriptive and holistic understanding of EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. The data collected took the form of words, and the written results of the research contained quotations from the data to demonstrate and validate the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I gained an in-depth understanding of the reality and experiences of the participants and exact quotations from the semi-structured interviews were presented to depict the detailed and descriptive accounts from the participants. Thereafter, textual data was analysed thematically.

Methodology refers to how the researcher embarks on finding out what she/he believes can be known (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). It is concerned with how the researcher goes about conducting the study to attain knowledge. To answer the study's two research questions, data was collected to explore the lived experiences of EHL teachers when assessing comprehension in EHL to second language learners in grade six as well, as the strategies they used to assess comprehension to grade six second language learners.

3.4. Research methodology: A Case study

The methodology chosen for this study was a case study. According to Yin et al. (1985), a case study is an empirical enquiry that examines a current phenomenon within its real-life context using several sources of evidence. It focuses on a single issue with the case selected to provide insight into the issue in a bounded system (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano & Morales, 2007). A case study can provide a "unique example of real people in real situations" (Cohen et al., 2007) and provides a precise description of a case (Flick, 2004). This study adopted a case study design to gain an in-depth insight into the multiple real-life experiences of EHL when assessing comprehension to second language learners in a bounded system of three selected schools. According to Yazan (2015), a case study examines the complexities and particularities of a single case (an entity, event, program, individual or group of individuals) within its important circumstances (Stake, 1995). According to Yin (2003), when a researcher wants to study a single person or group, a single case study is best suited to capture the conditions and

circumstances of everyday situations (Yin, 2003). The unit of analysis refers to what is studied, that is, if a person is the case studied, then that person is the primary unit of analysis (Yin, 2003). This study opted for a single case study design as it aimed at understanding the multiple experiences of EHL teachers when assessing comprehension of isiZulu speaking learners who attend schools where English is the LoLT. This case study sought ‘thick descriptions’ of participants’ lived experiences assessing comprehension to second language learners and their thoughts and feelings about assessing comprehension to second language learners.

The greatest advantage of using a case study is depth that comes from understanding the entire case in its totality (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Razaveih, 2010) within a natural setting. It is important to note that the findings of this study cannot be generalized because the contexts of cases differ (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Carminati (2018) says in a qualitative study, the understanding of complex human issues is prioritized over the generalizability of findings. Thus, this study aimed not to generalize the findings but to produce in-depth information on the experiences of EHL teachers when assessing grade six second language learners.

Ary et al. (2010) state that a case study is particularistic in that it focuses on a particular phenomenon, situation, or event. It is descriptive, as it provides thick and rich description. It is heuristic, as it focuses on providing new insights. Therefore, the case study allowed me to gain multiple perspectives from the participants

3.5. Location of the study

This study was conducted at three public primary schools in the Durban South area, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The three schools were located in a middle-class urban area. However, they served a low socio-economic community residing in informal settlements in the area. Pseudonyms were used to protect the schools’ identities.

- School A was Lilly primary school, an under-resourced multilingual and multicultural school. The learners were predominantly Black learners. The staff comprised of Indian and Black teachers.
- School B was Tulips primary school, a resourced multilingual and multicultural school with Indian, Black and Coloured learners.
- School C was Orchard primary school, an under-resourced school. It was a multilingual and multicultural school as learners are of the Black and Indian race.

This study looked at EHL teachers who teach isiZulu speaking learners in grade six at three primary schools in the Durban South area. These schools were previously exclusive to the Indian community during the apartheid era and the majority of the teachers at these schools were non-IsiZulu speaking. These three schools were also chosen for as they served informal settlements in the area, where many of the learners were isiZulu speaking learners. This was to explore how non-IsiZulu speaking EHL teachers assessed second language learners in grade six.

3.6. Sampling

In qualitative research, sampling is selecting specific data sources to collect data to address the research objectives (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). Sampling refers to selecting a portion of the population in a research area that will represent the whole population (Landreneau & Creek, 2009). According to Mugo (2002), sampling determines a population's characteristics by directly observing only a portion of the population. However, in qualitative research, the sample size is usually kept small, to gain rich and in-depth data (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019).

Three grade six EHL teachers were interviewed. One teacher was chosen from each school to participate in this study. Purposive sampling was chosen for this study as participants possessed particular characteristics needed to answer the critical questions of this study. This study used purposive sampling in selecting its participants. Flick (2004) states that purposive sampling is used in qualitative research for deliberately choosing participants based on the qualities they possess (Etikan et al., 2016). In purposive sampling, the researcher "selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Flick, 2004, p. 125). Participants were purposefully chosen to provide information needed to answer the study's research questions.

Purposive sampling enhances the understanding of selected individuals or groups' experiences (Devers & Frankel, 2000). In purposive sampling, the researcher decides what needs to be known for the study and embarks on finding specific participants who can and are willing to provide the information based on experience or knowledge (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample for this study were teachers teaching EHL to grade six second language learners and possessing at least five years of teaching experience in EHL. All three participants selected for this study were female, possessed degrees in Education and had more than five years of teaching experience in public schools. The experience was so that teachers could give a more detailed

description of their experiences and successful and unsuccessful teaching strategies over the last few years. To gain in-depth descriptions of EHL teachers' experiences of assessing grade six second language learners, semi-structured interviews were used.

3.7. Data generation methods

One of the most important tasks of a researcher is the selection of instruments used to collect the data (Arys et al., 2010). This section explains the instrument used to collect data for this study as well as how it was used to collect data from participants.

3.7.1. Interviews

According to Ryan et al. (2009), interviews are widely used as a data collection instrument in qualitative studies. Harrell and Bradley (2009) state that interviews are one-on-one discussions between an interviewer and an individual that aim to gather information on a specific topic. Three types of interviews exist; structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews. In a structured interview, the researcher has a set of structured and explicit questions that do not allow the interview to go off-topic (Ryan et al., 2009). Unstructured interviews are more of a conversation between the researcher and participant where they have a particular topic but no set questions or responses (Baumbusch, 2010). This study used semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool to collect data from the participants. The core reason for using semi-structured interviews in this study was because interviews could be conducted conversationally with one participant at a time, employing a blend of both open-ended and close-ended questions and allows for follow-up 'how' or 'why' questions (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). Using semi-structured interviews permitted the me to have in-depth understanding by asking the 'how' and 'why' follow up questions.

3.7.1.1. Semi-structured interviews

According to Ryan et al. (2009), a semi-structured interview is a more flexible approach to the interview process which enables the interviewer to ask open-ended questions that allow for spontaneous and in-depth responses from participants. This data collection instrument involves the interviewer preparing a list of predetermined questions that unfolding a conversational style, providing participants the opportunity to explore issues they deem as important (Longhurst, 2003). It is casual and informal in tone and allows for open responses in participants' own words rather than a simple 'yes or no' answer (Longhurst, 2003). Semi-structured interviews are used when the researcher wants to explore a particular topic in-depth,

and thoroughly understand the answers provided (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). When using semi-structured interviews, the interviewer exercised discretion concerning the order in which questions were asked (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Although questions were standardized, probing questions were provided (Harrell & Bradley, 2009) so that detailed, descriptive and in-depth data could be collected from participants.

Although semi-structured interviews provide detailed and in-depth responses from the participants, Newcomer et al. (2015) note that they can be time-consuming in setting, conducting and analyzing. They are labour intensive entailing “the arduous task of analyzing a huge volume of notes and sometimes many hours of transcripts” (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 119). The semi-structured interviews took approximately 60 minutes because of participants' active involvement. No follow-up interviews were conducted as I did not need more information from a participant. To abide by the Covid-19 restrictions, telephonic interviews were conducted from participants' and researchers' natural environments (homes) which made both comfortable and relaxed during the interview (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017). The semi-structured, telephonic interviews were audio-recorded using two other recording devices. This means the telephonic interview was conducted on ‘loudspeaker’, which increased the volume on the telephone on the researcher's side so that responses from the participant could be heard clearly and recorded on two of the researchers' recording devices. The interviews were audio-recorded so that I could focus entirely on the interview during the interview process and be able to jump through or skip parts when looking for specific excerpts (Tessier, 2012). The audio recording also allowed me to go back and listen to the interviews as many times as possible. The audio recording of the interviews was then transcribed verbatim. Data was then analysed thematically.

3.8. Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves making sense of data regarding the participants' views of the situation “noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities.” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 461). It is concerned with how the data generated was “sorted, organized, conceptualized, refined and interpreted” (Thorne, 2000, p. 69). Data analysis examined the data generated from the semi-structured interviews and transformed it into a coherent account (Green, Willis, Hughes, Small, Welch, Gibbs & Daly, 2007).

Data analysis classifies and sorts data collected in a study (Green et al., 2007). This study analysed and sorted data thematically. Thematic analysis is a technique that systematically

identifies and organizes patterns of meaning, and offers insight into themes across a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It is a flexible and useful research tool that potentially provides rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis allowed me to easily see and understand the shared meanings and experiences presented in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Table 1: The six phases of data analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2012)

Phase one	Familiarizing oneself with the data where the researcher immerses themselves in the data by reading and rereading textual data.
Phase two	Generating initial codes where the researcher reduces chunks of data by looking for patterns within the data.
Phase three	Searching for themes where the researcher converts the codes to themes by grouping the codes that are similar to each other to form themes.
Phase four	Reviewing potential themes against the coded data and entire data set. The researcher “rechecks” themes with the codes.
Phase five	Defining and naming themes by stipulating how each theme is unique.
Phase 6	Producing the report such as a journal article or a dissertation.

This study used thematic analysis to ensure rich description of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The above table describes the six phases of analysing data according to Braun and Clarke (2012). Once data was collected, I transcribed the data verbatim. I then read and reread the words actively, analytically, and critically to understand what the data meant (Braun & Clarke, 2012), and to become intimately familiar with the data and identify aspects relevant to the research questions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I then coded the data and themes emerged as I reviewed the coded data and identified areas of similarity and overlapping (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The themes were then ‘checked’ against the coded data and the entire data set. The themes were then named and defined to show their uniqueness from each other. Each theme was discussed in-depth. The write up commenced based on the findings of the study.

This study analysed data using inductive reasoning as inductive reasoning is intertwined with qualitative methods of generating and analyzing data (Zalaghi & Khazaei, 2016). Inductive reasoning involves generalizing existing evidence to novel and specific situations so conclusions can be drawn up (Hayes, Heit & Swendsen, 2010). Themes and explanations presented in this study were presented by making generalizations based on the specific explanations from data collected through semi-structured interviews. According to Goel, Gold, Kapur & Hoele (1997), the crucial issue about inductive reasoning is the researcher searching through a “large database and determining which pieces of information are relevant and how they are to be mapped on to the present situation” (p. 1306). I began with sifting through large chunks of data collected from the semi-structured interviews, towards detecting themes and patterns in the data. The results of the exploration led to general conclusions about EHL teachers’ experiences of assessing grade six second language learners in comprehension (Soiferman, 2010).

3.9. Trustworthiness

In research, a qualitative study must be trustworthy to ensure that data collected is valid and reliable. There are four criteria that contribute to trustworthiness of a study which are: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Shenton, 2004). The four criteria are discussed below.

3.9.1. Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the accuracy or truthfulness of the findings (Ary et al., 2010). I audiotaped the interviews and transcribed the recordings verbatim. To ensure credibility, I gave the transcribed interviews back to participants to ensure that what was transcribed was what the participants had said in the interview. This is known as ‘member checks’ in which “informants may also be asked to read any transcripts of dialogues in which they have participated (Shenton, 2004, p. 68). This was done to clear up misunderstandings and inaccuracies (Ary et al., 2010). It helped me to ensure accurate data in the findings and obtain additional valuable data.

Credibility was also ensured in this study through the detailed descriptions of the participants. Elo, Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utriainen and Kyngas (2014) say credibility must ensure that those participants in the study are identified and described accurately. To ensure this, purposeful sampling was used so that teachers in the study were EHL with at least five years’

experience teaching grade six second language learners. The teachers were selected as they fitted the criteria for the study.

3.9.2. Transferability

Transferability is another criterion used to ensure the trustworthiness of a study. Elo et al. (2014) describe transferability as “the potential for extrapolation and it relies on the reasoning that findings can be generalized or transferred to other settings or groups” (p.2). For a study to be transferable, the researcher has to provide a thick and detailed description that will allow the reader to make inferences about extrapolating the finds to another setting (Polit & Beck, 2010). Therefore, I provided a detailed, descriptive and in-depth account of English teachers' experiences of assessing grade six second language learners in comprehensions and the strategies English teachers use to assess grade six second language learners. Ary et al. (2010) state that “it is possible to apply qualitative findings to other people, settings, and times to the extent that they are similar to the people, settings, and times in the original study” (p. 501). Therefore, the thick detailed descriptions in this study can help a potential user understand the phenomenon and transfer the findings to his/her situation that is similar to this study. The potential user can then make the necessary comparisons and judgments about the similarity of this study to their own (Ary et al., 2010).

3.9.3. Dependability

Dependability is the stability of data over time and under different conditions (Elo et al., 2014). To enhance dependability, the researcher must “demonstrate that the methods used are reproducible and consistent, that the approach and procedures used were appropriate for the context” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 502). This shows the reader or future researcher to what extent proper research practices had been followed. A detailed study would also enable future researchers to develop a thorough understanding of the process and methods of research. Therefore, detailed and descriptive information was given about schools chosen, the grade six English teachers who taught second language learners, and research approaches and procedures used. I discussed in detail the criteria by which participants were chosen, the methodology chosen, and the data collection methods chosen.

3.9.4. Confirmability

Confirmability is the researcher's comparable concern to objectivity (Shenton, 2004). Morrow (2005), states that in confirmability, “the integrity of findings lies in the data” (p. 252). The

researcher must be able to effectively link the data, analytic processes and findings of the study (Morrow, 2005). Confirmability refers to the measures the researcher takes to ensure that the study is unbiased. Interviews were also audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and then analysed to ensure that the researcher's biased interpretations did not occur. 'Member checks' were also done to avoid biasedness as participants viewed their transcripts.

3.9. Ethical issues

Ethical issues refer to ethical principles to avoid harm when conducting research (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). It involves receiving ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board to ensure that the researcher abides by the principles of confidentiality, non-maleficence and respect (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). I ensured that no harm was done to any human being involved in this study. Before this study commenced, I had first applied for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee to gain approval. Once approval was granted, I sought permission from the Department of Education to conduct the study in schools. I then proceeded to seek permission from schools selected for this study by writing a letter to the schools' principals requesting permission to carry out interviews in their schools. I ensured school principals that there would be no repercussions to the school, teachers or learners. Thus, the names of the schools were replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the school, teachers and learners. Once school principals granted consent, I then obtained informed consent from participants. Informed consent is one's ability to consent freely to participate in the study in such that he/she understands what is required of them in the study (Wolfensberger, 1967).

Due to Covid-19, the consent forms were emailed to participants to avoid any physical contact. The participants selected for this study were emailed consent forms that assured participants that they were not obliged to participate. Thus, they were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any point they had desired. Furthermore, the participants were also assured that their identities would be kept anonymous and confidential using pseudonyms.

3.10. Limitations of the study

To conduct this study, I had to first gain permission from various institutions. Cohen et al. (2007) state that the initial stage of any research project is to gain informed consent to access any institution where the research is to be conducted. Only upon acceptance by those whose permission is needed, can the researcher embark on the task (Cohen et al., 2007). Gaining permission from institutions such as the Department of Education, University of KwaZulu-

Natal, school principals and participants took longer than anticipated. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face contact with participants was avoided, and signed consent had to be emailed. The time taken to gain the signed consent forms from participants took much longer than it would have face to face.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions on physical contact, semi-structured interviews had to be conducted telephonically. Therefore, there was a lack of visual cues and nonverbal data when using telephonic interviews (Novick, 2008). Opdenakker (2006) states that seeing the participants' faces enables me to respond to nonverbal social cues such as voice tone and facial expressions, which gives the interviewer a lot of extra information. Since there was no access to visual cues and non-verbal data, I had to ask ice breaker questions and probing questions to gain additional information from participants. Furthermore, the telephonic interviews were audio-recorded using two audio recording devices to prevent loss of recorded data in the event one of the audio recorders malfunctioned.

This study adopted the case study approach and so findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Generalization is the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to new settings without further investigations in a new setting (Ary et al., 2010). In a case study, a precise description is given about a particular case (Flick, 2007), therefore, findings are difficult to generalize (Cohen et al., 2007). This study aimed to provide a thick and detailed understanding of the case of exploring EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. Because a detailed description is given about the phenomenon and the context, the findings cannot be generalized to another context. Hence, the findings of this study only pertained to the phenomenon and the context of this study, which means the findings were only related to the case of understanding the experiences of EHL teachers when assessing comprehension of isiZulu speaking learners who attend schools whereby English is the LoLT in the Durban South area in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

In qualitative research, the researcher reflects on their role in the research process, and how their personal beliefs and experiences potentially shape their interpretations, the themes they advance, and the meaning they ascribe to the data, which can affect the direction of the study (Creswell, 2013; Haynes, 2012). Creswell (2013) further mentions that researchers must explicitly identify their biases, values, and personal background that shape their interpretations formed during a study. As a EHL English-speaking teacher who experienced challenges when assessing grade six second language learners, I strived throughout the interview and research

process to be objective and take an impartial stance by not allowing my personal beliefs, experiences and challenges to influence the interview process.

This chapter presented the most suitable research methodology chosen for this study. This qualitative study was located within the interpretivist paradigm. This chapter discussed the methodology and methods used to answer the two research questions of this study. This study adopted a case study design. Purposive sampling was used to select degreed participants who had more than five years' experience in EHL teaching to isiZulu learners to second language learners. Semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection method so that an in-depth understanding could be achieved. These semi-structured interviews were conducted telephonically due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The data collected was analysed thematically using six phases according to Braun and Clarke (2011), to ensure a rich description of the data. This was followed by a discussion on trustworthiness, ethical considerations as well as the study's limitations. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings of this study.

Chapter Four: Presentation of data

4.1.Introduction

The previous chapter provided a detailed description of the methodological approach used to collect data for this study. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews conducted telephonically due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing from Braun and Clarke (2012), data was analysed thematically using the six phases of data analysis, namely; familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The data collected were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings. The data were analysed in relation to the two research questions:

1. What are the experiences of EHL teachers when assessing comprehension in second language learners in grade six?
2. What strategies do EHL teachers use to assess comprehension of second language learners in grade six?

The three participants in this study were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2008). Quotations and excerpts are displayed from the transcribed interviews to provide a deep and detailed account of EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners in the Durban South area in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

In this chapter, a biographical profile of the three participants is presented to provide an understanding of their experiences of assessing grade six second language learners in comprehension. Thereafter, the findings are presented under each of the research questions. The terms 'participants' and 'teachers'; as well as 'second language learners' and 'learners' are used interchangeably in the data presentation.

4.2. Biographical profile of participants

All three participants were current grade six EHL teachers to isiZulu second language learners, but were themselves English-speaking teachers. Participants and schools in which they teach were given pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants, the schools and learners. The table below presents information about the participants, the schools where they taught, the

number of years of teaching experience, and the number of years teaching EHL to second language learners.

Table 2:Participants biographical information

Participant	Darla	Rosa	Brenda
School	Lilly Primary School	Tulips Primary School	Orchard Primary school
Highest qualification	Master's in Education law and Policy	Postgraduate certificate in Education (PGCE) B.A in Social work	Bachelor's in Education Honours
Years of teaching experience	25 years	27 years	13 years' experience
Years of experience teaching EHL to second language learners	15 years	10 years	7 years
Subject specialization	Afrikaans, English and psychology	Afrikaans, Natural Sciences and Geography	Biology (FET)

The table above shows that each teacher was qualified and possessed either a three year or four-year Bachelors in Education teaching qualification. Furthermore, all three participants are postgraduate students in such that they attained either a Masters in education law and Policy degree, Bachelors in education Honours degree or a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, which proves that they had furthered their studies in the education field. The participants were well experienced in teaching as their overall teaching experience ranged from 13 years to 27 years. Furthermore, teachers' experience of teaching EHL to grade six second language learners ranged from 7 years to 15 years. It is also important to note that not all the participants were English specialist teachers. The participants had specialized in Afrikaans, Natural Sciences, Geography and Biology, as discussed in the data analysis presented.

4.3. EHL teachers' understanding of comprehension and of assessing comprehension

Before discussing the experiences EHL teachers had of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners, it is important to explore participants' understanding of comprehension first. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter two, comprehension is the ability to draw meaning from a text. It entails learners combining their prior knowledge and past experiences with the text to gain a deep and insightful understanding (Acosta, 2019; Pardo, 2004). Findings in this study showed that participants had different understandings and interpretations of what comprehension is. Brenda said:

“Comprehension for me... learners will get a passage... read through it themselves and then you (teacher) obviously unpack with them and explain... give them a little bit of more detailed explanation, so that they can then answer the questions with better knowledge” (Brenda)

This comment from Brenda shows that her understanding of comprehension refers to the way she teaches and assesses comprehension as an EHL teacher. Therefore, her understanding of comprehension is influenced by the way she taught comprehension. Rosa and Darla, however, revealed to have a better understanding of comprehension than Brenda. Rosa stated:

“Well, it's the way in which kids interpret the story and are able to answer questions related to the story- the way they interpret the information that they are given” (Rosa).

Rosa's understanding of comprehension is similar to Darla's understanding as both comments include that comprehension involves interpreting and making meaning of texts, Darla said:

“My understanding of it is where the learners will be able to gain the knowledge, to get the idea of what the comprehension is all about-the meaning of what is written” (Darla)

Both participants showed similarity in their understanding of comprehension in that they expressed that comprehension involved learners drawing meaning from texts (Klapwijk, 2015). The excerpts from Darla and Rosa showed that these two EHL teachers had a better understanding of comprehension and what it entails. Rosa's understanding aligns with

Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) view that comprehension must involve learners interpreting a text because assessments in comprehension check learners' understanding of both English and of English texts. Learners' interpretation of a text is vital in comprehension as Rahman (2018) argues that interpreting a text is subjective. Hence, when learners interpret a text, they bring in and incorporate their background knowledge and experiences into the text to gain understanding. Rosa understood that comprehension entails learners' interpretations.

For Darla, comprehension is more about meaning making and gaining knowledge. She believed that learners must build new knowledge from the text onto their current knowledge to "*Gain the knowledge*" (Darla) of the text. Darla's understanding reflects that of Klapwik (2015), who posits that comprehension is where learners use cues from the text and combine them with their existing knowledge to construct meaning. For Darla, comprehension is about the construction of new knowledge from prior knowledge so that learners gain a better understanding of the texts.

The findings show that the three participants had different understandings of comprehension. Whilst Brenda showed lack of understanding of the meaning of comprehension as she mixed her role as an English teacher with what comprehension means, Darla and Rosa showed some understanding of comprehension. However, Brenda did have less experience with teaching EHL comprehension than Darla and Rosa and stated, "*I haven't really got a feel of English*" (Brenda), which provides reason for her lack of understanding of comprehension. This is because Brenda was trained to be a high school teacher, specializing in the subject Biology (explained further in themes to follow). Darla and Rosa either mentioned that comprehension involved making meaning and building knowledge or interpreting text using background knowledge and experiences. However, all participants did not understand that comprehension entailed all factors (meaning-making, background knowledge and experiences, building on existing knowledge) (Acosta, 2019; Pardo, 2004), and not either-or. Therefore, EHL teachers did not have a thorough understanding of what comprehension is, even though they taught and assessed it to second language learners.

For Henderson and Buskist (2011), teachers must understand what comprehension is to be able to improve comprehension in their learners. If EHL teachers do not understand what comprehension is, then they cannot implement comprehension activities or assessment properly, which then disadvantages learners. Since the participants' diverse understandings of

comprehension has been established, the following section discusses their diverse experiences when assessing comprehension to second language learners.

The following section discusses the multiplicity of EHL teachers' experiences when assessing second language learners in comprehension, which responded to the first research question, "What are the experiences of EHL teachers of assessing reading comprehension of second language learners in grade six?" The themes that arose from the semi-structured interviews were: 'multiplicity of EHL teachers' experiences when assessing second language learners in comprehension'; 'factors influencing EHL teachers' experiences of teaching, learning and assessing comprehension'; and 'EHL teachers envisions to improve assessing second language learners in comprehension in the future'. The first theme is discussed below.

4.4. Multiplicity of EHL teachers' experiences when assessing second language learners in comprehension

The findings revealed a multiplicity of EHL teachers' experiences when assessing second language learners in comprehension. This means that the participants had a mixture of positive experiences and adverse experiences when assessing comprehension to second language learners. On one hand, some claimed that "*I don't have a problem*" (Darla) and "*it's okay*" (Rosa), while on the other hand one said "*it's challenging*" (Brenda). This theme also discusses the rewarding feelings participants got when second language learners showed text understanding in the classroom, and when they showed interest and enthusiasm towards comprehension. Participants also revealed the "*difficult*" (Brenda, Rosa, Darla) experiences they had because of the language barrier between teacher and learner. Therefore, these positive and adverse experiences constituted the multiple experiences EHL teachers had when assessing comprehension to second language learners. The first sub-theme discusses the positive experiences of EHL teachers when assessing second language learners in comprehension.

4.4.1. Constructive experiences of EHL teachers when assessing second language learners in comprehension

The data showed that EHL teachers had positive experiences when assessing second language learners. They said that learners "*love*" (Darla), "*enjoy*" (Brenda) and are "*enthusiastic*" (Brenda) about being assessed in comprehension. According to Janssen, de Hullu and Tigelaar (2008), having positive experiences invokes positive emotions in teachers, which in turn, creates positive spirals of cognition and action. As such, EHL teachers in turn

teach and assess more effectively. This theme comprises two sub-themes which are; ‘Increasing learner vocabulary skills and confidence when assessing comprehension’ and ‘cultivating positive learner attitudes of interest and enthusiasm towards comprehension’.

4.4.1.1. Increasing learner vocabulary skills and confidence when assessing comprehension

When participants were asked “*What are some of the rewards of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners?*”, the findings revealed that participants experienced positive emotions and rewarding experiences when their teaching and assessment of comprehension enriched second language learners’ lives by expanding their vocabulary and confidence. Brenda mentioned that:

“I think it’s broadening their vocabulary, that’s something very good for me. It’s nice when you teach them a word, especially when you use it in context in a comprehension and then later on you use it again and you see on their face that ‘oh, I understand that’ ...They’ve picked up or they’ve absorbed some of that, whatever it is that you were teaching” (Brenda)

Brenda felt good about her practice when learners broadened their vocabulary. She could physically see learners’ vocabulary expand as learners showed positive facial reactions and body language whenever learners recognized a word Brenda previously used in a comprehension activity. This reaction gave her a fulfilling feeling as learners showed that “*They’ve understood*” (Brenda) the vocabulary and concepts she had taught. Similarly, Darla also found it rewarding that assessing and teaching comprehension improved learners’ vocabulary and also extended into their creative writing.

“It [assessing comprehension] increases their vocabulary. It simulates various ideas in them. They will be able to write better compositions. They become very creative in their writing....” (Darla)

As learners engaged in comprehension texts, they began to think critically and ‘out of the box’, and this affected other aspects of English, such as in their creative writing activities. Thus, it was a delight to Darla that her teaching of comprehension went beyond comprehension activities, and had a positive impact on learners’ language and writing in English. Rosa also attested that the increase in learner confidence was a reward.

“You can see once they start performing (well) and being able to answer questions and understand exactly what’s going on, you see a different child going into grade seven... I think that’s a reward” (Rosa)

For Rosa, the reward of teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners was seeing a boost in learners’ confidence in English. Consequently, as learners began to understand and perform well in comprehension, they became confident and developed a positive attitude towards English. This was a delightful feeling for Rosa as the surge of learners’ confidence drove them to succeed and, a motivated and self-assured learner moved to the next grade.

The findings depicted the positive emotional rewards EHL teachers experienced when they saw improvement in their grade six second language learners’ vocabulary and confidence. Keller, Frenzel, Goetz, Pekru and Hensley (2014) posit that teaching is regarded as an emotionally rewarding profession because teachers derive joy when their learners achieve learning goals. Sutton and Wheatley (2003) argue that teachers associate their jobs with joy, satisfaction, and pleasure, especially when learners make progress and when learners who initially struggled begin to show progress. In the instance of the three participants in this study, the EHL teachers found it rewarding whenever their second language learners showed improvement in EHL vocabulary, creativity, and confidence. The results of this study echo results from studies conducted by Sutton and Wheatley (2003) and Chen (2019) which found that teachers experienced positive rewarding emotions concerning learners’ improved progress, learner responsiveness and participation in lessons, and increase in learner motivation and confidence. Happy teachers will create a more positive learning environment and cultivate positive learning habits and interests in learners. The next subtheme discusses how EHL teachers cultivated interest and enthusiasm in grade six second language learners.

4.4.1.2. Cultivating positive learner attitudes of interest and enthusiasm towards comprehension

The data exhibited information that second language learners had good, positive attitudes as they displayed interest and enthusiasm towards comprehension. Darla and Brenda revealed that they had a similar experience as both indicated that *“they [learners] enjoy it [comprehension]”* simply because learners like to listen to stories as their teachers read to them. Brenda commented:

“They like it because it’s a story. They love to listen to something, they like ... when I read to them, they enjoy that...I don’t find that there’s a lack of enthusiasm with comprehension, maybe with the other aspects ... but not with comprehension, they’re enthusiastic” (Brenda)

This statement from Brenda suggests that learners showed more interest towards comprehension lessons than other aspects of English simply because they enjoyed listening to their teachers read comprehension stories and texts. The comment by Brenda suggests that learners’ enthusiasm towards comprehension was because of the way the EHL teachers presented comprehension texts to learners, which captured attention and drew learners towards the lesson. Darla captured the attention of learners through reading as she claimed that *“when I read the comprehension to them, I’m going to read with expression”* (Darla). Therefore, the entertaining way comprehension is taught to learners captivated their attention, striking an interest in learners.

Teachers promoting enthusiasm and interest in the English Language is an important task as it increases second language learners’ motivation towards learning English (Al Kaboody, 2013). Al Kaboody (2013) notes that enthusiasm and interest are contagious in the classroom. As learners recognize teachers’ enthusiasm towards the task, they too become enthusiastic. As Darla and Brenda show enthusiasm by delivering comprehension texts with expression and imagination, second language learners also became enthusiastic about the lesson and begin to show interest because their teachers first showed enthusiasm. Gabrys-Barker (2014) notes that this enthusiastic approach used by teachers creates and enhances thoughtful teaching and learner passion towards the lesson. Moreover, enthusiastic approaches used by teachers increase learners’ participation and achievement directly and indirectly (Gabrys-Barker, 2014), create enjoyment and interest in the lessons (Dewaele & Li, 2021), and improve teachers' emotional state as they appear to be in positive moods (Kunter, Tsai, Klusmann, Brunner, Krauss & Baumert, 2008; Dewaele & Li, 2021).

The above discussion shows how contagious teachers’ enthusiasm is on learners in the classroom as way EHL teachers deliver and present comprehension lessons to second language learners influences learners’ enthusiasm and interest towards the subject, and more towards comprehension. For teachers to stir up learner interest and passion towards a subject, they must first show enthusiasm when presenting the subject to learners. Teacher enthusiasm, not only promotes healthy attitudes and moods in teachers, but also in learners as they become

motivated, interested, and involved in the lessons. The more positive energy participants exuded when teaching, the more engaged learners became.

Although learners showed much interest and enthusiasm towards reading comprehension, participants mentioned that learners had “*difficulty*” (Darla) articulating their thoughts through speech and writing. This difficulty was caused by the language barrier between teachers and learners because learners' mother tongue was different to the mother tongue of their teachers. The adverse experiences EHL teachers had when assessing comprehension to second language learners in grade six is discussed in the theme below.

4.4.2. Adverse experiences by EHL teachers when assessing grade six second language learners

The participants in this study also described their experiences assessing comprehension to second language learners as being “*challenging or difficult*” (Darla, Rosa and Brenda) because of the language barrier that existed between teacher and learners. Learners were isiZulu speakers learning in the English language. Hence, a language barrier existed between the EHL teachers and the second language learners because they had a “lack of shared language” (Robinson & Buly, 2007, p. 85). One of the challenges was the communication barrier because misunderstandings occurred in verbal communication between teachers and learners (Al-Zubaibi & Richards, 2010). This theme is divided into two subthemes, which are; ‘Language as a barrier to learning: Assessing comprehension to second language learners in EHL’ and ‘Language barrier as a negative influence to assessing comprehension’. The two themes discuss the adverse experiences participants had.

4.4.2.1. Language as a barrier to learning: Assessing comprehension to second language learners in EHL

Participants revealed that there was a language barrier between learners’ mother tongue (isiZulu) and the language used as the LoLT (English), which was also the teachers’ mother tongue language. Brenda stated that:

“it’s hard because remember [English] a home language at our school so it’s difficult because of the language barrier, English is the problem” (Brenda).

Darla shares the same experience as Brenda but further explained the repercussions of the language barrier. She said:

“Their mother tongue is isiZulu and I am now doing English Home Language... they [learners] do not understand what is going on because it’s a language barrier” (Darla)

Theron and Nel (2005) explains that a language barrier exists in schools because the South African reality is that many learners are not educated in their mother tongue but in another language. Therefore, learners are taught in a language unfamiliar to them, which causes misunderstandings and confusion when learning. This language barrier hinders learners from understanding comprehension texts to their full capacity because they do not understand what they are learning or being assessed on. Furthermore, English teachers also struggle when teaching and assessing second language learners in the classroom because of the disconnect between their home languages and the learners’ (Childs, 2015). Brenda mentioned that her struggle when teaching and assessing comprehension was:

“Because of the language barrier, when it comes to understanding difficult words, complex words that’s a big problem for me” (Brenda).

In Brenda’s instance, learners got confused and could not understand the difficult words in the comprehension texts. Furthermore, teachers had difficulty explaining these difficult and complex words to second language learners because the learners did not understand the explanations teachers gave, causing a disconnect in learning. This disconnection between the different home languages can harm teachers’ practice and learners’ learning. A teacher survey in California, conducted by Gandar, Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll (2005), found that public school teachers had difficulty communicating with their second language learners about academic content and personal and social issues because of teachers’ and learners’ different home languages. Teachers could not connect with learners at a deep, academic, personal and social level, which negatively impacted learning. Nel and Muller (2010) also observe that communication between teacher and learner is vital for learning and knowledge transfer. If the communication channel is obscured, learning cannot be successful. Thus, the language barrier in the present study hindered learning.

Rosa had a different experience in that the language barrier was a challenge when new second language learners that entered the school. She mentioned that:

“If they [learners] been in our school for a while then its ok”. However, “if they come in ... from a Zulu medium school ... they can’t read and they can’t write...in English ... these kids have no idea what you are talking about because they were not taught in English before” (Rosa).

Rosa’s comment shows that the language barrier was a challenge with the new second language learners entering this school. The existing learners at this school performed better in comprehension as compared to new second language learners even though English is not their mother tongue language. The comment shows that the more exposed second language learners are to learning in the English language, the better they perform in comprehension. However, when second language learners enter English medium schools, they struggle to perform well in assessments in comprehension because the language barrier prevents them from understanding their EHL teacher, making these learners lost in comprehension. Thus, the next theme discusses the language barrier’s negative influence to assessing comprehension

4.4.2.2. Language barrier as a negative influence to assessing comprehension

Participants also noted learners’ lack of understanding due to the language barrier as shown in their written tests and examinations. Darla revealed that

“When it comes to putting it down on paper, writing it down ... to answer a question... then they seem to be a bit reluctant”. (Darla)

This reluctance to answer questions results in learners not answering questions in assessments *“they would rather like leave it (the question) blank. They won’t answer it”* (Darla). For Rosa, the answering of questions proved to be a challenge as learners were *“not able to write answers they like repeat the question”* (Rosa). Brenda notes that learners were unable to construct full sentences when answering so they answer in ‘one-word’

“Sometimes a question will say, ‘answer in full sentences’ and the children will write just the name of the person for example if they ask what is the name of the girl in the story. So, they will just give you the name” (Brenda).

The response shows that EHL teachers had adverse experiences when assessing comprehension because second language learners showed hesitance to answer questions because they did not understand the questions and what they require of them. Therefore, the language barrier has a

negative influence to assessing comprehension as learners' articulation and expression on paper proved to be a problem. Due to the language barrier, learners could not answer the questions in comprehension to the best of their ability, disadvantaging learners during comprehension assessments.

Aside from the language barrier creating adverse experiences for EHL teachers, participants also identified various factors that further affected their practice.

4.5. Factors influencing EHL teachers' experiences of teaching, learning and assessing of EHL comprehension

This theme discusses the various factors that influenced EHL teachers' experiences of teaching and assessing EHL comprehension. These factors are: 'The lack of resources on teaching, learning and assessing comprehension'; 'Discipline issues and negative learner attitudes towards comprehension'; 'Effects of Covid-19 on assessing comprehension: lack of access to public libraries and peer learning'; 'Absence of parental involvement in learners' learning of comprehension'; 'The teaching of EHL comprehension by non-specialist teachers'; 'EHL teachers lack in-service training'; and 'Lack of support in teaching and assessing comprehension from stakeholders and school management teams'. These factors are discussed in detail below.

4.5.1. The lack of resources on teaching, learning and assessing comprehension

This section explains the impact of lack of resources on teaching, learning and assessing comprehension. This factor is divided into two subthemes; 'lack of library resources at schools' and 'the effects of poor infrastructure and overcrowding on assessing comprehension'. These two subthemes are discussed below.

4.5.1.1. Lack of library resources at schools

Participants revealed that the schools in which they taught did not have the appropriate resources to assist learners in developing their comprehension skills. Darla indicated that practice reading was essential for learners to learn English and improve comprehension.

"In order for a learner to comprehend, the learner needs to be reading, reading is the most important thing in order for any learner to grasp knowledge of English" (Darla).

However, in Darla's school, there was no fully functional library available for learners to use, and the books available were way out-of-date to capture the interests of learners and make them want to read.

“We do not have a fully functional library at our school. Our library is in such a terrible state, our books are outdated” (Darla).

Other participants made no mention of utilizing school libraries which implied that either the participants were not using the resources of the school library or that there were no libraries at their schools. Lance (2002) says that school libraries are a powerful force in learners' lives as they influence learners' achievement in comprehension. Furthermore, Lance (2007) states that in an Intermediate school in Davenport- America, it was found that the increased use of the school library increased learner performance in Black and Hispanic learners compared to the general school population. Thus, utilizing the school library had a positive effect on second language learners' achievement levels. However, having no school library or a school library in a poor state does not create a thirst for reading in learners or opportunities for them to read and improve their achievement in comprehension (Mahajan, 2010). Paton-ash and Wilmot (2015) criticized the South African government for the lack of funding for school libraries in Gauteng schools, as it creates a further inequality gap between 'rich' schools that have good libraries and library resources, and 'poor' schools with outdated, and poor condition school libraries. Therefore, it is vital for schools to have functional libraries with up-to-date books for learners to utilize and improve their comprehension. However, due to lack of funding, most public schools have poorly conditioned facilities and infrastructure which makes it difficult to further enrich comprehension in second language learners.

4.5.1.2. The effects of poor infrastructure and overcrowding on assessing comprehension

Poor infrastructure at schools and lack of classroom space is another factor that limits the teaching and learning of comprehension in schools. Having poor infrastructure contributes to the overcrowded nature of South African schools, and in turn, affects teaching and assessing comprehension. For Rosa, *“what affects [assessing and learning comprehension] is the large classes”* (Rosa). For her, large classes mean that there are too many learners placed in a single classroom because the school does not have available classrooms for learners to occupy. Rosa states that the numbers are *“more than 45. Now this year, the grade six classes, is 55 and 56”* (Rosa). This shows that the ratio of teacher to learner is high and EHL teachers cannot

give the struggling learners the attention they need. Rosa mentioned that many learners struggle in large classes because “*a lot of them need one-on-one help*” (Rosa) in comprehension. Learners learn better in smaller classes because there is room for individualized attention (Marias, 2016). However, the high number of learners in a single classroom prevents teachers from providing individualized attention to improve second language learners’ comprehension. The learners who need extra attention from teachers are neglected as teachers do not have enough time to attend to them, even after noticing them. If the neglected learners are not assisted by the teacher, they fall further behind in class and struggle to progress in assessments in comprehension. Another factor that participants identified was the indiscipline and negative learner attitudes towards comprehension.

4.5.2. Discipline issues and negative learner attitudes towards comprehension

Indiscipline and negative learner attitudes accounted for EHL teacher's negative experiences of assessing comprehension to second language learners. Participants disclosed that learners exhibited bad behaviour in the classroom simply because of lack of understanding of the English language. Darla revealed that:

“They bore too quickly. When you are reading something to them, obviously, they do not understand what is going on ... they going to get bored and then it’s a discipline problem erupts from there” (Darla).

For Darla, learners get bored easily and become disruptive because they do not understand the teachers’ instruction or what is being taught. Rosa experienced the same situation as lack of understanding caused learners to lose interest and focus on displaying bad behaviour. Rosa said it was because

“They don’t understand, you kind of lose them. Those are the ones who start acting up and start misbehaving in class” (Rosa)

However, Rosa shows empathy and understanding towards the misbehaving learners and the reasons for their behaviours. She notes “*it’s kind of sad because they’re completely lost*” (Rosa). When the learners become lost and bored, they withdraw their attention from the lesson (Zhu & Zhou, 2012). This finding mirrors findings by Amjah (2014), where second language learners indicated that they were bored and uninterested in English lessons because they did not understand the teachers’ instructions, and considered the lessons less meaningful.

Furthermore, the limited linguistic skills and cultural mismatches between teachers and second language learners caused learners to misbehave (O' Connor & Geiger, 2009; Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003).

Kruk and Zawodniak (2018) found that EFL Polish learners were bored in the English classrooms because of the repetitive, boring tasks and activities they encountered. The Polish learners became discouraged and uninterested because they had to do things they did not want to do in the teacher-controlled classroom. Studies (Amjah, 2014; Kruk & Zawodniak, 2018) show that, not only are second language learners bored because they do not understand their English teachers, but also because they feel lessons are mundane and repetitive, causing them to lose interest. Comprehension activities should be able to attract the learners' attention and involve them in participation (Yi, 2006).

Rosa also indicated that second language learners who entered their school, come from a school where they learn in their mother tongue language (isiZulu) because their teachers use the isiZulu language to teach them because they do not understand English. These second language learners who enters Rosa's school become ridiculed and mocked because they cannot speak or write in English like the learners who have been at the school longer can.

“Sometimes, our kids that have been at our schools for, you know, since grade R, they tend to like, mock them and stuff”. (Rosa)

Rosa's response paints a picture of how 'weaker' second language learners become demoralized by other learners in their school, causing them to become withdrawn and unparticipating during comprehension, out of the fear of being embarrassed or bullied by English-proficient learners. Hence, the 'weaker' learners begin to act out and cause disruptions in the class to remove the feeling of inadequacy (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019). Yi (2006) notes that in an English class, learners have more opportunities to speak, talk, read loud and argue with each other than in any other subject. Therefore, the English classroom should build learners' confidence by encouraging learners to speak and improve their comprehension. However, because learners do not communicate in their home language, they refrain from classroom participation (Abdullah, 2015; Al-Khresheh, Khaerurrozikin & Zaid, 2020). Therefore, they lose out on the opportunity to improve their comprehension through practice and participation in the classroom. They feel unworthy, inadequate and inferior in the

classroom which will most likely cause their behavior to be maladaptive (Marais & Meier, 2010).

EHL teachers have difficulty teaching and assessing comprehension, and maintaining discipline in the classroom. However, with the new Covid-19 pandemic rules and regulations that prevent large gatherings in the classroom, half the classroom capacity of learners attend school every alternate week. Thus, the next factor discusses the effects of Covid-19 on assessing comprehension to second language learners.

4.5.3. Effects of Covid-19 on assessing comprehension: Lack of access to public libraries and peer learning

Darla indicated that learners were disadvantaged in the Covid-19 pandemic because of the lack of access to public libraries. Darla stated that “*now with Covid [sic] ... the libraries are all closed*”. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, access to books was limited, when it is argued that the more second language learners are exposed to interesting books and stories, the better they perform in English comprehension and expand their vocabulary (Roberts, 2008) (as explained in the subtheme 4.5.1.1. Lack of library resources at schools). Public libraries offer other services such as access to the internet and social interaction with peers. With libraries being closed, teachers found it difficult to encourage research for learners, especially those with no internet and computer access. Furthermore, peer interaction at schools and libraries was also prohibited. Brenda revealed that:

“Now we not allowed to because of Covid-19, but if use the peer or the buddy technique, you find that they do catch up because that friend is explaining it to them first in isiZulu and then explaining it to them in English”. (Brenda)

This response revealed that peer learning improved comprehension for some second language learners as their bilingual peers could explain the text, questions and what was required of them, in their mother tongue. When second language learners collaborate with other second language learners who are English-proficient, they form a community where each one supports and motivates the other, sharpen each other’s communication skills, become confident and learn to be cooperative (Oxford, 1997; Ibrahim, Shak, Mohd, Zaidi & Yasin, 2015). Struggling second language learners can communicate better with their bilingual peers and ask questions that they cannot ask their English-speaking teacher. Regrettably, Covid-19 prevented the ‘buddy technique’ and collaborative learning during comprehension. Therefore, learners could

not receive assistance in comprehension from their bilingual peers. Furthermore, if learners were uncomfortable or shy to ask their teachers for assistance in comprehension, it would result in learners performing poorly in comprehension.

Another factor that participants identified that influence assessing comprehension was the absence of parental involvement in second language learners' English learning.

4.5.4. Absence of parental involvement in learners' learning of comprehension

Participants noted that another factor that influenced the teaching and assessment of comprehension of second language learners was the lack of parental involvement. Rosa mentioned the reality that parents placed their children in English medium schools because “*parents want their kids to come into our schools to learn English*” (Rosa). However, there was lack of support from parents in their children’s learning of comprehension. Darla argued that parents did not show interest in learners’ learning:

“There’s a lack of parent involvement. So, learners’ homework is not checked on by the parents. I think those things if parents could see to on that side” (Darla).

Parents’ neglect of learners’ comprehension homework indicates that learners' learning went unsupervised at home. In a South African study conducted by Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004) that looked at Black parental involvement in learners’ education, it was found that parents who were not involved in checking children's homework contributed to the poor performance of their children in schools. Participants mentioned that they wished parents would become more actively involved in learners’ learning of comprehension and be responsible enough to make sure learners do what is required of them. Darla stated that parents should engage in:

“Simple things like reading with them, sitting down and talking in English with them because what they do is as soon as they leave that classroom, as soon as they turn around to their friend, they speaking in isiZulu again...” (Darla)

Teachers felt that parents should reinforce the English language more regularly at home so learners can become more familiar with using the language and in turn, improve their comprehension. Studies have shown that children whose parents encouraged them to read, were more likely to have a higher reading literacy achievement than those whose parents did not

(Van Staden & Bosker, 2014, Geske & Ozola, 2008, O'Connor & Geiger, 2009). Darla also argued for the impact parental involvement had on learners' motivation to learn English and improve their comprehension.

“There are schools where there is enough parental involvement, the learners are motivated to do their work. In those schools, you would find the system as it is with the listening comprehension and written comprehension works fine” (Darla)

Arias and Morillo- Campbell (2008) state that teachers perceive that lack of parental involvement is evidence of lack of parental interest. Teachers need to consider barriers parents experience such as lack of education and English proficiency, and the disjuncture between home culture and school culture in which they viewed schools and teachers as experts, and did not want to interfere with learner' learning (Arias & Morillo- Campbell, 2008; Michaels, Wolhuter & van Wyk, 2012, O'Connor & Geiger, 2009). Furthermore, lack of time and work obligations also played a role in parents' lack of involvement (Chi & Rao, 2003; Forey, Besser & Sampson, 2015, Michaels et al., 2012). Teachers and parents needed to come to an agreement that worked for both parties, to ensure that learners are engaged in improving their comprehension and not left unsupervised.

Participants also noted the difficulty they faced, especially when parents took their children from isiZulu medium schools and enrolled them in English medium schools. Rosa explains her challenges by claiming:

“The thing is you can't bring a kid whose been learning in isiZulu all this time and then just dump them in grade six...it's not right. Which means you got to start right from the beginning” (Rosa)

This comment shows Rosa's frustration with parents as they 'dumped' their children without liaising with teachers to help their children. Parents sent their children to such schools and expected the teacher to teach their children how to speak and understand the English language without working hand-in-hand with them. The teacher was now expected to bring the 'new' learner's English proficiency at par with the other grade six learners in the class as well as bring the learner to have the same comprehension abilities as the other grade six learners. Brenda experienced the same situation where the learner had no good foundation in the English language enrolled in their schools.

“The kids are moving into schools so they move from, for example, an isizulu school where they learnt in isizulu as their home language and now they come here and they got to swop over to English. Then they don’t understand because they not communicating in that language” (Brenda)

This comment highlights EHL teachers’ experiences when second language learners come from isiZulu medium schools and were thrown into grade six at English medium schools. EHL teachers were expected to teach English learners who do not understand English and have no prior exposure or familiarity with the language. With no support from parents, the responsibility for the learners’ English acquisition and ability to comprehend English relied solely on the teacher. Mncube and du Plessis (2011) posit that schools cannot be solely responsible for learners’ education, but parents should also assume responsibility for their children’s learning. However, sometimes parents chose not to participate in learners’ learning of English or helping them improve their comprehension. In a study conducted by Mashiya (2011) in KwaZulu-Natal, twenty Foundation Phase teachers in rural schools were interviewed, and it was found that parents did not want to get involved or participate in their children’s education as they regarded teachers as competent enough. Without parent support, teachers become overwhelmed and stressed, worse if teachers are not English specialist teachers. The next factor discusses how non-specialist teachers were expected to teach EHL to second language learners.

4.5.5. The teaching of EHL comprehension by non-specialist teachers

All three participants were English speakers. However, not all participants in the study were EHL specialist teachers. Brenda noted that *“English wasn’t a major for me at university”* (Brenda). This statement proves that Brenda was not an English specialist teacher. According to Crisan and Rodd (2017), a non-specialist teacher is a teacher who teaches English but does not have the training to do so. Moreover, Brenda revealed that she was not a primary school teacher.

“I was actually a high school teacher and I was teaching in a high school but because of the post I moved to primary school” (Brenda).

At the primary school level, teachers are assumed to be capable of providing instruction to all subject areas regardless of teachers’ specializations (Ardzejewska, McMaugh & Coutts, 2010).

Therefore, because Brenda, being an English speaker, was now teaching at a primary school level, she was assumed to be a competent English teacher.

Rosa also did not possess the qualifications to teach the EHL but was assumed to have the ability to teach English by her school, and therefore allocated to teach EHL. Rosa said:

“We (teachers) get allocated certain subjects to teach every year and because they (the school) were not offering Afrikaans, then they (the school) gave me English” (Rosa)

Ardzejewski et al. (2010) state that it is unlikely that teachers can teach all subjects with the same competence. Thus, some EHL teachers like Brenda and Rosa, have no prior training or experience in the subject. From this finding it can be deduced that primary schools should employ specialist English language teachers trained to teach EHL to second language learners. Using a generalist approach, where primary school teachers were expected to teach any subject across the board did not help second language learners to gain a firm grasp of comprehension or the English language that an EHL specialist teacher could. All teachers need to be adequately trained, both pre-service and in-service, to teach and assess the subject they are given to teach at any school level. Therefore, the next factor identified was the lack of in-service training the EHL teachers receives.

4.5.6. EHL teachers lack in-service training

Participants also noted that they experienced lack of in-service training to teach and assess comprehension of second language learners. Darla revealed that she had *“no training. I use my own ideas. So, I just improvise”* (Darla). Some teachers relied on their creativity to teach and assess learners. Teachers had to come up with new and interesting ways to improve second language learners’ comprehension because they received no other aids or assistance.

Similar to Darla, Rosa revealed that she *“didn’t receive any training as such.... I learnt at school”* (Rosa). Rosa relied on her experience of teaching and assessing at school to guide her teaching and assessment of comprehension. Therefore, what she learnt from her experience of teaching and assessing comprehension in her school, is all she knew. These findings from Darla and Rosa were similar to the findings of O’Connor and Geiger (2009) where English Foundation Phase teachers in the Western Cape stipulated that they had to learn through their own experiences how to teach second language learners because they had not received any

other in-service training. English teachers blamed their challenges on lack of proper training (O'Connor & Geiger, 2009). Brenda also attested to having received no in-service training to teach and assess comprehension to second language learners apart from the department workshop conducted at the beginning of the year,

“Besides the workshops, the department workshops that you know we attend at the beginning of the year.... So besides that, I haven't been for any other English training” (Brenda)

However, Brenda said these workshops were of no help to them because they did not provide solutions to the challenges they faced when assessing comprehension.

“They [department] unpack the documents and that kind of thing and they give you advice with regards to resources and assessment planning and that kind of thing” (Brenda)

The workshops held only gave off information on what was required of EHL teachers to teach and assess for the year. That was not enough because it did not assist EHL teachers with advice on how to assist struggling second language learners in comprehension. The lack of in-service training and inadequate guidance from department workshops caused EHL teachers to believe they had to rely on their experience and expertise to teach and assess comprehension. Therefore, EHL teachers are left to fend for themselves without having continuous professional enhancement. English teachers being inadequately trained is a global issue and many international studies (Brumen & Cagran, 2011, Oakley, 2011, Fareh, 2010) and national studies (O'Connor & Geiger, 2009; Nel & Muller, 2010, Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019) provide anecdotal evidence that prove that teachers are insufficiently trained. Furthermore, studies (Oakley, 2011; Nel & Muller, 2010) have shown that lack of training has a negative impact on teachers' confidence in the classroom. The following factor identified discusses the lack of support in teaching and assessing comprehension from stakeholders and school management teams.

4.5.7. Lack of support in teaching and assessing comprehension from stakeholders and Head of Departments

Participants expressed mixed feelings towards various stakeholders such as DoE, subject advisors and Head of Departments (HoDs). This theme consists of three sub-themes which are: 'Lack of support and guidance from DoE in assessing comprehension of second language

learners’; ‘Lack of support and guidance from subject advisors when assessing second language learners in comprehension’, and ‘Support from Head of Department (HoD), staff and school clusters for EHL teachers for assessing comprehension’. These three sub-themes paint a picture of the neglect, discouragement, and lack of support EHL teachers in this study received from their stakeholders.

4.5.7.1.Lack of support and guidance from DoE in assessing comprehension of second language learners

Participants expressed feelings of neglect and felt undermined because they had not received any assistance for teaching and assessing comprehension of second language learners from the Department of Education. According to Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018) teacher support is a core ingredient in the education system. However, Rosa had feelings of neglect from the department of education and questioned their involvement in teaching and learning:

“When last have we had a workshop? Except for the ones that we have at the beginning of the year, [when] they giving us the info, especially, first time English teachers”(Rosa).

Participants felt ignored and disregarded because the department only met with teachers once at the beginning of the year to give them information about what was required of EHL teachers for the year. Other than that, teachers did not receive any other workshop from the department to aid them with their struggles with teaching and assessing comprehension. Participants unanimously indicated that they needed more professional development and support from DoE to help EHL teachers to teach and assess comprehension second language learners successfully. Rosa states:

“We need more workshops basically to help us to deal with these circumstances [assessing comprehension]... [with] the language learners cause it’s not easy. So basically we need more support from the department”(Rosa)

Darla painted a picture of what exactly EHL teachers needed from the department.

“We should be workshopped on various resources, strategies, how we can use those strategies in the classroom. They need to come in sit in on a lesson and even do a lesson for us because that is a challenge we really have” (Darla)

Brenda shared the same view and stated that:

“I think in terms of giving support and techniques and ideas and things like that for the teaching of English to second language learners, I think that would be a great help” (Brenda)

Participants urged the department to come to their classroom level and show them how teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners should be done effectively. They urged the Department to provide EHL teachers with various strategies, techniques and resources to address and narrow the challenges of teachers with second language learners in comprehension. A qualitative study conducted by Kotze et al. (2017) on eleven grade one teachers who had isiXhosa learners in their classroom, urged the Department to recommend how to accommodate isiXhosa language learners and train teachers to support isiXhosa learners. Teachers also stipulated the need for teaching assistants from the DoE and teaching and learning resources/aids (Kotze et al., 2017).

Participants also felt that DoE undermined EHL teachers with the workshop conducted at the beginning of the year as they called teachers to simply read the policy document of what is required of teachers. Brenda notes this undermining feeling as she stated that:

“Department needs to understand that they are working with professionals. People who can read a document and understand it. Spending a lot of time unpacking a document is not very necessary, it’s not very effective because I mean we can read and understand a document” (Brenda)

Participants believed that the Department should workshop teachers on comprehension strategies useful in the classroom rather than reading a document to them at workshops. The next factor discusses the lack of support and guidance from subject advisors when assessing second language learners in comprehension.

4.5.7.2. Lack of support and guidance from subject advisors when assessing second language learners in comprehension

Participants experienced the same sentiments when it came to support for assessing comprehension from the subject advisor. Darla noted that the English subject advisor has never visited her school.

“We never had an English subject advisor coming to us..... now we got a new subject advisor so hopefully it gets a bit better” (Darla)

This comment shows that the Department wanted good results from teachers, but did not want to assist them in their challenges when teaching and assessing comprehension. Rosa found that when the subject advisors visited, they pointed out what EHL teachers did wrong rather than helping EHL teachers to cope with teaching and assessing EHL comprehension to second language learners:

“The subject advisors only coming in and nailing us, they should come and show and give us [comprehension] strategies and tactics how to deal and how to cope better in class” (Rosa).

This conclusion matches Nkambule and Amsterdam’s (2018) findings where the twenty participants (three principals, eight HOD’s and eleven post level 1 teachers) from three primary schools in a Mpumalanga district stated that the national officials and curriculum advisors who visit schools focus more on the output of what teachers are doing rather than the input. They did not provide sufficient teacher support, neither did they mentor, advise or coach teachers, but focused more on criticizing teachers and looking for mistakes (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). The subject advisors were more interested in visiting schools to monitor and provide proof to the DoE that they are visiting schools (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). Therefore, EHL teachers have adverse attitudes towards Subject advisors as they felt that the advisors were either not interested in assisting them with their challenges when assessing comprehension or were ‘nailing’ them for what they were doing in the classroom. Moreover, teachers felt the subject advisors needed to provide mentorship, advice and guidance towards teaching and assessing comprehension effectively, rather than criticizing and judging teachers in their practice. It is clear from the above theme that EHL teachers got no help from DoE or subject advisors to combat the challenges they faced when teaching and assessing comprehension. The teachers relied on themselves or on their colleagues and HoDs to cope with challenges they faced when assessing comprehension to second language learners. Thus, the next theme discusses the support from Head of Department (HoD), staff and school clusters for EHL teachers for assessing comprehension.

4.5.7.3. Support from Head of Department (HoD), staff and school clusters for EHL teachers for assessing comprehension

Participants had mixed experiences when it came to support from their HoDs and staff with regards to teaching and assessing comprehension to second language English speaking learners. While some participants indicated that they received support from their school staff and HoDs, others had to carry the burden of providing the support to other teachers or depend on other schools. For Darla, the burden of English language fell upon her:

“My HOD does not know much about English. I carry the entire load and I do whatever I need to do, and I got the grade 5s and the grade 4s under my wing and I mentor them... I don't have any teacher support”. (Darla)

Darla took charge because the Head of Department (HoD) was a non-English speaker. As a result, Darla received no teacher support from her school management, and had taken responsibility for mentoring the English teachers. Therefore, Darla felt accountable for the EHL subject and the other teachers in her school. Darla was the one providing support for other English teachers in other grades rather than receiving support for assessing comprehension from her management.

In certain areas of the Umlazi district, schools in surrounding areas come together and form clusters to assist teachers in the teaching and assessing of subjects. In the area, where the study was conducted, the existing English cluster that assisted the EHL teachers in the area. Rosa revealed that she did not get much assistance from her HoD but got much help from the cluster.

“We get a lot of support from the cluster. I know anytime I need any assistance, I would get more assistance from [the] cluster head ... she knows what's going on because she also has second language learners there. So having a cluster really helps”. (Rosa)

Rosa felt that she could rely more on the cluster leadership for assistance rather than the school support. Her comment depicted the good relationships, support and unity between the EHL teachers from different schools in the area as they worked together to help each other through the clusters formed. The EHL teachers did not receive support from their HoD, or school staff but could rely on the cluster to share their struggles and successes when assessing comprehension to second language learners with each other. As a result, they could improve

their teaching and assessing methods, and improve second language learners' comprehension. Rosa also said, "*I think [we need] greater support from our HODs*" (Rosa). Bantwini (2019) posits that strong leadership in schools is crucial and beneficial to schools. If the school management team is involved and takes the lead in encouraging teachers, the chances of success are likely to be high (Bantwini, 2019). Therefore, if HoDs can lead well, encourage and support their teachers, the success rate in teachers' practice of teaching and assessing comprehension will improve, as well as learners' performance in comprehension.

Participants made no mention of having school subject committees. The grade six EHL teachers did not liaise with other EHL teachers in the other grades in their schools to discuss their challenges and come up with solutions to the challenges. Bantwini (2019) states that collaboration among teachers in the same school is vital and should be encouraged because most teachers at the primary school level are not specialists in the subject area. Therefore, teachers can learn a great deal from each other about effective teaching as they engage in collective inquiry (Bantwini, 2019).

However, some schools in the study provided support to EHL teachers. However, the support was not specific to comprehension:

"We have support from our HOD's in terms like in your subject. In terms of the subject English, on the overall, I get a lot of help from my HOD" (Brenda).

For Brenda, she receives aid with whatever challenges she encountered.

"She will send resources, she will give you ideas if you go to her with a problem and if you say 'I'm having a bit of a problem with this and I don't know how I'm going to get this through to the learners' so those kinds of things we get". (Brenda)

Brenda's HoD was more helpful than the HoD's of Darla and Rosa. The assistance the HoD provided did support Brenda in EHL as it was not specific to comprehension, "*...like overall support from the staff and ...obviously the other teachers.... its not specific support for comprehension*" (Brenda). Support given to Brenda was general and HoDs and school staff did not acknowledge the specific challenges EHL teachers encountered when assessing comprehension.

4.6. EHL teachers envisioning to improve assessing second language learners in comprehension in the future

Due to participants being neglected and unsupported by internal structures (HoDs) and external structures (parents, DoE, Subject advisors), participants voiced their hopes of what could potentially make assessing comprehension to second language learners run smoother. This theme presents the possibilities participants envisioned for improving the assessing of comprehension to grade six second language learners. This theme is divided into two sub-themes; ‘greater support from internal and external support structures’ and ‘call for the use of teacher assistants as translators when teaching and assessing EHL to second language learners’. These two sub-themes are presented below.

4.6.1. Greater support from internal and external support structures

Participants expressed their vision for the future as well as the possible changes to be made in order to assess comprehension in grade six effectively. Darla said:

“I think in ideal schools, with the right amount of support from the parents, from the learners from the teachers and so on with the key players” (Darla).

Darla believed that if internal and external support structures played their part, learning and assessing comprehension will be effective. Rosa explained that:

“I think greater support from our HODs and maybe workshops as well.... If somebody [department] can come off with a better idea. That would be fabulous”
(Rosa).

Responses from Darla and Rosa show the overlap of themes on ‘Absence of parental involvement in learners’ learning of comprehension’, ‘lack of support and guidance from DoE in assessing comprehension to second language learners’ and ‘Support from Head of Department (HoD), staff and school clusters for EHL teachers for assessing comprehension’. Bantwini (2019) posits that classroom success depends on the nature of support teachers are given. If given the support from the DoE, HoDs and staff and parent structures, EHL teachers are likely to be successful and improve second language learners’ comprehension of texts.

4.6.2. Call for the use of teacher assistants as translators when teaching and assessing comprehension of second language learners

Participants shared the same sentiment that it is difficult to teach second language learners because participants (EHL teachers) are not fluent in the isiZulu language. Darla stated that “*there is no ideal situation I [have to] use learners as my resource*” (Darla). Darla contradicted herself in this comment as she had previously mentioned that assistance from parents and teachers will make the situation better (See 4.5.4), but now seemed pessimistic about her situation, arguing that nothing could be done to make the situation better but to make use of their bilingual learners. This means teachers used bilingual learners to translate from English to isiZulu during comprehension so that learners could understand the instructions and the texts. Rosa showed the same pessimistic attitude as Darla by claiming:

“How else can we do but the way we are doing it right nowonly way I see the way it works for us is if I get another learner who speaks Zulu to explain to the child okay, this is what the question is asking,And I also found that when I was teaching Afrikaans, if you speak in Afrikaans and English, you know, you can get better results like that... because we (Non-isiZulu speaking teachers) don't know the language as well you know”(Rosa)

Rosa, previously an Afrikaans teacher, found that code-switching from Afrikaans to English seemed to help learners understand. However, because teachers did not know isiZulu well, they relied on bilingual learners to use translanguaging or code-switching. According to Childs (2016), translanguaging is used by multilingual individuals to move between the languages that they know to communicate in a range of social contexts. When learners use translanguaging, it can facilitate more effective learning and understanding (Child, 2016). However, Darla notes the dangers of using learners to translate as “*maybe that learner is translating in the incorrect way*”. Teachers would not be able to tell if work was communicated correctly or incorrectly in isiZulu as they do not understand the isiZulu language. Furthermore, learners who translate for teachers may be disadvantaged as this responsibility can be burdening and take their focus away from their learning to help others. Rosa states:

“We put [them] next to one of our bright learners whose helping [them] in some way, you know, and its not fair to other kids as well. Cause their time is also impacted on.” (Rosa)

Although teachers are aware of the disadvantages of using learners as translators, they are left with no other choice as they are not affluent in isiZulu. Van de Walt and Ruiters (2011) advocates that teachers be trained at teacher colleges to teach in the multilingual classroom so that they have some knowledge of the language to be able to converse with learners in their mother tongue. Brenda suggested the employment of a teacher assistant who can act as a translator in the classroom so that learners would not be used as translators.

“Especially if its home language in a school and there’s second language learners, I think it would help if there was an assistant who spoke in the native language. So, in isiZulu for example and was able to explain to the learners the difficult concepts in their language and then explain it in English.” (Brenda)

This response shows that both teachers and learners would benefit greatly from having teacher assistants in their classrooms to aid in delivering instruction in learners' mother tongue language. However, the reality in the South African education system is that there is shortage of resources and teachers (Bantwini, 2010). The Government is also faced with financial challenges as they introduced no-fee paying schools to accommodate financially struggling parents, while funds are needed to purchase textbooks and learning material for teachers and learners, and to buy stationery for section 21 schools (Maharaj et al., 2016). School Governing Bodies can offer to pay for such assistance but some schools are ‘cash-strapped’ because they do not receive school fees from parents or sufficient funds from the Department (Boateng, 2014). The idea of having such assistance is a dream that seems unlikely to come true.

The above analysis depicts the findings for the first research question “What are the experiences of EHL teachers of assessing comprehension of second language learners in grade six?” Data were analysed thematically, and it was found that the three participants from the study had a constructive and adverse experiences when assessing comprehension to second language learners. Data also showed the challenges EHL teachers faced when teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners. These included indiscipline; Covid-19 restrictions on peer learning and public library access; lack of infrastructure; lack of in-service training; and lack of support from parents, stakeholders and school HoDs. Data suggests that school structures, DoE and parents played a more active role in aiding EHL teachers so that EHL teachers can improve second language learners’ comprehension, rather than undermining teacher intelligence and criticizing teachers’ practice. Participants advocated having teacher assistants who can translate instruction from English to isiZulu so that learners can understand

comprehension texts better. However, with the Government financial crisis and schools' lack of funds, this idea seemed unrealistic. It is clear from the data that EHL teachers experienced highs and lows when teaching and assessing comprehension to second language learners. However, amidst their challenges, the participants still found creative methods to teach and assess comprehension effectively. Below are findings in relation to the second research question of this study; “What strategies do EHL teachers use to assess comprehension of second language learners in grade six?”

This research question of the study looked at the strategies EHL teachers used to assess comprehension to grade six second language learners. Data generated showed that multiple strategies were used by EHL teachers to assess and teach comprehension to grade six second language learners. From the data, three main themes arose; ‘multiple strategies used by EHL teachers to assess comprehension’, ‘the successes of teacher assessment strategies of learners’ performance’ and ‘drawbacks of EHL teachers’ strategies on learners’ performance’. These themes are presented below.

4.7. Multiple strategies used by EHL teachers to assess comprehension of second language learners

The strategies used by EHL teachers to teach and assess grade six second language learners’ comprehension followed the CAPS document, and included using synonyms in questions, using visual aids, and encouraging learner reading. It is important to note that teaching and assessing is inseparable. As discussed in the literature review, teaching comprehension and assessing comprehension should be seen as inseparable because assessment leads to good instruction and good instruction leads to good learner achievement (Pantiwati, 2013). Similarly, Oakleaf (2009) explains that as teachers reflect on the learner results of formative assessment, they work towards improving their instruction. Furthermore, teachers can provide learners with necessary aids to assist struggling learners. Hence, when teachers implement this new and improved instruction to increase learners’ learning, they ultimately improve their teaching and pedagogical skills.

From the data, five sub-themes emerged; ‘Structuring and aligning comprehension assessment activities to the EHL CAPS document’; ‘Using synonyms to make questions in comprehension assessment activities understandable’, ‘Using visual aids to promote learner understanding of the comprehension text’, and “simulating and developing healthy reading habits to assist second language learners with comprehension tasks’. Each of these sub-themes discusses in-

depth the ways EHL teachers teach and assess second language learners amidst their challenges and language barrier. Excerpts and participant quotes are presented to create a deep and rich discussion.

4.7.1. Structuring and aligning comprehension assessment activities to the EHL CAPS document

Participants indicated that they consistently set assessments for comprehension according to the CAPS policy document and did not set or design assessments for the sake of it. Darla revealed that: *“It [assessment] has to be in line, in keeping with the protocols of our policy document”* (Darla). The current CAPS curriculum is a prescriptive curriculum that demands uniformity across the nation even in assessment tasks in every subject (Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012). It stipulates strict guidelines for all teachers to follow to teach and assess learners to provide similar learning outcomes per subject across all socio-economic groups (Phasha, Bipath & Beckmann, 2016). Darla noted:

“It’s in keeping with [policy]. So, everything has to follow a certain format. So, we (teachers) cannot just go and do comprehension and say, we just dishing out a comprehension to a group of learners and they need to just read now and, you know, answer the questions” (Darla)

Participants made sure the assessment tasks were aligned to CAPS. Hoadley (2018) posits that CAPS sets out what needs to be covered in detail, and teachers must follow these details to teach and assess comprehension to second language learners. Brenda also claimed:

“I follow the document.... when I am setting the paper, I set the paper according to their level. So, I have the correct breakdown in terms of higher-order and lower-order and middle-order [questions]” (Brenda)

Brenda also follows the CAPS assessment guidelines like Darla, but also sets comprehension tasks according to Barrett’s Taxonomy, as CAPS stipulates. Rosa indicated that following Barrett’s Taxonomy caters for those second language learners who struggle with the English language

“We use the different order questions like lower-order ... the kids that are weak, with the lower order questions and they able to, you know, get at least some marks there.” (Rosa)

Barrett's taxonomy catered for all levels of learners, whether they are 'weak', or 'high-flyers'. It allowed struggling second language learners to correctly answer the 'low level' questions but also pushed the 'high-flyers' to think creatively and critically when they encountered the 'higher level' questions in the assessments of comprehension. Thus, all learners were not assessed on just one standard or level in a task, but on different levels. This is to ensure struggling learners will pass, while pushing learners to think 'out of the box'. However, because second language learners have smaller vocabularies than English-only speaking learners, EHL teachers came up with other ways to further adapt the CAPS assessment guidelines to learners' capabilities and assist them in comprehension. The next theme discusses how EHL teachers used synonyms to formulate comprehension assessment activities to make them more understandable for learners.

4.7.2. Using synonyms to make questions in comprehension assessment activities understandable

When participants were asked the question *“How do you adapt the CAPS curriculum to support the second language grade six learners when assessing comprehension?”*, Brenda revealed that she used synonyms to further explain the questions when assessing comprehension.

“What I do is when I am writing the questions out, when I am setting the paper, I give them a little bit of more explanation. So, if there's a difficult question like, for example, if its 'identify', in brackets I would say 'list', you know, or 'point out'”
(Brenda)

Brenda used this creative method to help her learners understand the questions in the assessments of comprehension whilst still complying with the policy guidelines. The simpler synonym helped them to answer the questions easily. Although this technique made assessment simpler for learners, it still shows that teachers viewed learners as empty vessels and forced them to be passive recipients of knowledge. In a qualitative study conducted in Iran by Karimian and Mohammadi (2015), EFAL teachers found using synonyms to teach second language learners very useful. However, Karimian and Mohammadi (2015) argue that synonyms in English are close to the meaning but not the exact meaning of the same word.

Hence, one should be aware when choosing synonyms (Khazaal, 2019) as the synonym used may not reflect what the question means.

Moreover, teachers also use synonyms to show the control they have over the meaning that learners will make from the text, as they specifically tell learners what is required whilst robbing the learners of the satisfaction of finding the answer themselves. Therefore, all learners will produce the answers teachers want but not the answer that give learners' perspectives, which can impact learners' educational growth. Lak, Soleimani and Parvaneh (2017) posit that when teachers have full control over teaching and assessing methods, it prevents students' educational growth. However, participants noted that learners have problems when it comes to writing down answers as they could not articulate their thoughts properly on paper. Rosa stated, *"in their writing, they [are] not able to write answers... they don't do very well"* (Rosa).

Therefore, participants felt they have to help learners in comprehension. Brenda says, *"I never leave them on their own because then they absolutely in the dark then, you know they lost"*. Participants felt the need to point out what was required of the learner because they feared that if they did not, learners would be lost and fail assessments. Participants did not realise that 'helping' learners this way was causing learners to always expect help and never think of the answer on their own. The next theme discusses how EHL teachers use useful comprehension assessment strategies such as the Thinking aloud strategy and the Summarizing strategy.

4.7.3. Using useful comprehension assessment strategies: The Thinking aloud strategy and the Summarizing strategy

Rosa described using the thinking aloud strategy when assessing second language learners in comprehension. She stated:

"[In] comprehension... I read the story with them and then we discuss it...and look at how they are interpreting it ... the kids interpret the story in a different way... and they relate it... to their own experiences ...then we discuss" (Rosa)

Sonmez and Sulak (2018) say that in the thinking aloud strategy, learners vocally express his / her thoughts and shows how comprehension occurs while engaging in a text. Rosa's comment notes that she allows learners to vocalize their thoughts and interpretations through classroom discussions after the text was read. Therefore, she encourages learners to 'think aloud', make their thoughts visible and be aware of learners' comprehension processes (Sonmez & Sulak,

2018). Rosa also allows for learners to connect their prior knowledge and experiences to the text to see how learners construct meaning, getting different interpretations from learners. Rosa alluded to the use of the ‘thinking aloud’ strategy, she did use it as a comprehension assessment strategy to see what goes on in her learners’ minds as learners provided their interpretations of comprehension texts (Zayed, 2021).

Participants also described using the summarizing strategy during comprehension when they requested bilingual learners to explain to the other learners what the text is about. Rosa says,

“I get another learner who speaks zulu to explain to the child...it helps”. (Rosa)

Brenda also says “[their] friend is explaining it to them first in isiZulu and then explaining it to them in English... so they sort of understand better” (Brenda)

According to Özdemir (2018) summarizing entails finding the main idea of the text and associating it with secondary ideas whilst eliminating unnecessary ideas of the text. Even though the learners retelling the text to their peer in isiZulu, they still summarize the text as they pick out the important information without giving unnecessary details which improves their recalling and organization abilities (Khoshsima, & Nia, 2014). However, Brenda requests learners to summarize and retell in isiZulu and then in English. Like the thinking aloud strategy, the participants did not directly mention that they used the summarizing as a comprehension assessment strategy for the purposes of improving comprehension in learners. Participants used this strategy for the purposes of aiding struggling learners. Therefore, by indirectly requesting learners to translate texts to other learners improved the translating learner’s ability to summarize, recognize important details and improve their own comprehension whilst helping the struggling learners have a better understanding of the text. Another strategy participants used to improve comprehension for second language learners was using visual aids.

4.7.4. Using visual aids to promote learner understanding of the comprehension text

Darla mentioned that using visual aids helped learners to gain a better understanding of the text. Darla was a firm believer in using pictures. She says:

“If there’s a picture there... [it] creates more understanding of the picture... [looking] at the pictures, any learner or any person who is not fluent in English or

any language as such... will be able to gather what is in the picture. So basically, a picture tells a 1000 words.” (Darla)

Pictures bring the outside world into the classroom, making situations more real and helping the learner to use appropriate associated language (Kaya, 2012). Using pictures can help learners to strengthen and reinforce what they have learned as learners absorb the information through additional sensory perception (Allen & Marquez, 2019). Studies have shown that using pictures in English classrooms stirs up and captures the interest of second language learners (Allen & Marquez, 2019; Mathew & Alidmat, 2013, Macwan 2015). Furthermore, using pictures encourages learners to make predictions about the texts. When learners are given a picture, they can make predictions on what they think will happen in the text before the text is read. Predicting using pictures helps the learners’ understanding of comprehension texts as learners’ prior knowledge gets activated, a purpose for reading is set and learners guess what the passage is going to be about, and thereafter, learners read the passage to see if their predictions were correct (Duke & Pearson, 2009; Echeverri Acosta & McNulty Ferri, 2010). Whilst Darla may not have been directly asking learners to make predictions about the comprehension text, by learners looking at the pictures, learners can engage with the text and make predictions about what they think will happen. Therefore, by Darla using pictures, she encourages the prediction strategy to improve learners’ comprehension.

4.7.5. Simulating and developing healthy reading habits to assist second language learners with comprehension tasks

As explained in the theme “*Effects of Covid 19 on comprehension: lack of access to public libraries and peer learning*”, participants believed that learners can expand their vocabulary and English language through reading. However, Darla states:

“Parents are a bit sceptical. They don’t want to send them to library because due to like, you know, the danger situation and now Covid” (Darla).

This theme overlaps with the subtheme ‘*Effects of Covid 19 on comprehension: lack of access to public libraries and peer learning*’ as learners’ access to libraries was limited. However, Iftanti (2012) says it is vital for second language learners to have healthy reading habits. Second language learners greatly benefit from English reading practices as they enhance their social skills, hand-eye coordination learning, and enjoyment (Iftanti, 2012). Krashen (2003) explains that teachers must motivate learners to read by providing them access to interesting and

understandable books, and time for them to read. Therefore, participants came up with ways to cultivate good reading habits in learners. Darla created a library within her class to encourage learners to read: *“I get books that I have at home and from wherever and I formed a small library in my class”*. Darla claimed that this method *“seems to be working”*. This suggests that second language learners were engaged in the reading material and developing good reading habits.

Rosa also encouraged learners to engage in reading materials to build their confidence.

“We use the JP (junior primary) books. So, we actually borrow some of those readers so that we can help the kids with simple stuff. Cause if they can read like that, then slowly but surely, they can get more confident”. (Rosa)

Rosa started with books at a lower level to build the confidence of learners until they reached the grade six level of reading. By starting learners with simpler English texts, learners are able to read and understand what they are reading with ease, and familiarize themselves with simple sentences that they can learn to construct. Junior books introduces learners to vocabulary and language structures that are less complicated, and have relatively shorter texts (Malu, 2013). Therefore, junior level books are much easier to understand. Once learners have mastered these simpler books, they will have the confidence to engage in the reading of higher level age-appropriate reading texts. The next theme will discuss the success of EHL teachers' assessment strategies on learner performance in comprehension.

4.8. The successes of teacher assessment strategies on learners' performance in comprehension

When participants were asked the question *“How do grade six second language learners perform when assessing comprehension?”* Some participants believed their strategies were useful as learners performed reasonably well in comprehension. Darla, who used visual aids to promote understanding in comprehension in learners and encouraged reading describes her learner average in comprehension to *“be like 60-65%”* (Darla). Darla found learner average pleasing as she felt *“I don't have a problem”* (Darla), with learners' comprehension performances. Darla believed the strategies she employed in her classroom were working as they gave pleasing results to her. Similarly, Brenda believed her strategies of using synonyms in questions to make them more understandable worked because learners' interest increased towards comprehension rather than other aspects of English *“they perform better in*

comprehension than they do at the other aspects like language, like writing, those things” (Brenda).

4.9. Drawbacks of EHL teachers’ strategies on learners’ performance in comprehension

This theme discusses the drawbacks EHL teachers experienced in using their strategies, and the impact on learners’ performance in comprehension. All three participants unanimously agreed that learners only performed well in comprehension when they received assistance from teachers as compared to working on their own. For Darla, with her assistance, the majority of the learners in the class engaged in their comprehension tasks effectively *“there will be like maybe 80 % of the class that would answer correctly and follow my steps”* (Darla). When Darla assists learners and gives them a breakdown of the texts, questions and what they need to do in detail, most of the learners followed through and answered the task correctly. However, for Brenda, the difference between her help and no help was evident in learners’ marks. Brenda described her classroom scenario with and without her assistance.

“With teacher assistance in the class when they are doing class comprehensions, I think they fall between 50-60% as an average and when they are on their own its between 40-50%. So, you see that difference.” (Brenda)

There was a ten per cent difference between learners’ marks with teachers' help and without teachers' help. According to the CAPS document, learners are required to achieve at least a 50% to pass Home language. In Brenda’s case, the ten per cent increase in learners' marks due to assistance from the teacher determined whether the learner would pass or fail English. Brenda further explained reasons for such low marks:

“When it’s a test and they have to read and answer on their own so they don’t have any assistance that’s when they do not perform as good... they would [perform good] if a teacher was explaining to them and going through it with them and discussing the texts with them and the questions with them.” (Brenda)

This buttressed second language learners’ lack of understanding and misunderstanding of texts, questions on tests and test instructions on their own because of the language barrier. However, if their teacher had to explain the instructions, text and questions, learners performed better.

From the findings it is evident that EHL teachers used creative assessment strategies to improve comprehension in second language learners. EHL teachers used synonyms, pictures and reinforcing reading habits in learners to help them understand comprehension texts and perform well in assessments. Participants also used questioning as an assessment strategy as they followed the strict guidelines of the EHL CAPS document, which guided them on how to set questions in tasks based on Barrett's Taxonomy. However, unbeknown to EHL teachers, they also used useful comprehension assessment strategies such as summarizing, thinking aloud and prediction. Thus, even with participants being non-specialist teachers teaching EHL, having lack of support from stakeholders, parents and HoDs and even lack of preservice and in-service training, participants went to great lengths to improve learners' comprehension through assessment. The next section discusses the theoretical framework and how it was used to guide this analysis.

4.10. The relation of Vygotsky's ZPD to the study

This section discusses Vygotsky's ZPD in relation to the findings of the study, that is, EHL teachers experiences of assessing comprehension as they guided second language English speaking learners through the ZPD. Following this discussion, the concept of scaffolding is discussed and how EHL teachers 'scaffolded' learners by using synonyms to explain questions and learners as translators as they move through the ZPD. Thereafter, the concept of mediation is also recapped as well as the mediation tools EHL teachers used such as visual aids (using pictures) and creating classroom libraries to enhance understanding. Finally, a conclusion is provided to bring closure to this chapter.

4.10.1. Vygotsky's ZPD

As discussed in Chapter Two, the ZPD is a tool that provides teachers with an understanding of how learning occurs in learners and how to enable learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Chaiklin, 2003; Wass & Golding, 2014). South Africa is diverse both culturally and linguistically, but English is the leading choice for many parents as the LoLT for their children (Theron & Nel, 2005). Therefore, many learners in South Africa are not taught in their mother tongue but in English. EHL teachers are tasked with teaching and assessing second language learners' English on the same level as English-speaking learners. This means that EHL teachers must guide second language learners through the ZPD by taking them from their actual development of what they can do on their own to their potential development of what they can do with the assistance of a teacher, using mediation tools and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Shabani et al., 2010). The

rationale for using this theme in this study is to explore the way EHL teachers experienced assessment of second language learners through strategies they used to move second language learners through the ZPD using mediation and scaffolding.

4.10.2. Scaffolding

Scaffolding is used to describe the kinds of support that teachers give learners to move them towards new knowledge, skills and understanding (Maybin et al., 1992). In this study, scaffolding was used when participants used other learners 'more competent' in English and isiZulu to translate texts and instructions so that struggling second language learners could understand. Participants also indicated that they followed Barrett's Taxonomy order of questions in assessments as stipulated in the EHL CAPS. Hardman and Ng'ambi (2003) posit that using questions is a very useful indicator of what assistance the learner needs as it provides exclusive access to the learner's ZPD. By using Barrett's taxonomy, teachers could observe what order of questioning learners can answer from the comprehension. When learners did not understand Barrett's taxonomy questioning words, participants scaffolded learners by using synonyms to provide an understandable meaning of the questions. Providing synonyms assisted in moving learners through their ZPDs. Learners may have understood the comprehension text (actual development-what they could do) but could not understand what the questions required of them (potential development-what they could do with assistance). Therefore, teachers scaffolded learners using synonyms as an explanation so learners could understand what was required of them to perform successfully in comprehension assessments.

4.10.3. Mediation

Mediation refers to the interaction between individuals and their worlds using cultural artefacts, symbols and tools (Thompson, 2013). These mediation objects may be physical such as computers, pens, worksheets etc., or psychological tools such as language (Thompson, 2013). Teachers use mediation tools to enhance learner understanding of comprehension during the teaching and learning process (Mutekwe, 2018). Using mediation tools to facilitate learning helps teachers move learners through the ZPD successfully (Shrestha & Coffin, 2012). In this study, participants utilized mediation tools such as visual aids (using pictures), enforcing reading by creating classroom libraries, and providing junior level books to build vocabulary and increase reading in learners. Moreover, EHL teachers used language as a mediation tool through learners translating teachers' instructions from English to isiZulu so that learners could

gain a better understanding. As teachers used these mediation tools to facilitate the process of learning, they became mediators (Levykh, 2008).

4.11. The effect of scaffolding and mediation on assessing EHL comprehension

As learners go through the ZPD, teachers must gradually dismantle the support structure as learners advanced towards independence (Harland, 2003). They must slowly retract their assistance so that learners can do the task independently. However, data from this study showed that learners only performed well when receiving assistance from the teacher. Shabani et al. (2010) state that “the focus of teaching is on tasks inside the ZPD which the learner cannot do by him/herself but has the potential to accomplish with the guidance of others” (p. 238). Therefore, in this study, most tasks were set within the learners' ZPD (as reflected in Figure 1 on page 39: grey circle) because second language learners could complete the task with assistance, and their performance increased with teacher assistance. However, participants claimed that only with teachers help can learners perform well in comprehension, but when they are left to do the assessment alone, they do not perform well. Hence, learners could only move through their ZPDs and reach their potential level only with the help of the teacher. If the scaffolding and mediation tools were removed, learners would not perform well on the task. Furthermore, for some learners those same comprehension assessments lied in the zone of what they cannot do even with assistance (Figure 1: white circle). Darla mentioned 80 % of the class follow her steps whilst “*the others, the like 20 %...maybe did not understand*”. Rosa also says that certain learners “*can't read and write at all*”. For these learners, the assessments were beyond their capabilities and therefore, even with assistance, cannot do the task. As a result, learners left questions blank or rewrote the question in the answer slot. It can be deduced in both instances that learners at these schools are second language English speaking learners being forced to learn English at a Home Language level and the language barrier between teacher and learner, learners cannot take on the assessments successfully because they have a lack of exposure to English but are placed in schools where the LoLT is English. It is for these reasons second language learners either cannot complete the comprehension assessment successfully without teacher assistance or cannot do the comprehension assessment at all even with teacher assistance.

4.12. Conclusion

This study found that participants experienced rewarding emotions whenever their learners excelled in comprehension and when they were able to create interest and enthusiasm in

learners towards comprehension. Participants however, had adverse experiences because of the language barrier that existed between teachers and learners, which made it difficult to explain difficult words and concepts to learners. Participants particularly had difficulties teaching new learners who came from isiZulu medium schools and have no prior knowledge of English. Participants also revealed factors that influenced their teaching and assessment of comprehension, which included discipline problems due to learners not understanding instructions, Covid-19 and its impact on learning and lacking resources and infrastructure, lack of reading sources and overcrowding in classrooms. Moreover, participants described their frustrations due to the lack of support from parents, DoE, subject advisors and school management teams. Participants advocated that the DoE and subject advisors provide more support and mentorship to teachers rather than undermine teachers and criticize their practice. The study also showed the limited support HoDs provided, causing them to rely on clusters. Participants also advocated for teacher assistants, which however, seemed unlikely.

Central in this study was the EHL teachers' devotion and commitment to help second language learners to improve their performance in comprehension regardless of the challenges they faced. Thus, participants revealed creative methods such as using pictures, creating classroom libraries, and using synonyms in questions to assist learners during assessments. Despite the challenges EHL teachers faced, teachers went to great lengths to ensure learners achieved their goals.

Vygotsky's ZPD was used as the theoretical framework understand EHL teachers experiences of assessing grade six second language learners. Participants used scaffolding techniques such as using learners as translators to code switch and synonyms of key question words. Participants also discussed the mediation tools they used such as pictures and fostering reading through classroom libraries and providing junior level books for learners, which increased learners' vocabulary. The next chapter summarises the emerging themes from Chapter 4 and then looks at recommendations for this study and for further studies.

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Summary and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided a deep analysis of the data generated through semi-structured interviews in response to the two research questions of this study. The data generated was analysed and presented thematically. The interpretation of the findings of this study were related to relevant literature and Vygotsky's ZPD. This chapter provides an overview of the study, key findings, and recommendations for further studies.

5.2. Overview of study

This section provides an overview of the study chapters. Chapters one to chapter four are broken down and presented in the paragraphs below.

5.2.1. Chapter one

Chapter one served as an introduction and background to this study. The background of the study was provided, which discussed South African children's performance in comprehension. The focus of this study was to explore how EHL teachers experienced assessment of comprehension to second language learners, particularly isiZulu speaking learners, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; as well as the strategies EHL teachers, use to assess comprehension to second language learners in grade six. This was followed by a discussion of the location of the study which described the context of the three primary schools. The rationale was then discussed whereby the contextual motivation and personal motivation for this study was provided. The research methods used, data collection methods and trustworthiness were briefly provided.

5.2.2. Chapter two

Chapter two provided a review of past literature relevant to this study. Both international and national studies were discussed, showing the similarities and differences. The review showed the lack of research on this topic as many studies focused on EFAL rather than EHL teaching. The assessment strategies for assessing comprehension employed by EHL teachers was also explored and presented in this chapter. Vygotsky's ZPD was the theoretical framework used to guide this study, and was also addressed in this chapter along with its concepts of mediation and scaffolding to understand EHL teachers' experiences as they assessed comprehension of grade six second language learners.

5.2.3. Chapter three

This chapter discussed the qualitative research approach used, located within the interpretivist paradigm to understand EHL teachers' experience of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners and the strategies EHL teachers used. This study opted for a case study research design as it was a case of EHL teachers. Participants were purposefully selected to generate data. The data generation instruments, and methods of data analysis were explained as well as trustworthiness, ethics and limitations of the study.

5.2.4. Chapter four

Chapter four presented the findings of the study in detail. The data that was generated through semi-structured interviews, interviews were transcribed, and were analysed and presented in themes. In this chapter, the biographical information of the three participants was discussed as well as the themes that arose from the data. The themes were discussed in relation to the two research questions. The theoretical framework, Vygotsky's ZPD, along with its concepts of scaffolding and mediation, were used to explain EHL teachers' experiences of assessing grade six second language learners, as well as the strategies they used to assess learners effectively. Literature was incorporated to further understand the participants' responses.

5.3. Summary of key findings

There were two research questions that this study aimed to answer:

- What are the experiences of EHL teachers in assessing comprehension of second language learners in grade six?
- What strategies do EHL teachers use to assess comprehension of second language learners in grade six?

The above research questions were motivated by the researcher's interest in understanding the experiences of EHL teachers when they engage with assessing comprehension as well as the strategies they employed to assess comprehension of grade six second language learners. The findings of this study revealed that participants had a multiplicity of experiences when assessing comprehension to second language learners. The summary of the key findings that were found is discussed under the two research questions. The key findings discussed under the research question are italicised for emphasis.

5.3.1. Research question one: What are the experiences of EHL teachers in assessing comprehension of second language learners in grade six?

Participants experienced rewarding emotions and positive feelings whenever their learners excelled in comprehension such as when learners increased their vocabulary, became interested in comprehension and became more confident in the English language. Participants also found it rewarding when they were able to cultivate learners' interest and enthusiasm towards comprehension in the way they read comprehension passages to learners. The findings revealed that EHL teachers enjoyed their practice whenever learners improved or excelled in comprehension. The results of this study mirrored the results from studies conducted by Sutton and Wheatley (2003) and Chen (2019) which found that teachers experienced positive rewarding emotions concerning learners' improved progress, learner responsiveness and participation in lessons, and an increase in learner motivation and confidence.

On the contrary, participants also revealed *the adverse experiences they had when assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners* because of the language barrier that exists between teacher and learner. For example, due to learners and teachers speaking different mother tongues, participants revealed they had problems communicating with learners, and learners lost focus because they did not understand their teachers' instructions. It was particularly challenging for the participants to teach and assess comprehension, especially when new learners attended their schools, having previously learnt in their mother tongue language, isiZulu. With these learners having no experience of learning in English before and lacking exposure to the English language, participants expressed their hardships of trying to teach and assess a learner who does not understand English at all. These hardships were experienced by EHL teachers during *teaching, learning and assessing comprehension* such as when teachers were teaching a child who does not understand a single word the teacher was saying. Drawing similarities from studies (Theron & Nel, 2005; Gandar, Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll 2005, Childs, 2015) all three EHL teachers in this study expressed the hardships they experienced as *the language barrier had an influence on second language learners written comprehension assessments* as learners would leave questions blank, rewrite the questions in the answer slot or produce one-word answers simply because they did not fully understand the language of the text. The lack of understanding of the comprehension texts due to the language barrier experienced by learners caused a drop in learners' performance and creates a greater challenge to EHL teachers.

Additionally, the findings revealed *factors that influenced EHL teachers' experiences of teaching, learning and assessing of EHL comprehension* such as that some EHL teachers were *non-specialist teachers teaching EHL*. The findings showed that teachers were not adequately prepared and were inexperienced to teach EHL as they were *non-specialist English teachers teaching EHL*. This shows that teachers did not have a say in the subjects they taught but rather, were given subjects to teach based on the needs of the school. Thus, the study found that the CAPS curriculum assumed that primary school teachers were generalist teachers who could teach all subjects. However, it can be argued that all subjects regardless of grade, needed to be taught by a specialist teacher for their proper implementation and for learners to gain a firm foundation.

Furthermore, the study found that some of the participants *lacked in-service training to teach second language learners*, let alone, EHL. It is for this reason that the participants had a vague understanding of what comprehension is. Therefore, it was found that proper, adequate training of teachers was needed. English teachers being inadequately trained is a global issue and many international studies (Brumen & Cagran, 2011, Oakley, 2011, Fareh, 2010) and national studies (O'Connor & Geiger, 2009; Nel & Muller, 2010, Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019) provide anecdotal evidence that suggest that teachers are insufficiently trained. Moreover, EHL teachers felt *neglected and undermined by stakeholders, DoE and school management teams*, which led teachers to rely on their expertise to teach and assess comprehension to second language learners. this caused EHL teachers to have negative *attitudes toward the DoE and subject advisors* as frustrations grew as participants advocated that DoE and subject advisors show them how to assess comprehension to second language learners effectively, rather than undermine and criticize them for what they were doing (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). Little support from HODs was offered to teachers, and it was not helpful specifically to comprehension. School clusters proved beneficial to participants more than HODs and other stakeholders.

Learner discipline and negative attitudes, Covid-19, lack of infrastructure and lack of parental involvement also emerged as *factors that influenced EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension of second language learners*. Participants revealed that the language barrier provoked ill-discipline and disruptive behaviour because learners did not understand teachers' instructions or what assessments required. Furthermore, overcrowded classrooms made indiscipline a greater challenge, and teachers had difficulty meeting the needs of struggling

learners. Access to library resources that could have assisted learners was prohibited to curb the spread of the virus. Participants were disappointed with the lack of parental support and called for a more active role of parents in their learners' education. Participants believed that if parents were more involved in learners' learning, comprehension would improve, much like studies by Singh, Mbokodi & Msila (2004), and Mashiya (2011), and Mncube & du Plessis (2011). Most of these factors were out of teachers' control and contributed to the adverse experiences EHL teachers had when assessing comprehension.

Participants revealed their *envisionings for assessing second language learners in comprehension in the future*. They called on all stakeholders, HoDs and parents to be more involved in second language learners learning. Teachers require *DoE, subject advisors and parents to provide more support to EHL teachers* so that comprehension can be implemented effectively. This way, learners can be supported at school as well as at home. More in-depth workshops and training programs needed to be held by DoE and subject advisors will adequately prepare teachers for the effective teaching and assessment of comprehension. Teachers also called *for teacher assistants as translators* or who would be able code-switch from isiZulu language to English and vice versa, so that learners can understand instructions better. Arguably, if in-depth development workshops, training and assistance from the DoE and subject advisors were adequately given to EHL teachers, and teachers received proper training, then teacher assistants to translate would not be needed as comprehension would be taught and assessed effectively.

The second research question highlights the findings related to the strategies EHL teachers use to assess comprehension to grade six second language learners.

5.3.2. Research question two: What strategies do EHL teachers use to assess comprehension of second language learners in grade six?

One of the key findings that emerged from this study was that all EHL teachers in this study *used unique and creative strategies (such as using pictures, synonyms, instilling healthy reading habits) to teach and assess comprehension of grade six second language learners*. Participants also unknowingly and indirectly used *useful comprehension assessments strategies* such as *thinking aloud* when participants asked learners to provide their interpretations and understanding of the comprehension text, *summarizing* when they asked bilingual learners to translate and provide the main points of the text to the struggling learners

and *prediction* (Duke & Pearson, 2009; Echeverri Acosta & McNulty Ferri, 2010). when participants provided learners with a picture and fostered prediction as learners looked at the picture and determine will happen in the text (Allen & Marquez, 2019; Mathew & Alidmat, 2013, Macwan 2015). Although EHL teachers were inadequately trained and left unsupported by DoE and parents, they still persevered to assess comprehension effectively.

Another key finding was that all three EHL teachers *structured and aligned their assessments in comprehension with the assessment guidelines stipulated in the EHL CAPS document*. This meant that teachers did not design assessments in comprehension according to their discretion but designed assessments according to what policy stipulated. Therefore, EHL teachers set comprehension tasks according to Barrett's taxonomy's level of questioning that catered for the weak learner, the average learner, and the high-flyer. This exposed learners to a range of questions that could foster critical and creative thinking rather than just simple recall questions. However, because of the language barrier, following the CAPS assessment guidelines and using Barrett's taxonomy was not enough to help second language learners in comprehension. Therefore, EHL teachers followed policy but added creative and unique assessment strategies to the assessment (Pictures, synonyms) to make comprehension more understandable to learners. EHL teachers' assessments in comprehension comply with policy but teachers further simplified the assessments for learners to understand better.

Another key finding was that teachers believed their *strategies were successful*, only when they provided learners with assistance. Other than that, learners would perform poorly when left to answer questions on their own. This finding showed the reliance learners had on teachers during English assessments because of learners' language barrier. Learners' performance levels fell in the 40-50 % range which, in EHL, indicates failure as learners required 50% to pass. Therefore, second language learners were incapable of tackling assessments in comprehension competently on their own at grade six level. They depended on their teachers (such as translation of the text into isiZulu, teacher explaining in the text detail and discussing what the questions require with learners or using pictures and synonyms next to the questions) because they still did not have a firm grasp of the English language at grade six level.

5.3.3. Key findings in relation to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

Concerning Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978), EHL teachers reflected on their experiences as they moved second language learners through their ZPDs from their actual

development level (what they can do on their own) to their potential development level (what they can do with assistance from a teacher). From the findings, EHL teachers described the multiplicity of experiences as they helped learners move from what they knew to what they needed to know. EHL teachers revealed the joys they experienced when learners understood comprehension as they moved through the ZPD, as well as the hardships they experienced caused by the language barrier between teacher and learner. Internal factors (such as lack of support from HoDs, lack of infrastructure, discipline and being non-specialist teachers) and external factors (lack of training, lack of support from DoE, Subject advisors and parents, Covid-19), proved influential to EHL teachers experiences of implementing assessment to learners as they move learners through their ZPDs. Nevertheless, EHL teachers used creative scaffolding techniques (Using synonyms, learner translators) and mediation tools (pictures, reading books, code-switching) to help learners move through their ZPDs. It was found that second language learners were not able to complete assessments in comprehension successfully on their own without help from the teacher. Hence, learners could only move through their ZPDs with the help of the teacher. The language barrier, the fact that the learners are second language English learners learning English at Home Language level, and the lack of training and support for EHL teachers provided reasons why second language learners were not assessed effectively. Had EHL teachers been specialist teachers, adequately trained in-service and pre-service, and provided with the necessary support, teaching and assessing comprehension would have been more effective and successful. Nevertheless, even with a lack of support, training and being non-specialist teachers, EHL teachers in this study still showed commitment and dedication to assist second language learners using creative and innovative techniques to help learners through their ZPDs when assessing comprehension.

5.4. Recommendations for the study

Based on the responses by the participants in this study, the recommendations are constructed concerning the experiences EHL teachers had when assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. The recommendations for this study are discussed below.

The first recommendation is for continuous professional development for teachers to be held by the DoE and schools in the form of in-depth workshops and training programs. In-service development of teachers would equip EHL teachers with new skills and knowledge to successfully assess comprehension to second language learners, as well as refine and improve their taken-for-granted assessment strategies. Furthermore, the professional development

provided to teachers would make teachers feel valued and supported, boosting their morale and work ethic in the classroom, and positively impacting learners' achievement. The current workshops and training programs held by the DoE and schools should not be held annually, or primarily focus on reading the CAPS document to teachers. Rather, training and workshops should be ongoing and place more emphasis on assessment strategies and practices, as well as model strategies that show EHL teachers how assessing comprehension of second language English speaking learners should be done. Moreover, the DoE should ensure that subject advisors visit schools regularly providing assistance and guidance to EHL teachers rather than simply monitoring them.

The second recommendation is for the DoE to revise their policies that permit non-specialist teachers to teach their specialist subjects at the primary school level and not only at the high school level. English specialist teachers possess high-quality knowledge of their specialist subject which can help second language learners gain a deeper and broader understanding of comprehension texts and adequately prepare learners for assessments. Thus, specialist teachers can build a firm and long-lasting foundation of English for second language learners because they have strong subject knowledge and can implement curriculum and assessment better than non-specialist teachers. Moreover, specialist teachers possess high confidence in their specialist subject, and would be able to deliver comprehension with passion, excitement and motivation and be able to teach their subject to the best of their ability. Thus, having English specialist teachers would tap from their relevant knowledge, techniques and various strategies that would bring out the best in learners.

The third recommendation pertains to active parental involvement at schools. The findings revealed that participants believed that learners perform better when parents play a more active role in learners learning. However, the study revealed that there was lack of parental involvement in primary schools. This study recommends that schools develop good relationships with parents and encourage them to be partners with teachers. Establishing partnerships with parents will encourage learning to take place at home rather than ending when schools close for the day. Teachers can show parents what they can do to facilitate learning at home. Frequent parent meetings should be held at parents' to give regular updates on learners' strengths and weaknesses. With parents' active involvement in learning, learner behavioural problems and absenteeism would be minimized, and learner achievement would improve.

The fourth recommendation advises universities to emphasize pre-service training on assessment strategies and how to address language barriers when teaching English to second language speaking learners. They should equip student teachers with the necessary skills, values, knowledge, and strategies to address the hardships English teachers face when assessing second language learners because of the language barrier. There is a growing number of second language speaking learners attending English medium schools. Thus, newly appointed teachers need to be adequately prepared to communicate, facilitate, and assess second language learners.

The fifth recommendation for this study pertains to the DoE as findings revealed that teachers worked in schools that lacked resources such as functional libraries and had overcrowded classrooms. It is recommended that the Department provide the resources to upgrade primary schools so that learners can have access to such facilities and increase their comprehension skills. More classrooms would allow for a smaller number of learners in the classrooms, enabling teachers to provide more one-on-one and instruction of learners. Moreover, providing or upgrading library facilities would allow second language learners to access English books and encourage reading, overall improving their vocabulary and comprehension.

The sixth and final recommendation is for EHL teachers to provide immediate and effectual feedback to learners. Feedback is an integral part of learning as it provides learners with a comparison of their performance with their academic goals, intended to help learners achieve their goals (Schartel, 2012). Winstone and Boud (2020) posit that assessment and feedback go hand-in-hand. None of the participants made mention of providing learners with appropriate or immediate feedback after assessments. If learners were not given feedback, it could lead to poor learner performance as learners would continue to do the incorrect things, and ineffective learning could go on without being noticed. Ahea, Ahea, Kabir and Rahman (2016) state that feedback is vital for improving learners' performance as it allows learners to reflect on their learning and make adjustments. Therefore, it is recommended that EHL teachers provide effectual and immediate feedback on assessments in comprehension so that second language learners misunderstandings can be immediately corrected, and learning can be successful.

The six recommendations discussed above were derived from the responses from the participants as they reflected on their experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. These recommendations set the platform for me to contemplate suggestions for further studies. These suggestions are discussed below.

5.5. Suggestions for further studies

This study attempted to close the gap in understanding EHL teachers' experiences in assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. Exploring and understanding teachers' experiences provides an interesting insight into the reality of what takes place in classrooms. Upon conducting this study, it became clear that more needed to be explored. This study was specific to EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. Below are some of the suggestions I make for areas that may be explored:

- This study was conducted on a small scale as only three participants from three schools participated. I suggest this study be conducted on a larger scale that involves more schools and more participants. This way more experiences and classroom realities can be explored.
- This study focused on EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to grade six second language learners. It is suggested that studies on EHL teachers' experiences of assessing grade six second language learners in other aspects of English such as writing, language or reading be explored as well, on a larger scale. The EHL teachers' assessment strategies and experiences of assessing these other aspects can be brought to light.
- Experiences of EHL teachers teaching English to Grade one to three (Foundation phase) second language learners should also be explored to understand the strategies and techniques teachers use to teach comprehension skills to second language learners. With the growing number of second language learners entering English medium schools, it would be interesting to explore how EHL teachers build the foundation for the second language to grasp, speak and understand the English language.
- It would also be interesting to explore how Universities prepare student teachers to teach and assess second language speaking learners in EHL comprehension.

5.6 Conclusion

Comprehension plays a vital role in learning EHL and subjects across the curriculum. This study revealed that EHL teachers went to great lengths, using their creativity and imagination to come up with ways to help second language learners with comprehension, regardless of the limited assistance they receive. However, if EHL teachers' experiences of assessing comprehension to second language learners are recognized, the correct support can be given to teachers and to learners to address the comprehension difficulties they face. In a diverse

multilingual context like South Africa, listening to the voices of EHL teachers express their experiences and perceptions when assessing comprehension to second language speaking learners, can bring about a transformation to the classroom as the appropriate support can be given to EHL teachers to mould South Africa's future, one learner at a time.

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