

# Grade 1 Teachers' Knowledge and Perceptions Regarding Reading Instruction

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This study found that Namibian teachers' knowledge of language and reading components was poor. Teacher training should ensure that teachers are trained adequately in how to teach reading in languages with both transparent and opaque orthographies.

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This study explored the knowledge, perceptions, and classroom practices of teachers in Namibia in relation to teaching reading and how learners' reading acquisition is supported. Data was gathered by a self-completion survey with 132 grade 1 teachers. Teachers' knowledge of language and reading components was poor. Teacher training should ensure that teachers are trained adequately in how to teach reading in languages with both transparent and opaque orthographies.

- Becoming a skilled reader with the ability to decode and comprehend written language is an important prerequisite

for full participation in modern society.

- National and international reading assessment scores indicate that Namibia's learners are not faring as well as expected.
- It is important to identify factors in the Namibian classroom that may be preventing effective reading achievement, and to seek for possible solutions to alleviate reading problems.
- There is considerable variation in teachers' depth of knowledge and skill level.
- A considerable number of teachers have not received consistently high quality training and instruction to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge and skills required to be effective teachers of reading.

### **How to teach reading in local languages?**

- In Namibia, the phonics-based approach to reading instruction is one of the teaching methods that is emphasised.
- Teachers applying the phonemic basis of the alphabet produce the most successful readers, especially in languages with transparent orthographies.
- Reading comprehension (especially listening comprehension) should not be neglected while focusing on word reading only, even for initial reading acquisition.
- Most teachers in Namibia do not use the methods they were taught in their basic education teachers' diploma in college.

### **Factors affecting good learning results**

- Teachers' knowledge: teachers should have core knowledge of language constructs that are required to teach reading.
- Teachers' experience: the teachers' first five years as a teacher are most important.

- Class size: smaller class sizes enable more individualised teaching.



## The study

The aim of this study was to examine Namibian teachers' knowledge, perceptions, and classroom practices related to teaching reading, and how they support learners' reading acquisition.

Research question:

- *What are teachers' knowledge and perceptions regarding reading instruction in grade 1, and how do they support learners' reading acquisition?*

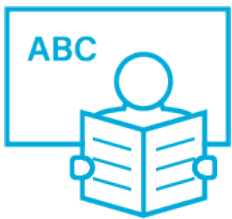
**Participants and procedure** A self-completion survey of 132 grade 1 teachers in Namibia was conducted.



## Findings

- Whilst 91% of teachers had at least a teaching diploma, 32% claimed they did not have training in reading instruction
- Some 83% of teachers used several methods when teaching reading, with the most popular method being phonics-based (used by 90%)

- Some 92% of teachers encouraged poor readers to read by giving them simple texts to enable them to experience success and competence
- Teachers' knowledge of language and reading components was poor.
- Less than 37% of teachers had detailed knowledge of specific aspects of reading such as being able to identify syllables, morphemes, and speech sounds in words as well as demonstrating knowledge of phonics, phonemes, and diphthongs.



## Implications

- Teacher training should ensure that teachers are trained to teach reading in languages with both transparent and opaque orthographies adequately.
- Furthermore, mother-tongue instruction, higher teacher qualifications for junior primary teachers, better training in reading instruction, and better reading-resourced classrooms, are also important.

## Teaching techniques

- The technique of scaffolding includes contingency (i.e. teachers support their learners based on their level of need, fading, and transfer of responsibility), whereby teachers withdraw their support gradually when their student masters the required skill.