TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN USING PHONICS METHODS IN TEACHING ENGLISH READING TO JUNIOR PRIMARY PHASE IN OHANGWENA REGION

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore Junior Primary teachers' experiences in using all phonics methods in teaching English reading skills. The study addressed two research questions: What are teachers' experiences in using the phonics method when teaching English reading at a Junior Primary phase? and What should be done to improve the use of the phonics method in teaching English reading skills at the Junior Primary phase? The study adopted a qualitative approach following a single case study design. Purposeful sampling was used to select the five teachers teaching English in the Junior Primary phase. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observation. Content analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings of the study revealed that teachers understood phonics as a way of teaching learners the relationship between sounds and letters. The study further revealed that teachers relate their understanding of the concept of reading to the skill of combining sounds and creating the meaning of what has been written. It was also clear from the study findings that teachers use phonics methods to teach English reading skills. They are, however, faced with numerous challenges in teaching English reading skills using the phonics method. Such challenges include a lack of teachers' training, a lack of appropriate teaching materials, the influence of Oshikwanyama as a medium of instruction, and overcrowded classrooms. Based on these challenges, teachers' training and provision of teaching materials were suggested by teachers as measures to ensure the effective use of phonics in teaching English reading skills at the Junior Primary phase. The study recommends that there is a need for Junior Primary experts to deliver the right English subject content and lay a good foundation if learners are to master early English reading skills. The study further recommends that such teachers (Junior Primary) should prepare various activities and use a variety

of teaching materials to arouse learners' interests and enhance early reading. Furthermore, it was recommended that Junior Primary Educational officers frequently provide workshops for the teachers to continuously improve their teaching skills and become more professional in their work.

Keywords: *Phonics, reading, reading skills, phonemes, decode, medium of instruction.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BED	Bachelor of Education
CVC	Consonant Vowel Consonant
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DJPE	Diploma in Junior Primary Education
FoE	Faculty of Education
HoD	Head of Department
INSET	In-Service Training
MoEAC	Ministry of Education, Arts & Culture
UNAM	University of Namibia
UPE	Universal Primary Education Fund
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late dad Simon Lamek and Aunt Frieda Akudhenga. Your lives were cut short to see how well I am doing in my academics. May this thesis serve as a constant reminder that you existed and that your existence has provided me with so many wonderful memories that I will never forget.

DECLARATION

I JULIA DHIGININA LAMEK, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my research and that this work or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of high learning.

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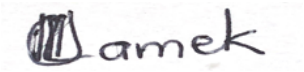
Julia Dhiginina Lamek		October 2023
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Phonics is one of the important methods for teaching letter-sound correspondences, used to enhance the Junior Primary learners' reading competencies. The methods are grounded in the view that the word reading skill must be explicitly taught to the beginning or struggling readers. The methods are characterised by systematic and direct instructions focused on the relation between subunits of words (e.g., graphemes, phonemes, onsets, and rimes) and their corresponding sounds (Henbest & Apel, 2017). The phonics methods, therefore, strengthen the learner's ability to identify a letter and its accompanying sound for language acquisition.

Language acquisition is developed through the modelling of letter sounds which leads to learners identifying words and pronouncing them correctly (Kim, *et al.,* 2010). In Junior Primary Phase, learners are acquainted with letter names of the alphabet, and it is good that they get to understand the phonemes of each letter. Learners must understand the phonemes of all the letters because English is an opaque language meaning a letter can have more than one sound (CHUA, 2022), which makes it very difficult to understand in terms of letter sounds. Ijalba and Obler (2015) argued that when English is being taught and learned as a second language, it is a challenge to understand letters that have more than one sound, for example, /a/ in "can" is not the same sound as /a/ in "mag" or /u/ in "duck" is not the same sound as /u/ in "cute". In contrast with English, other languages, such as Oshikwanyama, are transparent and easy to understand due to their letter sounds. Georgios (2021) advocates that teachers with transparent first language orthographies (Oshiwambo) cannot effortlessly teach new Second language (English) words when there is no straightforward relationship

between orthography and phonology, (as in the case of language with opaque orthographic structure). Knospe (2022), believe that the phonics methods are only effective when learners have background knowledge of literacy skills (letters and sounds) in the language. The environment in which learners grow up and their home language (Oshikwanyama) plays a major role in the successful teaching and learning of phonics.

In Namibia, the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture emphasises that mother tongues should be used as a medium of instruction in all government schools at the Junior Primary Phase (MEAC, 2015). Therefore, except for English, all subjects from Grades 0 - 3 must be taught in mother tongues. In English lessons, learners must be taught in English, however, if learners are struggling to understand English, the predominant local language can be used. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture permit well-grounded convincing motivation to all schools that apply to use English as a medium of instruction. Since phonetics is a crucial element in language development, the current study explored the Junior Primary Phase teachers' experiences in using the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, such a study has never been conducted before in Namibia.

1.2 Background of the Study

Research over the past decades has been instrumental in informing educational practice on the development of reading and the best ways to foster this ability in young learners (Melby-Lervag, *et al.,* 2012). The use of the phonics methods may not be the only way to teach reading, but it is likely to make up a significant improvement to the learner's reading skills. Ariandika and Kartikawat (2018) believe that the whole language approach, the language experience approach, the phonics methods, the global

reading approach, the look-and-say, etc. are commonly used methods to teach early reading.

The phonics methods, which are the focus of this study, are a teaching approach that teaches learners the correspondence between the letters and the sound they make (Johnston, & Watson, 2014). The methods were developed to help slow and struggling readers, however, it was found to be essential for use by all learners, especially those who are in the Junior Primary Phase (Henbest & Apel, 2017) to grasp the phonemes of different letters. Thus, the use of phonemes allows the learners to know a letter thereby causing them to be aware of the corresponding sound of the same letter, making it easier for them to decode letters into their respective sounds (Ariandika & Kartikawati, 2018). It is argued that decoding skills are essential because they allow learners to link unfamiliar print words to their spoken language. Thus, the decoding skills enable the learners to read different words, making the learner's ability to read easier and faster (Yasui, *et al.*, 2019).

According to Glazzard (2017), the use of phonics methods is common in countries such as the United Kingdom where English is the first language and medium of instruction in all schools. Kurita (2012) suggests that phonic sounds are influenced by the way the English language is spoken in native countries. Therefore, first-language speakers of the English language have an advantage in mastering phonics awareness over those who use English as a second language. The first language speakers are well acquainted with the letters and the sounds of the English alphabet at a tender age; however, English second-language learners or speakers have limited exposure which may compromise their English reading skills (Totemeyer, *et al.,* 2015). Moreover, English second-language learners must first turn the words they see in a text into English sounds and make sense of them. It is, therefore, very important for learners to

learn letter-sound relationships because English uses letters in the alphabet to represent sounds, which allows them to know that a change in the order of letters changes a word's meaning (Mesmer & Kambach, 2021). For example, if the learners do not pay attention to the order of the letters, words such as 'dog' and 'tip' might be misread as 'god' and 'pin', respectively (Wong & Russak, 2019). Paying attention to letters underscores the critical importance of word recognition in reading using phonics methods.

In the Kingdom of Thailand, most of the native teachers of the Tai Language struggle to use the phonics methods as some English sounds do not exist in the Tai language. For example, the Thai language does not have a “sh”, so the closest sound to "sh" in Thai is "ch" and in the English language, "ch" is a sound on its own (Jericho, 2015).

In Slovakia, the use of the phonics methods is considered difficult for teaching English reading because their letter sounds are represented only by one sound. For Example, the Slovaks would mistake and replace the vowel /æ/with/e/ for example, the words bit versus bid are pronounced with an equally short length or the words ‘beat’ and ‘bead’ with an equally long length instead of shortest length in a ‘bit’, middle length in ‘bid’ and ‘beat’ and longest length in ‘bead’. In English, this kind of mistake would lead to a change in meaning. For example, if the word ‘bad’ is pronounced as /bed/ instead of its correct pronunciation /bæd/, the word gets a completely different meaning (Soradova, 2018).

In Japan, English teachers have difficulties in teaching English reading, especially in using phonics methods, because there are some significant differences between their numbers of vowels (Kamiyama, 2011). Japanese has five vowels (/i, ɯ, e, o, a/) in its vowel system, while in the English vowel system, there are 15 different vowels which all use (/a, e, i, o, u), which include several diphthongs such as /aw/, /ay/, and /oy/

(Ohata, 2004). Therefore, it is believed that in certain circumstances phonics methods may have a negative impact on learners in countries where English is taught as a foreign language to native speakers of other languages (Olugbeko, 2016). In linguistics, a native speaker is someone who speaks and writes in his or her mother tongue. The traditional view holds that a person's ability to speak and write in a specific language is determined by their place of birth, i.e., their parent's birthplace (Cohen, 2016). The term "mother tongue" refers not only to the language learned from one's mother but, also to the speaker's dominant and home language. It is the first language in terms of acquisition time and importance and the ability to master its linguistic and communicative aspects (De Mattia-Viviès, 2022).

In Namibia, one of the greatest challenges is that some of the alphabets in English is not in the Namibia vernacular languages (vernacular languages), making them difficult to comprehend. For example, there is no letter R in Oshikwanyama which might make it difficult for the Oshikwanyamas to pronounce the /R/ confusing it with the /L/, and words like running might be mispronounced as ‘lanning’ or six pronounced as ‘shix’ (Frans, 2020).

In government schools, the medium of instruction for Junior Primary is the mother tongue from Grade 1 to Grade 3 (MEAC, 2015), however, learners use different vernacular languages which are typically defined as the native languages of a community (Venuti, 2021), or different dialects which might create difficulty for the teacher to instruct. The ministry further emphasises that all schools with English as a medium of instruction should have 10 English lessons for Grades 1 and 2 and 9 lessons for Grade 3, while schools with mother tongue as a medium of instruction are limited to 6 English lessons for Grade 1 and 2 and 9 lessons for Grade 3 (MEAC, 2015). The allocation for teaching English to the junior primary phase, therefore, indicates that the

exposure of learners to the English language is limited thereby presenting a challenge to the use of phonics in teaching English reading skills, considering the environment where learners pronounce words and letters in a vernacular tone.

It should be noted that English is one of the languages with an opaque orthography, as opposed to Oshikwanyama and other Namibian languages, which have transparent orthography. According to Frans (2020), a transparent orthography is largely regular in its sound-symbol correspondences. Because there are fewer sounds and a direct correspondence between sounds and letters, words in a transparent orthography are quite easy to decode. On the other hand, an opaque orthography, such as that of English, includes less direct correspondence between letters and their sounds. Some of the letters and sounds in the English words; lieutenant, psychology, and so on have no direct correspondence. It was discovered that many learners in the Oshikwanyama language wrongly pronounce the letter /s/ (Nepando, 2018). For example, /s/ in the word 'casket', may be pronounced as 'cashket', with the phoneme /sh/. Thus, the different orthographies can affect both teachers and learners in their reading of certain English words using the phonics methods. The challenge in teaching English phonemes is compounded by the fact that some of the teachers who teach English in the Junior Phase were trained during the apartheid era when Afrikaans was used as a medium of instruction. This affected the teachers' mastery

of phonic awareness (Fellowes & Oakley, 2013).

The phonics methods require more attention from the teacher to the learner if it is to be used effectively, however in Namibia, especially in government schools, we have a challenge with a high teacher-learner ratio of approximately 1:44. The high teacher-learner ratio may compromise the learners' ability grasp well the concept of the sounds of the letters. Haufiku, *et al.*, (2022) postulate that the recommended teacher-to-learner

ratio in Namibia is 1:35 for primary schools and 1:30 for secondary schools. According to the New Era report, teachers are sometimes forced to teach more than 44 learners per classroom, compromising educational quality. With such a ratio, it is hard for teachers to have adequate time with individual learners as it might be desired, making this not conducive for learning to read. In the study by Haufiku, *et al.,* (2022) one participant (teacher) from the focus groups said: “At this point, I am no longer worried about learners’ performance as I cannot effectively perform my work in overcrowded classes, and the circumstances in my classes are obviously beyond my control” (p 1951). Teachers also emphasized that large classes were a burden to them because they could not cater to the individual differences of learners, particularly slow learners who require special attention. One teacher repeatedly expressed his frustration: “large classes stress a lot, and they always give me high pressure” (p 1951). As a result, learners may take longer to learn all the 26 alphabet letter names, and graphemes and identify their different sounds (phonemes), taking into cognizant that certain letters have more than one sound, example "a" has nine different sounds these are "mat", "mate", "boat", "Linda", "any", "ward", "all", "war", "village", (Bizzocchi, 2017).

The Namibian English Curriculum for Junior Primary Phase (0- Grade 3) stresses that the prepared and unprepared reading skills should be integrated into the English reading lessons and the use of phonics should be assessed daily (Ministry of Education (MoE) 2015). The curriculum policy, therefore, indicates that learners need to practice letter sounds daily to acquire the alphabetic codes and decode unknown words. Thus, according to Arrow, *et al.,* (2015), the practice of the phonics methods requires teachers to have a higher understanding of the basic structure of English and an understanding of the sound symbols that influence reading skills. In addition, teaching English reading skills are essential to learners as it allows them to access the breadth

of the curriculum and improve their communication and language skills (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). Teaching English reading skills also enables learners to recognise letters, words, and phrases in a written text (Smith, 2009).

Despite the importance of teaching English reading using phonics methods, teachers worldwide and in Namibia are finding it challenging to use phonics methods/instructions in teaching English reading to Junior Primary learners (Akram & Malik, 2010). It is on this basis that this study seeks to explore teachers' experiences in using phonics methods when teaching English reading in the Junior Primary Phase in the Ohangwena Region of Namibia.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

According to Walker, *et al.,* (2013), teachers feel positive about phonics being used to teach reading and how it contributes to early reading. However, the researcher observed that teachers are experiencing difficulties in using phonic instructions in teaching English reading to learners. Hartney (2011) indicated that teachers are experiencing difficulties teaching various letter sounds, particularly when the letter has a different phonic sound depending on the context in which it is used. English has 44 phonemes, yet only 26 letters of the alphabet exist. As a result, differentiating how to sound out various letters might be a difficulty for teachers (Mardiyati, 2020). For example, the letter "a" has several different sounds in words like "bat," "ball," and "nap." As a result, the teacher may find it difficult to convey the differences in how the vowel "a" sounds in different words. The researcher observed that some teachers have trouble distinguishing the phonic sounds of letters with similar sounds, such as "e" and "i." This may lead to the learner's early reading skills being confused. It concurs with the MoE (2015) that there is a lack of letter-sounding system usage by

Junior Primary teachers, which could affect the development of learners' English readiness.

There has been poor performance in English language examinations over the years in the Ohangwena Region which led to this study in the region. According to Ariandika and Kartikawati (2018), most of the studies done in the field are on the use of phonics methods by learners and the effective methods of teaching reading in general without considering the teachers' experiences which may add value to the field. For example, Thaen-ng and Leenam (2016) conducted a study that focused mostly on the use of phonics methods of instruction to enhance learners' reading ability. Additionally, Junias (2009) also conducted a study in the field, but the focus was on factors affecting teaching English reading skills in a second language. However, there are no specific studies done on the teachers' experience in the use of phonics methods in teaching English reading to Junior Primary phrase learners in the Ohangwena Region of Namibia. The study sought to explore the teachers' experiences in using the phonics methods in teaching English reading to Junior Primary learners. The findings of the study, therefore, may assist educators and other interested parties to use their experiences to develop better ways of teaching English reading skills using the phonics methods and contribute to the literature on the subject.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are teachers' experiences in using the phonics methods when teaching English reading in the Junior Primary phase?
2. What should be done to improve the use of the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills in the Junior Primary phase?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study will add to the literature on teachers' experiences in teaching early reading skills using phonics methods in the Ohangwena Region of Namibia. The insights of the teacher will help to give information on how they are using phonics methods and areas that might need improvement in using the phonics methods. The study findings are anticipated to help Junior Primary teachers enhance their teaching of reading skills using the phonics method by providing literature that can give them more information in the field. For example, identifying letter names and sounds is expected to assist learners in their manipulation (decoding-reading and encoding-spelling) of words when reading. Recommendations from this study are hoped to assist the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture by adding data to existing knowledge on how to use the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills in the Namibian context and ensuring effective ways for teachers to use the phonics approach. The study may also assist the Ministry of education in its policy formulation.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The study employed a single-case study design in which a case of a school in the Ohangwena region was used. Thus, it was difficult to generalise the study findings to other schools in the region. Despite all the teachers giving their consent to participate in the study, one of the teachers withdrew from the study due to unforeseen circumstances. Therefore, only five teachers participated, nevertheless, the study provides a good basis for a further broader study in the selected field as the data collected provides enough insight into the study. Probing was done to an extent that more information was obtained.

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

The study only focused on junior primary teachers from a selected school in Eenhana Circuit, Ohangwena Education Region.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Reading

In the science of reading, there were two main trends in the approaches to teaching English reading; the code emphasis which focuses more on a specific "code" or set of letters and words; and the meaningful emphasis approach which focuses on comprehension Wahyuni (2022). As per this study, reading focuses more on the code emphasis of English words than comprehension skills. Thus, reading refers to a cognitive activity, which deals with decoding a graphic representation of sounds (Olugbeko, 2016).

Phonics Methods

Phonics is an approach that trains learners to master the relationship between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds that are associated with them. Paris (2019) says that phonics is a way of decoding written letters and spoken sounds that encourages learners to decode words by sounds, rather than by recognising whole words. The approach focuses on how the readers' understanding of letters and how to pronounce them correctly in reading activities. There are four types of phonics methods: synthetic phonics, analogy phonics, analytic phonics, and embedded phonics (Drew, 2020).

Analytic Method

Analytic phonics is defined as a method of teaching reading in which the phonemes associated with graphemes are not pronounced in isolation (Cox, 2019). The method emphasises how the phonemes of certain words are linked together. If a learner can read a word such as a book, the person will have no difficulty reading the word look.

Analytic Phonics is defined as a method of teaching whole words first and then analysing the constituent parts which made up the word (Johnston & Watson, 2014). Through this method, learners learn to recognise words by sight, in a method like rote learning. For example, when a learner can read a word such as 'sat', they tend not to have difficulties reading the words such as m**at**, p**at**, f**at** and c**at** since their reading is on the initial sound or onset and any rhyme pattern.

Synthetic Method

Synthetic phonics is defined as a way of teaching reading and spelling through decoding and encoding with a systematic approach. Johnston and Watson (2014) indicate that synthetic phonics is based on teaching the learners sounds and their corresponding letters of the 44 phonemes of English. Once learners know some sounds, they can use this knowledge to build and structure words so they can be decoded to read words or encoded to write words. For example, reading (cat) firstly the sound /c/a/t/then blending it to the word cat.

Embedded phonics

Embedded phonics is referred to as the phonics in the context that is taught in the context of reading stories to the learners, especially when learners have difficulty in reading a particular word (Riesen, *et al.,* 2003)

Analogy phonics

Analogy refers to comparing objects based on their similarities (formed by adding onsets or consonant patterns at the front). A teacher might demonstrate and utter the phonogram -ab, for instance. He or she gives an example of how to construct the relations cab, dab, gab, jab, lab, nab, and tab by adding the single consonants c, d, g, j, l, n, and t at the front. The teacher then helps the learners reread and spell the word family.

Decode

Decoding is the reading of words by saying the sounds corresponding to the letters in the words and then blending the sounds, either aloud or silently. It is the process of applying knowledge of the letters-sounds relationship, knowledge of letter patterns, and correctly pronouncing words as one reads. For example, when a learner is reading the word "father", the learner first needs to understand the letters used, the sounds made by each letter, and how they blend to form the word “father” (Chapman, *et al.,* 2018)

Phonemes

Phonemes are the smallest units of sounds in words that make a difference in pronunciation. For example, the word show has 3 phonemes *‘/sh / o / w/’* while the word swim has 4 phonemes *‘/s /w / i /m* /’ (Bizzocchi, 2017)**.**

Grapheme

Graphemes are defined as symbols of letters that are used to represent a sound, such as "sh, ch". A grapheme is the spelling of a word (Seidenberg, 2017)

Onset

Onset is defined as the initial consonant/s phonological unit of any single-syllable word or a syllable e.g., *c* in cat (Hines, 2009).

Rime

Rime is defined as the strings of letters that follow, usually a vowel and the final consonants e.g., *at* in cat (Hines, 2009).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter further discusses the concept of the science of reading, reading methods, the effect of the mother tongue, phonics methods, teachers' experiences in using the phonics methods as well as the strategies that can be used by teachers for effective teaching English reading.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored by the Social Constructivism theory of Lev Semionovich Vygotsky (1934; 1978), which is based on observation and scientific study about how people learn (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), social constructivism is a useful theoretical framework because it allows for the necessary qualitative analysis to reveal insights into how people interact with the world. In most cases, social constructivism is influenced by the background, culture, and embedded worldview. Therefore, teachers construct their knowledge in unique ways because they bring different backgrounds, experiences, and interests to the learning situation thereby bringing their knowledge and life experiences to the academic setting (Aljohani, 2017, Vygotsky, 1934; 1978). Background, culture and language become frameworks through which individuals experience, communicate and understand reality (Amineh & Asl, 2015). The study used this theory to evaluate how teachers' culture, background, etc impact the teaching of reading in English using the phonics methods. Social Constructivism focuses on the collaborative nature of learning in which knowledge develops from how people interact with each other, their culture, and society at large.

Additionally, Vygotsky (1934) argues that learners learn the most about language and its corresponding system signs through their interactions with others. A key influential concept of Social Constructivism theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which according to Vygotsky refers to the level a learner may be successful based on appropriate support (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Social constructivism emphasises the central idea that learning and development is a social, collaborative activity with these activities in mind. In conjunction with Lev Vygotsky's ZPD, this approach can be used to guide curriculum and instructional planning (Dennick, 2016).

A social constructivist teacher fosters a learning environment in which learners can participate in engaging activities that promote and facilitate learning (Anagun, & Anilan, 2013). Thus, the social constructivism approach to teaching emphasises interpersonal communication and views the teacher as a facilitator of learning rather than a transmitter of knowledge. The social constructivism theory encourages teachers to identify key phonics sounds and teach learners the best phonics strategies. In the case of this study, teachers coach learners step by step when using phonics methods, allowing them to increase their understanding and perform new tasks. Teachers take advantage of using practical examples by providing a slight stretch of a learner's existing knowledge and skills regularly.

The understanding of Social Constructivism may assist teachers in employing a variety of teaching methods that enhance learning by including group work, pair work, and whole class. The teacher can facilitate knowledge acquisition in the classroom by interacting with the learners or by creating an environment that encourages peer interaction among learners. The teacher, therefore, needs to demonstrate reading, making phonics sounds etc and the learner observes and imitates the teacher (ÇETİN, *et al.,* 2012). The teacher may also make competent learners demonstrate while peers

observe and practice the acquired skills on their own. Jones, (2015) opined what a child can do today with assistance, s/he will be able to do by him or herself tomorrow. Therefore, Vygotsky believed that peer interaction is an important part of the learning process, which is relevant to the current study. The social constructivism theory allowed the researcher to identify teachers' methods to help learners understand reading using the phonics methods. The teacher was able to model through social interaction, practise aloud, and lead group discussions, which enhanced the social component of learning (Krusche, *et al.*, 2020).

Another key concept in Social Constructivism is scaffolding, which refers to the assistance provided by teachers and more competent peers during learning episodes (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). The assistance may include "clues, reminders, encouragement, breaking down the problem into steps, providing an example, or anything else that allows the learners to grow in independence as a learner" (Slavin, 1997, p. 48). The teacher immerses learners in experiences that challenge their preconceived notions about the existing knowledge, the teacher encourages learner discussion and questioning by asking open-ended questions, and to teach reading, the teacher provides primary resources, manipulatives, and interactive physical materials (teaching aids) (Aljohani, 2017). On the other hand, it is expressed that

> the teacher does not simply watch learners explore and discover; rather, she can guide learners as they encounter challenges (e.g., where learners have challenges in pronunciation), encourage them to work in groups to think about challenges and support them with confidence-building praise and advice as they tackle dilemmas, exciting activities, and challenges embedded in real-world situations of reading using the phonics methods (Dennick, 2016, p. 202)

According to Smagorinsky, *et al.*, (2013), the teacher is believed to be constructing an internal representation of how to deliver a subject's content. The teaching does not only involve passing knowledge from the teacher to the learner but rather apprehending information either from their background (cultural diversity, schooling, training, and social networking) broadly enough to apply it productively in their class (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Teachers should take the time to learn more about the background, values, histories, practices, and traditions of their learners to have the potential to change how they provide instruction when using the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills. Therefore, school learning should take place in a meaningful context and not be separated from the learning and knowledge that children develop in real-life situations, and experiences outside the classroom should be linked to those that the child has in the classroom. With the help of teachers, parents, peers, and the culture around them, learners can master concepts and ideas that they cannot understand on their own (Mann, *et al.,* 2016).

In the classroom, social constructivism is implemented by:

- providing a more experienced peer or adult (teacher) with knowledge and skills that the other learners lack; in this case, the teacher was the expert who provided the correct sounds of the letters.
- during social interaction, learners can observe how the letter sounds are pronounced, and later learners begin to practise the new skill.
- as a result, the teacher provides what are called "scaffolding activities" (Miller Marsh, 2002, p.463)

Therefore, teachers use numerous activities in the classroom that can incorporate social constructivism. For example, the teacher teaches learners how to use their social skills

and knowledge in a group to work together more effectively (Eryilmaz, & Cigdemoglu, 2019).

Additionally, the teachers' training has an influence on the experiences in teaching English reading skills using phonics methods. In some cases, this will include formal pre-service university education, in-service professional development, and informal training acquired through on-the-job experience (Smagorinsky, *et al.,* 2013). Teachers who have received the best training in using the phonics methods when teaching reading will develop appropriate reading strategies (Saleem *et al.,* 2021). As a result, learners will develop profound understanding, as it encourages the active participation of learners through asking questions, and drawing inferences involved in a Socratic dialogue. From Vygotsky's (1934; 1987) perspective, the role of the teacher is to mediate the learner's activity as they share knowledge through social interactions. It is through social interaction that learners seek to understand the actions or instructions provided by the teacher by internalizing the information and using it to guide or regulate their performance (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020). Social constructivism helps the researcher to link the teachers' training to teaching English reading using the phonics methods and draw the strategies that may be implemented to improve the teaching of English using the phonics methods.

Therefore, social constructivism theory assisted the researcher in exploring teachers' experiences in using phonics methods in teaching English reading. The theory also supports and connects the teaching of English reading skills in a dynamic social context, such as a multicultural rural school.

2.3 The Science of Reading

The term science of reading is a very old term that has been used for over 200 years and historically means pronouncing and decoding words based on basic research

(Shanahan, 2020). During the 18th century, the term was first applied to text reading, coinciding with the birth of linguistics, the scientific study of language. The determination of proper pronunciations of ancient languages was the primary agenda of scientific linguistics, for example, in the early nineteenth century, the term was used to refer to how to read the Koran or the Bible, particularly in terms of word pronunciation (Allan, 2010; Stewart, 1809). During the 1830s, the science of reading was first used pedagogically, and it was used in education to discuss teaching learners to properly sound out words, which was consistent with its original meaning in linguistics (Experience, 1836; Pitman, 1843). The term "science of reading" has been reserved for decoding, though early reading research was not limited to decoding issues (Huey, 1908/1968). It is often with an emphasis on no instructional research such as linguistic analyses of the English spelling system.

Today's usage of the term "science of reading" refers to an attempt to make pedagogical and policy claims based primarily on research in the cognitive sciences and neurosciences, particularly in the context of beginning reading (Seidenberg, 2017). In simple terms, the science of reading refers to research on how we learn to read that has been conducted over the last twenty years by leading reading experts, cognitive scientists, and researchers (Shanahan, 2019). The current understanding of the science of reading has led to debunking older methods of reading instruction that were based on tradition and observation, not evidence (Fletcher-Flinn, 2015). Based on reading science, the 2000 National Reading Panel Report stated that learners require explicit instruction in the following reading components: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Thus, many learners will struggle with reading throughout their lives if teachers do not learn these scientifically proven reading strategies and use them to teach their learners reading (Palasan, 2017).

Reading does not come naturally but is an acquired skill because the human brain is not wired to read, according to decades of scientific research (Shanahan, 2020). As a result, reading must be explicitly taught, which means that learners must learn the different sounds in spoken language and be able to connect these sounds to written letters and make meaning out of print (Richardson, 2014). Background and vocabulary knowledge is also required for learners to comprehend what they are reading. Learners must eventually be able to recognize words automatically and read text fluently while paying attention to grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation (Escudero & Mulak, 2014).

Reading science encompasses a body of knowledge that goes beyond phonics and many people agree that reading comprehension is a difficult job that necessitates a variety of cognitive and linguistic processes (Nation, 2018). Various models have been developed to clearly explain reading science however this study focuses only on two models which are the Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope).

2.3.1 Simple View of Reading

According to Gough and Tunmer, (1986), and Cho, *et al.,* (2019), a Simple View of Reading is a formula that demonstrates that reading consists of two basic components: word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension. The formula is a multiplication problem in which decoding is multiplied by language comprehension, and the result is reading comprehension. The simple view holds that learners must be able to decode print into an oral representation (Hugh, 2018). As a result, reading necessitates the ability to perceive the smallest meaningful units of language sound (phonemes) apart from phonemic awareness, to match letters and sounds, spelling patterns, and pronunciations, and to do so accurately, quickly, and fluently (Van Staden, 2016).

As a result, for reading comprehension to occur, learners must be able to decode and comprehend the language i.e., both decoding skills and language comprehension must be present for reading comprehension to occur (Reading Research Consortium & Chiu, 2018). Gough and Tunmer (1986) proposed this model because many educators at the time did not believe that strong decoding was required to achieve reading comprehension if learners had strong language abilities. Therefore, the simple view of reading teaches us that you must assess both a learner's decoding ability and language comprehension to develop a plan to help the learner (Cartwright, *et al.*, (2016).

2.3.2 Scarborough's Reading Rope

Scarborough's Reading Rope is the brainchild of Dr. Hollis Scarborough (1992) which was a visual for parents and teachers attending her workshops, to make them understand how difficult reading can be. Therefore, Scarborough's Reading Rope is a visual metaphor for the complexities of learning to read. All the little strands of the rope metaphor represent all the skills that must come together tightly for skilled reading to occur (Fien, *et al.*, 2010). The strands of the language comprehension bundle are background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. The strands of word recognition combine our phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, decoding, and sight recognition (McQuarrie & Abbott, 2013). Therefore, learners recognise words not because they remember how they look, but because they have read them before, and they are orthographically mapped. Scarborough's Reading Rope helps to reflect that the science of reading is not just about phonics, but that there are two strands, word recognition and language comprehension, each with its own set of sub-skills (Ronimus, & Richardson, 2014; Reed, 2013).

It can be concluded that both Scarborough's Reading Rope and Simple View of Reading teach us that word recognition and language comprehension are both required for skilled reading. Scarborough's Reading Rope, furthermore, goes on to explain that learning to read is a complex process that takes time (Cadime, *et al.*, 2016; Cho, *et al.*, 2019).

2.3.3 The Sequence of Teaching Phonics in English as a Second Language. There are seven key milestones from the start of reading instruction to reading comprehension. They are as follows:

Step 1: Teach the sounds of individual letters

At this stage, learners must be taught that words are made up of tiny fragments of sound called phonemes, as well as the specific sounds that make up each word. Phonemic awareness is achieved by hearing distinct sounds and comprehending how spoken sounds relate to letters (phonics) (Reed, 2013). The teacher must make sure to emphasise both the obvious beginning and ending sounds. Listening to ending sounds is often overlooked, despite its importance (Ehri & Flugman, 2018).

Step 2: Teach sound blends

Digraphs such as ch, ck, and ph, as well as sound blends such as st, fl, dr, and sh, should be highlighted. These letters combine to form distinct sounds or phonemes (Roberts & Sadler, 2019).

Step 3: Teach whole words

The ability to use sound-symbol correlations is a required component of whole-word recognition or word identification. Learners should take their time perfecting this skill because it is crucial. At this time, word families such as bat, cat, pat, and sat are

essential. Vowels should be handled with caution at this level, especially when distinguishing between short /i/ and short /e/ (as in /pit/ and /pet/) throughout the whole-word reading process (Fien, *et al.*, 2010). Certain sight words are picked up inadvertently or through daily living. Learners may recognize and appear to "read" signage and commercials that contain words known only by their appearances, such as PEP, KFC, and others (Hooper, *et al.*, (2014).

Step 4: Present meanings

Presenting meanings assure the children that they understand what they are reading. A variety of approaches, such as drawings, photographs, miming, and so on, can be used to communicate the meanings. Remember to check your understanding of the definitions on a regular basis. As you go over words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings, make sure learners can tell the difference.

Step 5: Teach word parts

It is critical to teach word components such as prefixes, root words, suffixes, and word derivations. Once learners are familiar with these components, they will be able to understand more words. For example, if a primary school learner understands the definitions of "bed" and "room," they will have no difficulty understanding the definition of "bedroom" (McKeown, 2019).

Step 6: Put words in contexts

One effective strategy is to instruct learners to consider the context of each word. A learner who can use words in phrases may also demonstrate an understanding of reading and language usage (McKeown, 2019).

Step 7: Teach reading comprehension

Reading comprehension instruction is critical for learners to enjoy reading and comprehending factual texts. There are numerous important methods for evaluating reading comprehension. One option is to have learners summarize, recount, or paraphrase what they have read (Ukrainetz, 2015).

2.4. Teaching methods used in teaching English reading skills.

Teaching learners 'reading,' which is defined as a cognitive process that includes a reader, a text, and the reader's interaction with the text, is one of the most important elements of primary education (Chieh-Fang & Melanie, 2015; Nejad, & Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2015). Learners who have not received comprehensive reading instruction because curriculum policy and teaching practices are not sufficiently informed by robust research evidence may face serious challenges in their educational development. As a result, reading instruction and reading curriculum policies must be informed by solid research (Athanases, *et al.*, 2012); Sullivan and Brown., 2013).

There are various reading methods, and there have been 'reading wars' (debates or contentions) over which method is the best. However, debates have been largely centred on three methods (whole language, synthetic phonics, and balanced instruction), on which this study focuses to provide some insight into the researchers' perspectives on the best reading method (Nishanimut, *et al.*, 2013).

2.4.1 Whole Language Method

The whole language method of teaching reading connects whole words with their meanings without first breaking them down into individual letters or groups of letters. As a result, the whole language approach teaches learners to recognize basic words as a single word (Hooper, *et al.*, (2014). Alemi and Lari, (2012) suggest that the meaning

of the word and how it can be used in various contexts and settings become critical. Learners must remember the structure, shape, and appearance of the word so that they can recognize it when they see it used. Instead of focusing solely on word and text decoding, the whole language approach encourages learners to use reading and writing for everyday tasks such as making lists and leaving notes (Erin, 2015). The emphasis of this method is on reading for meaning, and other aspects of reading, such as phonics, are considered in a non-systematic manner.

The entire language learning method has some advantages in that the teacher exposes the learner to excellent literature from the start of learning experiences. Because the learners are not required to learn any rules or go through lists of sounds, the approach stimulates their creativity and gives them a better understanding of the material they must read (Tong, *et al.,* 2014). The teacher affords the learners the freedom to observe how others read and then imitate that behaviour without feeling discouraged or threatened by their learning environment. However, the whole language approach has its drawbacks. For example, some learners may be unable to spell correctly if they do not receive adequate phonetics training, and learners may be unable to recognise or understand certain words (Alharbi, 2015; Liu & Todd, 2014).

2.4.2 Synthetic Phonics Method

Many people use the traditional reading method known as phonics, which involves the memorisation of letters and their sounds (Past, 1978). Teachers who use phonics to teach reading and writing use this method to teach reading and decoding, where words are often learned independently of books or other printed print. The systematic technique lacks context from real text because learners learn the sounds associated with each letter as well as the letters that typically begin with A and end with Z, and they combine letter sounds to create new sounds (Escudero & Mulak, 2014). The

relationship between individual graphemes and phonemes is the focus of the phonics method and learners develop the ability to connect and match letters. The strategy is important because it allows learners to 'sound out' written words they don't recognize, and the teacher usually starts by teaching single sounds and simple words (Nishanimut, *et al.,* 2013).

2.4.3 Balanced instruction method

By incorporating the best aspects of both the phonics method and the whole method, the balanced approach provides the best of both worlds. If the whole language appears too ambiguous and phonemic learning feels overly rigid, a balanced approach to reading may be the "just right" choice for you (Ronimus & Richardson, 2014). It aims to give equal weight to phonics and whole language methods by sitting somewhere in the middle (Reed, 2013). The balanced method recognises that learners do not learn in the same way, and different learning styles are accommodated by providing relevant education (Pilten, 2016; Sugino, *et al.,* 2016). Teachers can use this strategy by allowing learners to explore literacy in a meaningful way while also finding enjoyment in the materials they read (Coyne, *et al.,* 2012). Furthermore, it provides learners with the ability to dissect language into its constituent parts, allowing them to begin reading and writing at a young age (Hempenstall & Buckingham, 2016).

A balanced literacy program gradually gives learners more responsibility for their reading and writing as teachers model good reading and writing for their learners. Learners then practice their skills, teachers and learners participate in engaging literacy activities, and learners are encouraged to apply their knowledge on their own (Vernon-Feagans, *et al.,* 2018). There are valid arguments in favour of a well-rounded literacy

strategy, such as teachers encouraging explicit language training as well as language inquiry and discovery (Giles & Tunks, 2015).

The phonics method is widely regarded as an effective method for teaching learners to read; however, many teachers argue that it does not benefit learners as they progress through the grades in their literacy learning (Scull, *et al.*, 2012). Learners in phonics methods do not learn how to infer, ask questions, or interpret books by simply decoding words. And these are the skills they will need in the future to cope with more difficult reading material. Finally, when properly implemented, the balanced approach to literacy provides learners with the skills they need to read and write at all stages of their education (Spencer & Wagner, 2017).

2.5 The Effect of the Mother Tongue

Learning a language is difficult in general but learning a second language is more difficult for a variety of reasons. One of the difficulties is that, unlike the first language learner, who is in a concussive linguistic environment, the second language learner lacks this privilege, resulting in errors in speaking the second language. Some of the errors are caused by a lack of English sounds in the mother tongue (Patrick, *et al.*, 2013). Other course teachers frequently switch the language of instruction from official English to their mother tongue, either because they are not fluent in English or to help learners better understand the material (Haufiku, *et al.*, 2022). Given that neither the teacher nor the learners are native English speakers, the teacher faces a difficult task in teaching phonics-based English reading abilities. Furthermore, because English is not commonly used for communication in dorm rooms, teachers must employ a variety of effective instructional techniques to assist learners in developing their English reading comprehension skills. As a result, the goal of the

learning process will be met, and learners will be able to learn English more quickly Razi, *et al.,* 2021).

According to Cummins (2017), English language learning requires a lot of exposure; however, in some situations, excessive use of the mother tongue becomes a hindrance due to the learners' limited exposure to English outside of the classroom and at home where the native tongue is typically spoken, among other factors (Haufiku, *et al.,* 2022). Certain ethnic groups' mother tongues may distort pronunciation, defining the ethnic group's accent, so that when they speak English, you can easily identify their ethnic group. When East African natives speak English, for example, you can easily detect the accent (Patrick, *et al.,* 2013). As a result, the teachers' mother tongue-influenced accents and pronunciation will have a negative effect on the learners' accents and pronunciation in reading.

Language is regarded as an essential component of education because it facilitates the transfer of knowledge between teachers and learners. After all, communication in the classroom, comprehension, and academic success are all influenced by language (Lupogo, 2014). To address the challenges associated with teaching in one's mother tongue, several educational systems advocate for the use of national or "global" languages rather than teaching in one's mother tongue (Razi, *et al.,* 2021). The previous colonial language or a global language, such as English, is frequently used in education, implying that if learners have low proficiency in the instructional language, their learning will suffer (Anani, 2019). Relevant research on language use and academic achievement has revealed that learners whose language of instruction is a foreign language perform worse academically than those who receive instruction in their mother tongue. Pinnock & Vijayakumar, 2009; Nicholas & Lightbown, 2008). For example, it was discovered that by the end of primary school, learners in Zambia,

where English was the language of instruction among non-English speakers, were unable to read fluently or write effectively (Razi, *et al.*, 2021). However, there have been numerous reports that some teachers consistently violate the implementation of this policy by using the learners' mother tongue as the instructional language (Nyamekye, (2022). The use of one's mother tongue for educational purposes has its own set of benefits that needs to be always considered.

Fluency in the mother tongue, also known as the native language, has many benefits for the learner, including strengthening ties to culture, ensuring better cognitive growth, and encouraging the learning of new languages (UNICEF & JTWRI, 2013). According to Nishanthi (2020), language policy must consider mother-tongue learning to raise educational standards because educational models that neglect the mother language in the early years may negatively impact a learner's ability to learn. Mother tongue education, at least in the early years, can help teachers and learners learn more effectively.

According to UNICEF & JTWRI (2013), it is easier for someone to learn a new language if they have a strong command of their mother tongue. As a result, if a learner has read aloud in their native language since they were a child, their literacy skills in other languages will be stronger. The mother tongue is a good starting point for learning other languages. As a result, having a strong foundation in their native language allows them to learn additional languages, which is accomplished by learners adapting various linguistic structures to other linguistic systems. Because of the grammar that develops as a child learns their native language, he or she can easily predict the meaning of a word or distinguish between the meanings of words in different languages (Nishanthi, 2020).

2.5.1 Transparent vs Opaque orthographies

Angelelli, *et al*., (2014), advocates that speakers (teacher) with transparent first-language orthographies (Oshiwambo) cannot effortlessly teach new Second English language words when there is no straightforward relationship between orthography and phonology, (as in the case of language with opaque orthographic structure) (Escudero, 2015). There will be difficulties also in teaching reading especially through traditional theory because there is the grapheme and phonemes relationship between the two languages is incongruent (Nag, 2014). Due to that, English letters do not precisely represent the sounds and vice versa, therefore speakers of languages with shallow orthographies (Oshiwambo, Swahili, Finish, Greek) cannot employ their Transparent orthography patterns in decoding, in the language with deep orthographic structure (Davidson & Wilson, 2016; Escudero & Mulak, 2014).

2.6 The Concept of the Phonic Methods

The phonics methods are a way of teaching reading of a language where learners are taught the letters of the alphabet and their sounds, which allow the learners to decode the written letters into spoken sounds (Phajane, 2014). Phonics can be used to teach any beginner and not necessarily those with reading problems and help the learners to create a linkage between the letter names and sounds, (Ahmad, *et al.,* 2012). The methods are successful in teaching learners to read especially in lower grades (Cekiso, 2017; Paris, 2019). Reeb (2011) found that phonics methods teach kids to connect sounds with letters. The Department of Education of the United Kingdom (2015) maintains that the phonics methods teach learners how to recognise the sounds that each letter makes, identify the sounds that different combinations of letters make, and blend these sounds to make a word. Therefore, the phonics methods encourage learners

to read through understanding the sound made by individual letters and then read the word as a whole.

According to McArthur, *et al*., (2015), phonics methods are a way of decoding written letters and spoken sounds. For example, when learners first see the word CAT, they must (a) identify the letters, (b) translate each grapheme (i.e., a letter or letter cluster) into a speech sound (i.e., a phoneme, e.g., “k” “a” “t”), and (c) blend these phonemes into a word that is spoken aloud (e.g., “kat”) (McArthur, *et al*., 2015).

From the above definitions, the phonics methods focus on helping the learner identify the pronunciation of each letter in a word before pronouncing the whole word. Thus, a learner can read a word by combining all the individual sounds of letters that make up a word. Once a learner reads a word through the phonic approach, a memory is formed of the whole word indicating that the learner relates the pronunciation of the word to what he/she knows (McArthur, *et al*., 2015). A learner who is using the phonics methods will master how to pronounce the letter sounds of the words in the alphabet. Henbest and Apel (2017) believe that when a word is being read, the graphemes of the alphabet will be combined to come up with the word pronunciation. According to McArthur, *et al.*, (2015), there are three different types of phonics methods, namely synthetic, analytic, and analogy phonics.

2.6.1 Synthetic Phonics

The synthetic phonics approach emphasizes the need for the learner to be able to read the specific sound of every letter in a word. The sounds of letters are combined, and the learner will be able to read out a word, meaning that with synthetic phonics, learners are taught to segment sounds represented by each letter of a word and then blend the sounds (Henbest & Apel, 2017). Learners learn to read by identifying the smallest units of the sound within a word (phonemes) and blending these to read a

target word (McArthur, *et al*., 2015). Phajane (2014) concurs by maintaining that the synthetic approach begins with learning letter-sound relationships and blending them to create words such as l/o/v/e and then love.

2.6.2 Analytical Phonics

An Analytic phonics method is an approach where phonemes associated with graphemes are not used in isolation. It teaches learners the phonic relationships among words. Learners are taught to analyse letter-sound relationships and look to decode words based on spelling and letter patterns and their sounds. For example, if the learner knows "bat", "cat", and "hat", then the word "mat" will be easy to read (Cox, 2019). The teachers use the approach to teach learners all the words which have the same phonemes such as mat, pat, and rat allowing the learners to learn how to read new words by relating them with the words that they know. As the learners read certain words, the knowledge they gain allows them to use it as a base to read more words.

According to Henbest and Apel (2017), the method of analytical phonics teaches learners to pronounce "the onset and rime, e.g., b-ack, of a word rather than the individual letters and sounds" (p. 305). The analytic approach does not focus on making learners comprehend the specific sound made by individual letters, it is a wholesome technique of teaching learners, words that have the same pronunciation either at the onset or the end.

2.6.3 Analogy Phonics

The analogy approach involves teaching learners to recognise words' parts and patterns by analogy to group the known keywords (Denton & Otaiba, 2011). It encompasses the teaching of words that have similar pronunciations. In analogy tasks, learners are shown a word such as beak and are told its pronunciation, and then are

asked to read words such as peak or bean (Savage and Stuart, 2001). Therefore, if a learner learns the word ‘beak’, the knowledge of the word will enable him/her to read words such as ‘peak’ and ‘bean’ (Denton & Otaiba, 2011). Similarly, Teig and Scherer, (2016) state that an analogical process involves the identification of partial similarities between different words or situations to support further inferences and is used to explain new concepts, solve problems, and understand new areas and ideas. It is easier for the learner to understand a new word if it is taught simultaneously with other words that have the same sound. Several programs are used to teach English reading skills utilizing the phonics method which includes Jolly Phonics, Junior Learning Letters and Sounds, Letterland, Song of Sounds, Twinkl Phonics, Monster Phonics, No Nonsense Phonics, and Sounds-Write, to name a few (OGL. Department of Education of the United Kingdom, 2021). The Jolly Phonics program is currently being used in Namibia's public schools (Gittins & Jolly, 2019).

2.7 Resources for Teaching Reading Skills Using the Phonics Methods

To create the best learning environment possible, teachers must be inventive and creative in their use of flashcards, picture cards, alphabetic posters, reading books, and demonstration methods, to name a few.

2.7.1 Flashcards

It is simple to incorporate flashcards into general education and special education classroom routines (Erbey, *et al.*, 2011). Flashcards have been shown to improve reading fluency and sight word learning, including sight word learning in other languages. Similarly, for vocabulary learning in English as a Foreign Language, context embedding, sufficient repetition, and explicit word instruction on flashcards is all required (Barwasser, *et al.,* 2020). One compelling argument in favour of using the

phonics method to teach English reading as described in this paper is its ease of implementation. There are no special supplies required the teacher only needs a list of unfamiliar words, some stories that use those words, and flashcards. The interventionists' preparation is low-cost and requires little time and effort (Barwasser, *et al.,* 2020; Evans, *et al*., 2016).

Teaching using flashcards is a fun way for learners to learn reading skills using phonics methods and can increase their interest in the subject. Flashcards are a type of visual media that promotes the visual sense and this type of media employs symbols, numbers, phrases, and images to visually convey ideas (Herlina & Dewi, 2017). Flashcard games can also help to improve relationships between learners and teachers, and it is expected that incorporating this flashcard game strategy into the learning process will improve elementary school learners' ability to begin reading (Harisanty, *et al.,* 2020).

2.7.2 Picture cards

Picture cards are graphic materials that transmit information and messages including images and pictures (Redmond, 2015). The teachers in this case use picture cards as instructional materials to teach reading using phonics methods. The use of image cards in junior primary schools is critical because they can increase learners' enthusiasm for reading while also assisting them in becoming more knowledgeable and skilled in their use of language (Octaberlina & Anggarini, 2020). Learners will gain a better understanding of the material, enjoy studying English and reap other benefits from using picture cards when reading. For example, Deni and Fahriany (2020), agreed that various learning materials are required for phonics methods. Picture cards and reading cards are similar in that a learner looks at the picture first before attempting to read what they see. Picture cards are very useful because they allow the learners to analyse

the relationship between the syllable sounds in everyday objects. As a result, it has the potential to improve memory and make reading easier for learners (Rasmitadila, *et al.*, 2020).

2.7.3 Alphabetic poster

A poster is a visual arrangement of colours that conveys important concepts and makes everything interesting to everyone. Posters are one type of alternative evaluation of written tests that aid in reader comprehension (Hanum, 2017). Posters can be used to teach and learn in reading classes, and they are more effective in teaching reading comprehension than other methods (Wahyuningsih & Fitriani, 2021). A poster is a type of informational display that uses text and images to discuss one or more key concepts. The poster is a component of a visual learning tool that includes images accompanied by text or concepts related to the images (Hanum, 2017). Poster learning media can be used in the learning process to expand learners' English vocabulary through the writing on the poster, which is naturally expected to make it easier for learners to memorize and understand what is being transmitted by the teachers (Wahyuningsih & Fitriani, 2021).

2.7.4 Reading books

Teaching reading is truly rocket science, so academic English is difficult and given this complication, learners require carefully planned instruction to become fluent readers (Moats, 2020).

Wahyun, *et al.*, (2016), pointed out that phonics is taught through storybooks where teachers read various storybooks to the learners and then ask learners to recite what they have heard from the read books. Reading books may also be done by allowing learners to listen to a reading book on a television or a radio and then ask the learners

to recite the phonetic aspects that they have heard from the media or book being used (Graaf, *et al.,* 2009). Teaching phonics in the context of storybooks could be expected to endorse the use of phonic knowledge during reading activities because decoding is embedded in the context in which it is used, thus stimulating the generalisation of taught knowledge (Phajane, 2014). The use of storybooks helps the learners to pay close attention and understand some words that they did not know. Although a "literature-rich environment" is desirable and will promote learners' reading development, it is not a ‘must-have’ for them to learn to read (Saydakhmetova, 2020).

2.7.5 Demonstration method

A demonstration method is a method of teaching that involves showing learners examples of a specific action, circumstance, or object, whether they are real or just imitations. Demonstration methods can be used to present more tangible learning content where the presenter clearly demonstrated how to learn to pronounce the letters (Simangunsong, 2020). According to Aqib and Ali (2018), educators can serve as planners, teachers, and evaluators. The following are some phases of technique application: 1) Gather the materials needed to teach English reading skills; 2) Explain to the class how and what is expected; 3) Employ a variety of teaching tools and exercises to gradually demonstrate to the class how sounds are formed using the appropriate articulation organs; four) maintain a continuous flow of instruction. Repeat the demonstration method to ensure that the learners understand the material completely. 5) The teacher then allows the learners to demonstrate letter sounds step by step. (p. 50-51)

2.7.6 Use of Technology

Text, graphics, audio, video, and animation are the five main interactive components of multimedia technology that are very useful in encouraging learners to learn to read (Lin, *et al.,* 2020). Teaching phonics and decoding skills with technology is very useful and can be quite effective because there are many apps and online games that can assist learners in honing these abilities, with some apps even providing feedback to help learners get better grades (Mahayuddin & Mamat, 2019). Furthermore, learners can use applications to practice decoding phrases that have a difficult sound-letter correlation. Digraphs and diphthongs, for example, are sound-letter relationships (Chen, *et al.,* 2016). Some of the benefits of using technology to teach these critical skills include the ability for learners to work at their own pace and receive immediate feedback thanks to the visual and interactive assistance provided by this technology. Teachers can also adapt their lesson plans to meet the specific needs of each learner (Niipare, 2019).

The technological transformation of the educational system will undoubtedly provide an exciting opportunity to provide realistic, authentic, engaging, and fun learning environments and to improve the learning process, which includes teaching reading using phonics methods (Mahayuddin & Mamat, 2019). In addition to textbooks, resources for teaching reading using the phonics method include access to photocopiers, computers, and projectors (Manasreh, 2010; Khassawneh, 2011). As a result, for teachers to make English reading lessons more engaging for learners, junior primary schools should be equipped to provide them with a variety of reading materials and incorporate technology into their lessons (Chen, *et al.,* 2016).

It has been discovered that technology-assisted individualized learning has the potential to improve learning outcomes, particularly in low- and middle-income

countries (Chen, *et al.*, 2019; Lin, *et al.*, 2020). There is even a program for Jolly Phonics' systematic synthetic phonics methodology, which is used to teach the fundamentals of English reading and writing. Children in this program learn about sounds and how to segment and mix them in a fun and multi-sensory way (Gittins & Jolly, 2019). According to Haufiku, *et al.*, (2022), several schools in the Ohangwena Region lack amenities such as internet access and electricity, which may limit the use of technology in English second language instruction. The amount of technology used in Namibian schools is quite low, and many of them, particularly those in remote areas, lack electricity, making it increasingly difficult to deploy cutting-edge technology (Osakwe, *et al.*, (2017). Participants in the Haufiku, *et al.*, (2022) focus group discussion emphasized that their schools lacked photocopier machines to copy reading materials for learners, as well as computers and the internet, to integrate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching English as a second language, which makes them unable to teach the subject effectively by the syllabus requirements.

2.8 Teachers' Experiences in Using the Phonics Methods

Many teachers have positive experiences with the use of the phonics approach in teaching reading in English to speakers (learners) of other languages (Buckingham, 2016). The methods have been seen to be effective in helping learners master and improve their reading skills (Eshiet, 2015; Olugbeko, 2015). However, there are a few teachers who have negative experiences with phonics methods. For example, according to Olugbeko (2015), the phonics methods encourage memorisation by learners without having understood all the phonic rules. Hence, teachers might assume that learners are quite aware of all the phonemes, yet they will be lacking in some areas. In certain circumstances, learners taught using phonics methods find it difficult to understand spelling where the sound does not correlate to the spelling for example

cucumber, campaign, queue etc (Tsang, 2020). The other problem is that phonics methods do not teach learners to differentiate homonyms (words that has the same pronunciation but different spellings and meaning) in writing for instance brake vs break or by vs buy (Al-Sobhi, *et al.*, 2017).

2.8.1 Teachers' Positive Experiences of Using Phonics Methods in Teaching English Reading

Much research indicated that the phonics methods are the best way to teach reading (Bell, 2016; Flynn, *et al.,* 2021; Pearce, *et al.,* 2014; Walker, *et al.,* 2013). According to Henbest and Apel (2017), phonics methods are effective for teaching struggling readers because they will be taught one step at a time and later pronounce the words. Many English-speaking countries have adopted the use of phonics methods in teaching reading because of its perceived advantages over other reading methods (Hodgson *et al*., 2018). For example, in England, the methods are used for screening good readers and those readers who still need help (OGL. Department of Education of the United Kingdom, 2015). Similarly, Campbell, (2020) indicated that there is widespread agreement among educators and teachers in Australia that the use of phonics methods as well as other code-based methods is the best way to teach English reading. This indicates that teachers view the phonics methods as the best methods to teach English reading.

In South Africa, Phajane (2014) in her study on Introducing Beginning Reading Using Phonics Approach found that South African teachers use the phonics methods, which is done mostly by identifying a letter and using it throughout the week to teach its sound. This has shown that learners can identify that many letters make more than one sound. For example, the letter E can stand in for as many as 3 sounds in the sentence

"She sees the shoe inside the house", this allows the learner to grasp the alphabetic principle and helps them understand reading techniques at a much quicker rate (Pretorius, *et al*., 2016). Similarly, Walker, *et al*., (2014) state that schools are said to have discrete phonics sessions for learners in the early years of the foundation where learners are grouped for phonics sessions based on their abilities. The same study indicated that certain schools use the "phonics o'clock" which involves a reception where learners are taught smaller numbers of letter sounds to help minimise confusion about letters that look alike (for example "b" and "d").

A study conducted by the United States of America National Reading Panel (as cited in Walker, *et al*., 2013) established that systematic synthetic phonics teaching leads to significant benefits for pupils in preschool until the end of primary school and that it had a positive and significant effect on disabled readers' reading skills. Therefore, the methods are quite conducive for all readers with different abilities. According to Clark, (2020), phonics screening check methods were introduced in the United Kingdom and Australia in 2012. The proportion of learners meeting the expected standard of reading English has increased from 58% to 74% in 2014. This indicates that the number of learners who are mastering reading has improved, thus the phonics methods are useful methods of teaching learners to master reading (Martínez, *et al.,* (2014). In a study about the views of teachers on the impact of Jolly Phonics in teaching phonics in Jamaica, Moodie-Reid (2016), agrees that teachers were positive about the effect of using the phonic approach in teaching reading. These views show that the teachers are seeing the improvement that the learners are making in their reading process through the phonics methods. This makes the use of phonics methods an important technique in teaching learners how to read effectively.

According to Phajane (2014), teaching phonics is a more effective way to teach learners early reading skills. This concurs with Walker *et al*., (2015) who emphasise the importance of systematic teaching of phonics' in successful early literacy. Almost all learners, including those from deprived backgrounds, who have good teaching of phonics will learn the skills they need to tackle new words and read full texts. They also tend to read more accurately than those taught using other methods, such as "look and say". This includes learners who find learning to read difficult, for example, those who have dyslexia. Olugbeko (2015) agrees that phonics methods rapidly promote the learner's knowledge of sounds, word blending, word reading and spelling and that "it makes the learners competent to handle unfamiliar words. Additionally, the phonics methods stimulate the learning interest of learners' understanding (Olugbeko, 2015; Eshiet, 2015). The phonic methods are unique in the sense that it makes learners know the different phonemes of each word. Therefore, learners will be able to easily read the whole word by combining different graphemes. In addition, learners will be able to understand how different sounds are created in a word instead of the traditional methods that teach and uses rote learning (Eshiet, 2015). Buckingham (2016) suggested that early success in reading is a powerful predictor of later literacy achievement which should be done using the phonic methods.

Wahyun *et al*., (2016) mentioned that through the phonics methods, teachers are using word box sheets and songs. When a teacher is teaching the sound of the letter ‘s’ he/she can sing a song as:

The snake is in the grass, the snake is in the grass,’sss’…’ sss’…’sss’.

The stress on the word ‘snake’ in the song enables the learners to pronounce it correctly at the same time. Action songs also enable learners to write and sound the letter at the

very same time when they move their bodies in illustrating how to write it. It allows learners to learn the format of how to write it which as a result helps to improve the learner's ability in reading. The song emphasises the pronunciation of the letter 's' at the beginning of the word 'snake,' at the end of a word, 'grass' where there is a double 's' and where there is a continuous 'sss' in the hissing sound of a snake. The song enables the learners to know that they must differentiate the phonic sound of 's' depending on where it's used. If it is a single 's,' they do not have to drag the sound of the word. If there is a double 'ss,' the sound is dragged out a bit. In 'sss' the sound is dragged further teaching learners to pronounce the phonic sound of each letter in a word.

Ahmad *et al*., (2012) believe that teachers also use the multimedia approach where the phonics methods are integrated with other phonetic teaching media strategies for teaching the English language. Multimedia consists of various teaching techniques such as the use of graphics, pictures, audio, video, and models. The teacher uses projectors or laptops, which allows learners to have a better understanding of the reading concept. The multimedia approach helps to end the monotonous way of teaching phonics which can easily bring boredom to the learners. They further indicated that the multisensory approach helps learners with reading disabilities such as those with dyslexia. Learners with dyslexia have a shorter concentration span and the different interactive ways of the multisensory approach help them to concentrate.

In addition to that, learners who will be taught through early reading using the phonics methods receive a lot of help with their reading skills than learners who learn through other various methods. It is important that a learner master how to read at an early stage otherwise the reading deficiency will continue with time and affect language and comprehension reading skills hindering the progress of those people who are not good

readers (Phajane, 2014). So, the use of the phonic methods is critical since it helps learners to improve their reading skills and the ability to read empowers them to succeed. This supports the idea of Walker, *et al.,* (2014) who expressed that the most important thing in education is to ensure that every learner learns how to read. Walker, *et al*., (2014) further maintained that, if learners are taught to read using the phonics methods, they easily read the content that they are supposed to read.

2.8.2 Teachers' Negative Experiences in Using the Phonics Methods in Teaching English Reading.

Despite the perceived advantages of the phonics approach by the teachers, it is not every teacher that supports the use of the approach in teaching reading especially if it is used as a single approach. According to Hodgson *et al.*, (2018), English does not have a single letter/sound correlation, thus it is not a phonetically regular language. For example, single letter sounds such as, /a/ in cat and mat are different, or the /e/ in egg and meat are different. This is not only associated with single sound letters but also consonant digraphs such as /ch/ in church and chemistry are different. Correspondingly, Mackenzie, (2019) found that:

> "English has a complex orthography as compared to the languages like Italian or Finnish, English has about 44 sounds, which are allied with the 26 letters of its alphabet, and some sounds are represented by combinations of letters or vowels (eg. /sh/, ea), and some letters are represented in spoken language by more than one sound (eg. the letter c can be /s/ or /k/). Thus, due to many rules that the learners will have to master, not all approaches to using the phonics methods are effective."

Some critics of the phonics methods have complained about the methods as they view that there is more to reading than just phonics (Hodgson *et al*., 2018). Some of the

research also argue that using the phonics methods can decrease their reading speed and reading fluency as learners can sometimes focus too much on phonics (Reutzel, *et al.,* 2014). The synthetic phonics method especially delays the learners' reading because it focuses on the specific pronunciation of each phoneme (Glazzard, 2017). The phonics method is also believed to not promote a love for reading according to some sources.

Arrow *et al.,* (2015) pointed out some drawbacks to the use of phonics sound in the classroom. These, among others, include insufficient knowledge of the alphabetic principle and phonological awareness, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of parental support for the methods at home.

Insufficient knowledge of the alphabetic principle and phonological awareness

Arrow, *et al.,* (2015) argued that although teachers understand the importance of using the phonics methods, most of them have insufficient knowledge of the alphabetic principle and phonological awareness in using the phonics methods. Phonics needs to be taught in a way that is easy for the learners to understand, but if the teachers are lacking some knowledge about how to deliver the lesson, it affects its effectiveness (Mesmer & Kambach, 2021).

Overcrowded classes

Overcrowded classes are another challenge that many teachers experience when teaching reading skills in English, using phonics methods. Overcrowding occurs when the number of learners in a classroom exceeds the ideal number, interfering with teaching and learning and making it difficult for learners to focus on their lessons (Muthusamy, 2015; West & Meier, 2020). An overcrowded classroom would undoubtedly reduce the amount of time teachers have to use cutting-edge teaching strategies such as the phonics method, and it would have an impact on teacher-learner

interaction (Likuru & Mwila, 2022). As a result, it becomes difficult for the teacher to give individual attention to struggling learners, while learners struggle to concentrate. According to Mwanamukubi (2013), teachers became unable to introduce the use of phonics methods in teaching English reading skills because of the overcrowded classroom. Thus, it becomes difficult for teachers to assign their attention to all the learner's reading abilities in translating letters and letter patterns into phonological forms (alphabetic coding) (Shankweiler & Fowler, 2004).

Anyienda (2017), asserts that huge classes make it difficult for teachers to deliver high-quality instruction, particularly in lessons on English as a second language. As exemplified in the study done by Likuru and Mwila (2022) they state that "the participants in the focus group emphasized that large classes were a burden to them as they could not cater for the individual difference of learners especially, the slow learners who require special attention. One participant repeatedly voiced his frustration, saying: "large classes stress a lot, and they always give me high pressure" p1951). Overcrowded classes, therefore, violets Makielski's (2008) discovery that when a teacher provides one-on-one training or small group conversations, learners are more likely to learn.

Teaching English reading in a crowded classroom is difficult, intimidating, and demoralizing, especially from a second language perspective; thus, even the most effective teachers face a variety of difficulties when the classroom is overcrowded. According to Emery (2012), in most African countries, effective teaching of English as a second language is hampered by overcrowded classes, which has a direct impact on learning outcomes.

Lack of parental involvement

According to Senechal and LeFevre (2002), home environments contribute to the learner's reading skills. In a study conducted by The University of Stavanger (2015), it is pointed out that parents' attitudes to reading, the number of children's books in the house, the age at which parents start reading aloud to children, and how often they read to them all determine how well-prepared children are to learn to read when starting school. Most parents do not help their children with their homework, according to Likuru and Mwila, (2022), they also emphasised that parents failed to have a positive influence on their children's behaviours and attitudes toward schoolwork, especially in the English second language context.

It is believed that illiteracy contributes to a lack of parental assistance as illiterate parents are unable to assist their children with reading using the phonics methods as they, themselves, do not understand English (Mwanamukubi, 2013). Most parents' level of education is also low, and they are unable to carry out their children's educational responsibilities (reading in particular). On the contrary, literate parents are more reluctant in helping their children with reading because they tend to focus more on their entertainment life and have little or no time to sit and have time with their children reading in English. Thus, the lack of assistance from parents in helping their children with reading, especially in English, poses a negative effect on teachers in using phonics methods in developing good readers at schools (Nicholas, 2011). To improve teachers' effectiveness and reduce learners' disregard for their schoolwork, LaRocque, *et al.,* (2011) claimed that parent-teacher, parent-learner, and parent-parent joint relationships are necessary. Al-Mahrooqi, *et al.,* (2016), opined that parents serve as their children's first teachers and continue to do so throughout their time in school

by creating an environment that encourages independent study and collaboration with teachers.

2.9 Strategies for Effective Teaching of English Reading Using the Phonics Methods

According to Bowers (2020), systematic and synthetic phonics, instructions can be used for the effective teaching of English reading. Other methods may include sound and picture match-up, sing-alongs that teach specific sounds, kinesthetic learning and decodable readers (Wahyun, *et al*., 2016).

2.9.1 Systematic Phonics Instructions

Systematic phonics instruction is a method of instruction that can be used by teachers to teach learners the correspondences between graphemes in written language and phonemes in spoken language and how to use these correspondences to read and spell words (Graaf, *et al*., 2009). Gate and Yale (2011) suggest that teachers should start to teach the learners the emergent readers' letter-sound relationship, so the learners become aware of the letter names and sounds and apply the basic relationships. Therefore, helping learners to begin to connect the letters with the correct sounds, which will help them blend the sounds to form words when reading.

2.9.2 Synthetic Phonic Instructions

According to Goswami (2008), synthetic phonics is a method of teaching reading where words are broken up into the smallest units of sound (phonemes) which allows the learners to make connections between the letters of written texts (graphemes, or letters symbols) and the sounds of spoken language. Callinan and Zee (2010) suggest that teachers should break down words into the smallest units of sounds (phonemes). Through this instruction, learners will be assisted in making connections between

letters of written texts and the sounds of spoken language, e.g., bat= /b/a/t/ (Gate &Yale, 2011). Also, through synthetic phonic instructions, the learner will learn how to identify all the phonemes in a word and match them to a letter to be able to read and spell it correctly (Wyse & Goswami, 2008).

2.9.3 Sound and Picture Match-up

This method is about matching the picture to a given sound. Reed, (2013) believed that the learners might not know how to say the word, cow, but she knows a cow when she sees one. Seeing a picture of something that they know, allows them to pronounce the sounds more fluently which resonates with Shmidman, and Ehri, (2010) that some learners are better at linking sounds to pictures. Therefore, in this version, the pictures are shown at the same time as the letter sounds are heard, allowing learners to make the connection between the sound and the letter. A teacher can teach learners how to read by placing a picture next to the word those learners must read. Reed, (2013) further stated that picture cards could be used to teach learners keywords by showing a pictorial representation. So, learners can learn the phonic sounds of words by matching them to a pictorial representation.

2.9.4 Sing-alongs that Teach Specific Sounds

This method involves learners learning some phonic sounds through singing songs or rhymes that have a specific sound being taught. Learners can learn sounds by seeing and listening to specific sounds Reed, (2013). An observation made by Wahyun *et al*. (2016) shows that the use of songs is an instrumental approach to making learners master phonic sounds. The authors further stated that a teacher can come up with a rhyme or poem that teaches a specific sound. The learners will be invited to sing the song with the teacher. Through the combination of rhythms, clapping, and dancing,

the learners will be able to connect sounds and letters in an easy, memorable, and active way Reed, (2013). Learners will be able to master the phonic sounds better by doing physical activities that correlate with the sound.

2.9.5 Kinesthetic Learning

Kinaesthetic, also known as tactile learning, is a way to get learners moving and doing; using the body in some form or fashion as they learn to read Reed, (2013). The use of kinaesthetic learning entails that the learners be physically involved in making shapes of letters or sounds using their bodies. Ariandika and Kartikawat (2018) suggested that learners should be allowed to make a movement that goes along with the sound that they are making. Similarly, Reeb (2011) believed that learners must learn phonic sounds by doing everyday activities that they can easily remember. For example, learners can play hide and seek with words and sentences (Farkas, 2013). It is believed that the teacher writes the words on pieces of paper and hides them around the room and a learner finds the piece of paper with the word, they must read it before searching for the next one. Thus, kinesthetic learning helps learners to master phonic sounds playfully.

2.9.6 Decodable Readers

The ‘decodable readers’ supported by the teachers are intentionally designed books that provide learners with practice with a specific letter-sound pattern that is taught as part of a synthetic phonics program (Adoniou, *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the books that can be decoded are made to fit with precise, methodical phonics education. They are short tales that use letters and letter groups that learners have learned in phonics classes almost exclusively to create words that can be phonetically decoded (Ehri & Flugman,

2018). The following lines, for instance, are from a decodable reader that emphasizes the consonants "N" and "P" and the short vowel "/a."

Nan and a pan.

Pap and a pan.

Nan and Pap (Adoniou, *et al.,* 2018).

Decodable texts can be especially useful for learners whose decoding skills are very limited. All learners should read texts that provide ample opportunities for them to apply the decoding skills they have learned (Spear-Swerling, 2019).

2.10 Summary

The chapter started by giving different authors' definitions of phonics methods. Different ways of teaching through using the phonic approach such as synthetic phonic, analytic phonic, and analogy phonics were stated and explained. The researcher also highlighted different experiences of teachers about the use of phonics methods in teaching reading. The chapters also highlighted the use of phonics methods in teaching reading. The chapter also dwelt on how to improve the effectiveness of the phonics methods in teaching reading. The current research aims to investigate teachers' experiences in teaching English on the phonics methods template. The methodology employed in investigating these experiences is presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology used in this study. First, the chapter discusses the research approach and design. Secondly, it focuses on the study population, sampling methods, data collection methods, and data analysis for this study. Lastly, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations for the study.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

This study employs a qualitative approach, using a single case study design. The qualitative approach is primarily exploratory research, which is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations that helps to provide insights into the problem (Monfared & Derakhshan, 2015). According to Fox and Bayat (2013), a qualitative approach aims to find the fundamental reasons behind a phenomenon. Similarly, Creswell (2014) points out that a qualitative approach enables the researcher to find the underlying reasons for a situation in a societal setting. In this study, a qualitative approach was used for exploring and understanding the meaning of how individuals or groups describe a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, the approach allowed the researcher to obtain the personal opinions of the teachers, and to see how learners are practising reading using the phonics methods.

A case study is a general term for exploring an individual group or phenomenon (Yin, 2014). It is characterized by its focus on a specific case or a single unit (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). Case studies are used to shed light on aspects of human thinking and behaviour that would be unethical or impractical to study in other ways (McLeod, 2019). In this study, a single case study design was used to investigate how teachers use phonics to teach English reading skills in a natural setting (Levitt, *et al* 2018). This allowed the researcher to obtain an in-depth analysis of a case (Yin, 2014). The research focused on a single unit, which was grounded over a duration of 4 weeks and varied sources of information was used to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

A single case study was convenient for this study because:

- The natives of the area where the school is located have challenges pronouncing certain letters. This is because those letters are not part of their

alphabet, for example, /R/ is pronounced as /L/; /S/ is pronounced as /SH/. The researcher wanted to understand the challenges impact teaching English reading using the phonics methods.

- The school is in a rural setup and it lacks resources like textbooks and teaching aid. The researcher was interested in knowing how lack of resources would impact teaching English reading using the phonics methods.
- The majority of the teacher in the school lack college training. Only three of the teachers received a college education. The researcher wanted to understand how lack of college training impacts teaching English reading using phonics methods.

3.3 Population

The population is defined as an entire group about which some information is required to be ascertained (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). The population for the study consisted of all the Junior Primary teachers at the selected school in the Ohangwena region.

3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample

According to Gay, et al., (2013) sampling procedure is a process of identifying the representative part of a larger whole that will allow findings to be representative of the population. For this study, purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. According to Fox and Bayat (2013), purposeful sampling entails that only members who can answer the research question can participate in the study. Thus, in many cases, purposeful sampling is used to select the people to be interviewed or situations to be observed, as well as the sites in which such persons or situations could be expected to be found (Shim & Lee, 2020). The use of purposeful sampling in this study allowed

the researcher to seek and obtain data from the participants who are directly linked to teaching reading in English at the Junior Primary Phase. All teachers who directly teach reading skills in English at the selected school were females, hence the sample of this study consisted of female participants only. A sample, according to Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010) is defined as a subset of the population. The sample for this study comprised five teachers from the selected school who are currently teaching English at a junior primary phase in the Ohangwena region, Eenhana circuit (see appendix H) of the Ohangwena Region map). These five teachers were purposively sampled on the teaching phase and teaching experiences. All participating teachers must be junior primary teachers with 5 years of teaching experience.

3.5 Research Methods and Instruments

This study used interview, and observation methods to collect the data.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Mukherji and Albon (2018) define a semi-structured interview as a qualitative method of inquiry, which combines a predetermined set of open questions that allows the researcher to explore themes using an interview guide as an instrument. It is designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon (McIntosh & Moses, 2015). Thus, according to Gay *et al.,* (2013**),** a semi-structured method is used to guide and provide the researcher with a clear set of instructions for the interview. Similarly, it is believed that a semi-structured interview allows the participants to respond anyhow they want, and the researcher may ask further questions based on the answer given (McIntosh & Moses, 2015)**.** In this study, each interview took approximately 45 minutes, and all interview conversations were recorded with the consent of the participants using a voice recorder. The semi-

structured interviews further allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of teachers' personal experiences on teaching reading using the phonic methods. The audio recordings allowed the researcher to listen to them repeatedly and assisted in the transcription processes. To obtain the teacher's experiences, an interview schedule was used. The schedule focused on the teachers' experiences of using the phonic methods in teaching English reading as well as the strategies that can be used to teach English reading effectively.

3.5.2 Non-Participant Observation

According to Creswell (2014), non-participant observation is a relatively unobstructed qualitative research method, where the researcher observes the participants without actively participating using an observation checklist. In non-participant observation, the researcher is made to understand the phenomenon by entering the social setting involved, while staying separate from the activities being observed Gay, *et al*., (2013). Non-participant observation also allows the researcher to become open-minded and less likely to feel sympathy and therefore produce biased data. Therefore, during non-participant observation, the researcher maintains an impartial role while the participants under study cooperate. In the current study, non-participant observation allowed the researcher to obtain first-hand information from the participants and make a comparison between what teachers say in the interview and what they do in the actual teaching. The researcher used an observation schedule checklist (refer to appendix G) to help guide what was being observed. The checklist (see appendix G) focused on the type of phonics methods that are being used by the teachers and how they are used.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher visited the school to make appointments for both interviews and observations with the teachers. Individual interviews were conducted during teachers' free time to avoid the disturbance of formal school activities and for the teachers to have ample time to take part and contribute more to the study. For the researcher to ensure that the interviews were efficient and that the data collected was rich and accurate, a voice recorder was used. The voice recorder allowed the researcher to listen to the recording repeatedly during data transcription and this provides a basis for reliability and validity (Nabeel, 2012). For triangulation purposes, participants who were interviewed were observed twice during English reading lessons. The physical classroom setting, teacher and learner interaction, use of various phonics instructions, and availability of literature materials in the classroom were observed using an observation checklist.

3.7 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using content analysis which is defined as a method, which mostly focuses on comparing, contrasting, and categorising data to draw meaning from it (Gall, *et al.*, 2007). The researcher compared the observation data with the interview data to confirm the agreement between the actual teaching practice and what was said in the interview. According to Roller (2019), content analysis condenses data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation. Thus, in this study, the collected data was manually coded and then condensed into categories. The condensed categories were then developed into themes, which were used to present the data.

3.8 Research Ethics

Research ethics are norms and values a researcher follows when conducting a study (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015). The researcher sought ethical clearance from the University of Namibia Ethics Committee, in the Research and Publication office. The researcher further asked permission from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Ohangwena Regional Education Director to carry out the study at the selected school. Consent letters were sent out to all participants to seek formal permission for participating in the study. The participants were informed about the aim of the study and that their participation was voluntary thus they were free to withdraw anytime if they found themselves uncomfortable with the study. To ensure anonymity, participants were assured that their personal details would not be disclosed to a third party. The data was kept confidential and only disclosed for the purpose of the study. The researcher also practised honesty in presenting the finding as no manipulation of data was done to suit some desired end. The researcher also had respect for intellectual property and avoided plagiarism.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. The study explores teachers' experiences in using the phonics methods in teaching English reading to Junior Primary learners. The study used a qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews and observations with five (5) Junior Primary school teachers in the Ohangwena region. Ohangwena region is a region in the northern part of Namibia generally known as Ovamboland because it is mostly inhabited by Ovawambo people. The mother tongue language in the area is Oshiwambo, where Oshikwanyama is the central language of the study. The data were analysed using content analysis, resulting in the data emerging in five (5) themes, which were used to present and discuss the data. The themes emerged from both interviews and classroom observations and were presented based on the research questions. Table 1 below shows the summary of themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 1: Summary of Themes and Categories

Themes	Categories
Demographic information of the teachers	
Teachers' understanding of the term phonics and reading	• Teachers' understanding of the term phonics. • Teachers' understanding of the term reading
Teachers' experiences in using phonics methods to teach English reading	Teachers' use of phonics methods in teaching reading skills in English. • The use of teaching resources • The use of teaching methods • The use of learners' activities
	Effectiveness of using phonics methods in teaching reading skills in English

Challenges faced by teachers in using phonics to teach English reading skills.	• Lack of teachers' training • Lack of appropriate teaching materials • Excessive use of Oshikwanyama as a medium of instruction • Overcrowded classrooms
Strategies to ensure effective usage of the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills.	• Provision of teachers 'training • Provision of teaching materials

4.2 Demographic Information of the Teachers

A total number of five (5) teachers participated in this study and the table below provides background information about the teachers which offers the reader a better understanding of the teachers.

Table 2: Demographic information of the Teachers

Teachers' identity	**Gender**	**Age Range**	**Teaching Experience**	**Teachers' Mother Tongue**	**Highest professional qualification**
Teacher A	Female	30 - 40 years	6 years	Oshikwanyama	Grade 12 (Currently studying towards a Diploma in Junior Primary Education at UNAM).
Teacher B	Female	30-40 years	8 years	Oshindonga	Diploma in Pre and Lower Primary Education (BETD)
Teacher C	Female	30 - 40 years	6 years	Oshikwanyama	Diploma in Junior Primary Education (NAMCOL)
Teacher D	Female	30 - 40 years	6 Years	Oshikwanyama	Degree in Pre and Lower Primary Education (UNAM)
Teacher E	Female	40 - 50 years	30 years	Oshindonga	Grade 12 (Currently studying for a diploma in Junior Primary Education at UNAM).

Table 2 shows that all the teachers teaching the Junior Primary phase at the selected school in Ohangwena Region were female. Four of the five teachers were in the age range of 30 – 40 years, while one teacher fell in the age range of 40 - 50 years. Thus, all the study participants are still in the active service year and hence, would share useful information on their experience as they teach reading skills using the phonics methods. Four out of the five teachers have more than six years of teaching experience on average, and one teacher has 30 years of teaching experience, therefore, indicating that teachers had significant experience teaching in the Junior Primary phase. The experience is a definite sign that they would have better teaching experience in the educational field; hence, they might have had much training or expertise in teaching English reading skills using the phonics methods. Babinski, *et al*., (2018) emphasize that the teachers' experience is important while teaching English reading skills and more skills are learnt as the teachers' years of experience increase. Among the teachers, three had acquired certificates in teaching the Junior Primary phase, while two teachers acquired Grade 12 as their highest qualification and are currently upgrading through in-service training at UNAM.

Furthermore, two of the teachers speak Oshindonga and three speak the Oshikwanyama language, which influences their English pronunciation.

4.3 Teachers' Understanding of the Term Phonics and Reading.

4.3.1 Teacher’s Understanding of the Term Phonics

Teachers were asked to explain what the concept of “phonics methods” means to them. All teachers described the phonics methods correctly as an approach involving the learners looking at letters and matching the sounds together to read. They further indicated that the phonics methods are used at the beginning of reading to connect

graphemes, enabling learners to blend letter sounds and read the words instead of individual units. The teachers had to say the following:

> "*Phonics methods is a way or approach in which one is able to use letter sounds to teach reading" (Teacher D).*
>
> "*Well…I think the phonics method is a way in which learners match the sounds of the letters together. For example, the sound of letters t=t and h=h. If you put them together, you get a totally different sound =th" (Teacher A).*
>
> *"Phonics methods is the start of someone reading, it's taught through looking at the alphabet letters, concentrating on the way they sound" (Teacher C).*

The view of educators is that phonics methods are successful in teaching learners to read, especially in lower grades. The Department of Education of the United Kingdom (2015) maintains that the phonics methods teach learners how to recognise each letter's sounds, identify the sounds that different combinations of letters make, and blend these sounds to make a word. Therefore, the phonics methods encourage learners to read through understanding the sound made by individual letters and then read the word as a whole. In this study, the teachers at the selected school concur that phonics methods help learners to master specific sounds of letters which helps with reading. Teachers' perceptions of the phonics methods reflect the views of Phajane (2014), Eshiet (2015), McArthur *et al.*, (2015) and Henbest and Apel (2017) who found that the phonics methods help learners in identifying the relationship between letters and the sound they make. Thus, if learners can identify the grapheme sound, it will be easier to blend the sound and read a word as a whole.

As pointed out by the teachers, phonics methods give learners letter-sound knowledge, a skill essential for tackling unfamiliar words by themselves. Hence, teachers who participated in this study correctly understood the concept of phonics methods.

4.3.2 Teachers' Understanding of the Term Reading

Two teachers defined reading as putting letter sounds together. They also expressed that reading includes combining sounds and making meaning of what they are reading.

> *"Reading is, basically, a way of changing print into a meaningful idea. It means that it involves being able to combine sounds and make meaning of what is being read"* (Teacher D).
>
> *"Reading is an active process where learners look at alphabetic symbols and combine their sound to draw meaning from them"* (Teacher C)

Teachers' understanding of the concept of reading was centred on the learner's knowing the letter names, letter symbols, and sounds of the letters of the alphabet, meaning that for the learners to read a word, they must first recognize the letter name, symbols, and sound. Chieh-Fang and Melanie, (2015) concur with the views of the teachers that reading is the process of taking in sense of the meaning of letters, symbols, and sounds. Recognising the letter name, letter symbols, and the letter sound permits learners to blend the sounds and make meaning of what they have read.

4.4 Teachers' Experiences in Using Phonics Methods to Teach English Reading.

4.4.1 Teachers' Use of Phonics Methods in Teaching and Reading Skills in English.

The data analysis revealed that teachers use phonics methods in teaching English reading skills. Below are how the phonics methods were used by teachers in teaching English reading skills.

The use of teaching resources

Teachers reported that they use different resources in teaching English reading skills using the phonics methods which include pictures, storybooks, alphabet posters, etc. According to the teachers, learners understand better and faster through viewing

pictures and reading words. The teachers further indicated that these resources enable learners to relate the sounds to the print on the poster when reading. They also felt that alphabet posters and storybooks are instrumental because they allow the learners to repeat the sounds of the letters on the alphabet poster. Storybooks help learners to read unfamiliar words and mostly get reminded of the phonics songs, which allow them to blend the words correctly. Below are some of the quotes from the teachers.

> "*This is a way of also teaching reading that I use where I use the look and say methods, where I have a picture of the word "hat" and underneath that picture is the word itself. Then I allow the learners to provide the sounds of the word. After that, they can also blend it together. I read with them and help explain its meaning in their mother tongue*." (Teacher C).
>
> "*When I write the word "dog" on the chalkboard, I teach the sounds of the word using the poster. I repeatedly keep saying the sounds together with the learners till they are able to blend the sounds.* She further added that *"at times we mostly sing the phonic songs with the learners*" (Teacher D).
>
> *"Sometimes we sing the phonic sounds pointing to the letters"* (Teacher E).
>
> "*The picture cards are helpful because my learners can relate the sounds to the print on paper that they are seeing. And it allows them to blend the letters correctly*." (Teacher C).

Although all teachers indicated that they use picture cards, this was not evident in the observation made. The observation revealed that only two teachers used picture cards during their teaching. Picture cards were used by teachers when they showed the learners the picture of an animal together with the word. The teacher supported learners by murmuring the first letter sound. The learners were then able to read the word

through the picture, completing the whole word, thereby helping the slow learners to read the words from the pictures with confidence.

Observation further revealed that resources such as flashcards, alphabet posters, reading books and phonics songs were also used by most teachers during English reading skills. Teacher A, on the other hand, had an alphabet poster in her classroom. However, she was failing to use it to refer to the learners who could not provide the correct letter sounds, which teachers D and E were doing.

Additionally, few teachers had reading corners in their classrooms that consisted of various books for reading practice. However, none of them made use of the reading corner during the observation indicating that in some cases, there are teaching materials available in schools that teachers do not use. In this case, these materials may promote English reading skills among junior primary learners.

Teaching materials used by the teachers

The teachers mostly used resources such as flashcards, alphabet posters and songs, and according to the teachers, this is because the resources are cheap to make, especially at the school under study which is in a remote area where resources are not readily available. However, there was a disparity between what the teachers said in the interview about the teaching materials they use versus what the researcher observed. From the interview, only two teachers stated that they use flashcards however the researcher observed that four teachers are using flashcards. All teachers claimed to be using picture cards, but the observation shows that only two teachers are using picture cards. During the interview, only three teachers indicated the use of alphabet posters while observation reveals that four teachers are using poster cards. In the interview, three teachers indicated that they are reading books to the learner however observation reveals that only two teachers are reading books to learners.

The disparity indicates that teachers do not do what they say they do. Barwasser, *et al.,* (2020); Evans, *et al*., (2016) assert that flashcards are cheaper than books and that they are used more when introducing letter sounds through phonics. Additionally, this allows the learners to develop a sense of comprehension by reading a word. Some of the teachers did not use these resources even though they were readily available and cheap. The researcher thinks that the teachers take the use of flashcards for granted and they do not prioritize their essence in teaching reading.

The use of teaching methods

All teachers acknowledged using different teaching methods in teaching reading skills using the phonics methods in English. Such methods include synthetic phonics, analytic phonics as well as analogy-based phonics. Most of these methods were used by the teachers combining them with whole class participation, demonstration, guided reading, shared reading, and individual reading methods.

Synthetic phonics

The study's findings revealed that all teachers use the synthetic phonics methods when they teach English reading in conjunction with the whole class participation methods. Teachers related whole class participation to a teaching method where all the learners are involved in learning. During the interview, the teachers further pointed out that using the synthetic phonics methods followed the learner-centred approach whereby teachers jumble letters, and then the learners blend them by reading the letter sound. After that, they join the letters to form words. Some of the teachers indicated that they sing phonic songs with the learners, and some play memory games and code-switch to accommodate all the learners as they read the words. Below are the quotes from the teachers:

"…I blend letters on the board" (Teacher B).

"*There are times I bring my laptop for the learners to listen and sing along with me to the phonic song"* (Teacher A).

"*Amm… I mostly use the memory game activity, where the learners sound the letter, they saw on the flashcard that was flashed in front of them".*

"*I try to tell a story in English then translate it where possible for the learners to make sense of the content"* (Teacher D).

The use of whole-class participation was evident from lesson observations where teachers were observed allowing all learners to sing aloud the phonics sounds and the action songs. The learners continually played the phonic game. Teacher C used the reading wheel. She allowed learners to spin the arrow and read the word where the arrow landed. Teacher A included all the learners by flashing the letters and allowing the learners to give the letter sounds.

It has also been observed that most teachers used their Mother Tongue (MT) to clarify points that the learners did not understand in English. Because of insufficient exposure to English, teachers switched to Oshikwanyama, the teacher's mother tongue, for the learners to comprehend and make meaning. Nevertheless, this may pose some challenges to the learners as they may not grasp the correct letter sounds anymore because of code-switching.

Teachers further reported using the demonstration methods by blending the letter sounds on the board. They made sure that the learners were looking at them as they sounded the letter sounds that were showing on the chalkboard. Moreover, the teachers demonstrated the letter sounds by humming the sounds and miming actions linking the letters to the real world. Teachers had these to say:

> "*There are so many ways that I use them. I can remember the way I demonstrate the letter sounds to the learners while they are looking at my lips and also, I blend the letters on the board"*
>
> *"I and my learners have created an action song which has letter sounds. So, every time my learners find themselves having difficulties with giving the correct letter sound. We mime the action song till the learners can provide the correct letter sound"* (Teacher B).

Similarly, the observation revealed that teachers used demonstrations to provide the correct letter sounds, using their lips and their bodies allowing the learners to imitate what the teachers were doing. Apart from this, the teachers also demonstrated the letter sounds with their bodies. For example, the letter "f" was demonstrated by Teacher D with the sound 'fuuuu' as well as actions like she is blowing a balloon.

These findings indicate that the demonstration methods enable teachers to correctly express the letter sounds for the learners to imitate. Imitation of these letter sounds by the learners led to the blending of words supporting Nadiera and Yamat, (2019) finding that when the teacher demonstrates letter sounds, the learners stick to what the teacher is saying and doing. It also indicates that the demonstration method enables the learners to correspond to the letter sounds well (Simangunsong, 2020). However, if teachers wrongly demonstrate the sounds, the learners will likely find it difficult to read the words correctly. For example, some teachers could not differentiate between the letter sounds *r* and *l*, which echoes Frans (2020) who asserted that the results of the learners taught by a teacher with insufficient English exposure would be disastrous. Nevertheless, her demonstrations were good for the research teachers with a better understanding of English letter sounds, such as Teacher D. As such, her learners imitated the letters correctly without any problem.

Analytic phonics

Two teachers reported that during their classes, their learners sometimes read words from the hanging charts or on the walls on their own. Thus, shows mastery of good reading skills. Moreover, at times the teachers assisted the learners, especially when they were failing to read words, which are pronounced the same but consisted of different letters, as captured below:

> *"…l find my learners in class trying to read any print they see around the class. But I have noticed that not all the learners are able to adopt this method"* (Teacher C).
>
> *"…I mostly sing the phonic songs and ask them to point at the letters while l watch, when they are struggling, I help them too"* (Teacher A).

Observation revealed that only learners in classes with charts on the wall and some hanging from the ceilings participated well in reading, and few teachers corrected the learner's mistakes. Though Teacher A indicated that her classroom had adequate teaching materials and that she provided support to the learners during their reading lessons, this was not evident in her actual teaching. This same teacher was only observed rendering little support to her learners. This indicates that teachers know what they are supposed to do however, they do not do it in actual teaching practice as observed. Therefore, teachers need to ensure that their way of teaching is guided by statutes in the guide for teaching Junior primary learners and the syllabus. In this case, classes must have adequate teaching materials and teachers should give hands-on assistance to the learners.

The findings indicate that Junior Primary classrooms should have various resources on the wall (word cards and flashcards) or a reading corner where books are kept for reading. This allows the learners to be able to make connections to what they are

reading. For instance, if the learners can read the label "window" on the window in class, they can identify the things even when they are not in class. Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) indicated that as a print-rich aid in the development of the learner's reading skills, learners begin to notice signs that help them figure out words they see. Thus, a foundation for reading is laid down as evidenced by the fact that teachers who had charts and assisted their learners made it easier for the learners to be able to read and make correct letter sounds, hence making the correct pronunciation of words. Henbest and Apel (2017) findings corroborate with idea that the phonics methods make teachers teach the learners to be able to pronounce words more easily when the learners read more frequently to the written and displayed charts in the classroom.

In contrast, the walls of the classroom that are bare of print material for reading limit the learners in learning the different letter sounds. The finding concurs with Pretorius, *et al*., (2016) who indicated that learners cannot practice reading in a poor print classroom environment.

Analogy-based phonics

The teachers indicated that they sometimes use flashcards of letters and ask learners to build up new words with those letters. These activities are said to develop learners' vocabulary and enhance their spelling abilities. Furthermore, the teachers reported that they had realised that their learners were mostly eager to read words with similar endings as well as build new ones from the same ending letters.

> *"... Sometimes I take flashcards with different letters and ask my learners to build up new words." .... "This activity teaches the learners new vocabulary and also helps with their spelling." (Teacher D).*

> *"... My learners are always happy when they are reading words that have similar ending sounds. This also helps them read unfamiliar words."* (Teacher B).

Similarly, most teachers were observed using the Consonant Vowel Consonant *(*CVC) word by substituting the initial sounds and asking the learners to form new words and read them out loud. The activity also allowed the learners to read unfamiliar words. Teacher B made the learners match the consonant to the blend and the learners had to read the words that were formed. For example, learners were shown the consonants m, l, s, t, and short vowels and then they had to combine the vowels with consonants to form a word and then read it. Learners practised the sounds, and the teacher modelled how to blend (or combine) them into small words: am, mat, at, sat and later assisted them in reading and spelling the same similar words. Most teachers also assisted the learners who had difficulties in reading unfamiliar words with similar ending sounds by sounding the first phonic sound before reading the whole words.

Through the analogy-based phonics approach, learners easily master different letter sounds which are being used in a different world and enable the learners to be able to read unfamiliar words by using a segment (rime) of a known word to form new words with the same segment. Learners do this by replacing beginning letters to form the new word, making it to be easy for them, e.g., date, rate, and bate, therefore, enabling them to notice word families and work with the sounds in a language. The finding, therefore, concurs with Teig (2016), who found that the analogy-based phonics approach enables the learners to use the knowledge that they already must read and decipher words they do not know yet, meaning they can be taught more words at a time because they share the same rhyme.

The use of learners' activities

The analysis revealed that teachers made use of different learner activities in teaching English reading skills. The following were said to be used: singing the phonic song, memory game, letter-sound correspondence, phonics picture cards and Consonant Verb Consonant.

During the study, phonics songs and memory games activities were used the most each taking 29% of the time. Letter and sound correspondence, phonics picture cards and CVC were the least used taking 14% of the time each.

Phonics song

Most teachers indicated that they gave phonic song activities to their learners during the teaching of English reading lessons. They believe that learners learn better how to read when they are involved in plays and that action is taking place, which is believed to arouse learners' interest. Below are some quotes from the teachers:

> *"At times, we mostly sing the phonic songs with the learners because learners mostly learn through play*" (Teacher D).
>
> *"I mostly sing the phonic songs and ask the learners to point at the letters while they sing, this is because it arouses their interest and makes them eager to want to read what they are singing*" (Teacher E).

It was similarly observed that most teachers started their lessons with action phonic songs such as jolly phonics songs, which aroused the learners' interest and gave them the confidence to read. It was, however, observed that one teacher did not use any phonics song in her actual teaching meaning that teachers do not do what they say they do.

The findings resonate with Wahyun, *et al*., (2016). who argued that learners understand better and participate more actively when they are learning and singing because it

enhances their morale and zeal to learn. Therefore, if the learners are not involved in the lesson, their participation will be minimal, and they can hardly understand the presented content. Thus, teachers must give their learners opportunities to participate in phonics singing activities.

Memory game

Two of the teachers reported that they make use of memory games in teaching English reading. They believe that the memory game allows their learners to focus on the visual discrimination of the letters. The teachers further reported that through the memory game, learners can concentrate on the flashcards and display the correct letters. Teachers had this to say:

> "*I also give memory games where learners point at the letter that was flashed to them in the alphabet poster and give the name and sound, which allows them to distinguish the letter they saw from others"* (Teacher D).
>
> "*I mostly give the memory game, where the learners sound the letters, they saw on the flashcards that they saw flashed in front of them because it allows them to concentrate on the letter"* (Teacher B).

All teachers were observed flashing some flashcards with letters to the learners and the learner was expected to provide the correct letter name and sound. Most of the teachers had an interesting way of doing it by allowing the learners to point to the alphabet poster to indicate the letter and give the correct sound. Learners were interested in ensuring that they pointed at what they saw. On the other hand, Teacher B flashed an attractive picture card to the learners and asked them what they saw. One learner said: "I saw a dog" she then flashed the letters one by one, and the learners gave the correct sound. She then wrote the word on the board with the learners blending the letters indicating that the use of memory games was very vital in the

understanding of the learners. The memory game improves the learner's visual recognition, leading to the learners being able to distinguish one letter from another and recognise their different sounds (Ramani, *et al*., (2020). Nevertheless, teachers who use unattractive materials during memory games do not improve the learners' zeal to learn how to read. As a result, learners will lose concentration.

Phonics picture card

Two teachers indicated that they used phonics picture cards. These teachers believe that the phonics picture card helps the learners to identify the missing sound and blend the sounds of the letters before they read the word. They further reported that learners learn short and long vowel sounds through the phonics picture card, improving their reading skills. Below are some quotes from the teachers:

> *"... This activity helps my learners to identify the missing sounds of the word which allows the learners to pay attention to the blending of the letter sounds of the word".* (Teacher D).
>
> *"I sometimes teach the short and long sounds of the vowels using this activity and it helps the learners with reading".* (Teacher E).

Similarly, Teachers D and E were observed using phonics picture cards, where the learners identified pictures and the corresponding sounds. In the phonics picture card activity, the teachers drew a cat and wrote the word 'cat' with a missing letter like "__at." The learners were expected to identify missing letters. The same teacher also drew an apple on the board and asked the learners to say the initial sound of the given picture. The teacher then wrote the word 'apple' and read it with the learners. The same concept was used with many different words.

From what was observed, using phonic cards was very effective as it helped the learners identify how to read given words. Therefore, using pictures and parts of words

made it easy for the learners to understand how to read the given words. Once a picture was given, learners already knew how they were supposed to read it. Hence, teachers are encouraged to promote significant efficacy in teaching reading using the phonics picture card as demonstrated by (Deni & Fahriany, 2020).

Consonant Vowel Consonant (CVC) words

Two teachers emphasized the use of CVC words in their responses during their interviews. They reported that they used CVC words to teach the learners to pair sounds together until they could hear what they were saying. According to the teachers, such words could also be used to teach learners to read unfamiliar words. The teachers believe that CVC words are easier to use because the learners can separate and blend the sounds. This can be evident from the quotes below:

> *"… I teach learners to pair sounds together… until they are able to hear what they are saying, especially when I am using the CVC words. Boy = (b/o/y)*" (Teacher D).
>
> *"Well... there are times I use the CVC words; this is because it allows the learners to put the sounds together and results in my learners reading unfamiliar words."* (Teacher C).
>
> *"... Using the CVC words is easier for learners to read because they can separate and blend the sounds"* (Teacher B).
>
> *"... I make cards of letters then place them on the board and ask the learners to come and form words for example pot from letters o, m, t. a, p, y, s, d"* (Teacher E).

It was similarly observed that teachers made use of CVC in their teaching. Teacher C used her fingers to illustrate the CVC words. She made the learners give the letter sound of the CVC using her fingers. The learners gave each letter sound individually

until they blended the sound and read it as one word. Teacher E focused on making the learners identify the initial, middle, and ending sounds of CVC words. The activity allowed the learners to read, even unfamiliar words. In Teacher D's class, it was observed that while the teacher was playing a game with the learners, she gave the letter sounds of the CVC words, and the learners listen to the sounds, wrote them down, and raised their hands to read out the given word. This allowed the learners to be involved in the learning process.

Observation revealed that several teachers used CVC words successfully. The teachers used different strategies to use CVC words, and all the strategies seemed to be easily understood by the learners. The use of the fingers to illustrate the CVC words appeared effective as it enabled the learners to identify the individual letters that were being represented by the fingers and to read the words. It is also evident that when the teacher made the learners read the initial, middle, and last letters individually, it allowed the learners to decode and blend sounds when reading. These findings support those of Cox (2019), who revealed that through CVC, learners learn how to decode letters into their respective sounds. The skill is essential to learners in reading unfamiliar words. Thus, it was noted that the use of CVC made learners' reading easier.

Letter and sound correspondence

Three teachers explained that they allowed their learners to paste the picture cards on the board and let the learners provide the correct initial letter sound of the picture illustrated. The activity is said to be very helpful because it allows the learners to know different letter sounds. Teachers quotes:

> *"I allow the learners to paste the picture cards on the board and allow the learners to identify the initial letter sounds of the pictures that are posted on the board."* (Teacher D).

"…these activities helped my learners to know letter sounds" (Teacher C).

It was similarly observed that teachers used hands-on activities that helped them to teach letter and sound correspondence. Teacher E used picture cards and had initial letters of the words of the pictures that were displayed. The learners had to pick a picture and match it to the initial letter of the picture's word. Then they had to read out the word. The learners also had to do their action songs to remind them of the letter sound. Teacher D had picture cards with flashcards of CVC words that were being represented. The learners matched the pictures to the correct words, and they had to read out the words. The teacher also had missing CVC words where the learners were expected to link the correct letter sound and read it, for example, c…. p (u); m…. g (u).

On the contrary, it was observed that teachers focused on using letter and sound correspondence in teaching English reading skills using the phonics methods, which helped the learners identify the general sound of letters and read unfamiliar words. With the letter, sound correspondence, teachers are believed to use various activities, matching the pictures to the initial letter sound or the correct word. These activities allowed the learners to recognise the letters in words and associate each letter with its sound. Moreover, the letter-sound correspondence also allows the teacher to demonstrate the letter sound to the learners, this later permits the teachers to scaffold the learners to match the letters and sounds correctly. In the end, the teachers are expected to fade support as the learners develop competencies. Eventually, the learners will be able to listen to the targeted sound and select the letter independently. All of this is very interesting because it helps arouse the learner's interest and provides the learners with an opportunity to participate in the class. These findings concur with Henbest and Apel (2017), who believe that the use of letter and sound correspondence

methods is the hallmark of teaching early reading. This is because learners are taught to understand the relationship between letters and their sounds (Phajane, 2014).

4.4.2 The Effectiveness of Using the Phonics Methods

The teachers were asked to indicate how effective the phonics methods were in teaching English reading. All the teachers acknowledged that the phonics methods are very effective in teaching English reading skills. They reported that using phonic methods helps learners learn the letter sounds, which allows them to decode and blend the sounds of the letters. As a result, the learners could read. The teachers also expressed that the phonics methods aroused the learners' interest in reading, leading to learners being able to tackle unfamiliar words. This is what the teachers had to say:

> *"Phonics methods is a very good approach to reading because it provides the learners with the knowledge and skill to be able to read the second language (English)"* noted (Teacher B).
>
> *"Phonics methods help the learners learn how to read unfamiliar words and most especially how to spell words correctly as a result enriches the learner's ability to read."* (Teacher A).

From the teachers' statements, all teachers admit that using the phonic methods makes it easier for the learners to master the sound of letters because it is essential to learners' reading skills, including dealing with unfamiliar words. Furthermore, all teachers acknowledge that the use of the phonics methods is essential because of its role in enabling learners to read words correctly.

These findings support those of Eshiet (2015); Olugbeko (2016), who maintain that the phonics methods are essential in improving the English reading ability of learners. Ahmad *et al* (2012) agree that the phonics methods are one of the methods used in helping struggling learners read better.

Even though some teachers indicated that the phonics methods are effective in teaching reading in English, they also felt that the methods are not always effective, especially in teaching letters with more than one sound and silent letters, as captured below:

> *"Oh, l do not even know how to explain this, l found it challenging, especially to the silent letters. I am saying this because the phonics methods deal with the sounds of letters and blending. Learners find it hard to ignore the silent words, for example, words like a knife, tongue,"* noted (Teacher C).
>
> "*This is really a challenge sometimes. You teach the sound of A as /a/ then find yourself teaching the letter sound to the same learner as /ae/ again, which confuses her/him. So, sometimes I avoid this and only use the whole language approach,"* said (Teacher B).

The above findings revealed that several letters in English have more than one sound value. For example, 'c' which can represent the sound /k/ in 'cat' or the sound /c/ in 'city'), is said to be the challenge that exists when using the phonics methods (Olugbeko, 2016). The findings also revealed that the phonics methods to teach English reading skills are not always a strict one-to-one correspondence between sound and letter, especially when dealing with silent letters. For example, if the teacher writes the word "knife", the learners will use word recognition to read it because /k/ is silent. Therefore, this just confirms that the teachers might lack a complete understanding of the different strategies for teaching English reading skills using the phonics methods. For example, a teacher might misunderstand that the hard g (grass) and soft g (giraffe) must be taught separately and then combined afterwards.

4.5 Challenges Faced by the Teachers in Using Phonics to Teach English Reading

All teachers confirmed facing challenges in using phonics to teach English reading skills. Such challenges include poor training (lack of knowledge), confusion of letter names and letter sounds, lack of appropriate teaching materials, the excessive use of Oshikwanyama as a medium of instruction, overcrowded classes, and poor background of the learners.

4.5.1 Poor Training

Poor training was one of the challenges reported by teachers. Most teachers indicated that they had not attended any training regarding the use of phonics methods to teach English reading skills. They had this to say:

> *"... I have not attended any training regarding how to use the phonics methods to teach reading in English"* (Teacher C).
>
> *" .... I have not gone to any training yet"* (Teacher D).

From the study, there is no assurance that teachers have the content knowledge necessary to deliver effective phonics instruction, and knowledge is not necessarily correlated with schooling level. The researcher deduced from the teacher's reports that their lack of necessary knowledge may be due to a lack of adequate training. The lack of phonics training may explain why the teachers struggled to use it during the English reading lessons meaning that if teachers do not receive training, they may fail to deliver the phonics instructions as much as they may want to. Campbell (2020) poses another challenge which might be faced by the teachers that is even though some instructors may have the necessary subject-matter expertise, they weren't always mindful of the concepts that learners were acquiring while participating in play-learning programs that they developed. The results of the interviews showed that while the teachers could

define the term "phonics," they were unable to apply in-depth knowledge and explain how phonics linked to early reading because they might lack high-quality in-service training for early literacy at the time the instructors finished their degrees. The finding complements other national and international findings that pre-service teacher preparation programs for early childhood educators fall short in providing information regarding children's reading development (Lynch & Owston, 2015; Raban *et al.,* 2017). Thus, Glazzard (2017) believes that teachers play a crucial role in how learners master the phonic learning approach and must be well-trained.

4.5.2 Lack of Appropriate Teaching Materials

Teachers reported that they do not have enough English teaching materials (textbooks) at the school. They further pointed out that they had to share the textbooks, which affected their timetable. They also expressed that they mostly improvise by creating alphabet posters, and flashcards using their money to develop these materials for their classes. Moreover, the lack of basic services such as electricity is hindering them from using electronic technology. Teachers indicated:

> *"… I have realized that due to the limited teaching aids, such as (alphabet books), the usage of phonics methods is affected because we end up sharing teaching aids and having to shift our lessons on the timetable because they can't because at the same time due to exchanging of teaching materials"* (Teacher C).
>
> *"I am struggling with the lack of resources; learners do not have enough books for them to learn various English words"* (Teacher D).
>
> *"Well… to date there is no electricity at my school, and I am unable to bring cassettes of phonics sounds for learners to listen to them. There are no radios, it is quite a challenge we do not all know the letter sounds and this could have*

been helping me for the learners to listen to the sounds on the recording" (Teacher E).

"I improvise by creating an alphabet poster with letters or at times I use my hard-earned money to buy posters for my learners. I also create flashcards for my learners" (Teacher E).

Teachers were further asked why all teaching materials displayed are in the vernacular language. One teacher quote:

"This is what we were told by the Regional officers that since the medium of instruction is Oshiwambo (Oshikwanyama) then the teaching aids should revolve around that" (Teacher D).

These findings reveal that the classrooms are short of teaching materials, which results in the teaching-learning process not being productive and conducive to the learners. The use of teaching materials is, therefore, very crucial in the learners' ability to master new letter sounds. The use of the material is congruent with the ZPD that focuses on teaching the learners from what is known to the unknown; hence teachers must first teach learners the letter sounds and then move on to new words using suitable teaching materials. In addition to the learners reading English, Henbest and Apal (2017) stated that learners must know the alphabet before they can be taught phonics. Therefore, alphabet books help learners to master the alphabet. However, because there was a shortage of these alphabet books, the learners had difficulties unlocking the English language symbols and complementing learners' enjoyment of books, especially during reading.

These findings further reveal that due to a lack of access to electricity, teachers were unable to provide the correct letter sounds using technological gadgets such as cassettes, laptops and even radios (Osakwe, *et al.*, 2017). As a result, the teachers used

their cell phones to play phonics songs and sang to the learners frequently so they could listen and pick out one or more letter sounds. However, the use of songs in teaching letter sounds can be a challenge to slow learners, as they have a problem converting the letter sounds to writing. For example, if the teacher reads the word '*cat'*, the learners might write '*ket'* because they are writing based on what they are hearing.

4.5.3 Excessive Use of Oshikwanyama as a Medium of Instruction

Most teachers acknowledged that the school/s used Oshikwanyama as a medium of instruction. They reported that using Oshikwanyama as a medium of instruction impacts the learner's progress regarding the use of the phonics methods in teaching English reading. Such impact includes learners having difficulties blending certain letters to produce one sound which may be due to a lack of some English sounds in the mother tongue (Patrick, *et al.,* 2013). This is evidenced in the teachers' statements below:

> *"… I have also noticed that the learner's mother tongue can also be a problem because there are letters that are used in Oshikwanyama when they blend r with certain letters to produce a different sound. Learners are having difficulties with those sounds'* (Teacher A).
>
> *"Well, the learners are mostly exposed to Oshikwanyama, and they are hardly exposed to English unless in an English lesson"* (Teacher C).
>
> *"I think this is also a concern, the medium of instruction which is the mother tongue. It makes it difficult to understand how to read English because they are only taught English once or twice and the rest of the entire day, they are taught Oshikwanyama*" (Teacher D).

This was also revealed in the observation when the teachers constantly used more Oshikwanyama during English reading lessons than the second language itself, English. Most of the teachers were constantly providing wrong pronunciations of letter sounds, especially words that had letters *L, R, W* and *U,* revealing the impact of Teachers' own English proficiency influences language learning. Teacher C had difficulties differentiating the letter sound of diagraphs as *'sh'* and 's' from the words she was reading. She read the words *shoe* as *suu* and s*nake* as *shnake*. The teachers' pronunciation influences the learners' pronunciation because as a regular practice, the teacher is seen as a model for correct speaking in class. If the pronunciation samples learners are exposed to in their classroom environment are inappropriate, the learners are most likely to adopt a similar pronunciation skill. Added to this is the challenge of the fossilised sound system of the mother tongue of the learners that inhibits the acquisition of the pronunciation and sound system of the second language (Patrick, *et al.,* 2013).

Therefore, the ability to master a second language can be affected by the school's medium of instruction, especially when teachers expose learners to more local languages rather than English. Kirchner and Mostert (2017) agree that the use of the mother tongue may negatively affect the learners' ability to master the second language. The situation may prevent the learners from reading using the phonics methods. If the phonics methods are to be used effectively in circumstances where the mother tongue has a negative impact, teachers must use the English language where phonics is constantly used in the correct pronunciation. This is in line with ZPD which entails immersing the learners in the targeted areas that they ought to master. These findings concur with those of Kirchner and Mostert (2017) that contemplate that the medium of instruction is very crucial in reading. Therefore, this is why learners need

to be more exposed to the second language in class and get encouragement to practice speaking English outside the class and at home.

MoESC (2010) emphasize that the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in all government schools at the Junior Primary Phase is mandatory. Contrary to this observation, vernacular use has been shown to improve reading comprehension and language development which may explain why its use is still encouraged during early childhood development (Bartlett, *et al*., 2015). Thus, it suggests that the factors affecting the learners' reading skills are multifactorial and confounding. Although the idea to cater for all learners during the learning process is good, it can be argued that the irregularity in the pronunciation made the learners have poor recognition of phonemes. Insufficient use of English in daily social conversations among teachers may be contributing to poor letter sounds among teachers. Furthermore, the learners spend more time at home, which leads to longer exposure to the Oshikwanyama language. Thus, when they return to school, teachers have problems teaching English reading because the learners pronounce sounds in their mother tongue accent, giving teachers extra work to teach.

4.5.4 Overcrowded Classes

Most of the teachers reported that the classes are overcrowded, with an average ratio of 1:38. According to the teachers, overcrowding makes it difficult for them to attend to all learners, especially those with reading difficulties. Consequently, teachers focus only on average learners, leaving out those with difficulties. They noted:

> *"Overcrowded classes, don't allow enough time to reach out to all the learners"* (Teacher C)

“In most common cases the learners are a lot of learners in the classroom. So, sometimes I can only teach the moderate learners (average ones in terms of performance), but the slow learners are always left out” (Teacher E).

"It is extremely difficult for the teacher and the learner to have one-on-one attention within a huge classroom," (Teacher D)

The above teachers' statements show that the teachers were burdened, as they had to cater to many learners. The teacher–learner ratio in Namibia is 1: 35, however, these teachers were teaching up to 38 learners or above. As a result, they find it difficult to assist those learners who are poor performers in reading English. West and Meier (2020) confirm that packed classrooms are a contributing factor to poor learning circumstances due to the lack of space, fresh air, and excessive noise levels that may cause learners to lose focus and even get stressed. The teachers’ interviews also emphasized the importance of considering the scarcity of resources in overcrowded classrooms.

Didactic neglect is defined as a teacher's failure to provide each learner with the individualized attention needed for success in the classroom (West & Meier, 2020). As evidenced by the statements that follow, teachers expressed concerns about didactical neglect because of overcrowded classes with a high learner-teacher ratio.

Teachers stated that there is no integration because there is too much planning on top of administration and assessment in a crowded class, and they do not differentiate, instead opting for a "one size fits all" approach. As a result, the quality of teaching is compromised, and some learners, such as slow learners, may suffer.

4.6 Teachers' Suggestions on the Effective Use of Phonics Methods in Teaching English Reading Skills

Teachers were asked to give suggestions on how the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills can be improved. Training for teachers and the provision of teaching materials were suggested by the teachers.

4.6.1 The Provision of Teachers' Training for Teachers

The provision of teachers' training was suggested by all teachers. They all feel that they would be able to learn possible ways that will enable them to facilitate the teaching of English if they receive training. To use phonics methods in teaching reading in English. They had these to say:

> *"…I personally love to go again for the training on how to use the phonics methods"* (Teacher A).
>
> *"Starting with the government, they should provide training for all teachers to be assisted regarding using the phonics methods to teach the reading skill. Training should not only be provided for the novice teachers but also for the existing teachers to learn new ideas".* (Teacher E).
>
> *"Well… the Ministry should provide training to all the teachers so that we can learn possible ways on how to integrate the phonics methods in our classrooms, especially during our reading lessons"* (Teacher C).

The teachers' responses show they are eager to learn more about how to use the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills through teachers' training. As put forward by the pedagogy analysts such as (Van Driel, 2012), training is vital as it shapes the teachers' directions for them to equip their learners to understand, grasp and have the knowledge in the learning process. Rosell (2017) concurs by arguing that

if a teacher does not receive enough training, she/she will cook disaster in his/her teaching process.

Few teachers also feel that there is a need for subject advisors from regional offices to visit schools more often and support them as much as possible enabling them to see where teachers are doing well and where they need help. They had this to say:

> *"Well, the educational officers also need to visit X Primary School so that they can assist us to use the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills…"* (Teacher D).
>
> "*At the regional office itself, the senior officers, I believe they should start coming to X Primary School. So, they see where their colleagues are stuck, where they are doing well and where they need corrections. They need to at least help us"* (Teacher E).

There is, therefore, a need for regional office officials to visit schools and assist teachers in their daily teaching thereby enabling teachers to use the phonics methods effectively and consequently render the necessary support to the learners. This is in line with Edo and David (2019), who pointed out that senior education officers visit schools and provide guidance to teachers.

4.6.2 Provision of Teaching Materials

Most of the teachers suggested the provision of teaching materials. Materials suggested include story books, posters, flashcards, radios, and computers which they said should reach schools on time. Teachers further indicated that the school ought to utilize the Universal Primary Grants (UPE) cash to supply sufficient teaching materials to the schools. They feel this will increase the effectiveness of using the phonics methods in teaching reading skills in English. Teachers also suggested a need for an electricity

supply at the school as the use of radios and television may require electricity. They had this to say:

> "*To the school at large, it should use the OPM money, the fund that is at the school to buy resources for the teaching so that teaching and learning can go ahead effectively for the benefit of the Namibian child"* (Teacher E).
>
> *"… The principal should try to hear the cry of us teachers so that the resources are provided at school on time. Because what is the use of materials reaching the school in the middle of the year? I advise the resources to be on time before learners commence"* (Teacher B).
>
> *"The school should provide the learners with more books to increase the learner's edge to want to read. They should provide storybooks, games, and flashcards, that can be used as we teach reading using the phonics methods. This will increase the effectiveness of using the phonics methods"* (Teacher D).
>
> Furthermore, *"The government should bring electricity to the school so it is easier for us to bring along our electronics to the school that can be used to assist with the correct sounds."* (Teacher D).

These findings reveal that there are insufficient teaching materials such as story books, posters, and flashcards in school. However, using teaching resources is critical in teaching reading using the phonics methods (Totemeyer, *et al.*, 2015). It was also observed that the school lacks basic service infrastructure such as electricity. The lack of electricity prevents teachers from using devices such as radios, computers, and DVDs. These devices, however, would help teachers provide the correct letter sounds when teaching reading using the phonics methods. This correlates with the views of (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015), who stated that schools that are in remote areas lack most of the basic services and they hinder the quality of education provided.

4.7 Conclusion

The chapter presented the teachers' understanding of the terms phonics and reading as well as teachers' use of the phonics methods in teaching reading skills in English. The chapter further discusses the effectiveness of using the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills and the challenges that teachers encounter when using the phonics methods in teaching English reading skills. Lastly, the chapter presented teachers' suggestions on the effective use of phonics methods when teaching English reading skills in the Junior Primary phase. The next chapter presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the study. The chapter further discusses the conclusions and outlines the recommendations for the study.

5.2 Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' experiences in using phonics methods in teaching English reading to the Junior Primary phase in the Ohangwena region. The study employed a qualitative approach, following a single case study design. Purposeful sampling was used to select the five teachers who participated in this study. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. The collected data was analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that teachers understood phonics as a way of teaching learners the relationship between sounds and letters. It was also revealed that teachers relate their understanding of the concept of reading to the skill that involves combining sounds and creating the meaning of what has been written. The findings further revealed that teachers make use of phonics methods to teach English reading skills, and this helps learners to learn the letter sounds, which allows them to decode and blend the sounds of the letters. As a result, the learners can read. Despite the perceived advantages of using phonics methods, the study found that there are numerous challenges that teachers face. Such challenges include a lack of teachers' training, letter names and sounds confusion, lack of appropriate teaching materials, the influence of excessive use of Oshikwanyama as a medium of instruction and overcrowded classrooms. Based on these challenges, the provision of teacher training and provision of teaching materials were suggested by teachers as measures to ensure the effective use of phonics methods in teaching English reading skills in the Junior Primary phase.

5.3 Conclusions

The study reveals that English reading skills are the product of a complex combination of knowledge, strategies, and understandings. Hence, English reading skill is a challenge when the content is being taught by teachers who are not effectively trained and delivered to learners who have a different native language (Campbell, 2020; Saleem *et al.*, 2021). The views of the teachers suggest that they acknowledged the importance of the phonics methods of reading and how essential it is to use them to teach English reading skills. However, it was revealed that although teachers made use of phonics methods in teaching English reading skills, they did not do it effectively, considering the critical role it plays in improving learners' reading skills. It is, therefore, an indication that there is a need for Junior Primary experts to deliver the right content and lay a good foundation if learners are to master the early reading skills they need (Glazzard, 2017). This will give learners and other readers a greater perspective on the world. Therefore, phonics methods should be used effectively in the teaching of reading skills to enhance the reading abilities of the learners. As indicated before that in most cases, social constructivism is influenced by the background, culture, and embedded worldview, the background of the teachers which includes the mother tongue has an impact on teaching reading using the phonics methods. Learners learning in their mother tongue gain confidence and show high participation in class however learners may face some challenges learning using phonics methods in situations where the English sounds are not found in the mother tongue. For example, the letter /R/ is not found in Oshikwanyama resulting in learners mispronouncing it as /L/. This study will contribute to the literature on teachers' experience in teaching using phonics methods. It will help in understanding the importance of teacher training in teaching reading skills using phonics methods. It will show the impact of

overcrowding and the effect of the mother tongue on teaching using the phonics methods.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

5.4.1 Recommendations for Teachers

1. When trying to achieve effectiveness in teaching using the synthetic phonics method, teachers should make use of phonics in distinct sounds meaning that teachers should teach the sounds and then blend the letters. Therefore, the teacher should focus on the letter sound and not the letter name.
2. Furthermore, for teachers to achieve effectiveness in teaching using the phonics methods they need to blend all the methods to suit the circumstances.
3. Teachers should provide a print-rich environment where there are adequate reading resources and media to help learners to have the zeal to read.
4. Establish a learning space that is full of multimodal literacy artefacts by assembling a variety of useful reading and writing resources in English for the classroom, such as comic books, magazines, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias, as well as pamphlets, flyers, circulars, posters with English-language captions, and dictionaries.

5.4.2 Recommendations for the Ministry of Education Art and Culture (Regional Officers)

1. The Ministry of Education Art and Culture should provide teachers with frequent training and workshops on the use of phonics methods for them to be fully equipped for their teaching process.

2. The Ministry of Education Arts and Culture should ensure that the Universal Primary Grants (UPE) money reaches the schools on time and that the schools buy the needed teaching materials on time.
3. The Senior Educational Officers should visit schools and help teachers with any challenges that they face regarding the use of phonics methods to teach English reading skills.
4. The Ministry of Education Arts and Culture should also look at refurbishing schools as they lag in terms of technological use in this 21st Century. Schools should be equipped with the requisite infrastructure (e.g., buildings, electricity, computers etc.) to ensure effective teaching and learning.

5.4.3 Recommendations for Further Research

1. This study focused only on one school; hence a more comprehensive study is required that covers a broader range of schools throughout the country to provide comparative results and ensure data integrity.
2. The study only focused on the views of five Junior Primary teachers at one school. Further studies should be conducted to engage a variety of stakeholders such as HOD, Senior Educational Officers,
3. This study focuses on a rural school with Oshikwanyama as a medium of instruction. Further studies need to be conducted in urban schools where English is the medium of instruction.
4. This study was conducted in a primary school, further studies need to be conducted in institutions of higher learning which prepare Junior Primary teachers.

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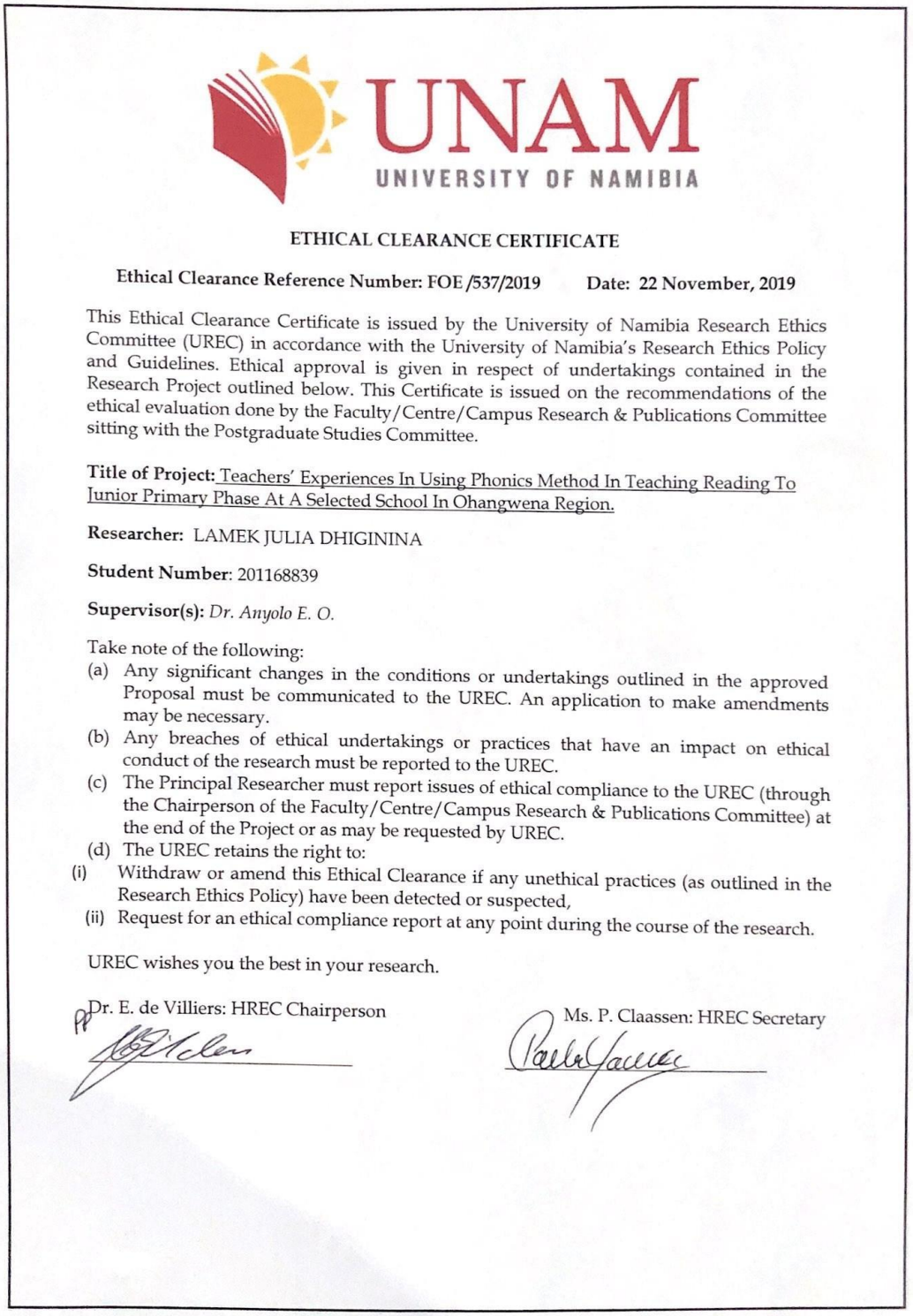
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance Certificate



UNAM
UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: FOE /537/2019 **Date: 22 November, 2019**

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the Faculty/Centre/Campus Research & Publications Committee sitting with the Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Title of Project: Teachers' Experiences In Using Phonics Method In Teaching Reading To Junior Primary Phase At A Selected School In Ohangwena Region.

Researcher: LAMEK JULIA DHIGININA

Student Number: 201168839

Supervisor(s): *Dr. Anyolo E. O.*

Take note of the following:

(a) Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the UREC. An application to make amendments may be necessary.

(b) Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the UREC.

(c) The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the UREC (through the Chairperson of the Faculty/Centre/Campus Research & Publications Committee) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by UREC.

(d) The UREC retains the right to:

(i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,

(ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

UREC wishes you the best in your research.

Dr. E. de Villiers: HREC Chairperson

Ms. P. Claassen: HREC Secretary

Appendix 2: Permission Letter from UNAM

CENTRE FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

University of Namibia, Private Bag 13301, Windhoek, Namibia
340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneers Park
☎ +264 61 206 3275/4662; Fax +264 61 206 3290; URL.: http//www.unam.edu.na

UNAM
UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

Student Name: Julia Dhiginina Lamek

Student number: 201168839

Programme: Master of Education by Thesis in Early Childhood Development

Approved research title: Teacher's Experiences in Using Phonics Method in Teaching Reading to Junior Primary at a Selected School in Ohangwena Region

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby confirm that the above mentioned student is registered at the University of Namibia for the programme indicated. The proposed study met all the requirements as stipulated in the University guidelines and has been approved by the relevant committees.

The proposal adheres to ethical principles as per attached Ethical Clearance Certificate. Permission is hereby granted to carry out the research as described in the approved proposal.

Best Regards

26/11/2019

Prof M Hedimbi
Director: Centre for Postgraduate Studies
Tel: +264 61 2063275
E-mail:directorpgs@unam.na

Date

Appendix 3: Permission Letter from Ministry of Education Arts and Culture

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

Tel: +264 61 -2933202
Fax: +264 61- 2933922
Enquiries: G. Munene
Email: Gibson.munene@moe.gov.na

Luther Street, Govt. Office Park
Private Bag 13186
Windhoek
Namibia

File no: 13/2/9/1

Ms Julia D. Lamek
P. O. Box 2569
Ondangwa
Cell: No. 081 480 7731

Dear Ms Lamek,

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN OHANGWENA REGION IN NAMIBIA

Kindly be informed that permission to conduct an academic research for your Master's degree in Early Childhood Development on *"Teachers' Experiences in Using Phonics Method in Teaching English Reading to Junior Primary Phase at a Selected School in Ohangwena region in Namibia,"* is hereby granted. You are requested to present this letter of approval to the regional Director of the region you wish to conduct your research in to ensure that research ethics are adhered to.

Further, you are requested to share your research findings with the Ministry after completion of the research project. You may contact Mr G. Munene at the Directorate: Programmes and Quality Assurance (PQA) for submission of a summary of your research findings at the above indicated details.

I wish you the best in conducting your research and I look forward to hearing from you upon completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely,

Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
Executive Director
2020 -02- 13

Appendix 4: Permission Letter from Ohangwena Regional Council

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

Tel: +264 61 -2933202
Fax: +264 61- 2933922
Enquiries: G. Munene
Email: Gibson.munene@moe.gov.na

Luther Street, Govt. Office Park
Private Bag 13186
Windhoek
Namibia

File no: 13/2/9/1

Ms Julia D. Lamek
P. O. Box 2569
Ondangwa
Cell: No. 081 480 7731

Dear Ms Lamek,

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN OHANGWENA REGION IN NAMIBIA

Kindly be informed that permission to conduct an academic research for your Master's degree in Early Childhood Development on *"Teachers' Experiences in Using Phonics Method in Teaching English Reading to Junior Primary Phase at a Selected School in Ohangwena region in Namibia,"* is hereby granted. You are requested to present this letter of approval to the regional Director of the region you wish to conduct your research in to ensure that research ethics are adhered to.

Further, you are requested to share your research findings with the Ministry after completion of the research project. You may contact Mr G. Munene at the Directorate: Programmes and Quality Assurance (PQA) for submission of a summary of your research findings at the above indicated details.

I wish you the best in conducting your research and I look forward to hearing from you upon completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely,

Executive Director
2020 -02- 13

Sanet L. Steenkamp
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

All official correspondence must be addressed to the Executive Director.

Appendix 5: Informed Consent Letter for the Teacher

P.O Box 2569
Ondangwa
09 March 2020

Enq: **Ms. Julia D. Lamek**
Cell: +264814807731
Email: jlamek@unam.com

The Teacher
Twaalulilwa Primary School
P. O. BOX
Eenhana

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Request for permission to conduct research in your classroom.

I am Julia Lamek, a student at the University of Namibia. I am doing my Master Degree in Early Childhood Development. The research topic is: Teacher's experiences in using phonics method in teaching English reading to Junior Primary Phase at a selected school in Ohangwena region. As part of my studies, I am requesting you to grant me permission to conduct my research study in your classroom and for you to be my interviewee. I have purposefully selected you to be part of my participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

This study will last for 4 weeks and it will entail an observation of two English reading lessons and a one on one interview of approximately 40-60 minutes in an agreed location at convenient time for you. Your participation towards this study is voluntary and you have the right to decline to answer to any question. The data will be treated with maximum confidentiality and only be disclosed for the purpose of the study.

With your kind permission, an audio-record will be used during the interview to serve as reference during the transcription data for analysis. A copy of my transcript will be sent to you, to confirm the accuracy of our conversation.

If you accept my invitation to participate in my study, kindly confirm by signing the consent form bellow.

Yours sincerely

Lamek Julia

Cell: 0814807731

CONSENT FORM

I..... give permission to Julia Dhiginina Lamek to record our interview session and conduct her observation during my English reading period. This is part of her collection of data for a research report that she will be writing for the completion of her Master's degree. her study titled is; **teachers' experiences in using phonics method in teaching English reading to junior primary phase at a selected school in Ohangwena region in Ohangwena region.**

....

Signature Date

Appendix 6: Teacher's Interview Questions

Interview schedule

Topic: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN USING PHONICS METHOD IN TEACHING READING TO JUNIOR PRIMARY PHASE AT A SELECTED SCHOOL IN OHANGWENA REGION.

School:

Name of interviewer: **Date:**

Name of interviewee: **Time:**

1. General information

a) Gender: Male or Female
b) What is your highest qualification?
c) Have you undergone any training to teaching reading skills using phonics method and how successful was the training?

2. What are teachers' experiences in using phonics method when teaching English reading at a junior primary phase?

a) How do you understand by the term reading?
b) How do you understand phonics method/ approach?
c) How effective is the phonics method in enabling your learners to learn how to read?
d) If the phonics method is not effective, why?
e) What do you consider strengths when using the phonics method in teaching English reading skill?
f) What challenges do you experience in using the phonics method when teaching English reading skill?

3. How do teachers use the phonics method during English reading skill?

a) How do you use phonic method in teaching reading?
b) What challenges do you experience when using the phonics method to teach English reading skills?
c) How do you deal with these challenges?

d) Which activities do you give to your learners to help them cope with the phonic method when teaching reading in English?
e) What resources do you use when teaching English reading skills using phonics method?
f) Do these resources enable you to use the phonics method with ease? If this is not the case, what support do you need to obtain the resources?

4. What should be done to ensure effective usage of the phonics method when teaching English reading skills at junior primary phase?

Appendix 7: Teacher's Observation Checklist

Usage of blending methods.			
Teacher knows the sound of the letters.			
Types of phonics instruction used			
Analogy phonics			
Analytic phonics			
Embedded phonics			
Phonics through spelling			
Synthetic phonics			
Materials used:			
Teacher's use of teaching aids.			
Teach phoneme blending in songs			

Classroom management skills

	Yes	No	
Teacher pays attention to all learners.			
Use the learner centered method.			
Teacher encourages learners' participation			
Teacher uses various strategies to teach reading skills.			
Shared reading			
Group reading			
Guided reading			
Story telling			
Teacher demonstrates and reinforces the correct production of letter sounds			
Learners know the letter names.			
Learners know- the letter sound.			

Learners are reading with understanding.			

Challenges experienced

	Yes	No	
Learners unable to produce letter sounds in the second language			
Disorganized classroom			
Learners poor word recognition			
Teacher confuses syllable identification with blending.			

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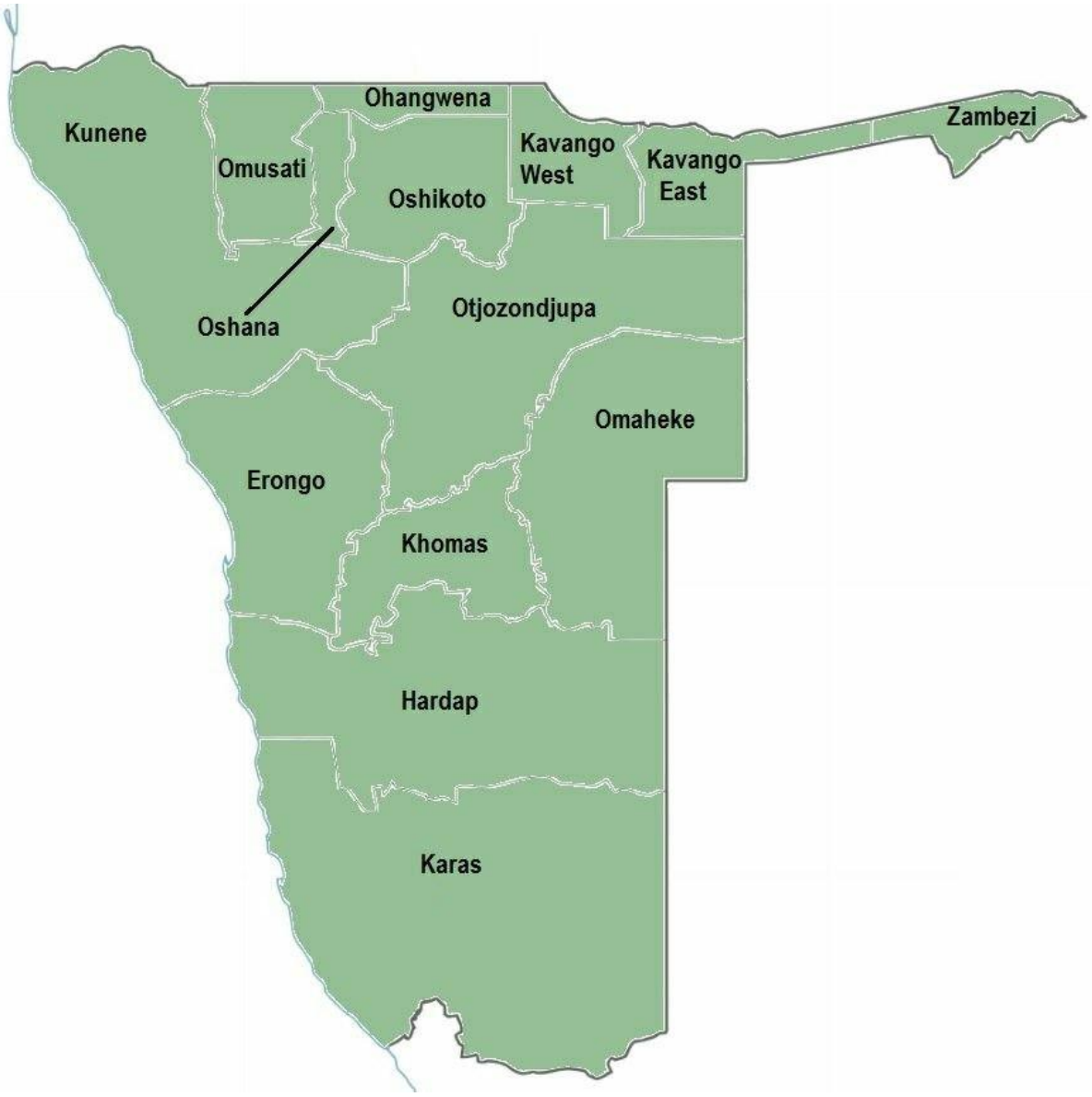
Appendix 8: Ohangwena region