Setting up classroom libraries in rural areas: The case of Mogodumo circuit in Limpopo

M Motseke (iD) **, MM Maja** (iD) **and S Meeran** (iD)
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
majam@unisa.ac.za

There is an urgent need to establish classroom libraries, especially in rural areas where learners hardly come across any reading material. The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers set up classroom libraries in rural areas of the Mogodumo circuit in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The study was qualitative in nature. Fifteen English First Additional Language (EFAL) teachers from 12 schools participated in the study. Observation and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data. It was found that while all participants recognised the importance of reading for their learners, only 7 of the 15 teachers managed to establish classroom libraries. The study revealed that teacher self-efficacy (TSE) played a crucial role in setting up classroom libraries, given the serious challenges of funding, resources and support experienced by rural schoolteachers. Teachers with high TSE managed to establish classroom libraries by using their own time, money, and resources, while those with low TSE failed to establish classroom libraries. We recommend that school managers should make time and resources available to rural schoolteachers to enable them to establish classroom libraries.

Keywords: classroom libraries; English second language; rural schools; teacher self-efficacy

Introduction
The use of English as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is common in many non-English speaking countries. In South African rural schools, children begin formal schooling in their home language (first language or mother tongue) with English being introduced later as English First Additional Language (EFAL) – also known as second language (Dickson, Thomson & Fricke, 2020). Transitioning from a first language to English as a second language results in learners experiencing challenges in grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, especially during the pre-primary and primary school phases (Dickson et al., 2020). Research has found that access to books plays an important role in the academic development of these learners (Harmon, Martinez, Juarez, Wood, Simmerson & Terrazas, 2019) and may promote reading and referencing among these learners, thus improving their vocabulary, comprehension, and thinking skills (Hart & Zinn, 2015; Hassen, 2016).

In Africa, many challenges regarding reading exist. For example, in Namibia, schools located in rural areas are characterised by a serious lack of libraries and books, and this has a negative impact on the academic progress of rural school learners (Shikalepo, 2019). Furthermore, in South Africa, Mohamed (2020) confirms that poor parents simply cannot afford to buy books or magazines, while schools in under-resourced areas are characterised by a lack of libraries, computer technology and connectivity for digital books. For instance, Farber (2017) found that South African rural school learners started schooling on the back foot as they were less exposed to early learning before coming to school, and then experienced poor teaching and learning conditions in the rural schools. The lack of access to books from an early age could be detrimental to the academic development of rural school learners. To confirm the challenges of poor reading, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) report for 2016 found that South African Grade 4 learners did not reach the international benchmarks and lacked basic reading skills by the end of the Grade 4 school year (Howie, Combrinck, Tshele, Roux, McLeod-Palane & Mokoena, 2017). Moreover, the 2021 PIRLS report shows that 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa could not read for meaning (Cherry, 2023).

School libraries are important for the academic development of learners; however, schools require funding to ensure the supply of a variety of books, shelving, and special rooms or a building with large spaces for book storage and leisure reading (Loh, Ellis, Paculdar & Wan, 2017). In contrast, classroom libraries may be established with limited funding by an individual or a small group of people (Hodges, Wright, Roberts, Norman & Coleman, 2019). Classroom libraries could, therefore, play an important role in helping learners to better understand the importance of books and reading, especially in rural areas (Msimanga, 2019). Once classroom libraries are established, they could be effective in developing knowledge and promoting learning through play, conversation, and interaction (Hassinger-Das, Zosh, Hansen, Talarowski, Zmich, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2020; Kim, Bosch & Lee, 2020). While there is no definitive answer to what makes a perfect classroom library, teachers need to establish a well-rounded, balanced book collection across content areas, genres, and diverse reading levels (Ezell, 2016).

Literature Review
Omigie and Idiedo (2019) define the classroom library as a classroom collection of reading books for easy access to learners to enhance their literacy growth. In addition, Premnath and Salvadori (2019) view the classroom library as a teacher/learner resource centre that is organised by the teacher in the classroom to enable

learners to easily access reading books and other learning material. The purpose of having a classroom library is to motivate learners to read, to increase their vocabulary, and to improve their learning skills for an effective lifelong learning attitude (Ni'mah, 2018). Research indicates that learners in classrooms equipped with libraries read far more than learners in classrooms without libraries (Harmon et al., 2019; Hodges et al., 2019; Osuchukwu & Edewor, 2016). In addition to frequent reading, learners with classroom libraries develop their critical thinking and self-confidence, which may be transferred to their personal and social lives (Hodges et al., 2019; Osuchukwu & Edewor, 2016). According to Mahwasane (2019), the advantage of a classroom library is having books that are relevant to the curriculum and the learners' level of understanding. Mahwasane (2019) argues that books in a school library are diverse, with some of them not being necessarily relevant to the curriculum, age, level and interest of the learners.

The process of setting up a classroom library is dependent on the availability of funding for the purchase, storage, and display of books. In a few developed countries, the government, parents and private sponsors make funds available for setting up classroom libraries (Catapano, Fleming & Elias, 2009; Laksono & Retnaningdyah, 2018). For instance, in the United States of America, parents contribute for the buying of books from yard sales, dollar stores, library sales and bookshops (Catapano et al., 2009). In Indonesia, the government provides funds for the purchase of new library books (Laksono & Retnaningdyah, 2018). However, in many developing countries such as Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, funding for school libraries is a challenge, while funding for classroom libraries is non-existent (Mohamed, 2020; Shikalepo, 2019; Tokwe, 2013). Research reveals that issues of poverty, rurality, and remoteness of schools in developing countries contribute negatively to the establishment of school and classroom libraries (Catapano et al., 2009; Msimanga, 2019). For instance, financial support from parents is not available due to unemployment or low salaries, while government funding for education and books is inadequate (Premnath & Salvadori, 2019). In some instances, non-profit organisations donate books to deprived and rural schools for the purpose of establishing school libraries (Tokwe, 2013). For example, The Library Project, a non-governmental organisation, donated books to rural schools in Vietnam and China (The Library Project, 2020). In Zimbabwe, individuals have made financial donations, while organisations such as the Rural Libraries Resources Development Programme, Book Aid International, the Rotary Club and Books for Africa have made book donations to rural schools for the purpose of

developing school libraries (but not classroom libraries) (Tokwe, 2013). The implication is that since developing countries struggle with establishing school libraries, the issue of classroom libraries may not even be considered.

The actual process of setting up a classroom library is a daunting task for the rural schoolteacher. The teacher should find material to build shelves and cupboards for the display and storage of books within the available space. Krompák, Camilleri Grima and Farrugia (2020) note that it is easier to set up a classroom library in a large classroom with more resources than in a small classroom with no resources. According to Farber (2017), the limited space and the lack of resources could negatively affect interest in reading. Therefore, setting up a classroom library requires the teacher to carefully consider the space and resources available to properly plan the storage and display of books. Schools in disadvantaged areas are characterised by overcrowding and a lack of basic resources such as books, furniture, and shelves (Mojapelo, 2020; Taylor, 2019). The lack of funds and resources may compel teachers to request parents and members of the community to donate books, boxes, baskets, shelves, and any material that might be useful for a classroom library (Omigie & Idiedo, 2019). In some instances, the school's caretaker and parents may be requested to build the shelves for the classroom library, while the classroom teacher packs the books, labels the shelves, and arranges the books according to certain topics or themes (Donohoe, 2017; Omigie & Idiedo, 2019). Once the books are accessible and visible to the learners, learners may be encouraged to take them out for reading (Itenge-Wheeler, Winschiers-Theophilus, Soro & Brereton, 2018). The classroom teacher may also encourage the use of the classroom library by turning it into a learning space for learners. According to Ramírez-Leyva (2016), turning classroom libraries into learning spaces for learners involves making available information relevant to the curriculum and conducive to training, enlightenment, discovery, and joy. To ensure that learners learn from reading books, the classroom teacher may be compelled to provide questions and instructions on how to read (reading skills), what to look for when reading (reading comprehension), and what to achieve through reading (reading and academic achievement) (Gao, Wang, Mo, Shi, Kenny & Rozelle, 2018). The implication is that the classroom teacher should have a good knowledge of all the books found in the classroom library. Therefore, the establishment of classroom libraries may be physically and mentally strenuous for classroom teachers, especially when funding and resources are not readily available.

In 1994, a democratic, majority government replaced the apartheid government. Separate

development was a discriminatory government policy officially called *apartheid* (Mashaba & Maile, 2019). In South Africa, the majority of African teachers teach at poorly resourced schools, with no laboratories and libraries, which is in line with the policy of separate development (Mashaba & Maile, 2019; Taylor, 2019). However, since the dawn of democracy, the residential and resourcing arrangements did not change dramatically, since most African schools still have few or no resources, no laboratories, and no libraries (Mashaba & Maile, 2019). Therefore, setting up a classroom library in such schools is a major challenge for African teachers, especially those working in rural areas.

With this study we aimed to investigate how teachers have set up classroom libraries in the rural areas of the Mogodumo circuit in the Limpopo Province. The research question that we intended to answer was: How have rural schoolteachers managed to set up classroom libraries?

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy determines whether coping behaviour may be initiated, how much effort may be expended, and how long it may be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. For instance, people with high self-efficacy tend to view problems as challenges, while people with low self-efficacy tend to see difficult tasks as threats that they should avoid (Daniilidou, Platsidou & Gonida, 2020). Therefore, self-efficacy is how people judge their capabilities to execute the required actions to attain certain types of performance, and it affects how people feel, think, and act (Daniilidou et al., 2020).

Bandura's self-efficacy theory led to the study of teacher self-efficacy (TSE) (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca & Malone, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). TSE is viewed as the teachers' belief in their ability to cope with tasks related to their professional role (Caprara et al., 2006). Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) view TSE as teachers' judgment of their capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of learner engagement and learning, even among those learners who may be difficult or unmotivated. The teachers' motivation positively affects their effort and persistence in the face of obstacles that they may encounter in the teaching situation (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Wheatley (2005) maintains that doubts about self-efficacy can motivate teachers to develop new skills, which may lead to a more effective learning environment for teachers and learners.

The rural schoolteachers in South Africa face a number of challenges, such as a lack of reading books, funding and resources. These challenges may discourage them and threaten the proper execution of their responsibilities. Hence, high levels of motivation and persistence are required to enable them to continue with their teaching projects, and to strive for the achievement of good academic performance by their learners. The teachers' efforts to establish classroom libraries without any funding and resources could be a measure of their motivation and levels of self-efficacy. The high levels of self-efficacy among teachers could explain why some teachers manage to establish classroom libraries, while others fail to do so. Hence, TSE was deemed appropriate for this study.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted in the rural Mogodumo education circuit of the Limpopo province in South Africa. This circuit is characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy among parents or the adult population (Mojapelo, 2020). Therefore, the learners who attend the schools in the circuit come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools located in this circuit cater for African learners, whose home language is Sepedi, which is the LoLT in Grades R to 3 (Foundation Phase), after which English becomes the LoLT in Grades 4 to 7 (Intermediate and Senior Phases). The teachers in this circuit work in schools that do not have school libraries, nor funds to buy books and establish school libraries.

Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature and underpinned by the interpretive paradigm which provided a lens through which the findings were viewed. Fifteen EFAL teachers from 12 schools were purposively sampled to participate in the study. The criteria used to sample the teachers were their experience of teaching EFAL in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6) for 5 years or longer. All the participants had attended a training session on classroom libraries through the Classroom Interaction Pedagogy project. The training session provided teachers with very basic information on how to set up a classroom library, how it could be used in EFAL teaching and learning, and how the borrowing of books is managed. Teachers were then given time to set up their own classroom libraries. After a period of 6 months, the teachers were visited in their classrooms. The classroom libraries were viewed, and support was provided where necessary. We visited each participant in their various classrooms to observe whether the classroom library had been established and then interviews were held in the classroom of each teacher.

Observation is a method of research in which the researcher visits the research site and observes the actual or true picture of the situation, without depending on the participants' reports (Sikhakhane,

Govender & Maphalala, 2020). In this study, it was important for us to see whether classroom libraries had been established and how such libraries were being used in the classrooms. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to ask questions and allow the participants to respond as freely as possible (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018), but probing questions were asked to seek clarity (Cohen et al., 2018) and thus elicit clear and rich information from the participants. The high number of participants allowed the researchers to reach saturation point on a number of aspects since many participants repeated what previous participants had said (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). According to Faulkner and Trotter (2017), data saturation refers to a situation when the participants no longer come up with new information but mention what was previously mentioned. Saturation assures the researcher that the emerging themes and conclusions are relevant (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017).

Data were analysed qualitatively. The thematic data analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyse the data collected. The process began with the verbatim transcription of the interviews. The transcriptions were then read several times to enable the researchers to familiarise themselves with the data collected. The observation data were integrated with the transcribed interviews during the data analysis process. Thereafter, words that were the same, or had similar meanings were clustered together and allocated codes. From these codes, well-defined themes were identified and named.

Findings
Table 1 The biographical information of the participants

Participant	School	Classroom library present? Yes (Y)/No (N)	Gender	Teaching experience	Ages in years	Number of learners in class
Teacher 1 (T1)	A	N	Male (M)	13	39	25
T2	B	Y	M	18	45	58
T3	C	Y	Female (F)	25	49	57
T4	D	Y	F	28	51	63
T5	D	N	F	11	35	59
T6	E	N	F	22	46	58
T7	E	Y	M	28	52	54
T8	F	Y	F	10	37	23
T9	G	N	F	21	49	68
T10	H	N	F	22	48	59
T11	I	N	F	5	28	60
T12	J	Y	F	23	49	55
T13	K	Y	F	17	42	35
T14	K	N	M	19	51	37
T15	L	N	F	6	30	63

The participants' biographical information presented in Table 1 indicates that the majority of the participants were mature teachers with vast teaching experience. The information in the table indicates that only seven of the 15 teachers had established classroom libraries.

Securing Reading Books
Of the 15 teachers who participated in the study, seven teachers were found to have secured reading materials and established classroom libraries. These teachers had the following to say:
T2: *It was not easy to find these books, as it involved a lot of time.*
T7: *I used my own money to travel to the city library to ask for some of these books.*
T12: *I looked for reading books in the storeroom and cupboards in the school.*
T13: *I visited the public library and the school libraries in town to ask for obsolete books.*
However, eight of the 15 participants were unable to secure books for purposes of establishing classroom libraries. These teachers had the following to say:
T1*: I never get a chance to look for reading books.*
T10: *There is no support from the school management in terms of covering traveling costs to the city library.*
T14: *Time and money are serious challenges that make it difficult for me to find books. For instance, I use public transport to come to school. Then how do I go around looking for books? If I find them, how do I carry them to school?*
The implication here is that there were a number of challenges associated with sourcing and securing books for the classroom libraries. Therefore, it required much sacrifice and determination from the individual teachers.

Setting Up Classroom Libraries
Once the reading materials were secured, the process of storing and arranging them in the classroom library followed. This was also a challenging task as it involved skills that teachers

did not have, such as identifying or creating space, building shelves or storage, arranging books and labelling books. However, teachers who had established classroom libraries reported as follows on the process of creating classroom libraries:

> T7: *After finding the books, I removed the doors of a cupboard to create shelves for the classroom library.*
> T12: *I requested the factotum (school's handy person) to help build shelves for keeping the books. This was difficult because the material for building the shelves was not readily available. Broken furniture had to be used for this purpose.*
> T8: *I used old furniture, like old tables, to display available books and magazines. It was not ideal, but at least learners saw the reading materials available.*
> T13: *Fortunately, there were old bookshelves in the storeroom, which I used to display available books.*

As shelves and storage facilities were not readily available for keeping the books, teachers used their creativity to create classroom libraries to store and display the available reading materials. However, some teachers were unable to set up classroom libraries and reported as follows:

> T1*: There is no support from the school management.*
> T6: *Our classroom is used as a school hall. So, there is no way in which books can be kept in it.*
> T10: *The classrooms are full of desks, with no space for a classroom library.*

Learners' Access to Reading Material/Books
The books, newspapers and magazines that were brought into the classrooms offered learners access to reading.

> T3: *The availability of books helped me a great deal, because I could give learners passages to read from a book, and then ask them questions based on what they read. This I could not do before I established the classroom library.*
> T7: *The learners were excited about choosing books and reading them. In addition, they happily talked about the stories they read.*
> T12: *It was good for learners to read books and share the stories they read. This encourages the reading of different books.*

The establishment of the classroom libraries made English accessible to learners, who were excited to read these books and interact through the stories.

Recognition of the Importance of Reading
The majority of participants appreciated the importance of reading and recognised the value that it had for learners

> T7: *Learners are able to improve their vocabulary through reading many books. The classroom library plays an important role in helping learners to improve their vocabulary.*
> T12: *With classroom libraries, learners can read stories and then relate these stories to other learners. In this way, reading leads to group discussion among learners – which is good for promoting communication and exchange of ideas.*

Some teachers did not establish classroom libraries but brought books for learners to read during their EFAL periods. These teachers said the following:

> T1: *Reading is very important for learners. I may have not established a classroom library, but I do bring books for learners to read during my EFAL period.*
> T11: *I could not establish a classroom library, but I do bring books for learners to read during my period.*
> T14: *Learners get the opportunity to read when I brought them reading books.*

The implication is that the benefits of reading are well-recognised by all teachers, including those who could not establish classroom libraries.

Discussion
With this study we aimed to investigate how teachers managed to establish classroom libraries in the rural areas of the Mogodumo circuit in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The area of study was characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. The schools experienced a major lack of resources and a complete lack of school libraries. The biographical information provides data that confirms that classes ranged between 50 and 60 learners per classroom in the Mogodumo circuit. This concurs with Marais's (2016) study which found that the participants experienced classrooms with large numbers of learners cramped together in one classroom. This contradicts the ideal learner-teacher ratio of 40:1 (for primary schools in South Africa (Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2016). The biographical findings of the study reveal that the majority of the participants were mature female teachers with vast teaching experience. This is in line with the distribution of teachers in primary schools in South Africa, where the majority of primary school teachers are female with many years of teaching experience. The many years of teaching imply that the participants had acquired the expertise necessary for managing big classes, despite all the challenges that large classes present.

The findings reveal that of the 15 teachers who participated in the study, only seven teachers managed to establish classroom libraries. The seven teachers viewed problems as challenges that could be overcome as the teachers were determined to establish classroom libraries. The process of setting up a classroom library involved finding or securing reading books and other reading material and finding ways of displaying them that would be visible and accessible to learners, as well as places to store them. This process involved traveling to public and school libraries in the city, requesting reading books that were obsolete from these libraries, transporting these books to their schools, and then introducing these books to learners for taking out or borrowing. In addition, the teachers

were required to read the books to know the stories and to model their lessons around these stories. The teachers also had to plan their time in such a way that learners were offered an opportunity to read paragraphs or to share what they had read with the teacher and their peers. The process of planning and executing all the responsibilities accompanying classroom libraries was burdensome and limited to only those teachers who established classroom libraries. Despite all the additional responsibilities, teachers who had established classroom libraries received little or no support from the school principal or the school management team. The lack of support implied that teachers had to use their own resources to ensure that the classroom libraries were established and that their learners had access to reading materials so that they could develop a culture of reading. TSE played an important role since only teachers with high self-efficacy were motivated to source books and reading material for the classroom library. The use of the teachers' own efforts and resources implied bearing the transport costs, using their time, re-organising the classrooms to create space for the classroom library, and re-arranging the classroom activities to accommodate reading. The motivation to do all these activities amid all the challenges confirmed the teachers' high levels of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

The eight teachers who had not established classroom libraries worked in environments that were similar to those of teachers who had established classroom libraries. Some of the eight teachers came from the same schools as those who had established classroom libraries, implying that these teachers were exposed to the same situation and worked under the same conditions. However, these eight teachers cited time, money, poor principal support, and overcrowded classrooms as serious impediments. The TSE, therefore, was the main difference between the teachers who established classroom libraries and those who did not. The eight teachers who did not establish classroom libraries confirmed the views that teachers with low levels of self-efficacy experience uncertainty and uneasiness when confronted with challenging situations (Daniilidou et al., 2020; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). However, of the eight teachers, two reported that they brought reading books for their learners and displayed them and allowed learners to choose books that they preferred to read. The learners were encouraged to read the books during the EFAL periods, and then return them to the teacher at the end of the period. Although two teachers did not establish classroom libraries, they recognised the importance of reading, and thus created opportunities for learners to read. They may not have had the level of self-efficacy required to establish a classroom library, but they were motivated enough to realise the importance of reading for learners, and thus created the opportunity for learners to read. Therefore, nine of the 15 teachers who participated in this study recognised the importance of reading and created opportunities for learners to read. The six teachers who had not established classroom libraries nor brought books to the classroom for learners to read had denied their learners the benefits that accompany reading, such as the improvement of vocabulary and scholastic achievement (Gao et al., 2018).

Conclusion
The study revealed that TSE played an important role in teachers' motivation in the establishment of classroom libraries in the rural areas of Limpopo. The scarcity of libraries and reading books in rural areas implied that the rural school learners had little or no opportunity of reading, thus jeopardising their chances of becoming successful in their studies. The lack of resources and the lack of support from the school principal, which were very common in the area of study, may have discouraged teachers from making any efforts to secure books and establish classroom libraries. However, TSE was an important catalyst in this situation. Of the 15 teachers who participated in the study, seven had established classroom libraries while two teachers brought books for their learners to read during their EFAL classes. Therefore, nine of the 15 teachers recognised that reading was important for learners, and prepared lessons based on the additional books brought to the classroom. The six teachers who did not establish classroom libraries, nor bring books for learners to read, may have had very low TSE, which made them view the challenges as insurmountable.

We recommend that school principals should encourage teachers to establish classroom libraries. This can be done by covering the teachers' travel costs, providing shelves or shelving materials for the storage of books, and allowing teachers time off for purposes of searching for books. Supportive school principals may not only encourage the establishment of classroom libraries but may also improve the self-efficacy of teachers.

Authors' Contributions
All authors contributed to the writing of the literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion, and reference sections of the manuscript, while MM and MMM conducted the interviews with participants. All authors

reviewed the final manuscript.

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