Using the sound reading system to teach English spelling: A case study

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Abstract

Namibia is a country where English is mostly acquired as a taught subject and Grade 4 is a transitional year where the medium of instruction changes from the mother tongue or predominant local language to English. The National Curriculum specifies that it is crucial for learners to acquire English literacy skills in Grades 1, 2 and 3 to ensure a smooth transitioning to Gr.4. However, data revealed that when Namibian learners enter the Senior Primary phase (Grade 4-7), their shaky foundation leaves them at a disadvantage which hinders optimal academic progress. Spelling is essential for reading comprehension therefore it is crucial for literacy development and needs to be taught explicitly in the Junior Primary phase. The case study presented in this paper is part of a broader qualitative M.Ed. study which explored the teaching of English spelling by using the Sound Reading System *(SRS) in spelling instruction* from Grade 1 to Grade 3 at a school in the Erongo region *of Namibia. The findings revealed that teachers felt their own alphabetic knowledge was strengthened and their approach to teaching spelling had evolved. The use of SRS provided a systematic approach to their teaching. The teachers believed that there is a definite link between spelling and reading and that this strategy has provided an opportunity to teach these skills simultaneously and in an integrated manner.* The paper discloses that for spelling instruction to be effective, teachers should be equipped with thorough alphabetic knowledge as well as pedagogic content knowledge.

Keywords: *spelling instruction, reading, systematic phonics, SRS*

Introduction

Although a plethora of studies on spelling instruction emphasised the importance of applying scientifically based methods in schools, school results cast a long shadow on the efficacy thereof. In the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) III report by Shikongo et al. (2011), they distinguish between basic reading skills (levels 1 to 5) and advanced reading skills (levels 6 to 8). 'Basic reading' (level 3) was found to be still below the desired level of mastery, while 'advanced reading for meaning' referred to the beginning of a desirable level of mastery. While these studies identified learners' lack of reading skills in the Namibian education system, they did not explore the way reading and spelling are interrelated. Thus, the researcher found it necessary to explore how a systematic spelling system for teaching English is implemented because spelling and literacy are interwoven. Moats (2005) emphasises the fact that research has shown that learning to spell and learning to read rely on much the same fundamental understanding of the relationships between letters and sounds; hence, spelling instruction can be planned in such a way that it enhances reading skills.

Hartney (2011) emphasised that Grade 3 learners in the Khomas region, for whom English was not the first language, experienced difficulties in reading English. Julius and Hautemo (2018) found that Grade 5 teachers regarded foundation-phase issues as part of the

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challenges they face. The need to improve the quality of teaching in the primary phase in Namibia was emphasised. Furthermore, Julius and Hautemo (2018) emphasised that learners proceeded to the next grade without having mastered the requirements for the current grade. In addition to this, February (2020) highlighted that numerous findings show that Namibian children struggle to read properly. Although these studies identified learners' lack of reading skills in the Namibian education system, they did not explore the way reading and spelling are interrelated. Thus, the researcher found it necessary to explore the way in which a systematic spelling system for teaching English is implemented because spelling and literacy are interwoven (Ehri, 2014). Spelling skills affect both the reading and writing skills of learners. This research stemming from will comprise a case study of the way in which the Sound Reading System (SRS), as a method of spelling instruction, is implemented in Grades 1, 2 and 3 in a Namibian school. The case study is guided by two research questions:

1. What are the benefits and limitations of teaching spelling by applying the SRS?
2. What adjustments, if any, do teachers make to ensure that the SRS as a spelling programme is appropriate for Namibia?

Knowledge about sound patterns that children acquire in the early years through instruction helps them to decode new words in their reading. As they mature and begin to spell longer and more complex words, children apply this knowledge of base words, prefixes, and suffixes to their spelling (Ehri, 2014; Ehri, 2000; Foorman & Petsche, 2010; Hutcheon, Campbell & Stewart, 2012). This knowledge of morphology, in turn, helps children to analyse longer words in their future reading. In light of these findings, spelling instruction strategies is regarded an important part of literacy development.

Theoretical Framework
This study is framed by the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) which argues that social interaction precedes development. According to Vygotsky (1978, p. 157), teaching and learning is the way through which cognitive, social, and affective development takes place, and this research deals with teaching children while also providing teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their own practice. As a consequence of social constructivism, Vygotsky (in Jones & Brader-Araje, 2000, p. 4) demonstrates that the role of others in learning has led teachers to re-examine the extent to which learning is regarded as an individual process. Learning is best understood in the light of others within an individual's world. This recurrent interchange between the individual and others is described by Vygotsky (1978) as a zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2000, p. 4). Hence the importance to ensure that the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) is adequately equipped to steer the learning/teaching process effectively. Learning, as a cognitive function that happens in a societal framework, is essential for cognitive development and for the child's development as a whole person.

Adults, the MKO, structure activities for the child so that the child gradually gains control over the activities that needed to be done. The mediator's role is that of scaffolding so that the learner can become independent. The adult helps the child by setting problems to be solved and then by providing clues to the solutions. With the help of the mediator or group the learner is assisted to work out an individual and personal solution to the problem. Through discussions, mediation and negotiation, learners gain mastery, and the use of SRS to teach English spelling in a systematic way is fully aligned with this notion. The Vygotskian perspective asserts that the quality of the teacher-learner interaction is crucial in the learning process.

Literature Review
Historical Perspectives On English Spelling
Reed (2012) explains that for many years, spelling has been idling on the back burner in education, most likely because teachers either regarded reading and writing skills as more

important or assumed that the English language spelling system is too irregular and unpredictable to make instruction worthwhile. This latter assumption has been disproved by researchers (Adams-Gordon, 2010; Moats, 2009; Simonsen & Gunter, 2001) who promote the explicit teaching of English spelling.

In the past, accurate spelling was the absolute goal of the spelling lesson without any attempt to teach meaning (Sawyer & Joyce, 2006). I believe this method is not viable and it is most likely that after a while of not using a word which has no meaning in any case, a learner might simply forget about it. In this age of discarding things that have no apparent use, we are challenged to find a purposeful method for teaching spelling effectively.

In the mid-1800s, spelling instruction was investigated for its total disregard for word meaning. Later, in the 20th century, linguistically-based research concluded that English orthography embodied logical and predictable patterns embedded in semantics (word meaning) as well as phonology (Sawyer & Joyce, 2006). Spelling was acknowledged as much more than a mere rote memorisation activity, a process of linguistic and cognitive progress. Although many spelling programmes exist, it is imperative to be able to identify effective programmes.

Link between Spelling and Reading

It is evident that when children learn about words and the word parts through spelling activities, this familiarity can improve their reading (Moats, 2005). Therefore, the link between spelling and reading can no longer be underestimated. Oakley (2018) stressed that teachers need good content knowledge, or knowledge about language. February (2020) emphasized the lack of such knowledge in the teacher. Therefore, explicit explanation of the English orthography, which includes the sounds, syllable patterns, meaningful word parts (morphemes), and the language of origin is needed at classroom level. Similarly, Ehri (2014) contends that as knowledge of the spelling–sound system develops and nurtures spelling patterns, the learner can use these patterns (spellings of syllables, prefixes, and suffixes) to form connections and recollect the spelling and reading of words with many syllables. In addition, Moats (2009) emphasises that well-taught phonic decoding entails more than mere letter–sound correspondence for each letter of the alphabet. Daffern (2015) contends that spelling instruction in the 21st century should be contextualised and explicit in the Junior Primary phase especially because it is rarely taught in the senior secondary years.

In their investigation, Johnston, McGeown and Watson (2010) found that the learners taught using synthetic phonics had better word reading, spelling, and reading comprehension skills. This is in line with Holsted's (2014) emphasis on the particularity of phonics programmes. Non-systematic phonics programmes such as literature-based programmes, basal reading programmes, and sight-word programmes do not teach phonics explicitly and systematically. On the other hand, a systematic phonics programme offers the teaching of a carefully chosen and advantageous set of letter–sound relationships arranged in a logical instructional method (Holsted, 2014). Oakley (2018) insists that adequate knowledge about language is required to bring forth the metalanguage teachers require to enable them to teach children properly. In line with this, February (2020) highlights the importance of teacher knowledge of understanding the process of literacy to effectively teach literacy in that particular language.

What exactly is SRS?

The SRS is a synthetic phonics reading and spelling programme grounded in a model developed by Diane McGuinness, who based it on research data (Brooks, 2013). It is a systematic approach of teaching the English alphabet code developed by Nevola (2007) and based on the spelling code as analysed by Diane McGuinness.

SRS lessons encourage proficiency in phoneme segmenting and blending, the mastery of sound–symbol relationships, handwriting, spelling, reading fluency and reading comprehension (Nevola, 2007). Furthermore, it aims to encourage proficiency in phoneme

segmenting and blending, the mastery of sound–symbol relationships, handwriting, spelling, reading fluency and reading comprehension. Children are encouraged to regard the English writing system as a code and to learn exactly how this code works (Brooks, 2013). Grant (2014), however, warns that without constant review and repetition of good practice, some children can slip into bad practice.

McGuinness (2007) identified four features of the English alphabet code. A phoneme can be spelt, firstly, using one letter, like /p-e-t /; secondly, by using two to four letters: h-i-ll / sh-i-p; thirdly, in multiple ways: d-ay / t-r-ai-n / l-a-k-e / b-r-ea-k /; and lastly, spelling can represent more than one phoneme: g-r-ea-t / c-l-ea-n / b-r-ea-d.

On the website for Phonics International (2011), three facts are highlighted. One, two, three or four letters can be code for one phoneme (sound), for example /**c** / in **c**at, /**f**/ in ele**ph**ant, **igh** in r**igh**t and /ai/ **eigh** in **eigh**t. Most phonemes can be represented by different graphemes such as /**oa**/ as o, oa, ow, oe, eau, ough. Some graphemes can be coded for more than one phoneme like **ough** for /oa/ in though, /ou/in plough, /or/ in thought, long /oo/ in through.

For the 44 phonemes in English, the 26 letters of the alphabet are not sufficient and, according to McGuiness (2004), more than 176 spellings are used. Others (Moats, 2005; Foorman & Petsche, 2010) refer to 40 phonemes and more than 250 graphemes. English is an opaque code, therefore it should be taught in a systematic, explicit way.

Methods
Participants
The focus of this study was on gaining an understanding of the SRS implementation and the way teacher perceptions affect the teaching of English spelling. The decision to do the research at one school only was based on Bertram and Christiansen's (2014) findings that the interpretive researcher generally selects only one school and a small number of teachers to obtain optimal, in-depth knowledge.

Therefore, detailed information on the SRS as a spelling methodology was obtained from one specific school. For the purpose of anonymity, the selected school is named School A. School A was selected because it has applied the specific methodology that this study strove to understand, and also because of its location. The participants in this case study were Grade 1, 2 and 3 teachers in Walvis Bay (Erongo Region), who completed training in SRS for spelling instruction. These teachers who were employed at the school, implemented the SRS in their classrooms. They used their school's resources to develop SRS-based teaching material, like worksheets, stories and booklets and were supported by the school management. The school had also obtained CDs with sound-based stories from the course trainer. These CDs were then used to make booklets for the learners. This specific school had obtained permission from the Directorate of Education to implement SRS, on the understanding that all the prescribed sounds would be covered as set out in the syllabi.

Measures and Procedures
After obtaining ethical clearance and the necessary permission, purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Then, qualitative data collection methods were employed, namely classroom observations, document analysis and focus interviews. After explaining the purpose of the research study to teachers and obtaining their permission to participate in the data collection, spelling lessons were observed. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), existing documents can be a valuable source of data. Therefore, the National Curriculum (2010), the newly revised English syllabi (National Institute for Educational Development [NIED], 2015), the Integrated Planning Manual for Grades 1, 2 and 3 (NIED, 2015) and learners' books (notebooks and test books) served as evidence to ensure the alignment of learner activities with syllabus requirements and curriculum adherence. In addition, focus

interviews were conducted on how the SRS is employed as a spelling methodology in the grade1, 2 and 3 classrooms.

Data Analysis

In line with De Vos et al. (2002), in an attempt to bring order and structure to this research, Yin's (2011) five-phase cycle was employed. This involves five steps: 1) compiling, 2) disassembling, 3) reassembling and arraying, 4) interpreting and 5) concluding. It is a cyclical process, which starts with *compiling* all the data collected according to type (interview, document study and observation) and storing it in an electronic file. This formed the database containing all the data that was collected. The second step, *disassembling,* is sometimes referred to as data reduction or fracturing. During this process, the database was searched for similarities and dissimilarities which were sorted accordingly. Text was reduced to segments of information (short sentences) and labelled with descriptive code words, such as 'lesson detail', 'adjustments', 'strengths and weaknesses', 'knowledge of curriculum', 'knowledge of English orthography' and 'teacher perceptions', using the computer software QDA Miner Lite. From these codes, themes were developed, which this study focused on to determine how the SRS was implemented and what adjustments were made during its implementation in the classrooms.

The aim of the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data is to discover patterns, ideas, explanations and understandings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Therefore, to make sense of it, the collected data were scanned for patterns and ideas. Emerging categories included 'SRS', 'Curriculum' and 'English'.

The next step, *reassembling data,* required that ideas be examined and the emerging patterns questioned. The three methods endorsed by Yin (2011), namely, *constant comparison, rival thinking* and looking out for *negative instances,* were applied and emerging themes were checked again.

Results

The results of this study describe the teacher's perceptions of English spelling, the benefits and limitations of SRS as experienced by the Namibian teachers in this study and the adjustments that the teachers have made to employ this strategy which was developed in England, here in Namibia. The section concludes with a summary of the important results.

Teacher Perception of English Spelling

The results show that teachers viewed English spelling differently before they received SRS training. Their approach to teaching it, have been changed by the SRS- training. Participant B3 replied, *"I must say that before SRS I just handed out a list, build sentences and wrote a Friday test. SRS has made me more aware of sounds and of how to give it to the learner."* Similarly, the HOD mentioned that before the training she "*used mandatory lists, hoping that I don't mess it up ... But I had no specific strategy*". In the past, the teachers had been left to their own devices and merely handed out lists and built sentences and tested learners on Fridays.

Training in SRS had had a great impact on Participant B3's view on spelling: "*SRS made me aware that thoughtful activities that elicit understanding are more likely to produce better results than enforcing skills like memorisation and guessing."* This is in line with the response from Participant B2 who indicated that *"… after the training I understand why /au/ words can sound so different like **au**nt and s**au**ce ... au used to be a nightmare to me. I could not answer the children when they asked me why? It is so simple ... it is two different sounds spelt in the same way!*"

Furthermore, the experience of Participant B1 provides insight on an essential component that needs to receive more attention in teacher education programmes.

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> *I was a bit overwhelmed and not really keen on teaching spelling. English is not my first language and during teacher training, we did not really focus much on how to teach spelling, much less English spelling. I must admit it was reduced to a one day of the week lesson, it is only now that I have come to understand that it is a systematic process. I used random words in my spelling lists, from the Internet like frequently misspelt words or homophones ... sometimes theme related words.* (Participant B1)

The Benefits of SRS as Perceived by the Teachers
The result indicated that the teachers agreed that SRS provided knowledge and skill to them as teachers and equipped them to teach spelling from another perspective. Amongst the benefits mentioned is that SRS lends itself to inclusive education and can be applied as a catch-up programme during the afternoons. For example, Teacher B3 responded that, *"I like most that children can discover patterns as you make them aware of the sounds in words, and they match it to its letter pattern...and that **c** followed by **i** is pronounced **s** ... They love that lightbulb moment … and I love that light in their eyes when they've grasped a concept."* This statement captures the teacher's passion to ensure understanding when teaching.

Other benefits that were listed included pointed to SRS as a worked-out plan that offers a systematic progression of sounds and makes spelling and reading easier to teach. Teaching aids consist of copies or printouts of the SRS worksheets or stories and no extra equipment is needed. This makes the system accessible and affordable. The programme necessitates that children segment and blend all the time, which is an essential component of spelling and reading, thus bringing about an awareness of words and sounds. The teachers believe that this explicit teaching of spelling also benefits reading ability. The relationship between spelling and reading was acknowledged and the HOD described it that, *"Spelling and reading are really two sides of a coin!"*

The HOD emphasised that the more exposure the learners (who are not native English speakers) have to the English spelling system, the better they are equipped to deal with it. The HOD proposed a steady pace towards teaching the basic code:

> *"I am convinced that as they progress, the learners will realise that it is all parts and pieces of a bigger puzzle. The more sounds they can be exposed to, the better. The more they hear it the more they become accustomed to it and the more we expect them to apply their knowledge, the better. The more they learn and experience the English sounds, the better the chance of internalising it. They are not going to unlearn their mother tongue and as much as there can be advantages when transferring phonologic or dialectal knowledge, there can also be disadvantages, like in Afrikaans the /l/ sound is represented by the letter **l** but in English it can be **l, ll, le** or **el** and often Afrikaans students write sample as sampel/sampil. Therefore, it is imperative to have them practise what applies to English during the first three years of schooling.*

The shortcomings of this methodology, as perceived by the teachers who have implemented it, are discussed in the next paragraph.

The Limitations of SRS as Perceived by the Teachers
As much as the teachers support the whole notion of teaching phonics systematically to learners, they are also facing problems relating to the opaque nature of English spelling. Some words with tricky spellings (*one, two, once, the, are, eye, whom*) are extremely difficult to decode, and therefore, the teachers in this study had opted to teach them as whole words. All the teachers who participated in this study had experienced this problem. Another concern that was raised was the fact that silent letters are not acknowledged in the SRS methodology and words like knee and autumn have tricky spellings to learn. Teachers are then forced to become very creative. Moreover, teachers fear that teaching spelling (which is only one

component of one subject in a demanding curriculum with many other subjects) this way can be very time consuming. *"It is a lot of work for the teacher. One can easily slip into your old ways and just grab a worksheet that requires learners to fill in the correct word … or give a random list of words for spelling"* (Teacher B3). Although this teacher voiced her frustration that SRS does not address sight words or silent letters, which are a reality in classrooms, they are taught in SRS within their sound group.

Furthermore, the Integrated Planning Manual offers a year plan for the schools that want to follow the syllabus. Therefore, the necessity to design another year plan for the SRS is regarded as extra work by the teachers who opt to use this method. The SRS demands reflection and planning to ensure that differentiation is warranted. Boredom is a real threat, which is why a steady pace is suggested. Table 4.5 shows the statements regarding the benefits and shortcomings as perceived by the teachers.

Table 4.5
Teachers' statements on benefits and limitations SRS

Benefits	Limitations
The learners have all the activities ... the cloze, build a sentence, write a rhyme, find a rhyming word. I believe they transfer their knowledge to their written work and because the spelling is interrelated to reading like we say /s/ when the c is followed by e, i or y like in cell, circle or cycle, the reading also improves as the spelling does.	*Some learners skipped the sounding out part and merely copied the words on the sound lines.*
I can agree with that … They do transfer their skill … I can hear how they correct themselves as they grapple with words where a sound switching takes place ... like the /i/ in I, in and sit.	*The problem is just that you must design two levels of worksheets and sometimes three different levels.*
The more they learn and experience the English sounds, the better the chance of internalising it. They are not going to unlearn their mother tongue and as much as there can be advantages when transferring phonologic or dialectal knowledge, there can also be disadvantages, like in Afrikaans the /l/ sound is represented by the letter l but in English it can be l, ll, le or el.	*Takes a lot of planning, you have to sit and do a year plan because the year plans in the Integrated Planning Manual do not follow SRS.*
We do inclusive education so I enlarged the font to size 14 and use SRS as learning support for those who struggle.	*It does not say what to do with high frequency words or sight words as we know it traditionally and silent letters ... that is a bit frustrating.*
The fact that children can make sense of it all ... understanding to segment/blend ... I myself learned about most of the different sounds only now when I receiving SRS training and I felt so empowered, how much	*But a word like the I teach as a whole word, it would take too long to wait for all the sight words to come along within their sound group, as expected when you teach through SRS.*

more does a child feel when gaining understanding?	
I was a bit overwhelmed and not really keen on teaching spelling. English is not my first language and during teacher training we did not really focus much on how to teach spelling, much less English spelling. I must admit it was basically reduced to a one day of the week lesson, it is only now that I have come to understand that it is a systematic process. I used random words in my spelling lists, from the Internet like frequently misspelt words or homophones ... sometimes theme related words.	*It is a lot of work for the teacher. One can easily slip into your old ways and just grab a worksheet that requires learners to fill in the correct word … or give a random list of words for spelling.*
It makes spelling and reading easier to teach. There is a system in place ... I just follow it. Teaching aids are cheap ... no fancy or expensive equipment. If you can make copies, you are ready for class. Of course, you still have to prepare ... [laughs].	*It would be useful if there were levelled readers based on SRS. And some stories that the learners can relate to would have been nice.*
At least now, after the training I understand why /au/ words can sound so different like aunt and sauce ... au used to be a nightmare to me. I could not answer the children when they asked me why? It is so simple ... it is two different sounds spelt in the same way!	*Boring*
	Books are introduced late.
I like most that children can discover patterns as you make them aware of the sounds in words, and they match it to its letter pattern.	*It demands planning and can become tiring and boring. Therefore, it is essential to maintain a steady speed ... move on.*

Table 4.5 above shows that when the teachers had to reflect on their implementation of SRS, the perceived benefits seem to outweigh the problems they experienced. Boredom is perceived as a problem; in this case, the similarities in the worksheets and the delayed introduction of books. On the other hand, it was also observed that fun activities like crossword puzzles and word searches are included, presumably to spice up the spelling lessons. As mentioned earlier, Nies and Belfiore (2006) alert us to the issue that spelling programmes may be perceived as tedious and monotonous, but we are encouraged by Daffern (2015) to develop spelling into an intriguing and stimulating learning experience.

Teacher's Adjustments to Ensure Appropriateness of SRS as a Spelling Programme for Namibia
Curriculum Alignment
The newly revised syllabi for Grades 1, 2 and 3 have elaborate requirements regarding English as a first or second language (see Appendix L). The results of this study showed that the teachers applied the SRS as a spelling methodology within the curricular framework. Although the phonics progression in the SRS is not in the same order as that stipulated in the syllabi, the curriculum permits alternative methodologies. Therefore, it is perceived as parallel to the

intended outcomes for language development. The syllabi specify that digraphs like *wh, ch, th, sh*, and two-letter blends *st, sp, sl* (like in star, stand, stick/spell, spin, spill, spend / slap, sling) and three-letter blends *squ* (squirt, squirrel, squash) *thr* (thrill, thrush, three) and consonant clusters (*br, br, cr, cl, dr, fl, fr*) should be mastered by the end of Grade 3. In contrast to teaching so many different sounds, the SRS teaches one sound. The individual sounds in a word are taught and the complex English spelling system is taught in simple, logical steps, building up from common to rare spellings. The Namibian curriculum requires compensatory teaching or learning support to occur within lessons to cater for learners with learning difficulties (NIED, 2014). In this case study, SRS was used as both a strategy to teach English spelling as well as an approach to provide learning support in smaller group sessions.

Integrated approach to teaching in the primary years

The results of this study suggest that the Junior Primary teacher has a key role to play in the holistic development of young learners through an integrated approach. This approach is concerned with connecting the subject areas of the curriculum. Therefore, handwriting and phonics were taught simultaneously. Lessons were planned and presented in a way that integrated and linked the different areas of the curriculum. Successful integration through careful planning, and even in spur-of-the-moment integration, was applied. Teachers displayed a positive and creative attitude and an awareness of the curriculum content and areas. Therefore, the target sound was central to weekly activities which might include a creative writing activity, reading comprehension, a poem or a story. Skill transfer occurred as learners undertook dictation and reading comprehension, built sentences with target words and engaged in other reading and writing activities. The SRS teaching materials included worksheets and sound stories to practise what had been learnt about the target sound, for example, the spellings of the target sound. The study indicated that the SRS methodology lends itself to adaption to an integrated approach.

Adjustments made to SRS

In this case study, SRS was applied as a whole-class strategy to teach phonemes (sounds). The children are taught to identify and order the sounds in words through practicing segmenting and blending skills. Learners can discover patterns as they become aware of the sounds in words, and they match these sounds to their letter patterns (Nevola,2007). The teachers introduced all the sounds starting with the Foundation Stage in Grade 1, then moved on to Stage 1 words and through incremental teaching strive to complete the full English code at the end of Grade 3. This skill can be inculcated by building words and incorporating a change, for example, from 'and' to 'sand', to 'hand' to 'had'. An SRS lesson includes building and writing words, processing sounds, spelling and reading (of a sound story). Sound processing is sometimes called 'phoneme awareness' which is an essential supporting skill for accurate spelling (Nevola, 2007; Loui, Kroog, Zuk, Winner & Schlaug , 2011; Clayton, West, Sears, Hulme, & Lervåg, 2020).

Although the SRS method was developed in England as an intervention to help flawed readers (Jansen, 2019), the results of this study show that teachers found it suitable for teaching English spelling in Namibia, apart from one minor adjustment based on a difference in pronunciation. In England, *wash* and *wasp* are pronounced with an /o/ sound, like *wosp* and *wosh* which is not the case in Namibia, where people pronounce the **a** in *wash* as the sound /a/. Therefore, teachers did not teach the **a**-spelling for the sound /o/. Instead, the teachers decided to teach the sound /o/ with the spelling **o** and **au** as in *cot* and *sauce* and designed another worksheet accordingly. For the sake of uniformity all teachers agreed to this.

As mentioned earlier, the teachers made an adjustment regarding sight words. They believed that the methodology did not adequately address how to teach the spelling or reading of sight words, therefore they applied another strategy to deal with this. In the SRS, most sight words are taught within their sound group, for example in /ee/, sight words like *be, she, tree, three, we,* are taught. However, the findings showed that teachers applied a whole-word approach

to teach these high frequency words rather than to follow the SRS progression of sounds. This was because the teachers were convinced that it would take too long, leading to a delay in mastering the spellings of the most frequently used words in text.

The SRS was perceived as a tedious programme which demands commitment to working through all the segmenting, blending, sound processing, and spelling and reading activities while still having other curricular requirements to fulfil in language teaching. The method can become boring and some sound stories are not very entertaining. These were the challenges the teachers had to battle with and they overcame it with creativity and commitment.

Recommendations
Universities and other Teacher Training Institutions
This study recommends that the training of teachers is aligned with what they are required to teach. Learners need to be taught to hear or be aware of the individual sounds in words and the movability of sounds (e.g. the sound /m/ can be at the beginning of a word, in the middle or at the end: '*mom*', '*him*', '*jump*'). This implies that teachers need to be trained in the same concepts in order to effectively teach this skill to learners. Hayward et al. (2014) noted that studies over the past two decades have exposed the inadequate training of most teachers regarding English phonological awareness. They (2014) maintain that adequate knowledge of English empowers teachers to deliver more effective instruction. Based on the findings of this study as well as the works of Hayward et al. (2014), this stud study argues that the in-service training and prior-service training of teachers need a revamp in Namibia and the provision of adequate resources such as levelled readers in schools is essential. There is also a need for more interaction and coordination between teacher-training institutions, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and schools, to establish the gaps and act proactively. Additionally, a holistic approach should be followed throughout the training of teachers similar to that expected of teachers during the Junior Primary Phase. Subject content in teacher training modules should also be linked to curricular outcomes in the primary school to ensure that the teacher is equipped to meet the requirements of the job.

Curriculum Developers
Curriculum developers need to consider current research and trends, as well as endorse methodology that has been scientifically proven. The curriculum needs to stipulate the exact time allocated for each component of the English language to ensure that literacy skills are regarded as high priority. It is recommended that more guidelines be provided with regard to the allocation of time for teaching and assessment of spelling in the timetable. Curricular benchmarks should be linked to scientifically based findings. Be specific when formulating goals, providing training on the implementation of curricula and monitoring the process continuously while providing support.

Conclusion
This research was motivated by the poor performance of learners in English language and was aimed at providing information on how SRS, a scientifically proven method, can improve spelling ability. In line with other research done in Namibia (February, 2020; Frans, 2016; Julius & Hautemo, 2018), this research found that English as the medium of instruction was introduced in education immediately after independence in 1990 and that since then, problems experienced with English are regarded as a major factor in poor learner achievement at schools. Frans (2016) has called on all stakeholders in education and the entire Namibian nation to intervene. In response to Frans's call, this case study provides feedback on the implementation of the SRS methodology, which offers insights on the English writing system. Since very few teachers in Namibia are native speakers of English, it is time that English should is regarded in its non-native context and the problem should be tackled at its root – at the foundation stage in the primary school and the training of the teachers of this phase. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as part of teacher training is essential because teachers need the knowledge of student understanding (Novianti & Febrialismanto, 2020).

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