

**Grade 9 Learners' Interpretation of Visual Texts in English FAL: A
Case of Hlanganani North Circuit, Vhembe West District -Limpopo
Province**

by

Mulalo Hulger Nedzamba

Student Number: 8702630

**Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA**

MA ELT

Code: HSMELS 6300

Supervisor: Dr T.E. Sikitime

Co-Supervisor: Prof E.K. Klu

DECLARATION

I, Mulalo Hulger Nedzamba, hereby declare that the dissertation for the MA degree in English Language Teaching at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.



Signature

July 2025

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my amazing supervisor, Dr T.E. Sikitime, and co-supervisor, Prof. E.K. Klu, for their professional guidance, patience, and support during my study.

I extend my gratitude to the schools that participated in this study, providing valuable responses that shed light on the research.

I acknowledge the significant role my friends played in encouraging and supporting me throughout. Special thanks to Dr T.G. Neluvhola and Prof. S. Mukhola for shedding light when all was dark. I would like to express my gratitude to Hlekani Mahlaule for the assistance in e-communication with the university. I cannot forget friends who believed in me and fuelled my determination: Mr T.E. Mudau, Dr A. Nemaungane, and Ms T.J. Thivhafuni. Special thanks to Mr R.O. Nthangeni for the technical assistance and motivation.

Special thanks to my son, Muruli, for his understanding and enduring support.

All this would not have happened without God's grace. I am thankful that He saw me through this study against all odds.

DEDICATION

To

My Sub A teacher, my mother, the late Mrs T.C. Lalumbe
My father, Mr T.E. Lalumbe, who ignited in me the love of reading by writing plays for
radio broadcasting.

And my children Pfariso, Rotondwa and Muruli

ABSTRACT

The integration of linguistic and non-linguistic variables like images, colours and symbols is increasingly becoming a common practice in the contemporary communicative domain. Unlike in the past, where non-linguistic variables were mainly viewed as separate genres and interpreted as decorative and aesthetic ornamentals, current approaches reflect a paradigm shift. Notably, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for English First Additional Language (FAL) acknowledges and elevates the role of visual elements in contemporary communication practices. With these developments increasingly manifesting, proponents of multi-literacy question the capacity of contemporary readers to decode meaning presented with multiple modes. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Social Semiotics, the Grammar of Visual Design, and Relevance Theory, the study critically analyses how selected Grade 9 learners in English FAL, from the Hlanganani North Circuit in the Vhembe West District of Limpopo Province, South Africa, interpret visual texts. The study adopted a qualitative research design, and data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that participants face several challenges that hinder accurate interpretations of visual texts. These include limited ability to infer covert and implicit meanings, insufficient prior knowledge or background context to support plausible interpretations, and inadequate language proficiency, which often results in incomplete or incomprehensible responses. Furthermore, learners struggle to engage with visual literacy elements such as layout, font, captions, and the identification of key information embedded within visual texts.

The findings of the study revealed significant challenges, including poor comprehension, limited prior knowledge, and difficulties in identifying implicit and explicit meanings in a visual text. Participants also struggled to understand and apply visual elements like captions; a difficulty that was an obstacle in their attempt to construct meaningful interpretations. Notably, the challenges were revealed across the different performance levels (weak, average and good performers).

The themes that emerged as challenges in the interpretation of visual texts brought up insights and, consequently, recommendations for an intentional and structured approach

to teaching visual literacy in schools. The study generated recommendations for curriculum advisors, teachers, learners and the entire society aimed at fostering a collaborative curriculum framework to bridge the gap between visual information and learner understanding. The recommendations to teachers are not only for EFAL but for all teachers, as different subjects expose learners to visual texts.

The significance of the study guided the recommendations based on the findings of this study. The findings of this study, as presented and discussed, resulted in proposed recommendations to the Department of Education, curriculum advisors, educators, learners and the entire society.

The study recommends that curriculum advisors serve as the first source of scaffolding by conducting training sessions for EFAL teachers so that they can develop and implement strategies that facilitate reading comprehension and appropriate interpretation. It should not be taken for granted that educators know how to teach visual texts. English FAL teachers need to develop and pass on the concept of scaffolding to learners by providing support meant to develop and improve learners' comprehension, interpretation, and critical thinking skills, as well as building background knowledge for accurate and plausible justifications when interpreting visual texts.

The recommendation extends to learners as they are expected to explore multiple texts and practise interpretations as they work, justifying their view with factual visual evidence. Practising with a variety of visual texts will improve their language use and augment interpretive skills to build confidence in responding to all questions appropriately without leaving any unanswered.

In conclusion, the study highlighted that the ability to interpret visual texts is essential in today's visually driven world. Addressing the difficulties and challenges revealed requires a collaborative effort from curriculum advisors, teachers, parents, and the community. It is notable that with appropriate teaching, scaffolding, and support, learners can be guided towards developing visual literacy skills that will serve them academically and in everyday life. The collaborative effort can nurture the necessary competencies early in order to

build a strong foundation for learners to be critical, reflective and informed readers of visual texts around them.

Key Words: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS); English First Additional Language (EFAL); Senior Phase; Visual literacy; Visual texts.

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Human errors in interpreting visual metaphor- Potato chips in a box of cigarettes	P. 21
FIGURE 2: Human errors in interpreting visual metaphor- Cigarettes in a box of potato chips	P.21
FIGURE 3: Population and sampling stages	P. 52
FIGURE 4: Map of the research site	P. 53
FIGURE 5: Representation of the data analysis strategy	P. 56
FIGURE 6: Visual presentation: Overall gender composition	P. 66
FIGURE 7: Visual presentation: Overall age composition	P. 67
FIGURE 8: Number of grade attempts	P. 68
FIGURE 9: Participants' interpretation of the overt meaning of the text	P. 71
FIGURE 10: Analysis of participants' propositions and substantiations	P. 76
FIGURE 11: Analysis of participants' limited contextual knowledge	P. 86

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: Scope for visual texts	P. 12
TABLE 2: Core critical thinking skills and sub skills	P. 28
TABLE 3: School A: Participants' demographic details	P. 64
TABLE 4: School B: Participants' demographic details	P. 65
TABLE 5: School C: Participants' demographic details	P. 65
TABLE 6: Participants' responses to evaluate propositions and substantiations	P. 75
TABLE 7: Participants' responses on plausibility of inferences	P. 79
TABLE 8: Participants' responses depicting poor comprehension	P.81
TABLE 9: Participants' responses depicting poor comprehension	P. 82
TABLE 10: Participants' responses depicting poor comprehension	P. 83
TABLE 11: Participants' responses revealing limited contextual knowledge	P. 85
TABLE 12: Participants' responses that are unsupported	P. 87
TABLE 13: Participants' responses revealing unsubstantiated standpoints	P. 88
TABLE 14: Participants' responses showing lack of factual support that correctly justify the answer	P. 89
TABLE 15: Participants' responses revealing challenges in providing objective arguments	P.90

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: University Clearance Certificate	P. 109
APPENDIX B: Approval Letter: Department of Education	P.110
APPENDIX C: Participant's information sheet	P. 112
APPENDIX D: Consent form	P. 113
APPENDIX E: Data Collection Tool	P. 114
APPENDIX F: 2024 Mid-Year examination Visual Text	P. 116
APPENDIX G: Editing confirmation letter	P. 117
APPENDIX H: Turnitin Report	P. 118

Table Of Contents

<u>GRADE 9 LEARNERS' INTERPRETATION OF VISUAL TEXTS: A CASE OF HLANGANANI NORTH CIRCUIT, VHEMBE WEST DISTRICT -LIMPOPO PROVINCE</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>DECLARATION</u>	<u>I</u>
<u>CHAPTER ONE</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>1. INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>1.3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES.....</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>1.4. OBJECTIVES</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>1. 5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>1.7. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>1.7.1 SENIOR PHASE</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>1.7.2 CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENT</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>1.7.3 VISUAL LITERACY</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>1.7.4. TYPOGRAPHIES</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>1.8 DELIMITATION OF STUDY</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>1.9 CONCLUSION</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>2.1 INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>2.2 VISUAL LITERACY REDEFINED</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>2.3 VISUAL TEXTS AND PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>2.3 VISUAL COMMUNICATION</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>2.4 VISUAL IMAGES INTERPRETATIVE STRATEGIES</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>2.4.1 LEVELS OF MEANING-MAKING</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>2.4.2 META-INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES.....</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>2.4.2.1 PERCEPTUAL STRATEGY.....</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>2.4.2.2 ANALYTICAL STRATEGY</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>2.4.2.3 SOCIOCULTURAL STRATEGY</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>2.5 VISUAL LITERACY ANALYSIS FOR CRITICAL THINKING</u>	<u>27</u>

2.6 CONCLUSION	29
3.2 SEMIOTICS	30
3.2.1 CONNECTION BETWEEN SEMIOTICS AND VISUAL LITERACY	31
3.2.2 MODE AND SEMIOTIC RESOURCES FOR MEANING	32
3.2.3 SEMIOTICS: SCIENCE OF SIGNS	33
3.3 SOCIAL SEMIOTICS	37
3.4 CONCLUSION	40
4.1 INTRODUCTION	41
4.2. RESEARCH DESIGN	41
4.2.1 DESCRIPTIVE DESIGN	42
4.2.2 EXPLORATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN	43
4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH	44
4.3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	44
4.3.2 INDUCTIVE FORM OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	45
4.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM	45
4.4.1 POSITIVISM	46
4.4.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISIM	47
4.4.3 INTERPRETIVISM	48
4.5 POPULATION	49
4.5.1 TARGET POPULATION	50
4.5.2 SAMPLING	50
4.5.2.1 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE	51
4.5.2.2 SAMPLING SIZE	52
4.7 DATA COLLECTION	55
4.7.3 SECONDARY DATA	56
4.8 DATA ANALYSIS	57
4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	59
4.9.2 INFORMED CONSENT	59
4.9.4 AVOIDANCE OF HARM	60
4.9.5 CONFIDENTIALITY	61
4.9.6 PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW	61
4.10 CONCLUSION	61
5.1 INTRODUCTION	62
6.1 INTRODUCTION	93

CHAPTER 7	101
SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	101
7.1 INTRODUCTION.....	101
7.2 THE SUMMARY	101
7.2.1 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS.....	101
7.2.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	104
7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS	105
7.4 CONCLUSION.....	107
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	112
INFORMED ASSENT FORM – GRADE 9 LEARNERS.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
INFORMED CONSENT FORM – EDUCATORS ON BEHALF OF GRADE 9 LEARNERS.....	113

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the background to the study with highlights on the interpretative competencies that Senior Phase (Grade 7-9) learners are expected to display when decoding visual texts as per the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for English First Additional Language. CAPS prescription and expectation on reading visual texts support Kress and van Leeuwen (2020:12), who state that visual literacy is significant in navigating today's image-saturated world. The chapter also outlines the problem statement, the aim, objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study, and concludes with key concepts and the delimitation of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

English First Additional Language reading syllabi for Grade 9 learners, as prescribed by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), are meant to develop reading and viewing skills that are “central to successful learning across the curriculum” (DBE, 2011:25). The senior phase's (Grades 7-9) reading content expanded the traditional reading of words to include non-literary texts wherein learners are to “analyse, interpret, evaluate and respond to a range of graphic and visual texts including images like cartoons, comic strips and advertisements” (DBE, 2011:27). This is supported by Kress (2021:1), explaining “the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image”. As literacy moves from a focus on words to a range of non-linguistic signs, learners are now contending with reconfigured meaning-making practices to a proportion that has never been imagined. Due to contemporary

communicative developments, efforts are made through CAPS prescription that Senior Phase learners be taught and assessed on their comprehension of visual texts and infographics.

Research on reading and literacies shows that learners learn more deeply from combining words and pictures than from words alone (Mayer, 2003:307). Mayer continues to support the effectiveness of multimedia learning (2014). Kress agrees that visual texts are essential in enhancing literacy skills, as “images and graphics play a critical role in literacy development” (2010:54). The inclusion of visual texts in CAPS stresses the importance of word-image interactions, which is a means for improved reading and recall skills as well as facilitating deeper comprehension and engagement (Serafini, 2014:123). The importance of visual literacy is expounded in Carcamo, Cartes, Velasquez, and Larenas (2016:136), who argue that using different modes improves the student’s perception of his or her learning process. Combining words with pictures creates motivating environments for learning (Carcamo et al., 2016:136). Kress and van Leeuwen (2020:15) concur that visual texts facilitate deeper understanding and engagement among readers. The study’s purpose was to analyse English FAL Grade 9 learners’ interpretation of visual texts in order to find their level of comprehension and critical thinking in line with the outlined CAPS directives and expectations.

The relationship between critical thinking and visual literacy is explained by Unsworth (2014:24-25), who contends that exploring visual texts enhances learners’ critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving skills. Freedman intensifies this notion by indicating that analysing visual texts requires critical thinking skills, as viewers must interpret and make meaning from images and symbols presented (2013:12). Drezdson (2019:78) draws the relationship of critical thinking and visual texts by drawing it closer to classroom context, as he indicates that “By incorporating visual texts into educational curricula, educators can foster critical thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.”

Regardless of the strong support for the relationship between critical thinking and visual literacy, some contend that notion. Cheung and Jhaveri (2016:385) explain that students’ critical thinking can be developed through visual texts. In support of the view,

Phanthapongtam and Charumanee (2019:61). As visual texts have a lot of details to look at for meaning, Postman highlights that an element that makes visual texts distract, rather than enhance critical thinking, is an emphasis on aesthetics over content (1985).

It is worth noting that while these authors present opposing views, they do not necessarily dismiss the potential benefits of visual texts entirely. This is displayed by Kress, who explains that visual texts may not inherently promote critical thinking but instead “require careful pedagogical design” (2017:54). This reveals that virtual texts can enhance critical thinking with the appropriate teaching methodology. Jewitt agrees with Kress that the relationship between visual texts and critical thinking is more complex than automatic enhancement, as it requires “nuanced consideration” (2020:12).

This study illustrates that the highlighted views that may be considered opposing one another are revealing the need for strengthening the pedagogy, as Kress pointed out. The background of this study highlights that while the introduction of visual texts in the English FAL Senior Phase curriculum is meant to enhance the reading and learning skills with critical thinking, learners continue to demonstrate that decoding the variety of modes used in meaning-making poses challenges. The diagnosis indicates that visual texts do not automatically make learners critical thinkers. However, that brings the view that with the appropriate teaching and methods, visual texts enhance critical thinking. Therefore, this study must offer a springboard of opportunities that need to be explored while focusing on achieving CAPS expectations concerning the relationship between critical thinking and visual literacy. Consequently, the study contributes to knowledge as it highlights findings on learners’ interpretation of visual texts, thus adding to the practice in English language teaching through recommendations to teachers and learners.

A study by Mayer (2003) established that engagements with visual texts develop critical thinkers with improved vocabulary acquisition, as learners are taught to elicit meaning based on the images provided. Kay, Sabine, and Marissa (2017:148) highlight the importance of analytical and critical thinking skills in interpreting visual texts, including equipping learners with “critical literacy competencies that prepare them for life in the digital age.

In response to emerging textual shifts, different countries initiated distinct literacy campaigns to address English language curriculum content and the reconfiguration of core assessment standards and pedagogic approaches. In South Africa, the Read to Lead Campaign was launched in 2015, aimed at improving the reading abilities of all South African children. This was a response to national, regional, and international studies that showed South Africans do not have a reading culture and that children cannot execute tasks that demonstrate key skills associated with reading at different levels or grades (DBE: 2021). The Kha Ri Gude (Tshivenda for 'let us learn') Literacy Campaign in South Africa, which intended to reduce the national rate of illiteracy by 50% by 2015, aimed to empower people so they could participate more effectively in society. It then follows that the inclusion of visual literacy, as the current curriculum presupposes, is a further attempt to respond to the prevailing developments.

A similar campaign spearheaded by the Australian English Curriculum reform was instituted with a special focus on three strands: language, literature, and literacy. The aim is to *engage students towards understanding the English language and the repertoires of usage, whilst, on the other hand, the literature strand aimed at engaging students in understanding, appreciating, responding to, and creating literature, including multimodal texts* (ACARA, 2014:5). In essence the campaign questioned the level at which language and literacy programmes could respond to developing contemporary communicative realities.

According to the 2014 Annual National Assessment (ANA) Diagnostic Report (2015:44), it was observed that in their English First Additional Language summative examination, learners performed fairly well in summarising main points but experienced weaknesses in making plausible inferences or inferring meaning and in interpreting and analysing visual texts like advertisements and cartoons. In addition, the 2014 ANA diagnostic report also indicates that from 2011 to 2014, the English FAL performance in Limpopo ranged from 13.7% to 11.4%, which is significantly lower than expected. The gap between curriculum expectations and learners' actual performance stands out as a research problem that the study explores by analysing learners' responses to a visual text. It is

imperative to identify areas that cause the gap in order to put together recommendations for bridging it.

The 2014 ANA diagnostic report on advertisements and cartoons studied three crucial aspects in visual literacy. These include the analysis of advertisement which, according to CAPS, entails examining the use of font size, identification of the target/audience, inferring meaning and establishing the effect of emotive language (DBE, 2011:27). In these three aspects, it was reported that “learners could not correctly identify the reasons for the choice of a particular font pattern and size; they struggled to identify the intended target market; they are also seen to be unfamiliar with technical jargon and are unable to decode advertising techniques; lastly, they could not apply the skill required to analyse or interpret subtle meaning imbedded in a text which requires correct inferences.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) mandates that Senior Phase learners engage with visual texts, infographics and non-linguistic texts to develop their analytic, evaluation and interpretation skills (DBE, 2011:27). This is an ideal attempt by the department to respond to the contemporary communicative practices that accommodate multiple semiotic modes in meaning-making. However, contextual realities show that literacy practices in most public schools still put more emphasis on monolingual print-based texts. The demand that comes with the reading of multiple semiotic modes is, as a result, not given adequate pedagogic and requisite epistemological attention. Consequent to this glaring anomaly, a potential mismatch between curriculum content offerings and assessment practices would be inevitable.

Therefore, the central problem for this study is that many Grade 9 learners in English FAL are unable to interpret visual texts effectively, despite this competency being a requirement of the curriculum. This difficulty is consistently reflected in the poor performance in assessment reports. Consequently, this study aims to identify the specific challenges learners encounter by analysing their responses to test items on a visual text. Through exploring learners’ interpretations of visual texts, this study intends to inform and

strengthen the effective implementation of the curriculum, guiding teachers in developing teaching strategies that are responsive and aligned to learners' needs and understanding.

1.3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The study aims to analyse how selected Grade 9 learners in English FAL, in the Hlanganani North Circuit located in the Vhembe West District of Limpopo Province, South Africa, interpret visual texts as a component of reading skills.

1.4. OBJECTIVES

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To establish learners' ability to interpret and comprehend visual texts;
2. To evaluate the correctness of learners' inferences when decoding visual texts;
and
3. To identify the difficulties that learners encounter when decoding visual texts.

1. 5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent are Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit able to decode and elicit meaning from selected visual texts?
2. How plausible are the inferences Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit make when decoding selected visual texts in their contexts?
3. What difficulties do Grade 9 learners in the Hlanganani North Circuit encounter when interpreting visual texts?

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

New literacies demand a broad range of skills, which, among others, include the ability to construct and decode meaning conveyed through multiple semiotic designs. These

include understanding the semantic attributes and semiotic significance of spatial, visual, gestural, linguistic, and acoustic designs. In line with these developments, the current study is envisaged to help bridge the gap between traditional literacies and new emergent literacy practices.

The study might be of great significance to the Basic Department of Education in their curriculum and content development, as well as teacher development. This is in line with the DBE (2011) CAPS document on English First Additional Language, which stresses the importance of the interpretation of visual texts and links its significance to the ability to sharpen readers' analytical and critical thinking skills needed to prepare them for life in the information-rich digital society.

The findings are envisaged to provide credible and imperative data on learners' interpretations of visual texts in relation to CAPS requirements. This will contribute to the existing literature meant to explore analytical and thinking skills needed for the interpretation of visual texts.

Pedagogically, the findings might provide insights to Senior Phase English educators and curriculum advisors on how best to address problems associated with the interpretation of visual texts. As effective visual literacy instruction requires intentional planning, implementation, and assessment, educators will need to acquire knowledge and skills for the appropriate teaching of visual texts.

As skills and techniques acquired at school are not only meant to be used in the classroom, but the study is also significant to the entire society, as the reading of visual texts and appropriate interpretation will produce citizens who can discern facts and content presented in non-linguistic forms.

1.7. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.7.1 Senior Phase

The Senior Phase encompasses learners from Grades 7 to 9 (DBE, 2011). It is often identified as the phase in which learning is taking place in the final stages of compulsory education. The Senior Phase provides specialisation, depth, and rigour and prepares young people well for achieving qualifications at the highest level of which they are capable.

1.7.2 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is a streamlined, essential document necessary for teaching and learning in all subjects from Grade R to 12 (DBE, 2011). Each subject has one CAPS document that details content to be taught, learnt, and assessed on a grade-by-grade basis. The CAPS subjects' documents are more content-based, prescribing specific content and describing when it needs to be taught.

1.7.3 Visual literacy

Visual literacy entails the ability to decode, interpret, create, question, challenge, and evaluate texts that communicate with visual images as well as, or rather than, words (Serafini, 2017). According to Blue (2024), visual literacy is the ability to interpret and understand the ideas and meanings in what we see - visual texts, such as advertisements, cartoons, billboards, and a film shoot; and to communicate our ideas in visual form. However, for this study, visual literacy will focus on what Grade 9 learners are expected to demonstrate in their interpretation of visual texts, which is mainly advertisements and cartoons as per teaching plans in CAPS (DBE, 2011:28).

1.7.4. Typographies

Typography is defined as the designed form in which the transfer of ideas and information with the help of signs is done. It invites one to read the text, reveals the meaning of the text, links the text to other visual elements, and creates appropriate reading conditions (Vladimirova, 2017). Typographic features include, among others, cap size, font size and pattern, colour structure, and text alignment. When the colour is used creatively, it enables the text to stand out and convey the tone of the message in line with the writer's intention, as it expresses moods and emotions (Blue, 2024). Therefore, typographic features are extended beyond a text's ornamental, decorative, and aesthetic aspects. Instead, it looks at their semiotic significance on a given text.

1.8 Delimitation of the study

This study is delimited to Grade 9 learners in English FAL, in ten (10) secondary schools located within the Hlanganani North Circuit of the Vhembe West District, Limpopo Province. While the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) prescribes a wide range of visual texts, including tables, cartoons, and graphs, this study focuses exclusively on advertisements. The choice to concentrate on advertisements is guided by their prevalence in the curriculum and their relevance in assessing learners' multimodal literacy skills

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the background to the study, the problem statement, the aim and objectives, as well as the research questions. It also outlined the significance of the study, provided definitions of key operational terms, and stated the delimitation of the study. In the next chapter, the researcher provides a critical review of relevant literature. The next chapter offers a critical review of relevant literature and engages with theoretical perspectives related to the interpretation of visual texts.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an account of CAPS documentation on the interpretations of visual texts for Senior Phase learners. The chapter also explores areas that are essential in the comprehension and interpretation of visual literacy, which are visual communication, visual image interpretative strategies, and visual literacy analysis for critical thinking. For this study, the researcher used two main theories, namely semiotics and social semiotics. The theories' propositions are evaluated in relation to stipulations on the interpretations of visual texts as enshrined in the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for grades 7-9.

2.2 VISUAL LITERACY REDEFINED

The conception of reading has changed from monomodal print-based text to possibilities encapsulated by multiliteracies, including visuals and multimodal digital-based texts (Baguley, Pullen & Short, 2009). As Kress (2003) outlined, literacy in the new media age aims to produce prepared learners for school, work, and society. Baguley, Pullen, and Short (2009) view multiliteracies as a way to understand the literacy curriculum in formal schools more broadly, encouraging students to participate productively in the increasingly information-rich and screen-based society.

Including visual literacy proficiency in CAPS ensures that learners get prepared for the authentic world that needs their skills to interpret visual texts. According to Kress (2003:45), visual literacy is important in the new media age. Cappello (2017:170) supports the view in the highlight that shows that visual texts can be powerful tools for meaning making in literary instruction.

The Curriculum Statement, DBE (2011:25), outlined the importance of including visual texts in reading and viewing skills, which are central to successful learning across the curriculum. It is highlighted that reading and viewing skills are crucial as they enable learners to “develop proficiency in reading and viewing a wide range of literary and non-literary texts, including visual texts.” Through reading skills, learners become critical and creative thinkers, which are essential in reading comprehension. DBE (2011:25) expands the notion of reading, including reading visual texts, in Senior Phase learners by indicating that it should combine two elements: learning and applying strategies for decoding and understanding text, and learning and applying knowledge of text features. The CAPS document identifies a measure of visual layout and competencies that play key roles in interpreting visual texts. These visual layouts and competencies are stated as:

- Examining the use of emotive language, persuasion, manipulative language, headings and captions
- Determining how language and images reflect and shape values and attitudes;
- Evaluating the communicative effects of font types and sizes, headings, and captions
- An analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and response to a range of [visual texts]

(DBE 2011:25).

According to DBE (2011:27), visual literacy is an important area of study that senior phase learners are expected to study, thereby acquiring and demonstrating comprehension in several core assessment features, including, among others, evaluating and interpreting persuasive techniques.

However, with emphasis still being on mono-modal print-based literacies, the challenges that learners may encounter when decoding multimodal texts are not extensively documented. One may argue that the evaluation of persuasive techniques is a specialised skill that may require special training and a heightened level of inferential competency. This level of training may not necessarily be accorded at this level, considering the variations in students' performance on their summative and formative tasks, particularly in the realm of visual literacy. Despite the discrepancies between CAPS stipulations and

contextual realities, Senior Phase (SP) learners are expected to demonstrate that they understand how language and images reflect and shape values and attitudes, and how to decode non-linguistic features and typographic features such as font types and sizes, headings, and captions on a given text.

Table 1 below shows categories of visual texts followed by an elaboration on a range of semiotic designs, their composite features and possible modes for analysis.

Visual texts for information	Visual texts for enjoyment and entertainment
Charts, maps	Graffiti
Graphs, tables	Cartoons, caricatures
Posters, flyers, pamphlets	Comic strips
Advertisements	Jokes (illustrated)
Mid-maps, diagrams	TV programmes
TV documentaries	
Web pages, internet sites	

Table 1: Scope for visual texts: CAPS, 2011:35

Although several visual texts are available, as indicated in Table 1, for the development of analytic and interpretative skills, the CAPS teaching plan for Grade 9 focuses on teaching advertisements and cartoons (DBE, 2011:96-113). Recurring questions for assessment on advertisements often range from establishing the purpose of a text, which in most cases could be to persuade, inform, or entertain. Secondly, learners may also be required to identify the target audience of the text. Since such information is not always overtly stated, it would often require readers to make logical conclusions using available facts, which may or may not be accessible to learners of varying reading and cognitive competency (Rice, Wijekumar, Lambright & Stack, 2024: 121-130).

The next two sets of assessments often require high-order thinking. They often require readers to comment on various techniques used in the text and an assessment of learners' critical thinking skills. While an analysis of techniques focuses on the identification of slogans used, logos, persuasive language, emotive language, and visual elements, questions assessing learners' critical thinking may require learners to analyse bias, stereotypes, and the effects they have on the overall meaning of a text (DBE, 2011:30).

DBE (2011) also has a reading category focusing on intensive multimodal and visual text reading. According to the prescript on intensive reading in CAPS, multimodal texts make use of visual and written material in a single text (DBE, 2011:30). In this category of reading, senior phase learners are expected to apply their knowledge of images and visual elements to understanding how these support writing in multimodal texts. The pointers that specifically refer to advertisement and cartoon indicate that learners should be able to:

- Identify and discuss the way visual elements are integrated with written text.
- Identify and discuss the purpose and message in visual texts for information.
- Identify and discuss the message and effectiveness of visual elements of advertisements and the relationship between the written and the visual elements.
- Identify and discuss the purpose and message of visual texts created for enjoyment and entertainment in cartoons, comic strips, etc.

DBE, 2011:30.

2.3 VISUAL TEXTS AND PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:15), visual images play an essential part in communication, often even more important than the written text. The two authors argue that traditional education puts verbal and written literacy over visual literacy despite the increasing importance of visual elements in modern communication. Kress and van

Leeuwen (1996:39) are the ones who introduced the concept of multimodality to link modes of communication such as images and words. Images, colour, and other non-verbal resources like font size are not only used for aesthetic purposes to entertain or illustrate; rather, they are equally significant text features expanding ways of communicating thoughts, concepts, and ideologies (Reiner & Dunbar, 2022). However, studies on how learners, particularly intermediate learners, process meaning conveyed multimodally are few. It is for this reason that this study aims to explore the experiences of learners with texts comprised of multiple semiotics with special focus on their interpretive repertoire and limitations.

According to Olshansky (2008), students in today's world are confronted with many multimodal forms of communication, and teachers, despite extensive training on multimodal literacies, are expected to expose learners to this type of Higher Order Thinking (HOT), which among others includes critical thinking, creative problem solving, collaboration, and communication across semiotic domains. Proponents of multiliteracy contend that including visuals in teaching not only brings the authentic world to the classroom, but it has also been found to be effective in learning language as it connects words and their reality (Carcamo, Cartes, Velásquez & Larenas, 2016). Authors agree that combining visual and written texts in teaching strengthens visual literacy and, above all, connects academic content to real-life experiences, as abstract descriptions are connected to learners' real-world understanding (Callow, 2011; Jewitt, Kress, Ogborn & Tsatsarelis, 2001; Coetzer, Livingston & Barnard, 2023). Using visuals in teaching and learning has been demonstrated to improve the learners' perception of their learning process; they become more conscious and active towards language as they are stimulated with motivating environments in different modes (Carcamo et al., 2016:136). This literature strongly supports the crucial need to delve into how learners interpret visual texts.

A number of writers on new literacies use the term "visual literacy" interchangeably with "multimodal literacy". Baldry and Thibant (2006) define multimodality as the combination of different semiotic modes that are both co-deployed and co-contextualised in the making of a text-specific meaning. Machin (2007) explains that multimodal literacy describes the

grammar of visual communication with rules and principles that allow viewers to understand the meaning using elements like typeface (fonts), colour saturations, framing, proximity, etc. On the other hand, visual literacy is understood as a “complex combination of meaning-making activities that are seen as a useful yardstick to measure and evaluate the diverse ways of meaning-making” (Kedra, 2018:68). According to Carcamo et al. (2016), multimodal information presentation makes students feel that it is easy to learn and they can maintain their attention span, which will benefit the learning process and increase learning performance. It is believed that multimodal resources are not only important to engage learners’ attention but also to improve their performance (Pourhossein, Nizan & Masoumeh, 2011). As an addition to that notion, Mayer declares that “students learn more deeply from a combination of words and pictures than from words alone” (2013:307). Supporting Mayer’s (2013) principle that learning is improved when content is presented in both words and visuals, Frick, Kendeou, and Schuler (2024: 547-567) provide empirical recent data that illustrates how combining visuals with words enhances learners’ comprehension. Similarly, Lawson and Mayer (2024) provide evidence that supports the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning by showing that integrating words with visuals in a text significantly improves learners’ understanding. Senior Phase learners are therefore given this opportunity to engage in learning that incorporates visuals so that they can be challenged “to experience and learn in other ways as well” (Picciano, 2009:13) and gain more comprehension (Mayer, 2021).

As highlighted in the problem statement of this study, the poor performance of Grade 9 learners on the visual texts assessment consequently results in learners failing to create meaningful and long-lasting knowledge. That is because other subjects in the Grade 9 curriculum also use visual texts to elicit their content. In South Africa, many schools, including the population of this study, use English First Additional Language as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). This means that learners are expected to reach a high level of competence in English, which will also determine and influence their ability to interpret visual texts. It is envisaged that learners must use their additional languages at a higher level of proficiency to develop their cognitive academic skills, which they need to study other subjects in English. This is also relevant in visual literacy, as

visual texts such as tables, maps, graphic information, and diagrams are part of other Senior Phase subjects (DBE, 2011:30).

2.2.1 INTERPRETATION OF VISUAL TEXTS

Visual texts such as advertisements and cartoons allow information to be conveyed using various modes such as visual images, written language, design elements and other semiotic resources. DBE (2011:24) on CAPS contends that visual texts offer opportunities for differentiated instruction, addressing diverse learner needs, including those who are not fast with words. However, the interpretation and comprehension of visual texts seem to be more complex than written texts (word texts). That is because the message in visual texts is not as explicit as in word texts, as a reader has to employ inferential techniques to interpret a given text. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) differentiate written text from visual text by highlighting that meaning in written text is derived from the position of sequence, whereas in visual texts, meaning is made from the “spatial relations or grammar of visual images. Recent literature indicates that it is no longer enough to think of language and communication as relying on words only, as other modes of communication, including visuals, are part of reading texts (Woodrow, 2022:56). Visual texts are included in reading texts to communicate ideas and messages that learners should interpret by utilising critical analysis skills from identification to inference (Bloom & De Lorenzo, 2017:533).

Subsequently, every detail on a visual text is essential for senior phase learners to evaluate information, navigate visual texts, and supply appropriate, well-thought-out interpretations. In support of the importance of visual details in interpretation, Kress and van Leeuwen (2020:123) state that font size and pattern may significantly influence the interpretation, as, at times, they may be used to convey emphasis, attention or redirecting focus on the part of the reader. Adding to that, Jewitt explains that the details, like colour in visual texts, evoke emotions as well as convey meaning while guiding viewer attention (2013:12). It is concluded that in visual texts, the position, size, and composition of the contents of the image play a significant role in the interpretations and meaning-making. The conclusion relates to Unsworth’s observations (2014:50), who stated that ignoring

visual details can lead to misinterpretation of visual texts. Consequently, the need to explore interpretations of Grade 9 learners to establish their ability with what CAPS expects from them is strengthened.

Learners whose curriculum exposes them to visual texts must know how to use different semiotic modes and intertwine them to create a unified text or communicative event. A highlight by Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) shows different ways of exploring multimodal discourse analysis, including content analysis, conversation analysis, and social semiotics. The different analysis is evident in the questions that Grade 9 learners are exposed to advertisements and cartoons. That is because in these visual texts, learners are asked questions about content (what is happening), conversation (what is communicated), and inferences based on social interpretation. This study will focus on linguistic and non-linguistic elements that stand out in advertisements and cartoons, including layout, typography, colour, and discourse. Cohesion of these and other elements in interpretations of visual texts reveals the importance of visual communication. According to Kress, using multiple modes, especially the ever-increasing presence of images or visuals in writing, is like remaking the world around people, as “image is coming ever more insistently into the domain of everyday communication as a full means of representing ideas, information and knowledge” (2003:20).

Kress (2003:4) explains that reading visuals with comprehension is caused by the imagination that focuses on creating the order of the arrangement of elements, which are already filled with meaning. The exposition of elements in different modes that are aligned with representational and communicative needs demonstrates the increasing use of visuals as a means of communication (Kress, 2003:10).

2.3 VISUAL COMMUNICATION

The study of visual texts revolves around semiotics, which is the study of signs and their meaning in society. Saussure (1983) defines semiotics as an investigation into how meaning is created and communicated, with its origin in studying how signs and symbols create meaning. The signs and symbols used in everyday life are related to cultural and

societal conventions; hence, the messages are dependent upon people's ability to interpret them instinctively and instantly. Viewing and interpreting signs and symbols enables us to manoeuvre through daily communications and act accordingly. Ultimately, visual literacy leads everyone to be a semiotician, as everyone constantly and unconsciously interprets the meaning of signs around them. Therefore, the respondents in this study must demonstrate how they interpret signs and symbols in the identified visual texts.

Halliday indicates that language is a semiotic mode, and any semiotic mode should portray three main broad communicative metafunctions: ideational metafunctions, interpersonal metafunctions, and textual metafunctions. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) explore images and thereby conclude that Halliday's three Meta functions of linguistics can be extended and have the capacity to form texts as well as being able to represent a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented. They assume that image, colour, music, typography and other visual modes are similar to language and, as such, can fulfil and realise the three broad communicative meta functions as language does. A "meta" concept allows learners to go beyond what they see in a text. Macken-Horarik explains that a "meta" perspective is necessary if students are not only to analyse language and image (visuals) but also synthesise their understandings in explanatory accounts (2016:3). According to Macken-Horarik (2016), getting 'meta' to texts is something many students find difficult; and that is what the 2014 ANA Diagnostic Report illustrated. As ANA has not been administered since 2014, the researcher explored participants' responses on a most current common test administered in 2024 mid-year assessment.

Experimental meaning is a representation of experience wherein a meaning-maker employs either cognition or emotion to elicit meaning based on one's interpretations (Schneider, 2013). Macken-Horarik refers to an aesthetic perspective which assumes that texts are made in particular ways that are open to interpretation (2016:7). This perspective brings a demand to schools to expose learners to a variety of contents so that their

experiences, which might be limited, can be augmented by the classroom interactions in order to assist them in the interpretation of visual texts.

Visual meaning is based on how the reader's schema is derived from experiences and exposure. Interpersonal meaning is about social interaction where language is used to interact in questions, commands, and giving information. Macken-Horarik (2016:8) expands on this aspect by explaining how texts position readers and meaning-makers to see, feel, and judge in a particular way. The analytic manner that depicts meaning is to be done through questions related to literary craft relevant to an interpersonal lens on meaning. According to Macken-Horarik (2016), these questions align with the outline that CAPS (2011) displays on cognitive levels: narration, focalisation, dialogue, evaluation, and appreciation.

Textual meaning is explained as meaning that focuses on relevance in context. Gualberto and Kress (2018) indicate that in semiotics, a text is seen as a composition of interconnected signs in which a meaning-making individual must interpret the designer's representation. It follows that the texts given to learners should be relevant to their contexts so that they can make correct interpretations. The demand is big, as the school's curriculum and choices of texts need to align with authentic context beyond the school, which is the media in all its forms.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) use slightly different terminology in discussing the meaning of image in visual communication: 'representational' instead of 'ideational'; 'interactive' instead of 'interpersonal'; and 'compositional' instead of 'textual'. According to Gualberto and Kress (2018), images have meanings when integrated to allow the ability to "critically analyse media messages and recognise the role that readers play in making meaning from those messages." In his work on visual literacy, Burmark (2002) emphasises the significance of visual literacy in education. He supports the idea that visuals can develop learning and communication.

2.4 VISUAL IMAGES INTERPRETATIVE STRATEGIES

An active visual text reader is expected to promote, coordinate, and maintain the comprehensive comprehension of images, symbols, and signs in texts (Liu, 2013:1261). Liu refers to Panofsky (1955), who devised iconography and iconology to analyse meanings in art. In this method, various components of a piece of art are created and listed, and conventional meanings and underlying philosophical meanings are identified. Lastly, interpretations are constructed within the given socio-cultural context (Liu, 2013). Writers support the importance of the visual tests readers' ability to engage in symbol coordination from multiple semiotic modes to recognise relationships between elements and construct coherent interpretations. According to Vasquez, visual text comprehension relies on readers' ability to coordinate symbols considering context, purpose, and audience 2017:42. Exploring symbol coordination and meaning-making, Kress (2010:54) explains that such coordination facilitates meaning-making by establishing connections between elements. In addition, visual text readers are expected to employ symbol coordination to navigate complex information and multiple narratives. (Unsworth, 2014:24).

Coordinating symbols in visual texts can help interpret metaphors with complex meanings that require readers to engage inferentially. Unsworth (2014) and Vasquez (2017) agree that visual metaphors need symbol coordination to enhance comprehension and persuade and influence readers towards enriched interpretation. A visual metaphor of potato chips (French fries) or arrows in a box of cigarettes, as used in Figure 1, together with cigarettes in a box or container meant for potato chips, as indicated in Figure 2, would need a reader to coordinate the symbols in order to interpret that the audience is warned of the danger of smoking or eating chips.

Below are examples of the visual texts that are metaphoric in nature, requiring pre-existing knowledge to be understood and interpreted as intended by the text designers.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Human Errors in Interpreting Visual Metaphor (Petridis & Chilton, 2019)

Figure 1 above presents an example of a multimodal campaign text. The text designer draws a comparison between two seemingly unrelated items, cigarettes and potato chips, by ascribing them similar lethal effects. While it is common knowledge that cigarettes are harmful to human health, the inclusion of potato chips in the image creates an analogy that invites viewers to consider their potential dangers. The intended inferential conclusion is that potato chips may be just as harmful as cigarettes, thereby encouraging critical reflection on everyday consumption habits.

The same approach is used in Figure 2, but this time the text designer decided to put cigarettes on a McDonald's pack. This may connote that, while it may appear appetising to take fries, the text designer is of the view that the two items are equally lethal; hence, they should be avoided.

Dominant semiotic features in the two adverts are visuals - cigarettes with chips and cigarettes packed in a McDonald's pack. When decoding texts of this nature, as is often required when interpreting adverts, learners may require background knowledge that

gives insights into the context of the text. The context, therefore, becomes key in minimising possible human errors in interpreting visual metaphor (Petridis & Chilton, 2019).

2.4.1 LEVELS OF MEANING-MAKING

Liu (2013) introduces meaning-making as a process with levels. Visual texts employ hierarchical meaning-making, with surface-level meanings giving way to deeper, more nuanced interpretations (Unsworth, 2014:25). CAPS requires senior phase learners to demonstrate what Kress and van Leeuwen identify as multiple levels of interpretations, including literal, inferential, and interpretive, requiring readers to navigate complex relationships between symbols, visuals and artefacts (2020:15).

2.4.1.1 Pre-iconographic

The first level, pre-iconographic, is a denotative level that mainly focuses on the interpretation of the natural meaning or literal meaning. This is a visual text's literal meaning, which is derived from surface-level elements like images, colour, and typography (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020:123). This literal meaning provides initial understanding of what a reader sees; serving as a foundation for deeper interpretations (Unsworth, 2014:45). It is therefore instrumental that Senior Phase learners master how to extract the literal meaning of what they see in advertisements for them to work on processing connections between symbols and captions for appropriate interpretations.

2.4.1.2 Connotative level

The second, connotative level mainly focuses on the interpretation of secondary or traditional meanings. It is during this level of interpretive process that readers or viewers need to move beyond the natural or surface meaning to consider their schemata (knowledge and experiences). This is the inferential meaning, which has reader-driven interpretations based on visual cues and inviting personal connections. Kress and van

Leeuwen explain that readers infer meaning by analysing the relationship between visual elements (2020:125). In addition, Jewitt (2013:15) points out that inferential meaning expands literal understanding, considering context and experience. It follows from this that Grade 9 learners' contexts are significant in their process of reading between the lines in visual texts.

2.4.1.3 Iconological level

The third level is the iconological part, which focuses on the interpretation of ideological meanings of an image constructed in particular social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. Ideological meaning could either be underpinned by political, cultural, creed, social, economic, or readers' contextual experience. This level also includes comprehension and interpretation of symbolic and metaphorical meanings, which represent abstract concepts through visual symbols, metaphors, and allegories (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020:130). Possible misinterpretations may occur if readers are not exposed to values, ideals, and ideological orientations that underpinned the construction of a given text. Misinterpretation may also occur if readers' inferential repertoire is underdeveloped, leading to the surface level of interpretation, which often excludes the implicit meaning embedded in a given text.

According to Vasquez, interpretive meaning integrates literal and inferential meanings, considering cultural background and authorial intent (2017:82). If readers of visual texts have different experiences, they can construct interpretive meaning differently. Although interpretive meaning acknowledges complexities, ambiguities, and multiple perspectives as indicated by Unsworth (2014:55), visual readers are expected to employ critical thinking and analytical skills to produce acceptable interpretations in relation to contextual relevance, visual evidence, authorial intent, cultural sensitivity, and logical coherence (Jewitt, 2013:12).

These three levels of meaning are useful in the interpretive strategies that Liu proposes. These levels are essential in this study because, for an appropriate interpretation, a learner may need more than just identifying what is observed in a picture. The three levels

of interpretation call for one to draw from one's background knowledge and use other contexts in responding to questions on visual literacy. For the appropriate interpretation of visual texts, Senior Phase learners are expected to demonstrate the three levels of interpretation. This study will analyse the exit level of the phase, which is Grade 9, as it is envisaged that by the end of a phase, CAPS requirements should have been met (DBE: 2011). As the focus of this study is on interpretations, it is essential to explore interpretive strategies used and the limitations that visual text readers (Grade 9 learners) incur when decoding a given text.

The next section highlights some of the available strategies commonly used when decoding texts.

2.4.2 META-INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES

Liu (2013) indicates that the first interpretive strategy is the readers' meta-interpretive strategies, meaning readers must be aware of visual or multimodal meaning construction. Readers are expected to understand that visual images are no longer solely ornamental but are increasingly employed to make sense of the world. The visual semiotic resources used in visual texts are different from those used in printed texts, and thus, meaning-making strategies are different. Different modes, which evoke different responses from readers, are used as joint contributors to an overall meaning that surpasses the meanings conveyed by the separate modes. Therefore, this strategy emphasises that different modes are important. Thus, readers need to jointly use codes like colour, font size, signs, and emotive language in advertisements and cartoons to convey overall meanings.

2.4.2.1 Perceptual Strategy

This strategy explores what the reader notices. The visual and design elements, such as lines, shapes, textures, and other semiotic modes, are presented in the visual texts. Liu (2013:1262) explains that perceiving and noticing the visual elements of a visual text is an initial and primary aspect of the meaning comprehension process. The comprehension

of visual texts begins with the perception of the visuals used to render a story in cartoons or communicate a message in advertisements (Serafini, 2011). It follows that if learners do not notice the particular elements in visual texts, they may be unable to extract meaning from them during their interpretive processes.

2.4.2.2 Analytical Strategy

Perceptual strategy works as a prerequisite for the analytical strategy because it is after noticing what is in the visual text and the design elements that a reader can derive their meaning, which is key in this comprehension process. Liu (2013:1262) explores how this strategy touches on the organisation and location of images; the size and scale of the image; and if or how it impacts the meanings. What is essential in interpreting visual texts is that the analytical process necessitates readers to make sense of the interrelationships among various visual elements and understand the meanings associated with them in a certain culture. As indicated in the first strategy, readers of visual texts need to understand how the various elements interplay and coordinate to make joint meanings. Analysing visual texts at the interpretive level requires identifying underlying assumptions, unpacking symbolic meaning, and considering contextual factors influencing visual text creation and reception (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020:140). Grade 9 learners must demonstrate skills of evaluating historical and cultural contexts as they analyse visual texts. According to Unsworth (2014:55), readers must recognise implicit messages conveyed through visual elements by analytical strategies for the interpretive level.

2.4.2.3 Sociocultural Strategy

Sociocultural strategies play a significant role in interpreting visual texts, accentuating the importance of context, cultural background, and social norms. Inevitably, the Senior Phase learners', in general, and specifically Grade 9, cultural background influences their interpretation, as readers always bring their experiences and biases into making meaning of texts. Djonov and van Leeuwen explain that sociocultural context influences interpretation as cultural background shapes meaning (2018:35).

The early classic observation by Scott (1994) highlights that “pictures are not merely analogues to visual perception, but symbolic artefacts constructed from conventions of a particular culture.” It follows that in order to interpret the meaning of a given visual text thoroughly, readers need to consider the related social meaning system. On that account, Grade 9 learners are expected to go beyond looking at the relationships within the images and signs, but to go into the current social, cultural, scientific, ecological, and political background. Taking the sociocultural aspect in the interpretation of visual texts is essential, as images are an important means through which ideologies are produced and projected (Strurken & Cartwright, 2001:21). In agreement, Rose (2016:12-15) discusses the importance of considering cultural and social contexts in visual analysis. Van Leeuwen equally explores the role of visual text in creating identity and culture. (2015:50-60). As an illustration, the fact that a red rose ideally signifies love and a white dove signifies peace or death (or a condolence message), this could be a meaning constructed in sociocultural contexts, and it should, as such, be taken into consideration since visual texts often convey meanings beyond the literal meaning. Schneider refers to this as a science of signs where meaning attached to something differs according to social knowledge and cultural understanding of concepts (2013:2). It is therefore essential that the teaching of visual texts and signs should expose learners to all interpretative impetus since signs and symbols may have universal meanings and contextual meanings which could be limited to certain areas.

Successful interpretation or making sense of visual texts may pose a challenge for Senior Phase learners if their sociocultural backgrounds are not aligned with the composer’s level of knowledge and comprehension of visuals used in advertisements and the authentic world. It is therefore imperative that these learners be exposed to jargon and advertising techniques used to manipulate the target market (Unsworth, 2014:44). Liu (2013:1262) explains that making sense of visual texts requires that learners move beyond the traditional comprehension strategies, as that will help expand the perspectives and strategies, they may draw on to be fully literate.

2.5 VISUAL LITERACY ANALYSIS FOR CRITICAL THINKING

As per CAPS directives (DBE, 2011:27), visual literacy is one of the important areas of study that Senior Phase learners are expected to study and thereby acquire and demonstrate critical thinking in the comprehension of advertisements and cartoons. DBE (2011) highlighted that learners are to employ their critical thinking as they are exposed to different styles of language techniques, images, and shapes, as well as semiotic modes like font types and sizes, headings, and captions.

Critical thinking is a crucial element in the comprehension of visual texts, as learners are expected to apply their understanding of how language can create and maintain power relationships between text producers and readers (DBE, 2014:45). The visual literacy assessment that grade 9 learners take is meant to test whether they can read advertisements and cartoons and then make inferences. For learners to understand and interpret the purpose and intention of cartoons, they need a critical mind. It follows that learners require competencies that move beyond the traditional notion of literacy to meet the demands posed by visual literacy (Kay, Sabine & Marissa, 2017:147).

DBE (2011:27), CAPS expectations for learners to analyse, interpret, evaluate, and respond to a range of cartoons/comic strips in meaning-making validate the importance of learners' critical thinking. Kay et al. (2017:148) explore the importance of critical thinking in a multiplicity of discourses for comprehension. Six skills and sub-skills have been highlighted as cornerstones of critical thinking needed in the comprehension of visual literacy. For this study, five of these are indicated in the table below, as illustrated by Kay et al. (2017:153).

Core Skill	Definition	Sub-skill
Interpretation	To comprehend and express the meaning or significance of a wide variety of experiences, situations, data, events, judgements, beliefs, etc.	Categorise Decode significance Clarify meaning
Analysis	To identify the intended and actual inferential relationships among statements, questions, concepts or other forms of representations.	Examining ideas Identify arguments Identify reasons and claims
Inference	To identify and secure elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions.	Draw conclusions using inductive or deductive reasoning
Evaluation	To assess the credibility of statements or other representations that are descriptions of perceptions, experiences, situations, or opinions. To assess the logical strength of the actual or intended inferential relationships.	Assess the credibility of claims Assess the quality of arguments that were made using inductive or deductive reasoning
Explanation	To state and justify reasoning in terms of evidential, conceptual, and contextual considerations upon which one's results were based.	State results Justify procedures Present arguments

Table 2: Core Critical Thinking Skills and Sub-Skills (Kay et al., 2017)

The high-order thinking skill required in the comprehension of visual literacy is viewed as one that “comes with a whole new set of challenges and pressures” as it has to be taught “tapping into multiple modalities” (Olshansky, 2008:12). Both advertisements and cartoons expose grade 9 learners to different modes, as they are composed of two modes: image and writing. Kress (2003:20) explains that when these two modes are

used, each mode carries only a part of the information load; that is, no mode carries all the meaning. A reader is thus expected to think deeply in connecting the two modes to denote the core message of a visual text. As this study focuses on studying interpretations of texts with multiple modes, it consequently brings in a notion of semiotics. A reportage of semiotics is inevitable as it explores the relationship between a sign, an object, and meaning (Gualberto & Kress, 2018:1).

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented key arguments on visual literacy and its implications for reading and pedagogic practices. It also examined recommended reading strategies and essential competencies as enshrined in the CAPS document. The next chapter will focus on major theoretical frameworks that underpin this study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework that underpins the study. A theoretical framework can be defined as a set of concepts, theories, ideas, and assumptions that guide the processes of a research project. It provides a particular perspective through which to examine research (Grant & Osanloo, 2012). It helps readers or reviewers understand a specific phenomenon or problem. Grant and Osanloo view a theoretical framework as a “blueprint” for the entire research, as it serves as the guide on which to build and support a study (2012:2). The current study is underpinned by two interrelated theories, namely, semiotics and social semiotics. Propositions that underpin each theory are highlighted with subtle considerations that readers should make when decoding multimodal texts in their context.

3.2 SEMIOTICS

Semiotics is a term coined by Ferdinand de Saussure, and it is used to establish the relationship between signs and the signified concepts. It attempts to establish the meaning of signs in relation to what they represent. According to Gualberto and Kress (2018:1), the word “semiotics” is derived from the Greek “semeion”, which means sign – the smallest unit of meaning as a combination of form and meaning. It is explained that meaning becomes evident and visible, tangible, and audible in and through signs made in different modes.

Interpretations of visual texts cannot be discussed without an understanding of how signs (linguistic and non-linguistic) are used to convey meaning. According to Morris (1964), people are interpreters of signs, and signs can be words or nonverbal. It is further

explained that signs have three factors, which are the designative aspect, which directs meaning to the interpreter to a particular object; the appraise aspect, which highlights object qualities enabling evaluation; and the prescriptive aspect, which directs one to respond in a specific way. Morris (1964) expands on semiotics by highlighting the three stages that a reader employs in interpreting visual literacy, that is: the reception stage, where a person becomes aware of a sign; the manipulation stage, where a person interprets a sign and decides how to respond to it; and finally, where a person responds. Recent literature, as highlighted by Dressman (2016:111), supports that meaning is in people and not words or visuals, as interpretation of multimodal texts is essential in making meaning. This concept shows that different people have different understandings of a text as a result of different life experiences and socio-cultural contexts. The objectives of this study fully support this notion, as the research seeks to find out how Grade 9 learners make meaning through interpreting visual texts, specifically advertisements.

3.2.1 CONNECTION BETWEEN SEMIOTICS AND VISUAL LITERACY

Visual literacy is concerned with signs of visual variables and starts from the position that modes consist of a set of semiotic resources that people draw on as they interpret what they read. Kress and Leeuwen (1996) highlight that visual literacy incorporates multiple modes; hence, multimodality exposes visual communication and the relationship between image and writing. As learners are expected to understand the relationship between images and text in cartoons and advertisements, they are exposed to key concepts such as composition, modes, and framing. This is where the understanding of semiotic resources presents readers of texts with multiple visual variables, with tools to interpret images and signs coherently. In his discussion on “Multimodal discourses across the curriculum”, Jewitt (2008:3) explored themes in the study of multimodal discourses; themes which are relevant to this study as discussed below.

3.2.2 MODE AND SEMIOTIC RESOURCES FOR MEANING

Jewitt outlines how attempting to understand the relationship between image and text (words) is central to the development of multimodality. In *Reading Images*, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) provide a framework for describing the semiotic resources of images and analysing how these resources are configured to design meaning, represent the world in specific ways, and realise coherence. This process is what CAPS requires of Senior Phase learners in the interpretation of visual texts, as it has elements of critical thinking. Critical thinking assists a reader in creating meaning from words and any other mode of reading. According to Graziano and Raulin (2020:16), critical thinking is defined as gathering and evaluating information to reach consistently reasonable decisions. Grade 9 learners are therefore expected to reach decisions in giving appropriate meaning to the visual texts prescribed to them.

Carcamo et al. (2016:138) explain the importance of different ways to “create meaning, to understand the world and perform actively in our own learning process”. The different ways to communicate are referred to as modes, which according to Bezemer and Jewitt, are an organised set of resources for making meaning” (2010:183). It is crucial to note that authors describe a requirement that a mode needs: “in order for something to be a mode, there needs to be a shared cultural sense within a community of a set of resources and how these can be organised to realise meaning” (2016:138). In agreement, it follows that grade 9 learners’ interpretation of texts is aligned to their understanding of the world and cultural experiences.

A reference to the socio-linguistic approach by Carcamo et al. (2016), the analysis of the resources of a mode may change the meaning of communication. Modes can expand and alter meanings based on sociocultural contexts. While in other contexts a red colour could connote confidence and bravery, in another context, it may mean love or even danger.

For non-verbal signs, a thumbs-up gesture can mean approval or agreement in Western culture, but it is considered rude in some African cultures. This indicates that changing

meanings based on modes and socio-cultural contexts can significantly impact communication. What is acceptable in one culture may be totally wrong and unacceptable in another as illustrated.

The idea of meaning construction within socio-cultural contexts is supported by Gumperz when he claimed that “any verbal sign which when processed in co-occurrence with symbolic grammatical and lexical signs serves to construct the contextual ground for situated interpretation” (1999:461). Therefore, as Carcamo et al. emphasise, it is “relevant to teach a learner how to analyse all elements that are involved in the construction of a mode and the meaning that they entail” (2016:138). Pourhossen et al. explain that there are a variety of modes that learners should be exposed to, as used in visual texts that are interacting and interplaying, and each mode contributes to meaning construction (2011:1325). Hence, Grade 9 learners are exposed to modes of pictures, signs, colour, font size, font type, and words to construct meaning in advertisements and cartoons (DBE, 2011: 27).

3.2.3 SEMIOTICS: SCIENCE OF SIGNS

A shift of focus on literacy and communication that focuses on words to a type of literacy that explores multiple semiotics has brought a new discourse necessitating a relook at what it means to be literate in the 21st century. Schneider (2013) explores how semiotics theory is interested in microelements concerned with how information is transmitted and what makes up a message. Seiter (1992:31) states, “Semiotics is the study of everything that can be used for communication: words, images, traffic signs, flowers, music, medical symptoms, and much more.” As a systematic study of signs, symbols, and their meanings, Chandler (2020:12) proposes that it should also include examining how language and culture create meaning, convey information, and influence human behaviour.

Signs offer the most important element of semiotics in the way they are conceptualised and how they transport meaning. In explaining what a sign is, Schneider simply states

that “a sign can be anything that stands for something else” (Schneider, 2013:2). Signs may also differ in terms of form and referential qualities. Iconic signs are known to depict the signified vividly as it is; symbolic signs, on the other hand, are conventional, and meaning is given on the basis of socialisation. Thirdly, indexical signs are interpreted on the basis of a causal relationship between the sign and the signified. It is at this point that a reiteration is important to emphasise that something can have different meanings based on socio-cultural knowledge, exposure, and beliefs. Dark clouds are natural features that may indexically connote an impending heavy rain downpour. This is a discipline-specific referential application. When used in a different context, the same indexically sign may connote different things in a different cultural and social setting. Accessing the text designer’s intention for using a given indexical sign is, as a result, a product of critical literacy, which is the sum of one’s ability to make relevant inferences that are plausible (Chandler, 2007:36-49).

In his exploration of the relation between a word and the thing it stands for, Saussure defined the sign as a “two-sided psychological entity” that links a mental concept of a thing (the signified) to a sound pattern (the signifier) (Saussure, 1983:66). This view was criticised for not taking into account how other types of signs work and how the relation between a signifier and its signified is often not at all arbitrary, as Saussure argued (Schneider, 2013). Contrary to Saussure’s view on signs, Charles Peirce was convinced that there are different types of signs and that the relation between a sign and its object was not necessarily arbitrary (Hoopes, 1991:11).

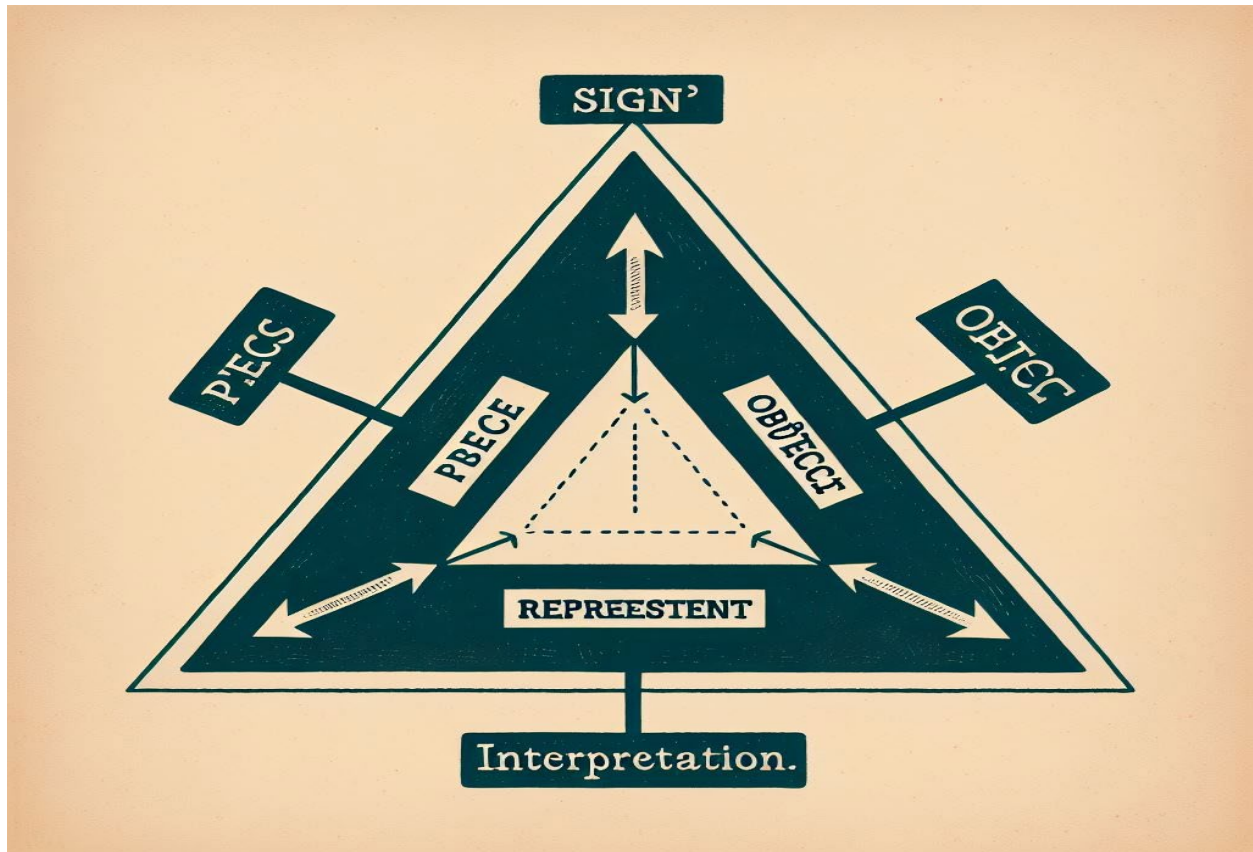
Peirce (2013) expands this notion, arguing that a sign consists of three elements that form a triangle: an object, its representation, and its meaning. An example of a rainfall was used to illustrate how the triangle works: “**the sound of rain on a window**” is what Peirce called the “referent.” It is linked to the actual rain falling outside (the “object”), but it is one’s interpretation (the “interpretant”) that connects the two, thereby completing the triangle and turning the sound into a “sign” for rain (Schneider, 2013:2).

The “interpretant” plays an important role in making meaning, as without it, there would be a signal (noise), but there would not be a meaningful entity or a sign-meaning

connection to rain. In the reading of advertisements and cartoons in Grade 9, this connection is also important, as the “interpretant” would not understand the signal and hence cannot have the meanings of the signals given in texts.

Schneider (2013) expands on Peirce's view of the semiotic triangle by displaying that a sign is defined by the link to its conventional meaning. Three different kinds of signs are then defined as icon, index, and symbol. The icon is a sign in which the representation resembles the object strongly enough to be recognisable as the real thing. A news picture of a car accident gets the reader's attention to the real event as it is, and not an artificially created drawing. At a surface level of representation, learners are often required to identify the literal meaning of a text with no reference to inferential meaning.

The second kind of sign is the index, wherein “the referent is the consequence of the object, and the meaning is not crucial to the relationship” (Schneider 2013:3). In this kind of sign, the sound of rain on a window signifies rain whether one hears it or not. An example of this kind would be smoke, which is an index that something is burning, regardless of whether anyone is there to interpret the smoke. This would be regarded as a universal meaning (Schneider, 2013). Finally, there is the type of sign that Saussure wrote about: the kind that does not have a strong relation to its object. Peirce refers to such signs as symbols. In this type of sign, the relation that matters is the one between the referent and its meaning, as is the case with words, company logos, or the kinds of rude hand gestures that people make when they are angry.



Peirce's Semiotic Triangle (Hardwick, 1977:111)

Hardwick (1977:111) elucidates Pierce's semiotic triangle with sign, object, and interpretant as interconnected elements facilitating meaning creation. Pierce's emphasis on the dynamic relationship between these three components is further highlighted as one enabling semiosis (Hardwick, 1977:113). Schneider explains that in most practical cases a sign will not neatly fall into one of these three categories but will share properties of each (2013:3). The explanation on this point out that the triangular relationship that Peirce introduced does not need to be understood in rigid terms. It is highlighted that specific signs can be located anywhere between the extremes, and they can move from one category to another over time. This places an emphasis on a pedagogical concept wherein exploration of these kinds of signs and interpretations should be dealt with. The relations and interpretations have the ability to expand on a triangle; that is, the referent of a sign can also be the starting point of a new sign triangle. For instance, a picture of a country's president would be the object in a triangle. That object can start another triangle,

as an “interpretant” makes meaning out of the picture; a simple depiction of a president in the form of a painting is called a denotation meaning, and it is in a first triangle. When one goes further and relates what the president means to him, then it is the second triangle and has a connotative meaning.

According to Eco (1979:191), a connotation is a semiotic relation (or sign-function) that consists of another semiotic relation. Eco explored the rules of relations and showed that “a sign-function is the correlation between an expression and a content based on a conventionally established code”. Eco explains that signs can be combined to form messages and codes, and transmitting, receiving, and decoding messages follow systematic patterns.

The next section highlights a theoretical formulation, social semiotics, which is a subfield or branch that evolved from semiotics.

3.3 SOCIAL SEMIOTICS

Social semiotics is described as a branch or a subfield of semiotics which investigates human practices in specific social and cultural circumstances and thus tries to explain meaning-making as a social practice (Gualberto & Kress, 2019). It examines the social and cultural contexts of sign-making and interpretation, focusing on how signs and symbols are used to construct and negotiate meaning in social interactions and cultural practices (Hodge & Kress, 2017:12).

Gualberto and Kress (2018) describe social semiotics as a “social theory about meaning and meaning-making in action; [a theory that] examines the varieties of ways texts can be made. The two authors refer to Halliday (1978), who argues that language must be interpreted within a sociocultural context. In agreement with Halliday’s semiotic thinking, Hodge and Kress provided their “account of language as a social phenomenon” by developing tools for the analysis of the interrelation of power and language (1988: vii).

Hodge and Kress's realisation that language was only a part of a much wider range of cultural resources for making meaning formed the basis of ongoing research in domains related to multimodality. It is true that meaning-making is related to sociocultural contexts, as people's background knowledge assists in the comprehension of texts. It therefore follows that the processes of making meaning in Grade 9 learners will be influenced by their sociocultural contexts.

According to Gualberto and Kress (2018), social semiotics theory presents texts as multimodal complexes that are constituted by more than one mode, which can include writing, layout, gestures, and visuals/images, in order to make meaning evident. In advertisement and cartoon texts that grade 9 learners are exposed to, a combination of such modes is used. The concept of multimodality, which is an outcome of the "Grammar of Visual Design," is a framework that has emerged from the social semiotics theory; hence, discussions on semiotics include them (multimodality/visual texts and visual design).

In social semiotics, modes are shaped over a long period of time in constant social interaction. Gualberto and Kress (2018) explain that the ceaseless shaping of each mode has produced and continues to produce resources whose regularities are recognisable and understood by members of a particular social group. Thus, the interaction and communication in sign meaning-making is due to the maker of the sign and thereby expected to be interpreted by the person who engages with it. According to Gualberto and Kress (2018), in social semiotics, a text is seen as a composition of interconnected signs designed with different modes. Furthermore, a visual text is produced to be cohesive and coherent internally as well as being coherent with its environment, so that it is complete from the occasions of its social use and making. This demand fits entirely with CAPS requirements for visual texts and therefore calls for schools to be focused on preparing learners for the demands of the new world of communication (DBE, 2011). Gualberto and Kress (2018) regard this as pedagogic institutions acting as a public domain that treats learning as a social environment to be considered as an utterly usual, unavoidable phenomenon of social action and interaction.

Gualberto and Kress (2018) agree that in social semiotics, success in communication is defined by interpretation. These authors explain that the processes of learning and teaching are instances of communication, the success of which is defined and guaranteed by interpretations. This strengthens this study as interpretations in communication are essential for meaning-making. That is, for Grade 9 learners in English FAL, to make meaning from visual texts prescribed in CAPS, they have to demonstrate appropriate interpretations of such texts. This demand on teaching and learning challenges what would generally be considered as learning, as the focus changes to ensuring that the social category of correctness is given attention. According to Gualberto and Kress (2018), a social semiotic perspective requires that the issues of meaning-making be continually discussed with appropriate attention being given to the potentials of each mode. Andersen, Boerii, Maagero, and Tonnessen (2015) characterise meaning as an aspect at the heart of social semiotics and being rooted in the social, in the real-life experiences of the people who make meaning. In these authors' reference to Mattheisen (1992), they indicate that the social and the interactive are central and essential in the exploration of semiotics.

According to Elkins (2008), visual literacy involves not just the ability to see and recognise images but also to interpret and make meaning from them. This indicates that for readers to understand visual texts, critical thinking and awareness of visual elements are crucial. This is equally required from senior phase learners.

Numerous academics from various fields have discussed and written on visual literacy from various angles. Nearly every profession may benefit from the use of visual literacy, advertising, anatomy, art, biology, business presentations, communications, education, and engineering (Peterson, 2012). Subsequently, Grade 9 learners' acquisition of the necessary skills to engage with visual texts is essential as they learn how visual features are mapped to meaning, enabling us to understand the meaning of visual texts (Peterson, 2012).

3.4 CONCLUSION

The chapter highlighted major theories that underpin the study. Semiotics and social semiotics were unpacked in relation to the main ideas of this study. The next chapter provides information on the research design and methodology used for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an outline of the research design, a detailed description of the research approach selected for this study, and a justification. The remaining sections of the chapter focus on the population of the study, sampling type, data analysis strategy, and ethical considerations. This chapter is important for the study as it shows how the study was carried out and justifies the reasons for the choices of the approach employed. The chapter outlines the blueprint of the study, provides methodological transparency, and ensures that the research process is rigorous and trustworthy.

4.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design refers to the overall strategy or plan that a researcher follows or adopts during the research process (Creswell, 2014). It is an analytical approach that one chooses in order to integrate, in a coherent and logical way, the different components of the study. It outlines the methods, procedures, and techniques that will be used to collect and analyse data in order to address the research problem.

A research design provides a framework for organising and conducting a study, ensuring that the data collected are reliable, valid, and relevant to the research question. It encompasses various components, including the research approach or paradigm, the research method, the sampling strategy, the data collection procedure, and the data analysis techniques.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), different research designs can be employed depending on the nature of the research question, the available resources, and the

desired outcomes of the study. Some common research designs include experimental designs, correlation designs, and descriptive designs. It could also be explorative research, explanatory design, or diagnostic in nature. Experimental designs involve manipulating variables to establish cause-and-effect relationships, while correlation designs examine relationships between variables without manipulating them. In essence, De Vos (2001:123) and Nieswiadomy (1993:31) submit that research design should be presented in a study to provide a blueprint of how the researcher will conduct the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018:15) also emphasise the importance of research design that is clearly articulated to ensure study validity.

The present study made use of both descriptive and explorative research designs. While descriptive research offers a methodical description of an item under investigation, exploratory researchers aim to gain insights, identify patterns, and establish a foundational understanding of a topic under study (Hassan, 2024). Thus, to collect information, find correlations, and investigate the experiences and contributing variables associated with a certain event, a researcher may utilise both exploratory and descriptive designs. The next section respectively discusses the two identified research designs and how they apply to this research study.

4.2.1 Descriptive Design

Descriptive research design aims to accurately and systematically describe a phenomenon, population, or situation. It is a type of research that examines a situation under investigation as it is without trying to change or modify it (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:179). DeSanto-Madeya and Henly (2022) submitted that this design involves the collection and analysis of data to identify patterns, characteristics, and trends without manipulating variables or testing hypotheses. It is also used to understand the “who, what, and where of a situation or target group” for informed decision-making (Kim, Sefcik, & Bradway, 2017).

There are a number of characteristic features of descriptive research that make the design ideal for a variety of studies. In keeping with the aim of the study, this descriptive study is carried out in a natural environment, allowing the researcher to gather data in a natural setting to avoid swaying respondents.

4.2.2 Explorative Research Design

Exploratory research aims to explore and investigate a problem or phenomenon when there is little or no existing knowledge on the subject under study, helping the investigator to gain insights, generate hypotheses, and identify patterns or relationships that can inform further research (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:145). When a researcher wants to pinpoint issues, describe the issue more specifically, and determine any particular goals or information needs that need to be obtained through further investigation, an exploratory study is crucial (Kinnear & Taylor, 1996). According to Aaker et al. (2017), exploratory research is very flexible, unstructured, and qualitative. It is conducted with the intention of either investigating the viability of conducting a specific research study or exploring an area where little is known (Yin, 2014:22). The adaptability of exploratory research is its defining feature. Thus, exploratory yields tentative findings that guide further research based on the descriptive results that are summative and detailed.

The applicability of an explorative research design in this study hinges on the objectives and the nature of the research problem. As such, an explorative design was adopted to investigate and gain deeper insight into learners' interpretations of visual texts and their inferential prowess.

The two research methods, exploratory and descriptive research, complement each other as exploratory research helps identify key variables and issues that need to be studied, while descriptive research then measures and presents these variables systematically.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

Research approaches are specific procedures used to collect, analyse, and interpret data to answer the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:3). In his definition of research approach, Bryan reiterates Creswell and Creswell's understanding by indicating that the analysed data is interpreted consistently with the research question or hypothesis (2016:15). There are basically three types of research approaches, namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. While quantitative research entails the use of statistical methods and mathematical models to analyse collected data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:15), the qualitative approach primarily focuses on worded data and non-quantifiable aspects of the study. The current study used a qualitative approach, as detailed below.

4.3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

According to Oranga and Matere (2023), qualitative research is an effective approach for exploring problems wherein researchers intend to gather participants' perceptions, experiences, and behaviours. In addition, Creswell and Poth (2023), highlight that qualitative research involves an interpretive approach aimed at understanding and describing the meanings individuals or groups attribute to naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. The paradigm of qualitative research is based on the social sciences, which, according to Sithole (2024), involves the study of people, often approached as a collaborative human activity in which social reality is studied subjectively with the aim of gaining a valid understanding of it.

The approach adopted in the current study is mainly for its affordances in exploring participants' perspectives. The researcher used Grade 9 learners' in English FAL 2024 mid-year exam scripts, from which it was possible to source out their analytical, inferential, and critical thinking skills through their interpretations of visual texts. As Creswell and Creswell (2022) indicate that qualitative research explores social or human problems; the study involved an inquiry process of understanding how Grade 9 learners in English FAL interpret visual texts, as an inquiry to explore an educational problem. This was more

suitable as it involved building a picture through analysing words that led to identifying patterns and themes in order to understand participants' level of interpretation of visual texts.

4.3.2 INDUCTIVE FORM OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The inductive approach in qualitative research is data-driven, and it focuses on generating themes and insights directly from data rather than testing predetermined hypotheses. Foundational authors such as Burck (2005) and Babbie in Mouton (2007) emphasize the importance of allowing patterns and meanings to emerge from participants' experiences. This is affirmed by more recent scholars, including Creswell (2018), Tracy (2020), and Braun and Clarke (2022), who highlight analysis through repeated cycles and thematic exploration. Through this process in the study, themes were derived directly from learners' responses, ensuring that the findings remained closely connected to their authentic abilities in interpreting visual texts.

Inductive form and logic, therefore, fit this study, as they provide the most appropriate means of capturing how Grade 9 learners in English FAL interpret visual texts in a way that is both data-driven and contextually grounded.

4.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research is built on a philosophical framework or a worldview, including ideas, beliefs, and biases that guide the research process, known as a research paradigm. It provides a framework of assumptions and comprehensions upon which the theories and methods of the research study might be based. Research paradigm refers to the beliefs and assumptions that provide the structure for research (Rahman & Alharthi, 2016).

Before discussing the paradigmatic assumptions of this study, it is imperative to begin by defining the concept of paradigm, its components, and various perspectives. Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2019) define a paradigm as a "world view". It is a set of beliefs, values,

or assumptions that guides a researcher's inquiry. Robertson, Magee, and Soldatic (2023) frame the paradigm as a worldview that shapes how researchers design studies, select methods, and interpret intersections. In addition, Pretorius (2024) emphasizes that a research paradigm explains what you believe reality is and how knowledge can be understood. This implies that researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project.

Some of the research philosophies are positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism. Each research philosophy is respected from a pluralist standpoint, and there is a strong conviction that each philosophy adds something special and worthwhile to research undertakings (Saunders et al., 2019:135-137). Recent scholarship has extended this, emphasizing the influence of paradigms on research design and execution. Research paradigms are based on one of two model types: positivism or interpretivism. These guide the theories and methodologies used in the research project. Chafe (2024) explains that positivist research paradigms are linked to quantitative studies, and interpretivist research paradigms are associated with qualitative studies. Furthermore, Positivism emphasizes objective measurement, social constructivism highlights the co-construction of knowledge, and interpretivism prioritizes understanding participants' lived experiences (Wells & Giacco, 2024).

By adopting an interpretivist and inductive approach, this study allows themes to emerge directly from learners' responses, ensuring that the findings are grounded in an authentic participant perspective, while still benefiting from the insights that other paradigms contribute.

4.4.1 POSITIVISM

Positivism is a philosophical stance that emphasises objectivity, empirical evidence, and the scientific method in research (Wells & Giacco, 2024). The organisation and other social things are seen from an extreme positivist perspective as real in the same way that a natural scientist sees natural and physical objects. Positivists believe that knowledge

can be obtained through empirical observation, measurement, and the use of logical reasoning.

As a result, positivists claim that the only phenomena that can yield reliable and significant data are those that can be observed, measured, and made regular. Positivists and scientists emphasise causal linkages in the data and generalise these relationships to forecast organisational behaviour and events. Positive researchers emphasise measurable observations that can be statistically analysed and have a highly structured technique (Saunders et al., 2016:135-136). In view of these inherent characteristic features, this was not applied to the study.

4.4.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

Social constructivism is a philosophical perspective that espouses that learning occurs through social interaction and the help of others, often in a group. This view acknowledges that as learners interact with others, their knowledge changes. It follows that learners who are more exposed to interactions have a better understanding of the texts they are expected to understand and interpret. Creswell and Poth (2018) explains social constructivism as an interpretive framework whereby individuals seek to understand their world and develop their world and develop meanings. Similarly, it is imperative for Grade 9 learners to interact with others in order to enhance their interpretive skills.

Mediated learning experiences also involve interactions between learners and a teacher or a peer. As a result, another person's mediating role modifies how the learner interacts with a text, leading to a better understanding. Teachers are viewed as essential in developing learners' knowledge when they are exposed to teaching methods like discussion and group work (Omwirhiren, 2015). This view will assist the researcher in making recommendations for appropriate teaching methods to enhance interpretations of visual texts.

4.4.3 INTERPRETIVISM

According to interpretive technique, social phenomena must be seen "through the participants' eyes rather than the researcher" (Khan, Lew, & Sinkovics, 2024). Understanding social phenomena in the context of their surroundings is the aim of interpretative methodology. As with ethnography and case studies, interpretivists primarily gather qualitative data from individuals over a protracted period. The method of data analysis that results from this process is inductive, meaning that the researcher looks for patterns in the data that can be grouped into broad themes in order to comprehend a phenomenon and develop a theory (Tshetshe, 2024).

This is completely at odds with the deductive approach, in which researchers first identify patterns and themes before beginning the data collection process. Once the data are gathered, researchers would search through the data for words, statements, and events that are instances of the pre-identified patterns and themes. Since they "tend to perceive theory as coming from data gathering and not as the driving force of research", interpretivists favour the inductive approach over the deductive one (Kouam, 2024). Data is typically audio or video captured and primarily conversational rather than statistical in order to "preserve the occurrences in a fairly authentic manner for eventual data processing" (Ponelis, 2023).

Although numerical data may be included, interpretive researchers use procedures that produce qualitative data and do not rely on it. Open-ended interviews with varying degrees of structure (standardised open-ended interviews, semi-standardised open-ended interviews, and informal conversational interviews), observations, field notes, personal notes, documents, etc., are examples of data collection techniques that produce qualitative data.

According to the interpretivist research theory, humans and their social environments cannot be investigated in the same way as physical phenomena because of how distinct they are. The interpretivist paradigm seeks to develop fresh and in-depth perspectives on how people interact with one another in society (Saunders et al., 2016:141). Additionally, people and organisations are seen as complex phenomena with numerous elements and

dimensions. It follows from this that this project's investigation cannot be conducted in the same way as would be done in a different social environment.

The interpretive paradigm has drawn criticism for a number of reasons, including being "soft", unable to produce ideas that might be applied to broader populations, and the researcher's interaction with participants, which reduces objectivity (Grix, 2004). Contrary to popular belief, qualitative research requires rigour, precision, systematicity, and meticulous attention to detail (Richards, 2003:6).

The interpretive paradigm offers a more nuanced understanding of complex social aspects (Hesse-Biber, 2016:23). Another advantage is that it has the ability to capture the meanings and interpretations of participants (Bryman, 2016:32). This makes it an appropriate paradigm, as the proposed study intends to investigate interpretations of visual texts. Guba and Lincoln (2016:12) highlight that it focuses on context and situated knowledge. This is appropriate to the study as the study is centred on social semiotics, which regards contexts and situations as crucial in making meaning.

As a subjective philosophy, interpretivism places a strong emphasis on complexity, richness, numerous interpretations, and meaning-making. For this research project, the researcher adopted an interpretivist philosophy because it is consistent with the highlighted views that acknowledge the importance of appropriate interpretation of texts for comprehension. An inductive approach of thematic analysis was used as the researcher immersed herself in data from which themes and patterns emerged.

4.5 POPULATION

Johnson and Christensen (2004:197) define a population as a large group to which a researcher wants to generalise his or her sample results. It is also viewed as the complete set of people, items, or data that the researcher wishes to understand and explain (Bryman, 2016:53).

The background of this study highlighted that the problem of interpretations of visual texts in Grade 9 is linked to poor performance in English First Additional Language (EFAL) in general, as reported in the 2014 Annual National Assessment, of which 50% performance in Limpopo ranged from 13.7% to 11.4% (2014:66). This presents grade 9 learners of Limpopo province as the population. As it would not be possible to conduct this research in the whole province or even the district, there was a need to downsize to a target population.

4.5.1 Target population

The target population of this study comprised grade 9 learners in Vhembe West District. Given that the district consists of fourteen (14) circuits, it was not feasible to include all circuits within the limited time frame of the study. For this reason, the researcher purposively selected Hlanganani North Circuit as the target population. Hlanganani North Circuit was selected for both accessibility and researcher familiarity. This circuit has ten (10) public secondary schools with Grade 9 classes. These schools are located in rural communities such as Chavani, Mashamba, and Mulima (Muwaweni).

4.5.2 Sampling

Creswell and Creswell (2018:158) define sampling as the process of selecting a subset of individuals or cases from a larger population with the aim of “making inferences about the characteristics of the population.” In accordance with the explanation by Bryman (2016:184), the researcher studied the characteristics of a subset (sample) to serve as a basis for making conclusions about or understanding the population.

4.5.2.1 Sampling technique

The researcher used a non-probability sampling method, as learners were not sampled randomly. Purposive sampling was used, wherein specific learners were identified because they possess characteristics relevant to the phenomenon being studied. This is embedded in the definition indicating that purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where participants are selected based on their ability to provide rich and detailed data relevant to the research question (Merriam, 2018:83). The overall sampling strategy used in qualitative research is “criterion-based selection” which is a purposive sampling strategy where participants are selected based on predetermined criteria and/or specific criteria relevant to the research question (Sullivan, Fenstermacher, & Hudson, 2020:28). The term “purposeful sampling” is also used because individuals or cases are selected to provide the information needed to address the purpose of the research.

The sample for this study needed to locate learners in three levels of performance who would represent the population well. The maximum variation method of purposive sampling was applied. Johnson and Christensen (2004: 220) define this type as one in which a wide range of cases (individuals, settings, or other phenomena) are purposively selected so that all types of cases are included lest there might be claims that certain cases were excluded on purpose. Furthermore, during data analysis, the researcher searched for common attributes or patterns that occur across the cases.

The research study chose a total of 18 learners from three secondary schools in the Hlanganani North Circuit. Limpopo Province schools are categorised in performance and strength in learner enrolment. Secondary schools are in three categories, that is, high enrolment, middle and low enrolment. The three schools selected represent these categories of enrolment. Six learners from each of the three schools in the circuit were carefully chosen to encompass a diverse range of academic proficiency levels. Specifically, the selection comprised two high-achieving learners, two mid-range learners (average performers) and two low achievers per school in the identified schools. These learners represented three categories: high, average, and low academic standards. English FAL educators assisted in selecting the records of performance in English.

3.4.5.2 Sampling size

The sample size comprised eighteen (18) learners from secondary schools at Hlanganani North Circuit. The schools in the circuit were clustered according to their villages to form four clusters. The schools are categorised as high-enrolment, middle-enrolment, and low-enrolment schools. Therefore, the sample for the study consisted of eighteen (18) learners: six (6) learners from three (3) secondary schools – high enrolment with more than a hundred learners, middle enrolment with fifty to ninety-nine Grade 9 learners, and low enrolment with fewer than fifty (50) learners. The respondents from the three (3) schools were carefully sampled using their performance in EFAL. The respondents, who are Grade 9 learners, were composed of a variation, namely top, average, and bottom performers. Two learners per performance category were sampled, bringing the total number to eighteen (18). The three schools selected adequately represented the 10 schools in the circuit, as the criteria on learner enrolment were used.

As Johnson, Morgan, Leech, and Onwuegbuzie (2020:12) explained, variation in respondents refers to “the heterogeneity or diversity of individuals within a sample, which can impact the validity and generalisability of research findings.” The variation in the Grade 9 learners' sample was necessary, although the issue of accuracy and transferability of research results was not the central focus of the study.

Below is a diagram representing this study's population and sampling stages:

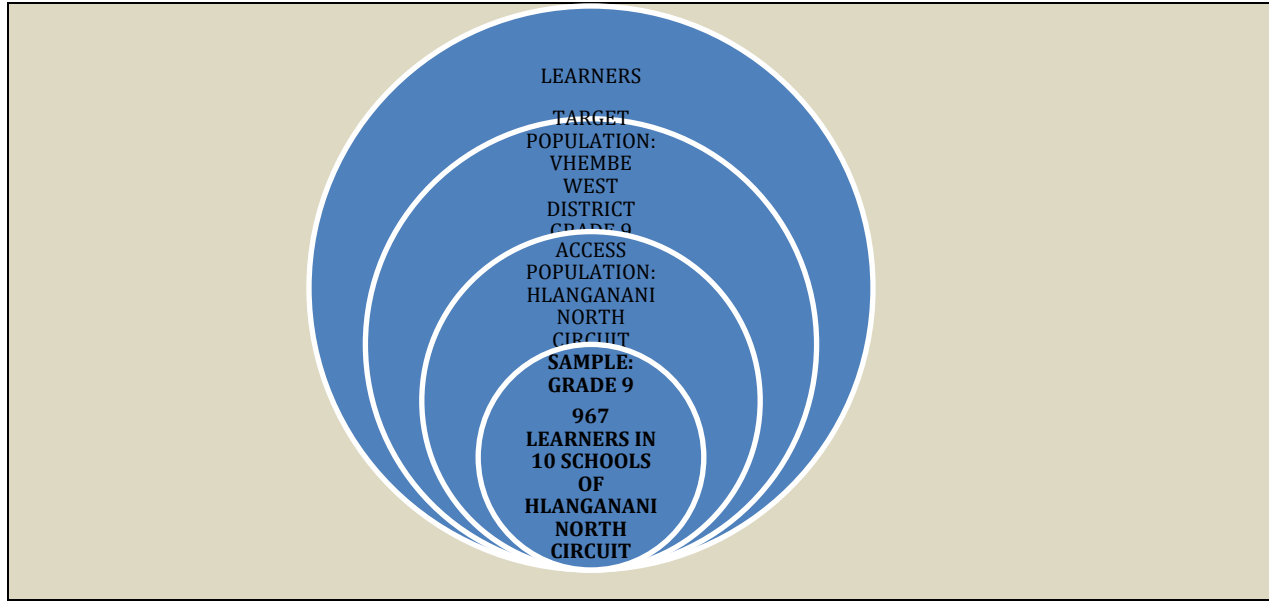


Figure 3: Population and Sampling (Adapted from Johnson & Christensen, 2004)

Figure 3 above illustrates the sampling process for this study, starting from the population of Vhembe West District Grade 9 learners up to learners in Hlanganani North Circuit as a target sample.

4.6 RESEARCH SITE

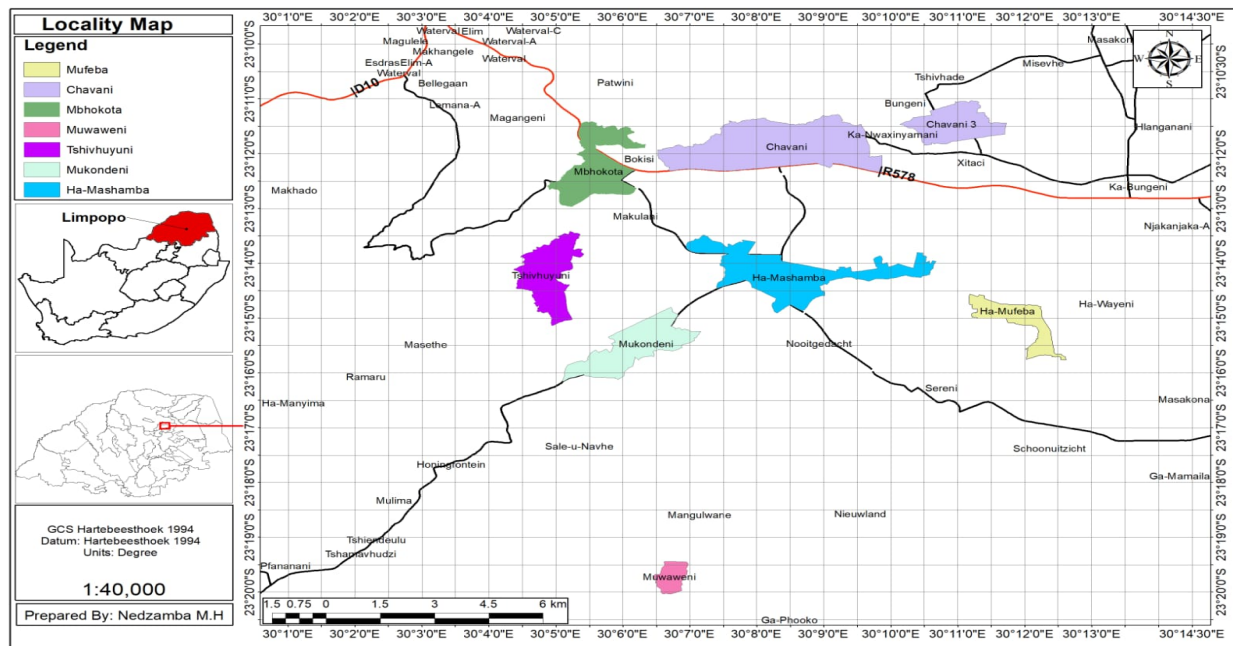


Figure 4: Map of the Research Site

The research undertaking captured the interpretations of visual texts by learners in the schools within Hlanganani North Circuit in Vhembe West District, Limpopo Province. The schools in the Hlanganani North circuit are spread across seven villages, namely Mbokota, Chavani, Mashamba, Mufeba, Mukondeni, Tshivhuyuni, and Muwaweni. All the areas are predominantly rural, with most schools under Quintile 2; thus, the second-poorest category of schools, with slightly better resources than Quintile 1, are still facing challenges (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019).

Schools in South Africa are categorised into five groups (quintiles) based on the relative wealth of their surrounding communities. Schools in poor communities are classified as Quintile 1-3, and schools serving the wealthiest are classified as Quintile 5 (Ally & McLaren, 2016). All the sampled schools are in poor rural communities; hence, they fall within the quintiles 1-3. All secondary schools in the Hlanganani North circuit are quintile 2, as they are of similar contexts.

4.7 DATA COLLECTION

Sekaran and Bougie (2020:234) define data collection as a “systematic and structured process in which the researcher collects relevant information from various sources like surveys, interviews, and documents.” Creswell (2020:123) states that the method of data collection is a technique that involves gathering and measuring information to be analysed in a research study. Data for the study were collected through document analysis of learners’ tests.

Document analysis is a type of qualitative research in which documents are reviewed and interpreted by a researcher. It involves examining and interpreting data to uncover meaning, gain understanding, and come to a conclusion (Bowen, 2019:123).

The researcher used document analysis to analyse learners’ interpretations of visual texts augmented by the diagnostic reports from teachers submitted after a summative assessment, as it was a formal mid-year examination. The documents that were analysed are learners’ English FAL 2024 mid-year exam scripts as they were already marked and readily available. Summative assessment is defined as a method of evaluating learners or students at the end of an instructional period, course, or period. It is typically used to measure achievement and determine whether learning objectives have been met (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2018).

The assessment paper used in this study was appropriate, as it was a mid-year examination of an exit level for the Senior Phase. It was an appropriate period to evaluate what Senior Phase knows in relation to interpreting visual texts.

4.7.1 Research Instrument

A research instrument is any tool, device, or method researchers use to collect, measure, and analyse data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:150). According to Creswell, they are the “tools used to collect and measure data in a systematic and structured manner”

(2017:145). Bryman further explains that the choice of research instrument varies based on the research question, methodology, and study design (2016:283).

4.7.2 Administered test

The current study adopted an administered test as a sole data collection tool. This type of instrument is often used to collect data by having participants complete a standardised set of questions or tasks under controlled conditions (Creswell, 2014:157). It is often used in “diagnostic, explorative, and evaluative action research studies, which are often context-based by practitioners intending to solve a contextual problem of a pedagogic or social nature” (Piggot-Irvine, Ferkins, Rowe & Sakaran, 2021). Mills (2018:97) explains that tests “can be used quite efficiently for action research purposes”.

Hence, the current study adopted a summative mid-year assessment task with a special focus on visual literacy questions. This study used learners’ scripts of the 2024 mid-year exam paper to collect data. Learners’ responses in the term 2 assessment were utilised as they were readily available and aligned with the objective of the study. These responses enabled the researcher to analyse how appropriately learners interpreted and answered questions related to visual literacy.

4.7.3 Secondary Data

Johnson and Christensen (2004:193) describe secondary data as a method of data collection where researchers can use data that came from an earlier time for a different purpose than the current research problem. Various authors, such as Johnson and Christensen (2004), cited De Vos et al. (2005:315), classifying secondary sources into primary and secondary. The former are categorised as the written material of the author’s own experiences and observations, and the latter consists of documents recorded by an organisation. The classification is based on the nature of a source, namely, personal documents (such as learners’ workbooks or test papers). This study’s use of learners’ exam papers fits well as secondary data.

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modelling data with the goal of discovering useful information, drawing conclusions, and supporting decision-making (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020: 345). Interpretation of data analysis, according to Johnson and Christensen (2004:500), involves a “cyclical process of collecting and analysing data during a single research study.” This method of data analysis is called interim analysis, as the process of collecting and analysing data continues to develop a successive, deeper understanding of the research topic. Johnson and Christensen (2004:500) identify this method as a strength since it allows a researcher to collect data more than once, thereby enabling the refinement of developing theories and testing inductively generated hypotheses.

Below is a diagrammatic representation of the data analysis process followed in the study:

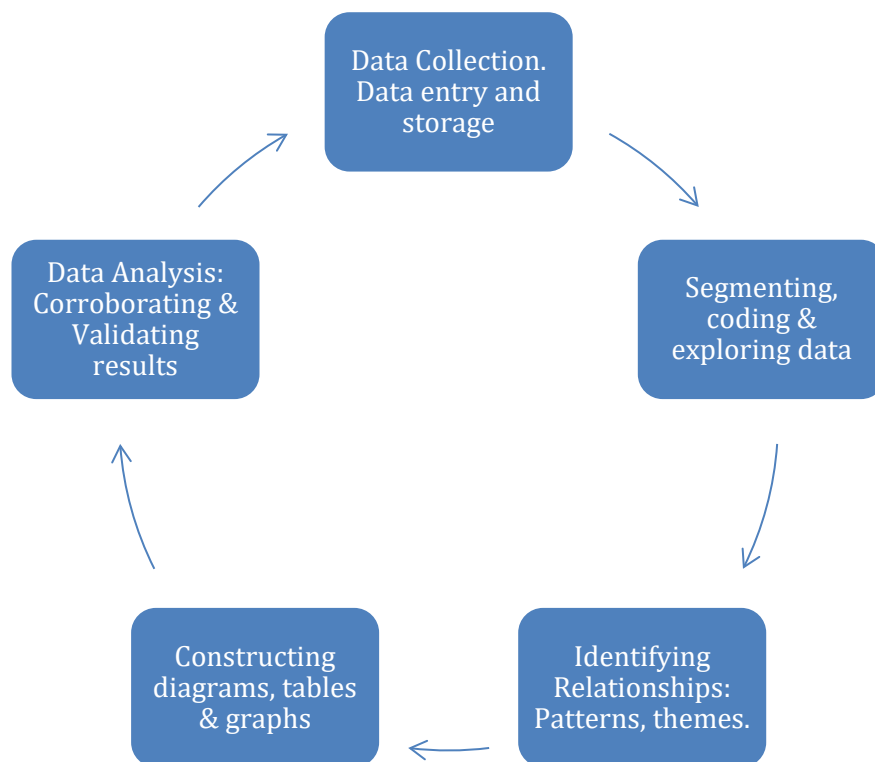


Figure 5: Representation of the data analysis strategy (Johnson & Christensen, 2004)

In this study, learners' interpretations of visual texts were analysed to determine their understanding. This analysis was guided by the relevance theory (RT), which assesses the appropriateness of responses in relation to the contextual meaning of the text.

In line with Sperber and Wilson (2002), the following steps underpinning the analytical flow of RT were followed:

Contextual Interpretation: exploring contextual information to interpret data more accurately



Inference Making: Making inferences based on available information. This enabled the researcher to draw conclusions from data patterns and trends, considering both explicit data points and implicit information



Efficiency and Effectiveness: Evaluating the cognitive effort readers make when decoding the subtle meaning embedded in a given text



User-Centric Analysis: Making the data more accessible and actionable



Error Detection and Correction: The last stage involves identifying and correcting errors in data interpretation by continuously evaluating the relevance of the information and adjusting the analysis accordingly.

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Dawson (2007:150) acknowledges that research projects cannot be conducted successfully without help from requisite respondents or participants. Ethical considerations in research involve the application of moral principles and values to ensure that human subjects, animals, and the environment are protected and that there is a promotion of transparency, honesty, and accountability (Callahan, 2019; Resnik, 2020:12; Hasan, Rana, Chowdhury, Dola & Rony, 2021). The caution on being an ethical researcher is that both the participants and the information they provide should be treated with honesty and respect.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher took deliberate steps to adhere to the following ethical considerations:

4.9.1 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

As part of the university's ethical clearance, the researcher applied for permission to conduct the study in the sampled schools within the Hlanganani North Circuit of the Vhembe West District. This process was guided by a set of principles that the researcher had to observe before the issuance of the ethical clearance certificate (see Appendix A). In addition, permission was obtained from the provincial Department of Education to investigate learners' interpretation of visual texts using formative assessment tasks. Approval was granted for this purpose (see Appendix B).

3.9.2 INFORMED CONSENT

This study is overt research, as the researcher was “open and honest about who she is and what she is doing” (Dawson, 2007:152). In this way, educators made an informed choice about whether to participate in the project. Johnson and Christensen (2004) state that an assurance of the ethical acceptability of the study includes the fact that the researcher should get informed consent from the participants. They outline three major elements of informed consent: information, voluntariness, and comprehension. In line with these principles, participants were given sufficient details regarding the nature of the

research and the procedures involved, enabling them to give informed and voluntary consent.

3.9.3 VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Voluntary participation refers to the act of individuals or participants making an informed choice to participate in a research study freely without any coercion or manipulation and with the ability to withdraw without any penalty or loss of benefits (Singer & Vinson, 2017:12). Honesty and openness start with the department of education, the school principals and English educators in the sampled schools. This is explained as being honest to “those who open gates” (Dawson, 2007:152).

In this study, Grade 9 EFAL teachers and principals of the sampled schools were informed of the study's purpose, and they were then presented with the consent form (**Appendix D**), as well as the participant's information sheet which described the study's aim and objectives in detail, attached as **Appendix C**.

4.9.4 AVOIDANCE OF HARM

The most important and fundamental issue confronting a researcher is the treatment of the research participants. Johnson and Christensen (2004) explain that educational researchers seldom run the risk of inflicting severe mental and physical harm on participants. Nevertheless, the researcher ensured that the research would be conducted in “accepted educational settings involving normal educational practices” and would prevent harm to participants, including physical, psychological, social, and economic harm, and would ensure that potential benefits outweigh potential risks (Johnson & Christensen, 2004:110). According to the American Psychological Association, researchers have a moral and ethical responsibility to avoid causing harm to participants and to take all necessary steps to minimise risks and prevent harm, including careful study design, informed consent, and ongoing monitoring” (2020:36). There was no harm for participants in this study, as the research had no contact with them in any way except utilising their scripts. Ensuring that their true identity would not be revealed worked as a means of avoiding any harm. The consent and assent forms made it clear that

participation in this study was entirely voluntary and participants were under no obligation to participate. Furthermore, schools were informed that if they would feel uncomfortable, there could withdraw, and there would be no negative consequences.

4.9.5 CONFIDENTIALITY

Ethical guidelines in research are designed to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality on ethical grounds and in terms of their personal and sensitive data. Researchers employ various to protect participants. Johnson and Christensen (2004:112) highlight two of those, confidentiality and privacy, which are elements that are important to avoid when connecting participants with any information that could be embarrassing or harmful. In this study, participants' identities were kept confidential by assigning codes in the form of pseudonyms. As a result, the data collected cannot be traced back to any participant.

4.9.6 PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW

It is essential to note that, as much as ethical guidelines have directed considerable attention toward the informed consent process, attention was also paid to the possibility of participants' withdrawal. Permission to withdraw refers to participants' liberty to withdraw from participation at any point during the study (Edwards, 2005:114). However, in this study, permission was obtained from the school principal and the educators to allow participants' test papers to be analysed, rather than requiring direct participation or personal involvement from the learners themselves.

4.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology of the study. The rationale for the design was also explicated. The chapter expanded on the study's population, target population, and sample size. The research site, data collection instruments, and procedures were discussed, followed by ethical considerations that concluded the chapter. The next chapter presents the findings of the study gathered from participants.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the discussion of the research methodology in the previous chapter, this chapter presents the findings of the study, which aims to establish Grade 9 learners' ability to interpret and comprehend visual texts and to evaluate the correctness of inferences that learners make when decoding visual texts, as well as identifying the difficulties that learners encounter when decoding visual texts. This chapter is structured into five sections: an introduction, presentation of findings, interpretation and analysis, comparison with relevant literature, and a conclusion.

The chapter presents the interpretation and analysis of data gathered from document study of learners' responses to a section on visual literacy and the advertisement section of a formally administered summative assessment task of Grade 9 learners. According to Creswell (2022:234), data interpretation is a process of giving the collected data meaning in order to extract useful insights. Saldana (2021:156) explains that data interpretation involves more than just assigning meaning to data collected, as it examines and reviews data to describe a concept.

5.2 HOW DATA WERE INTERPRETED

Intertwined with the thematic data analytical approach, the following steps which underpin Relevance Theory (RT) analytical flow, were adopted:

Contextual Interpretation

At this initial stage, the researcher explores contextual information and cues that may assist in interpreting data more accurately.



In the second stage, the researcher makes an inference based on available information. This enables the researcher to draw conclusions from data patterns and trends, considering both explicit data points and implicit information



Efficiency and Effectiveness

In the third stage, the researcher evaluates the cognitive effort readers make when decoding the subtle meaning embedded in a given text.



User-Centric Analysis

User-centric analysis entails making the data more accessible and actionable.



Error Detection and Correction

The last stage involves identifying and correcting errors in data interpretation by continuously evaluating the relevance of the information and adjusting the analysis accordingly.

5.3 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic details describe who the study participants are, with special focus on their profile, statistical characteristics, and variables in relation to the study. Swayne and

Mackenzie (2022:115) expand the term to include “the statistical characteristics of a population”, including age, gender, income, education level, etc. These characteristics are meant to provide insights into the composition and trends of a population. The characteristics enable researchers to understand the participants’ external variables that may influence or have a bearing on their meaning-making and interpretive repertoire.

Participants were from three categories. School A represented a low-enrolment school; School B represented a middle-enrolment school, and School C a high-enrolment school. The first 6 participants are from school A; 7 to 12 are from school B, and 13 to 18 are from school C.

Furthermore, participants were also categorised in terms of their grade percentage and performance. Participants 1 and 2 represented the top performers at a particular sampled school; 3 and 4 represented average performers, while 5 and 6 represented underperforming participants.

The demographic details for sampled Grade 9 learners in this study included gender, age, and number of years in a grade of study (Grade 9). The tables below show the demographic details per school category.

SCHOOL A PARTICIPANTS	Gender	Age	Number of years in Grade 9 (1st or 2nd attempt in the grade)
Learner 1- P1	Male	15	1 st
Learner 2- P2	Female	15	1 st
Learner 3- P3	Male	16	2 nd
Learner 4 P4	Male	15	2 nd
Learner 5- P5	Female	16	2 nd
Learner 6-P6	Male	16	2 nd

Table 3: School A participants’ demographic details

Table 3 above shows that most participants were males, with four males and two female participants. Of the four male participants, two were 16 years old, while the other two were 15 years old. Four participants attempted the grade for the second time, with only two

attempting the grade for the first time. It is clear that most participants, constituting 66.7%, were repeating the grade, with 33.3% of the participants in the sample attempting the grade for the first time.

SCHOOL B PARTICIPANTS	Gender	Age	Number of years in Grade 9 (1st or 2nd attempt in the grade)
Learner 1- P7	Male	15	1 st
Learner 2- P8	Male	15	1 st
Learner 3- P9	Male	15	1 st
Learner 4- P10	Female	15	1 st
Learner 5- P11	Male	14	1 st
Learner 6- P12	Male	17	2 nd

Table 4: School B participants' demographic details

The table above shows that most participants were males, with five males and one female participant. That is 83.3% males. Of the five male participants, one was 17 years old, while the other three were 15 years old, and one was 14 years old. Five out of six participants were above the expected correct age for Grade 9, which is 83.3%. Five out of six participants were attempting the grade for the first time, which constitutes 83.3%.

SCHOOL C: PARTICIPANTS	Gender	Age	Number of years in Grade 9 (1st or 2nd attempt in the grade)
Learner 1- P13	Male	15	1 st
Learner 2- P14	Female	15	2 nd
Learner 3- P15	Female	15	2 nd
Learner 4- P16	Female	15	2 nd
Learner 5- P17	Male	15	1 st
Learner 6- P18	Male	19	2 nd

Table 5: School C participants' demographic details

The table above shows that there were three females and three males in the sample. Thus, 50% females and 50% males. Five out of six participants were 15 years old, and one was 19 years old. Four participants attempted the grade for the second time, with only two attempting the grade for the first time. It is clear that most participants, constituting 66.7%, were repeating the grade, with 33.3% of the participants in the sample attempting the grade for the first time.

This demographic information offers valuable context for understanding the study's findings on Grade 9 learners' interpretations of visual texts. Factors such as age, gender, and repetition status may influence learners' proficiency and their ability to engage critically with visual materials. These insights have potential implications for teaching strategies and curriculum development aimed at enhancing visual literacy skills.

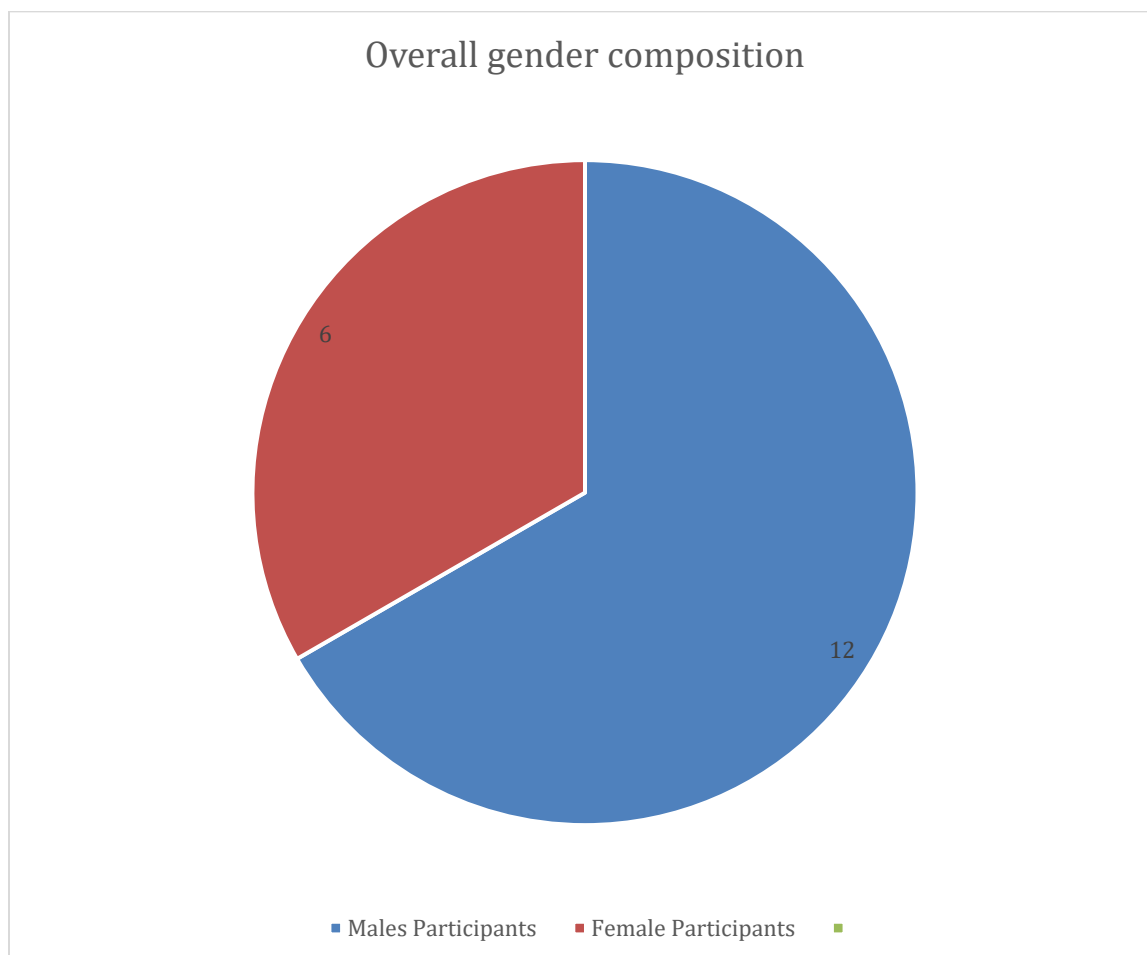


Figure 6: Overall Gender composition pattern of participants

There were twelve male and 6 female participants. School A has four out of six, School B has five out of six, and School C has three out of six. This information indicates a trend of more males than females in most schools. It will be interesting to note if there could be any causal relationship between gender category and participants' interpretative proficiency.

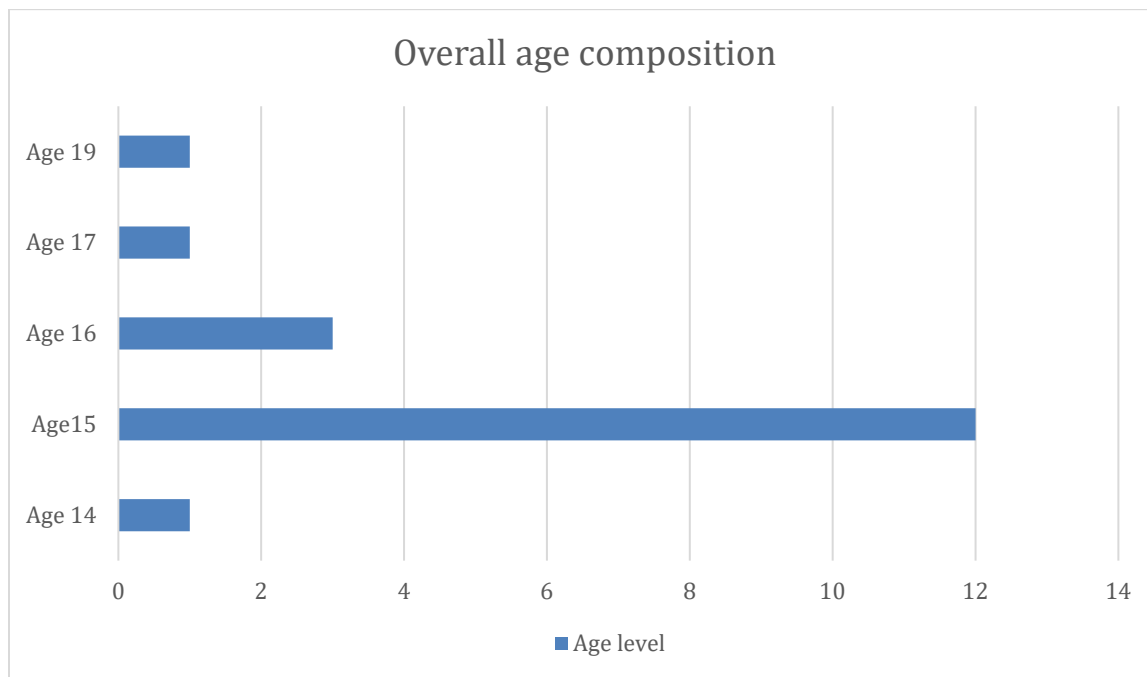


Figure 7: Age - Overall age composition

The demographic information revealed that most participants were older than the expected typical Grade 9 age of 14 years. According to the South African Department of Basic Education (SASA: 1996), Act No. 84 of 1996, the typical entry age in Grade 1 is 6 or 7 years. Most Quintile 2 schools use the 6-year Grade 1 entry, meaning that they would be 14 years old in Grade 9, assuming they progress through every grade without repetition. The information shows that 12 learners were 15 years old; 3 were 16; 1 was 17; 1 was 20; and only 1 was 14 years old. This could indicate that 17 participants had repeated a grade or two since they started school, or that there was a late entry, or another factor that affected their progression.

It will be worth exploring if there would be any causal relation between age group, inferential aptitude, and readers' interpretative capacity.

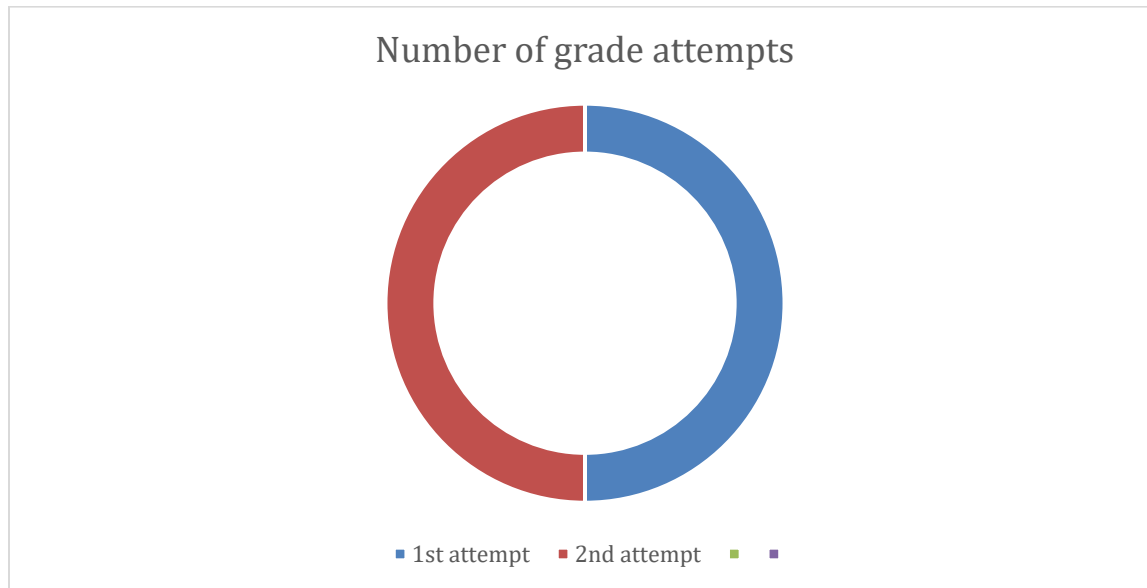


Figure 8: Number of attempts in Grade 9

Nine (9) participants, constituting 50%, were attempting grade 9 for the first time. Similarly, nine (9) participants, constituting 50%, were attempting grade 9 for the second time. It will also be interesting to see if the number of attempts correlates with participants' visual texts' interpretative repertoire.

5.3 DATA PRESENTATION

Data collected is presented in relation to the study's objectives and research questions. In line with thematic data representation, the researcher had to be immersed to make sense of learners' responses to the adopted data collection tool. See Appendix D, a tool used to generate participants' responses.

The objectives that underpinned the study are:

Objective 1: To establish learners' ability to interpret and comprehend visual texts;

Objective 2: To evaluate the correctness of inferences that learners make when decoding visual texts;

Objective 3: To identify the difficulties that learners encounter when decoding visual texts;

These study objectives are aligned with study questions, which are:

RQ1: To what extent are Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit able to decode and elicit meaning from selected visual texts?

RQ2: How plausible are the inferences Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit make when decoding selected visual texts in their contexts?

RQ3: What are the difficulties Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit encounter when interpreting visual texts?

The findings related to each of the research objectives and questions are presented in greater detail in the sections that follow.

5.4 DATA PRESENTATION PER OBJECTIVE

Objective 1: Grade 9 learners' competency in decoding and eliciting meaning from selected visual texts.

RQ1: To what extent are Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit able to decode and elicit meaning from selected visual texts?

Objective 1 was intended to determine if Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit could accurately interpret linguistic and non-linguistic signs from a given visual text. To

address this objective, questions from a formative task (Appendix E) that were associated with this objective were identified. Participants' responses to the identified questions were evaluated in relation to the research question. Below are the major themes identified from participants' responses:

THEME 1: INTERPRETATION OF THE OVERT MEANING OF THE TEXT

Participants' responses are presented, firstly indicating those who were able to interpret the obvious meaning of the text. One of the questions that required an interpretation of overt meaning was, "Who is the intended target audience of this advertisement? (Appendix E, Question 1)

P2: Stop divestment. Start job creation.

P4: To vote DA

P6: Shell

The data reveal that comprehension of the visual text challenged all participants, including the good performers. P2 under level 1 wrote stop advertisement. Start job creation. The response is totally different from the possible response required. Similarly, the responses by P4 and P6 further illustrated participant failure to give sense to the keyword of the question, whereas per the responses above, School A participants did not understand the primary purpose of the text; hence, across the three performance levels, they had difficulties with decoding overt meaning in a text, which in this case was the intended target audience.

Still addressing the objective concerning learners' interpretation of the overt meaning of the text, response from schools **B** and **C** revealed a mixed level of understanding. Among the eighteen participants, only four (P7, P8, P13, and P14) demonstrated correct interpretation of the overt meaning of the text. As previously noted, the question required participants to identify the person or group targeted in the advertisement. identify the person or group targeted in the advertisement, and the excerpts below illustrate the responses provided by the participants.

P7: *The people of South Africa who are eligible to vote.*

P8: South Africans who are going to the elections.

P13: *People over or at the age of 18 who are registered to vote*

P14: *All people of SA who are not under age of 18.*

The responses above show participants' awareness of the intended audience. The next section introduces participants' responses to questions that required the readers' interpretation of the implicit meaning of the text. To correctly elicit the implicit meaning, readers are often required to consider the context of the text, the word choice pattern in the text, and pauses and repetitions of a given word or phrase.

As shown in the findings below, only 22% of participants were able to respond effectively to questions or themes of this nature, while 78% demonstrated difficulty in interpreting the implicit meanings.

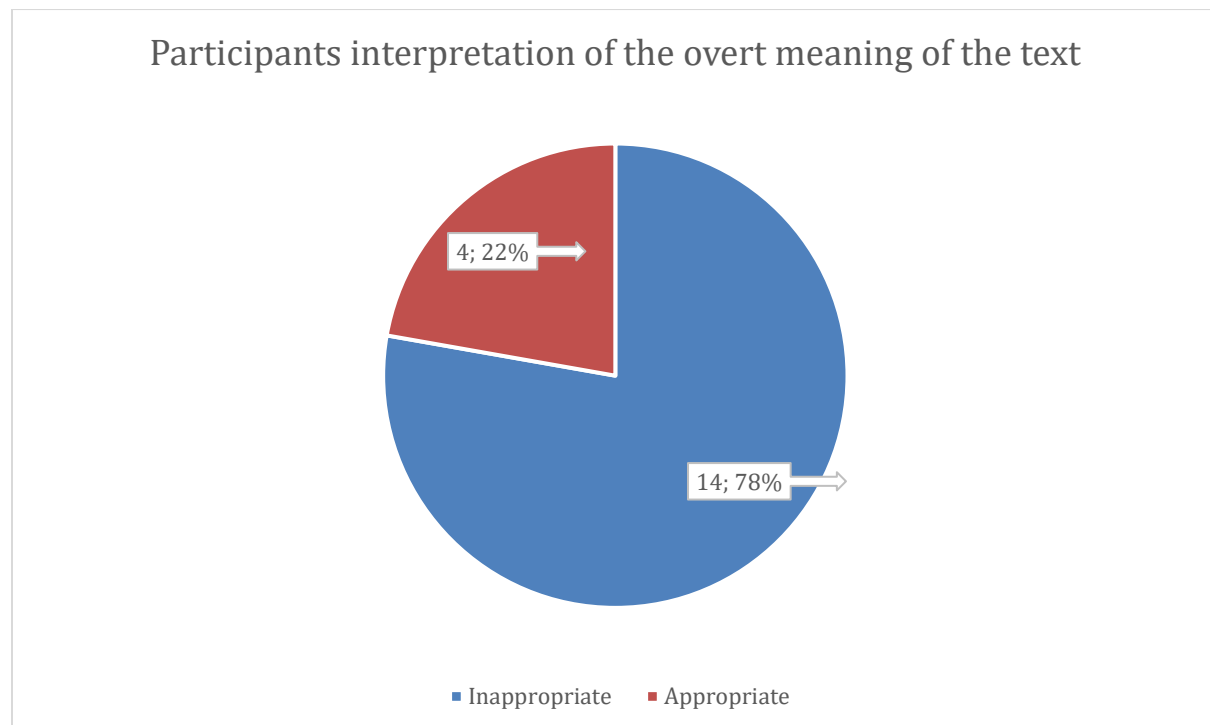


Figure 9: Participants' interpretation of the overt meaning of the text

THEME 2: INTERPRETING THE IMPLICIT MEANING OF THE TEXT

Implicit meaning is not openly available to readers. It requires the reader's ability to make sense of the given cues, context and background surrounding the text to correctly decode the subtle meaning embedded in a given text. The question "**How does the DA use Shell petrol stations to gain voters?**" was used from the formative task (see Appendix E) to establish this competency. Obviously, this was not clearly given and openly stated in the given text. Participants' responses were evaluated to categorise those who displayed an appropriate interpretation of the implicit meaning of the text and those who did not.

Responses show that all 18 participants, including the good performers, struggled when interpreting the implicit meaning of visual texts. Some of the anomalous, incorrect responses captured to the question: **How does the DA use Shell petrol stations to gain voters?**" are:

P1: *By creating job opportunities*

P4: *To get more money*

P7: *To attract people who are employed at Shell and the customers who go to Shell*

P11: *VOTE DA*

P12: *Leave South Africa*

P16: *Because they want to attract people who vote*

Notably, the responses varied from partially correct to totally irrelevant responses, with some totally clumsy and vague in relation to the context of the study. For instance, P16 provided a response which partially hinted at what the text intended to convey. In line with the context of the text, the text designer implied that the leaving of SHELL could be linked

to a sense of discomfort or retraction against the leading government. So, by blaming the leading government, it will presumably offer them a good rapport and public affinity. Conversely, P1, P4, P7, P11 and P12 expressed different responses which could not be linked to the text designer's intention of using the SHELL scenario as a campaign tool.

THEME 3: IDENTIFICATION OF THE TEXT DESIGNER'S INTENTION

Multimodal text designers often use different or multiple semiotic modes to achieve a specific intention. It could be the use of textual position, the font type and size or the choice and frequency of the usage of a given word.

Similarly, the text designer for the advertisement (Annexed F) had an intention to achieve in line with the sponsor's preference. In this context, the designer wanted to lure voters to vote for the DA. To achieve this, he used the contextual realities that:

STRATEGY 1: "South Africans need jobs."

STRATEGY 2: In creating his context on lack of jobs, the designer blamed ANC and EFF for Shell's move to leave South Africa.

STRATEGY 3: The words "**START JOB CREATION**" are in the middle of the text and in a bigger, bolded font. Technically, these words were to attract readers' attention.

To assess participants' interpretative repertoire, the assessment asked: "**What is the first thing that attracts you to look at the advert?**" This was to check learners' ability to identify the text designer's intention.

Participants' responses

P1: *Big bold capital letters because you can see the advertisement*

P2: *Jobs, because there one no jobs at the*

P5: *The petrol because the are a place that lost of people loved*

P7: *Start job creation*

P9: *Shell garage- because the fill station doesn't involve with politics*

P11: *ANC-EFF*

P17: *no response*

Responses by participants to this question show that participants across all levels of competency struggled with this question. Some responses (P1) only focused on the font size instead of the words and impact. Of the 18 participants, none could identify the designer's intention, as they could not identify the words with the relevant motivation.

THEME 4: EVALUATING PROPOSITIONS AND SUBSTANTIATIONS

Objective 2 of the study was to evaluate the plausibility of inferences made by Grade 9 learners in the Hlanganani North Circuit when decoding selected visual texts within their contexts.

RQ2: How plausible are the inferences that Grade 9 learners in the Hlanganani North Circuit make when decoding selected visual texts in their contexts?

Inference making involves making logical conclusions based on facts that are available, the background of the text and the context underpinning the interpretation of the central theme. At times, prior knowledge of various elements of the text may also play a part in how the text should be interpreted.

To evaluate this area of competency, the propositions that participants gave were assessed against the type of justification or the accuracy of substantiation they presented. In other words, the participant's standpoint was assessed against the representativeness of substantiation for relevance and validation.

Participants' responses showed three categories: those who managed to indicate their positions with reasons, those who offered propositions without reasons, and those who did not even present a proposition.

The table below summarises participants' responses.

Participant	Participants' excerpts	The connection between the proposition and the justification
P1	<i>No, because there are so many businesses that are more successful than Shell.</i>	Irrelevant & Inappropriate
P2	<i>Vote for the investment. Vote for jobs</i>	Irrelevant & Inappropriate
P3	<i>No, because have not already voted</i>	Irrelevant & Inappropriate
P4	<i>They show they want to destroy ANC</i>	No Proposition
P6	<i>No, if shell is living South Africa is going to have problem</i>	Irrelevant & Inappropriate
P7	<i>It is fair, because it wants to convince ANC and EFF supporters to vote for the DA.</i>	Appropriate
P8	<i>No, because they both do not promote crime and corruption.</i>	Irrelevant & Inappropriate
P9	<i>No- because the other fill stations doesn't have the power to be open 24/7 than Shell garage</i>	Irrelevant & Inappropriate
P11	<i>Vote for investment. Vote for jobs</i>	Irrelevant & Inappropriate
P12	<i>ANC voters BIL OMIRREGULAR SPEMTENG</i>	Irrelevant & Inappropriate
P14	<i>No, because they are not the ones who dragged Shell out of SA</i>	Appropriate
P18	<i>No</i>	No substantiation

Table 6: Participants' responses to 'evaluating propositions and substantiations'

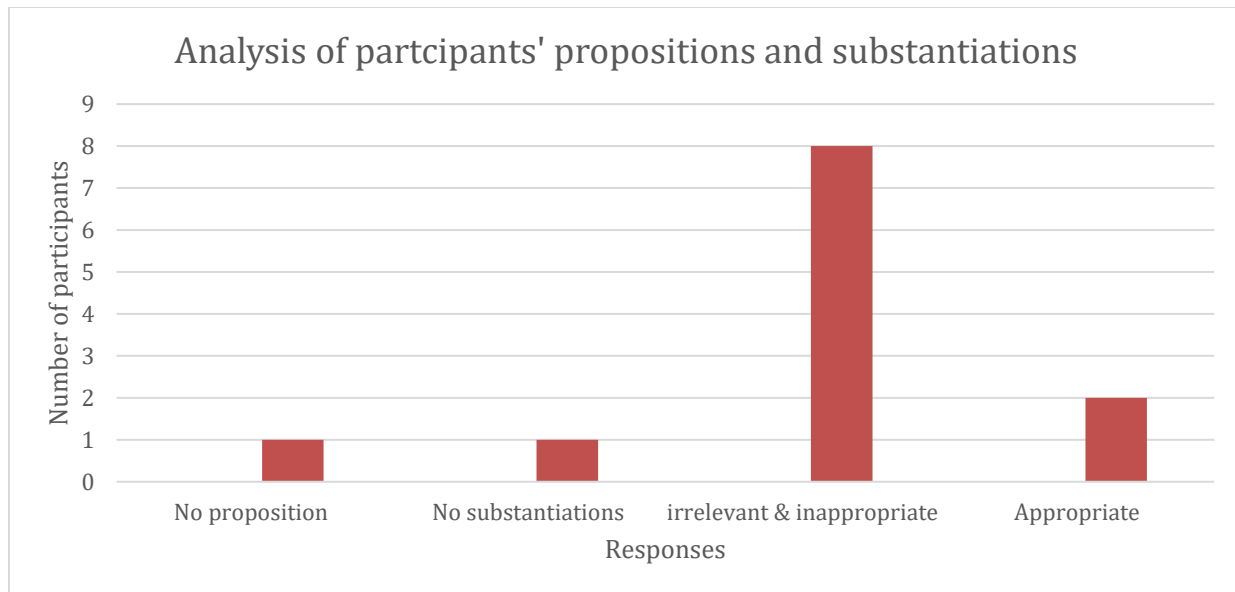


Figure 10: Evaluation of participants' propositions and substantiations

It is clear, as indicated in Table 6 and Figure 10 above, that participants varied in their interpretation of the text. One participant (**P18**) presented a viewpoint without justifications, and another (**P4**) presented a substantiation without a proposition. Two participants (**P7 and P14**) presented viewpoints correctly backed up by augmenting substantiations. However, the majority— eight participants (**P1, P2, P3, P6, P8, P9, P11 and P12**) — provided viewpoints supported by irrelevant or implausible substantiations when evaluated in the context of the text. The findings reveal participants' difficulty in inferring, which subsequently leads to propositions with irrelevant substantiation.

THEME 5: INCOMPREHENSIBLE UTTERANCES

Participants' excerpts also revealed a pattern of unclear and unintelligible utterances. This was evident in the four participants who wrote vague and unintelligible utterances. When asked a similar question: **Who should the target audience contact for more information?** (Question 2.5 in Appendix E), participants gave the following responses:

P4: *Me, because there is no contact.*

P5: *The petrol because they are using a place that lost of people love*

P12: *ANC wastes bil 10ms on irregur spendeng*

P18: *AMENZI*

In most cases, questions of this nature require readers to identify information which is overtly clear by simply referring to the overall content of the text. Response by participant 4 shows a rather indifferent response. It is so because it was impractical for the reader to be contacted since there was no link between the reader and the text designer. Similarly, responses by P5, P12 and P18 were utterly parallel to the ideal response expected, identifying the Petrol, ANC and AMENZI people to contact, respectively.

Objective 3: To identify the difficulties that learners encounter when decoding visual texts.

RQ3: What are the difficulties Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit encounter when interpreting visual texts?

The responses that focused on the third objective and question are presented with the themes that emerged.

THEME 6: NON-RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

The excerpts also show a pattern of non-response among some participants. For instance, two participants did not attempt to answer certain questions; suggesting that when participants are unable to decode and elicit meaning from visual texts, they may not give any response at all. Notably, a similar pattern is evidenced by P5, who, as a result, left 3 questions without responses. This applied to P17, who left 1 question without a response. In essence, this translates to 11.1% of learners who left out questions without responses. The remaining 88.9% gave responses, albeit not correct.

The absence of responses from the two participants may indicate participants' challenges in engaging with questions that require interpretation of the text for meaning, due to participants' lack of understanding.

5.5 PLAUSIBILITY OF INFERENCES IN CONTEXT OF THE TEXT

The plausibility of inferences refers to a reader's logical conclusions from textual evidence. In line with relevance theory (**RT**), participants' responses were evaluated by examining their proposition, their claim, and the correctness of the substantiation they made to support a given proposition. Furthermore, questions that asked why and how were considered to generate participants' inferential aptitude to interpret visual text. (**see Appendix F**)

The first set of questions required participants to interpret the following: **How does the DA use Shell petrol stations to gain voters?** The text (Appendix F) shows that the DA is using practical examples of how reputable companies performed under the leadership of the ANC. The DA used accusatory strategies to point out that SHELL is one of the companies that left South Africa, making people lose their jobs, and for that reason, the ANC, according to the DA, is to blame. Prior knowledge of the relationship between the ANC and the DA would have given participants hints on what the text designer intended to achieve.

The table below illustrates three columns: participants' number, participants' excerpts and plausibility determination of responses when evaluated in the text context. (**Appendix F**)

Participants	Extract	Plausibility of Inferences
P1	<i>By creating more job opportunities</i>	Incorrect
P2	<i>Vote for the job</i>	Incorrect
P3	<i>Thousands of jobs are at risk because of ANC-EFF politics</i>	Incorrect
P4	<i>To get more money</i>	Incorrect
P5	<i>Because the people will get attracted</i>	Incorrect
P6	<i>Vote for the job</i>	Incorrect
P7	<i>To attract people who are employed at Shell and the customers who go to Shell</i>	Incorrect

P8	<i>Because Shell petrol stations are the main petrol company and it advertises the Democratic Alliance (DA)</i>	Incorrect
P9	<i>Because Shell garages are one of the biggest filling stations, they are always busy.</i>	Incorrect
P10	<i>They use the petrol station that they want us to see when we go there</i>	Incorrect
P11	<i>VOTE DA</i>	Incorrect
P12	<i>Leave South Africa</i>	Incorrect
P13	<i>For the people who stop to get petrol can see the advertisement</i>	Incorrect
P14	<i>By saying it will create jobs, Shell petrol station will become the latest major firm to leave the ANC ruling SA, as it is out of SA</i>	Partially Plausible
P15	<i>By writing Vote for DA</i>	Incorrect
P16	<i>Because they want to attract people who vote</i>	Incorrect
P17	<i>Because the petrol stations most people go to put petrol in their cars, so many can sign.</i>	Incorrect
P18	<i>Stop divestment stay job creation</i>	Incorrect

Table 7: Participants' responses on the plausibility of inferences

The table above shows that most participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P15, P16, P17 and P18) struggled to establish why the text designer used Shell's departure as a direct consequence of ANC leadership. In other words, 17 participants, constituting 94.4%, wrote implausible responses in relation to the context of the text. This could be an indication of difficulty with the question and visual text interpretation.

The following observations were also made in line with participants' responses to questions on inferences and plausibility determinations.

5.5.1 Partial Plausibility of Inferences

One participant (**P14**) was partially plausible, indicating that:

P14: By saying it will create jobs, Shell petrol station will become the latest major firm to leave the ANC ruling in SA, as it is out of SA.

5.5.2 Inadequate interpretation of overt meaning or content

An example of inadequate interpretation overt meaning is evident in Excerpt **P11**, where the participant responded with “**Breaking news**” to a question that needed the target audience.

This type of response could be attributed to a lack of comprehension, as decoding and eliciting meaning is a prerequisite for the interpretation of texts. The failure to recognise the explicit purpose of the message indicates a gap in the learner’s visual literacy and reading comprehension skills.

5.5.3 Inadequate interpretation of implicit meaning or content

An example of inadequate interpretation implicit meaning or content is evident in Excerpt P7 where the participant’s response “**To attract people who are employed at Shell and the customers who go to Shell**”

This response could be attributed to difficulties in reading beyond literal interpretations, suggesting challenges in inferring implicit meanings.

5.5.4 Poor background on prior knowledge surrounding the context of the text

Question 2.7 (see Appendix E) required foundational knowledge to facilitate and provide a comprehensive and justified response. Participants’ responses indicated that many (94.4%) struggled.

For instance, in Excerpt, **P6** responded: *No, if Shell is leaving South Africa, it is going to have a problem.*

On the other hand, **P2** responded: *No, they want to make money.*

This response could be attributed to limited prior knowledge on the matter and a struggle with inferential comprehension.

Objective three established fundamental challenges that participants experience when decoding visual texts. This was aligned to the question, “What are the challenges participants encounter when interpreting visual texts?”

The following themes were identified as major challenges, with supporting excerpts from participants' responses:

THEME 1: POOR COMPREHENSION

Participants struggled to comprehend the advertisement and establish the writer's intention. Fifteen participants (83.3%) did not respond correctly, which could indicate the difficulty some had in comprehending the text.

As shown in Appendix E, question 2.6 was not appropriately addressed: **How does the DA use Shell petrol stations to gain voters?**

The responses below highlight the participants' comprehension aptitude measured on the level of relevance of responses in the context of the text.

Participants	Comprehension	Excerpts
P1	Poor comprehension	By creating more job opportunities
P2	Poor comprehension	Vote for the job
P3	Poor comprehension	Thousands of jobs are at risk because of ANC-EFF politics
P4	Poor comprehension	To get more money
P5	Poor comprehension	Because the people will get attracted
P6	Poor comprehension	Vote for the job
P7	Poor comprehension	To attract people who are employed at Shell and the customers who go to Shell
P8	Poor comprehension	Because Shell petrol stations is the main petrol company and it advertises the Democratic Alliance (DA)
P9	Poor comprehension	Because Shell garages are one of the biggest filling stations and it is always busy.
P11	Poor comprehension	VOTE DA

P12	<i>Poor comprehension</i>	<i>Leave South Africa</i>
P13	<i>Poor comprehension</i>	<i>For the people who stops to get petrol can see the advertisement</i>
P16	<i>Poor comprehension</i>	<i>Because they want to attract people who vote</i>
P17	<i>Poor comprehension</i>	<i>Because the petrol stations most of people they go there to put petrol in their cars, so many can sign</i>
P18	<i>Poor comprehension</i>	<i>Stop divestment, stay job creation</i>

Table 8 shows participants' responses depicting poor comprehension

The table above shows that the majority of participants, 15 out of 18, which is 83.3%, struggled with the question. Only 3 out of 18 (16.7%) highlighted areas of comprehension. This could be related to difficulty with critical or abstract thinking.

The next question focused on content which did not require prior knowledge of the context. As in Appendix E, the question read: **Which company was used in the advertisement?**

PARTICIPANTS	PARTICIPANTS RESPONSES
P1	SABC
P2	DA
P3	Breaking News
P5	Breaking NEWS
P6	ANC
P10	SABC
P11	Stop divestment. Start job creation
P12	EFF
P15	DA
P17	Sunbake
P18	DA

Table 9: Participants' responses depicting poor comprehension

Eleven out of eighteen participants (61.1%) were unable to recognise that Shell was the company referenced in the advertisement to support the DA message.

Furthermore, five participants incorrectly identified political parties as companies, while two others interpreted 'Breaking News' as the name of the company instead of a catchy phrase used to draw attention.

This could be attributed to participants' struggles with basic and inferential comprehension.

Similarly, the text of the question: **Who should the target audience contact for more information?** (Question 2.5 in appendix E), revealed that participants had challenges in comprehension. It is considered an elementary content question, and correct responses should ideally be possible since it does not require high-order thinking.

The narrative below shows the type of responses participants gave.

Participants	Responses
P3	<i>Work for jobs</i>
P4	<i>Me, because there is no contact</i>
P6	<i>Police</i>
P11	<i>Shell has become the latest major firm to leave South Africa under the ANC</i>
P12	<i>SABC</i>
P17	<i>Sunbake</i>

Table 10: Participants' responses depicting poor comprehension

The question's level of complexity was equivalent to Grade 9 expectations, implying that participants were expected to perform excellently. However, 6 participants (33.3%) whose responses are presented above revealed challenges in comprehension. This could be attributed to limited reading comprehension skills and inadequate attention to question

detail. The question required participants to identify a person or persons targeted by the advertisement (target audience). Contrary to that, the responses provided suggest that participants not only struggled with comprehension but also failed to grasp what the question specifically required.

P4 and P6's (11.1%) responses reveal some sense of paying attention to the question that needed a person; however, a lack of comprehension of the text led to incorrect answers.

P12 and P17 (11.1%) revealed that participants did not pay attention to question detail, as their incorrect responses might have been appropriate for a question that needed information about institutions or companies. The responses by P12, "**SABC**" and P17 "**Sunbake**", are not correct for the "who" question. This could be attributed to limited attention to question detail.

Two Participants (11.1%), P3 "Work for jobs" and P11 "Shell has become the latest major firm to leave South Africa under the ANC", clearly demonstrated limited reading comprehension. The two excerpts suggest that participants experienced difficulties with reading comprehension, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the text and the question.

THEME 2: LIMITED CONTEXTUAL KNOWLEDGE

Participants' responses demonstrated limited knowledge of the topic in the advertisement, as well as a lack of awareness of genre conventions that underpin the formulation of advertisements. Lack of contextual knowledge possibly hindered them from answering question 2.3 correctly.

Participants	Quotes
P2, P15, P17	DA, DA, DA respectively
P3, P5	Breaking news; Breaking news respectively
P6	ANC
P11	Stop divestment, start job creation
P12	EFF
P16	Sunbake

Table 11: Participants' responses reflecting limited contextual knowledge

To generate responses, participants were asked to identify the company used in the advertisement. This aligns with question 2.3 in Appendix E: **Which company was used in the advertisement?**

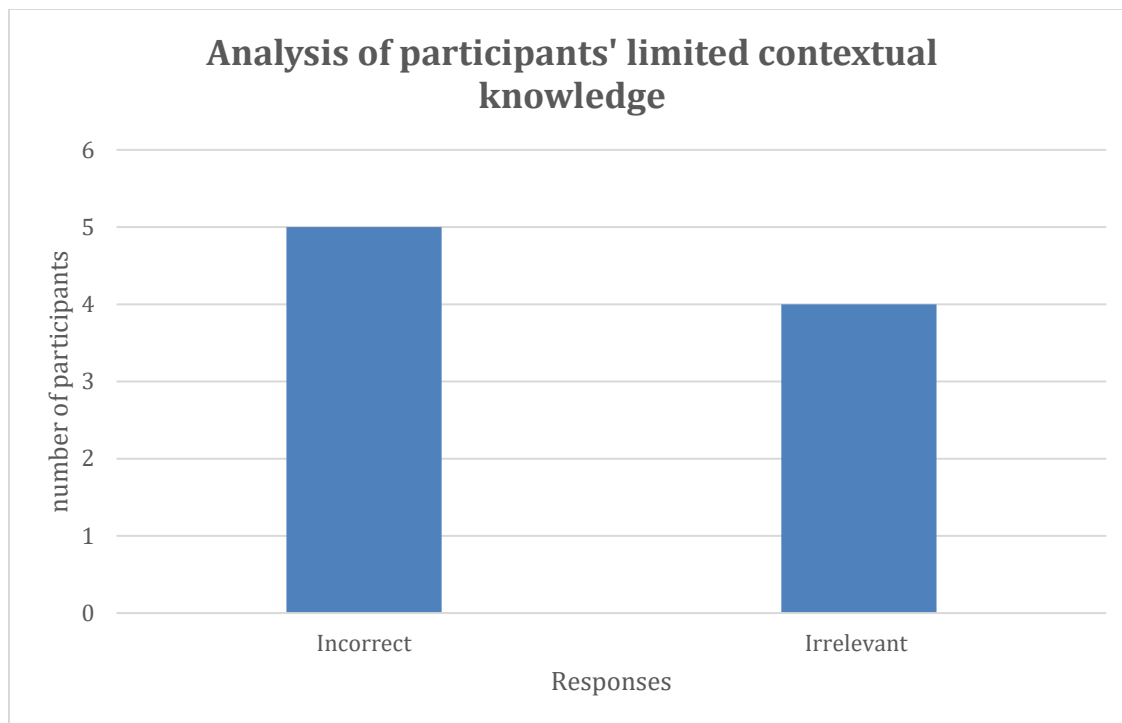


Figure 11: Analysis of participants' limited contextual knowledge

Table 11 and Figure 11, in essence, sum up how participants struggled with contextual comprehension. For example, five of the participants (27.7%) identified political parties as companies instead of Shell garage. Four participants (22.2%) mentioned some words like: *Breaking news*, identifying the phrase as a company, whereas it is a catchy phrase used to draw attention, while the other simply answered: *Stop divestment, start job creation*, which are equally incorrect in the context of the text. These responses indicate challenges in comprehension and context knowledge for appropriate interpretation.

THEME 3: UNSUPPORTED INFERENCES

Participants' responses to the question requiring support for their propositions show that Grade 9 learners struggle in this area. The data presented for this difficulty is based on responses to question 2.4 in Appendix E, which reads, **What is the first thing that attracts you when looking at the advert?** This also required substantiation.

Participants	Responses
P1	Breaking News
P2	Breaking News
P5	Breaking News
P6	ANC
P11	ANC-EFF
P12	Vote DA
P15	Start Job Creation
P17	No Answer

Table 12: Participants' responses that are unsupported inferences

The responses above, 8 out of 18 (44.4%), are unsupported propositions. Participants had to state words or icons that attracted them to look at the text and thereafter substantiate the response. The responses could be attributed to difficulty in evidence-based reasoning, which highlights the need for developing critical thinking and evidence-based argumentation skills.

THEME 4: UNSUBSTANTIATED STANDPOINTS

Participants' standpoints often lacked a sustaining statement. A question that required a standpoint and sustaining statements was left hanging, making it difficult to understand the learners' reasoning. The question whose responses revealed this difficulty is question 2.7 in Appendix E, which reads: ***Do you think that it is fair for the DA to accuse other parties of making Shell leave South Africa?*** Motivate your answer. The table overleaf shows the responses provided.

Participants	Experts' or participants' responses
P2	<i>Vote for investment. Vote for jobs</i>
P4	<i>No</i>
P11	<i>Vote for investment. Vote for jobs</i>
P15	<i>No answer</i>
P18	<i>No</i>

Table 13: Participants' responses revealing unsubstantiated standpoints

The five participants' responses above revealed a weakness in giving a claim or a standpoint without evidence. **P15** went to the extent of giving no answer to indicate the difficulty in comprehension and offering reasons to substantiate a viewpoint presented.

THEME 5: LACK OF FACTUAL SUPPORT

Participants found it difficult to support their propositions with correct factual support. Lack of objective arguments for open-ended questions led to unsubstantiated claims. Question 2.4 in Appendix E aimed to elicit learners' responses on the advertisement's appealing features and to provide justification for their selection. Some participants' justifications were irrelevant as a rationale for their choice of what attracted them. That is, the supporting argument is disconnected or unrelated to the first part of the response.

The data illustrating this difficulty are drawn from learners' responses to the following question:

What could be the first thing that would attract you to look at the advert? Give a reason to support your answer.

Participants	Quotes	Reason
P3	Start job creation , because Shell has become the latest major firm to leave South Africa under the ANC.	Unrelated justification
P4	The petrol because they are using a place that most of people loved	Unrelated justification
P6	Job creation - they promise people jobs and they do not hire them	Unrelated justification
P7	Breaking news . It shows that it is something important	Unrelated justification
P9	Shell garage -because the fill station doesn't involve in politics	Unrelated justification
P10	Start job creation because they want us to vote	Unrelated justification

Table 14: Participants' responses that show lack of factual support that correctly justify the answer

The table above captures responses of six participants, whose arguments or justifications were disconnected or unrelated to their main answers.

For example

The P3's viewpoint was 'Start job creation', and the validating statement was: "because shell become the latest major firm to leave South Africa". This statement does not validate 'start job creation' as words of attraction. The validating words could have mentioned the fact that people are interested in jobs, hence anything that talks about creating jobs attracts them. As this is an advertisement, the validating statement could have mentioned the bigger, bolded font size as a sign of attraction.

P9's response was 'Shell garage', but the substantiation, 'because the fill station is not involved in politics', does not qualify to be a fact for choosing 'Shell garage' as an attractive word.

Insufficient critical thinking skills could cause this disconnection and an inability to identify connected or relevant supporting details.

THEME 6: SUBJECTIVE ARGUMENTS

Participants were exposed to an open-ended question that required their critical thinking skills to enable them to provide objective arguments. Participants struggled to provide objective motivation for their responses, leading to unrelated substantiation or no justification at all.

Participants' responses to question 2.7 in Appendix E which reads: **Do you think it is fair for the DA to accuse other parties of making Shell leave South Africa? Motivate your answer.**

The excerpt below summarises participants' responses:

Participants	Participants' excerpts
P1	<i>No, because there are so many businesses that are more successful than Shell.</i>
P2	<i>Vote for the investment. Vote for jobs</i>
P3	<i>No, because have not already voted</i>
P4	<i>They show they want to destroy ANC</i>
P6	<i>No, if shell is living South Africa is going to have problem</i>
P9	<i>No- because the other fill stations doesn't have the power to be open 24/7 than Shell garage</i>
P11	<i>Vote for investment. Vote for jobs</i>
P12	<i>ANC voters BIL OMIRREGULAR SPEMTENG</i>
P14	<i>No, because they are not the ones who dragged Shell out of SA</i>
P17	<i>- no answer</i>

P18	No
-----	----

Table 15: Participants' responses that reveal challenges in providing objective arguments

The above responses of eleven participants constitute 61.1% of those with challenges in providing objective arguments or relevant justification. This could be attributed to difficulties with abstract thinking and the limited ability to provide relevant justifications.

For example:

The P1's viewpoint was 'NO', and the validating statement was: *"There are so many businesses that are more successful than Shell."* This could be partially correct because the participants see the use of Shell as a selective assessment. The leaving of Shell could be attributed to other factors that may not necessarily be linked to ANC leadership in government.

P3's response was also 'NO', but the substantiation, *"because they have not already voted"* does not offer relevant justification for being against the motion.

The participant used the non-referential pronoun **"they"** which does not show its referent, contributing to a vague substantiation. The argument that they have not yet voted is also inadequate to justify why the DA accuses the ANC for the departure of Shell garage.

P6's viewpoint was 'NO', and the validating statement was: *"if shell is living South Africa is going to have problem"*.

This does not justify that DA was wrong to blame ANC for Shell's decision to leave South Africa. The statement given does not offer an objective argument to substantiate the answer.

P9's answer was 'No', the argument was: *"because the other fill stations doesn't have the power to be open 24/7 than Shell garage"*. This utterance was totally irrelevant as the question was about Shell leaving South Africa and not its opening time. This revealed difficulties in comprehension and contextual inferences.

The identified challenges could be attributed to a limited understanding of objective argumentation, pointing to the need for targeted development of learners' critical thinking and reasoning skills.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented findings based on participants' interpretation of visual texts. The responses were analysed to establish the challenges participants experienced when decoding visual texts and to assess their inferential skills as an indicator of their interpretative abilities. The quotes revealed the challenges that learners encounter in understanding and analysing virtual texts, including difficulties in comprehension, contextual knowledge, and providing objective justification.

The presented data offers insights that serve as a basis for data analysis and discussion of findings in the following chapter. The discussion will explore the implications of the difficulties and the potential effects on learners' comprehension and interpretation of visual texts.

CHAPTER SIX

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings from the study, which aimed to explore the responses of Grade 9 learners in English FAL, in the Hlanganani North Circuit, regarding their interpretation of visual texts. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the data, summarise the key findings presented in Chapter 4, and discuss their implication in relation to the research questions. It also seeks to establish comparability to existing literature and the theoretical framework that underpinned the study.

The discussion is organised around three research questions, which collectively aim to explore learners' ability to elicit meaning, make plausible inferences, and examine difficulties that learners encounter when they interpret visual texts. The analysis and discussion are aligned with the study's research questions and objectives.

6.2 DATA ANALYSIS

To enhance understanding of the data presented in the previous chapter, a detailed analysis is provided in this section. According to Creswell (2014), effective data analysis includes a systematic process of coding, categorising, and interpreting data to identify patterns, describe themes, and interpret the meaning of themes.

Creswell and Poth (2018:123) emphasise the importance of selecting a suitable qualitative research design, as that informs the data analysis approach. The research design method employed in this study, outlined in Chapter Three, guided the sampling of participants, data collection, and analysis. The design was validated and confirmed as suitable for the objectives of the current study.

6.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section discusses the findings of the study on the key themes that emerged from data analysis. As detailed in the previous chapter, the themes that were outlined are:

Key Theme 1: Interpretation of the overt meaning of the text

Key Theme 2: Interpretation of the implicit meaning of the text

Key Theme 3: Identification of the text designer's communicative intentions

Key Theme 4: Evaluating propositions and substantiations

Key Theme 5: Incomprehensible utterances

Key Theme 6: Non-response

These themes are discussed in detail, highlighting their implications for understanding participants' challenges in their interpretation of visual texts in accordance with the study objectives. The themes are discussed with reference to the literature review and the theoretical framework of this study.

6.3.1 THEME 1: INTERPRETATION OF THE OVERT MEANING OF THE TEXT

The first key theme that emerged from the findings was on the interpretation of the overt meaning of the text. This theme focused on the participants' ability to understand the literal meaning of the text.

The findings revealed that 77.7% (14) of the participants struggled to interpret the overt meaning of the text. This answers the first objective: "to establish learners' ability to interpret and comprehend visual texts." This key theme incorporates comprehension and interpretation. Poor comprehension of a given text, visual or non-visual, is often marked by inability to make sense of the text's central message. This may include the inability to identify implicit and explicit content embedded in the text. With explicit meaning easily identifiable by simply accessing the content of the text, the implicit meaning of the text is,

conversely, often hidden, requiring a heightened level of interpretative repertoire, which is often supported by readers' prior existing knowledge.

Literature concurs that poor reading comprehension leads to inappropriate and irrelevant interpretation of texts. It is explained in Snow (2002:11) that reading comprehension is essential for critical thinking and interpretation; it enables readers to extract meaning, analyse texts, and interpret the overt meaning. This is also supported by Guthrie and Klauda (2014, 2014:15), who concede that reading comprehension helps the readers to actively understand and synthesise knowledge, enabling the reader to interpret the text successfully. Reiteratively, The Smart Independent Reading and Comprehension Learning (2024:2) highlights that poor reading comprehension can significantly hinder readers' ability to interpret texts.

Studies on reading and the underlying cause of poor comprehension abound. The central underlying factors leading to the inappropriate interpretation of the overt meaning of the text have been explored widely. Pretorius (2002), findings on Grade 12 learners included the fact that poor reading comprehension significantly impacts academic achievement and interpretation of texts. Guthrie and Klauda (2014), who focused on Grade 3-5 learners, emphasised the importance of reading comprehension in improving learners' ability to interpret and understand texts. This finding cuts across the grades, including Grade 9, which is the focus of this study. It is reinforced by Olifant (2015), who, though not focused on visual texts, suggests that improving reading comprehension skills can have a positive impact on learners' ability to interpret complex texts, including visual texts. The findings of Theme 1 in this study's data analysis, therefore, align with existing research, reinforcing the importance of reading comprehension in facilitating effective and appropriate text interpretation of overt meaning.

6.3.2 THEME 2: INTERPRETING THE IMPLICIT MEANING OF THE TEXT

The implicit meaning of the text is not readily available to novice readers. It is often subtle since modes that are used in this regard should often be decoded in their context. This often requires readers' access to genre-specific conventions, connotative meaning of signs, and awareness of a range of textual variables. Interpreting implicit meaning is an

important aspect of reading comprehension as it prepares and enables readers to infer and deduce meaning beyond the literal text (Snow, 2002:11).

This study revealed that 100% (18) of participants struggled with interpreting implicit meaning, as the skill needs critical thinking and inference. This finding reinforces the complexity of implicit meaning interpretation, which requires readers to engage in deeper cognitive processes (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014:300). These cognitive processes include readers' background knowledge or contextual familiarity with the subject matter. The finding that participants struggled with interpreting implicit meaning validates the theoretical framework of social semiotics as discussed in Chapter 2 of this study report. This finding, aligning with the social semiotics theory, shows that meaning can be shaped by more than what is in the text, including the social and cultural contexts in which texts are created and interpreted (Kress, 2010:32). Participants' struggle with implicit meaning interpretation illustrates the complex connection between signs, meanings, and contexts posited by semiotics and social semiotics (Kress, 2010:45; Halliday, 1978:12).

Researchers like Pretorius (2002:15) and Klapwijk (2015:5) highlight that interpreting implicit meaning requires a high level of reading skill, including the ability to make inferences. The findings revealed that these skills are underdeveloped in participants, leading to difficulties in interpreting the text.

A study by Duke and Pearson (2002:215) found that learners struggle with identifying implicit meaning in texts. Cain and Oakhill (2007:50) noted that difficulties with implicit meaning interpretations are often linked to prior knowledge. This implies that learners' background knowledge plays a huge role in the interpretations of implicit meaning embedded in a given text. Hence, this study found that participants provided poor and inappropriate interpretations, as presented in the previous chapter.

6.3.4 THEME 3: IDENTIFICATION OF THE TEXT DESIGNER'S INTENTION

Identifying the text designer's intention is also one of the crucial aspects of reading and comprehension. To achieve this, it may require readers to understand the author's purpose, tone, and point of view (Kintsch, 2005:12). The findings in this study revealed

that participants struggled with this skill, as their responses had unsupported inferences, poor interpretations, and unjustified utterances.

According to Halliday (1978:15), understanding the text designer's intention involves the social and cultural contexts in which the text was created. In this study data collected indicated that participants struggled with questions that required prior knowledge and background on the reasons behind Shell garage leaving South Africa. As Kress (2010:32) indicated, participants' struggle might be attributed to limited exposure to "diverse texts and contexts". This viewpoint has a classical reference as supported in one of the early studies by Anderson and Pearson (1984:260), who have shown that learners struggle to identify the text designer's intention due to limited prior knowledge and experience. This view was augmented in a study by Pressley (2002:108), who avowed that such challenges could be attributed to difficulty with inference and critical thinking. Inappropriate interpretations that participants provided also indicated a limited understanding of "authorial intent and text structure as highlighted in Graesser and McNamara (2011:140).

Other research has reported similar struggles and challenges in identifying the text designer's intention. It has been found by researchers that prior knowledge and experience are important in facilitating understanding of the text designer's intention (Broek and Kremer 2000:180; Ozuru, Dempsey & McNamara, 2009). This position is reinforced by an emphasis on the importance of prior knowledge in ensuring there is an understanding of the text designer's intention. (Graesser & McNamara, 2011:140 and McCarthy & McNamara, 2021: 196-214). In a review on the importance of prior or background knowledge and reading comprehension, Smith, Snow, Serry, and Hammond (2021) report that high levels of background knowledge on a text lead to better text understanding in high- and low-ability learners or readers. The study by Pressley also revealed that learners' challenge in identifying the text designer's intention is attributed to difficulty with inference and critical thinking (2011:140). The findings from this study revealed that participants have problems in skills that facilitate understanding a text designer's intention, like considering multiple modes of communication, elements of

images, language, and layout, as highlighted by Kress (2010) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

6.3.5 THEME 4: EVALUATING PROPOSITIONS AND SUBSTANTIATIONS

This theme emerged because some questions required learners to exercise their critical thinking skills in order to have a proposition complemented by current substantiation. This theme explores the difficulties learners experience in evaluating texts and arguments. Participants in this study revealed that there are challenges in analysing arguments and assessing their strength. Their difficulties in propositions and substantiations can be attributed to difficulty in critical thinking and a lack of or limited prior knowledge.

Authors support that critical thinking is an essential skill that enables readers to evaluate arguments and offer justification. According to Facione (2015:12), critical thinking is the systemic evaluation and analysis of information and ideas to form a judgment or decision. In agreement, Halpern (2014:23) indicates that the ability to evaluate arguments and evidence is a crucial aspect of critical thinking. It is also highlighted that propositions are evaluated based on their clarity, relevance, and consistency with the reader's existing knowledge (Paul & Elder, 2006:147). It follows that critical thinking a reader to analyse the text for relevant substantiations. The difficulty that the participants displayed indicated that they were unable to analyse the text and provide relevant substantiations.

6.3.6 THEME 5: INCOMPREHENSIBLE UTTERANCES

Participants' excerpts demonstrated an element of vagueness and complexity in some questions, as presented in the previous chapter. In some responses, participants used utterances that lacked clarity; in others, utterances were difficult to understand due to language structure and vocabulary.

Studies have shown that learners may produce incomprehensible responses due to a lack of prior knowledge or experience, undeveloped language skills, or having to deal with complex tasks (Sweller, 2010:292). In support of this notion, Sibanda, Dippenaar, and Swart (2024) found that although learners can decode a text fluently, many struggle to

understand as a result of lacking the necessary background knowledge and vocabulary to construct the required knowledge. Ntsikita, Condy, Meda and Phillips (2022) also found that most learners in their study struggled to demonstrate reading comprehension skills, which supports the conclusion that insufficient background knowledge leads to incomprehensible learner responses. Although participants are expected to have developed in EFAL, the incomprehensible responses revealed that there is a challenge in language development skills.

6.3.7 THEME 6: NON-RESPONSE

The theme of non-response emerged in the analysis of data as some participants failed to respond to questions. This theme revealed that participants lacked understanding or knowledge of the content in the text.

Authors attribute learners' non-response to lack of understanding, lack of knowledge, cognitive overload, and disengagement. According to Bloom (1976:56), when learners lack understanding of a question, they resort to non-response. Similarly, Alexander (1997:135) indicates that non-response can occur when learners lack the necessary knowledge or information to respond. In agreement with the view, Mayer (2009:145) highlights the importance of clear instructions and guidance, as a lack of understanding and a lack of knowledge do lead to learners' non-response. This supports Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development that suggests that learners may struggle to understand and respond to tasks that are beyond their current level of understanding (Vygotsky, 1978:86). In expanding this concept, Bruner (1978:19) developed the concept of scaffolding meant to provide support to improve their understanding, which would eliminate non-response. Bruner's concept of scaffolding is echoed in the work of later researchers like O'Donnell, who discusses the importance of collaborative learning and scaffolding in facilitating and developing learners' understanding (2006:123).

Researchers also attribute non-response to cognitive overload, whereby learners are overwhelmed by what they have to read and work on for a response. Sweller (2013:210)

explains that when learners are faced with texts that they view as complex and demanding, their alternative way becomes non-response. Participants who did not respond to some questions might have experienced the overwhelming frustration that is referred to.

Lack of understanding, lack of knowledge, and cognitive overload can easily result in learners' disengagement when they are faced with tasks. Hativa (2013:210) explains that a lack of interest in a task can lead to non-response as learners may not see the relevance or value in responding. It is noticeable that participants who left certain questions unanswered might have experienced a confluence of factors, including a lack of understanding and disengagement, which led them to refrain from responding.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a detailed discussion of the findings, organised around six key themes. Drawing on the presented data, these themes illuminated on the complexities of Grade 9 learners' interpretations of visual texts. The findings of this study are consistent with those of existing literature, thereby reinforcing their reliability and credibility. Overall, the discussion revealed that participants demonstrated poor comprehension of both literal and visual content, which negatively affected their ability to interpret both the overt and implicit meanings of texts. The next and final chapter presents the summary of the study, key findings, and recommendations based on the results.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the summary, key findings, and recommendations derived from the themes discussed in the previous chapter. It offers a concise, yet comprehensive synthesis of the core findings, highlighting the significant insights that emerged from the study. Furthermore, informed by these findings, strategic recommendations were thoughtfully presented, contributing valuable insights to guide future actions and decisions. It serves as a pivotal synthesis, bridging the discussion in Chapter 5 with actionable recommendations, enhancing the overall depth, relevance, and applicability of this study.

7.2 THE SUMMARY

This section provides a comprehensive summary of the chapters in this study. It offers an overview of the research process, from the formulation of the problem to the final recommendations, and highlights how each chapter contributed to achieving the study's objectives.

7.2.1 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

This study consists of seven chapters as outlined below:

Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study

Chapter 1 introduced the research study, laying out an overview of the background, context, and significance of the study. This is where the researcher highlighted the performance of Grade 9 learners in Limpopo as per the diagnostic report of the Annual

National Assessment, which pointed out that there was low performance in the visual texts section.

This chapter defined the research problem, outlined the aim, objectives, and research questions, and delimited the scope and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The chapter presented a comprehensive review of relevant literature and theories related to the study. It presented a comprehensive review of existing relevant literature across years and decades to validate the plausibility of the research topic.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter examined theoretical frameworks relevant to the investigation of interpretations of visual texts. The researcher adopted two theoretical frameworks, semiotics and social semiotics, as lenses through which to interpret the data. The two were aligned with the literature that highlighted the importance of comprehension, and prior knowledge and understanding. Hence, the researcher incorporated the essentials of semiotics and social semiotics to present and discuss data findings, with highlights on the importance of the interpretation of signs and the role of prior knowledge and context in visual text comprehension and interpretations.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

Chapter 4 outlined the research design and methodology employed in this study. It highlighted how the study made use of both descriptive and explorative research designs to enable the researcher to collect data and immerse themselves in it to describe, gain insights, and analyse, identifying trends and patterns without manipulating variables.

The chapter detailed the sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. The chapter outlined how purposive sampling was employed to cover learners' levels of performance, which are weak, average, and good performers. The researcher justified the chosen methods and further outlined the steps taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. An account of details on ethical considerations was given, including permission granted to conduct the investigation.

Chapter 5: Presentation of findings

The researcher became immersed in the data collected for familiarisation. Chapter 4 presented the results and detailed the findings that emerged. Using thematic analysis, the researcher identified themes in relation to the study objectives. The results were then presented in a clear and organised manner using themes, numbers, and graphs where necessary.

The six key themes were discussed with reference to relevant participants' excerpts per theme. The six identified themes were:

Key Theme 1: Interpretation of the overt meaning of the text

Key Theme 2: Interpretation of the implicit meaning of the text

Key Theme 3: Identification of the text designer's intentions

Key Theme 4: Evaluating propositions and substantiations

Key Theme 5: Incomprehensible utterances

Key Theme 6: Non-response

These themes led to the identification of revealed findings, which included: poor comprehension; difficulties in the interpretation of overt and implicit meaning of the text; and a lack of relevant background knowledge and context to facilitate appropriate interpretations and substantiations. The chapter discussed the findings that emerged in responses to questions, as illustrated in the data collection tool. (Annexure E)

Chapter 6: Interpretation and discussion of findings

This chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature and the theoretical framework in chapter 6. In this chapter, the researcher interpreted the results in light of the literature review and with reference to other researchers' findings. The discussion was specifically focused on the six key themes and allowed the researcher to provide an understanding of the research topic and highlight causes or reasons for the difficulties and challenges revealed in the data analysed. The researcher also highlighted the implications of the findings, working towards the recommendations of the study.

Chapter 7: Summary, findings and recommendations

Chapter 7 serves as a culmination of the entire study. It summarises all chapters, including the very same chapter. A summary of five chapters was presented to highlight the main points and what the researcher did in every chapter. This chapter also presented a summary of the key findings that were presented in Chapter 4 and further detailed in Chapter 5 and outlines their significance.

Importantly, this chapter provides practical recommendations targeted at EFAL educators, the department of education, learners and society at large. These recommendations aim to enhance the teaching and learning of visual literacy in the Senior Phase and promote improved comprehension and interpretation of visual texts.

7.2.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Through thematic analysis of the collected data, the study's key findings show that participants struggled with elements that are essential in the comprehension and interpretation of visual texts. The study revealed that participants struggled and had the following challenges:

1. Poor comprehension, hindering accurate interpretation;
2. Limited interpretation skills for the covert and implicit meaning of the text;
3. Insufficient prior knowledge or background context to support interpretation in a plausible manner
4. Inadequate language use resulting in incomprehensible responses to unanswered questions;
5. Difficulty in understanding visual literacy elements, including layout, font, confusing captions, and failing to identify key information aligned to visual text elements.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The significance of the study, as outlined in Chapter 1, guided the recommendations based on the findings of this study. The findings of this study, as presented and discussed, resulted in the following proposed recommendations to the Department of Education, curriculum advisors, educators, learners and the entire society:

7.3.1 Proposed recommendations to curriculum advisors

It is recommended that curriculum advisors serve as the first source of scaffolding by conducting training sessions for EFAL teachers so that they can develop and implement strategies that facilitate reading comprehension and appropriate interpretation. It should not be taken for granted that educators know how to teach visual texts.

Curriculum advisors need to promote critical thinking skills in learners by ensuring that the assessment on visual texts has questions that will continue to develop the skills essential for interpretation, propositions, and relevant substantiations.

7.3.2 Proposed recommendations to EFAL senior phase teachers

1. Teachers need to develop and pass on the concept of scaffolding to learners by providing support to learners. This can help improve learners' comprehension and interpretation skills.

2. It is recommended that visual literacy be taught and assessed, focusing on developing comprehension and interpretation skills, intentionally focusing on identifying explicit and implicit meanings in visual texts.
3. Teachers ought to build background knowledge by providing learners with relevant contextual information in every visual literacy lesson. This kind of scaffolding will assist learners build their information and knowledge bank to refer to when expected to offer accurate and plausible justifications when interpreting visual texts. This will enrich learners' social knowledge to build social semiotics, allowing appropriate interpretations.
4. In order to develop learners' critical thinking skills, it is proposed that teachers use guided reading strategies where they employ guided questions and think-aloud strategies to help them unpack meanings. Differentiated support should be provided to learners at varying performance levels: weak, average, and good performers.
5. Teachers should teach visual literacy explicitly, focusing on elements such as colour, font type and size, layout, and composition of phrases. These elements should be taught to highlight how they facilitate meaning in visual texts.
6. As the study site is rural, more learners are not exposed to a variety of social information that is of value in the interpretation of visual texts. It is therefore recommended that teachers should encourage peer collaboration and discussions in their lessons. The discussions would also promote deeper understanding and help in reasoning and substantiation as learners share perspectives.
7. Lastly, it is recommended that there should be continuous assessment and feedback on visual literacy. Learners cannot improve their understanding and interpretation of visual texts if they only get assessed in summative tasks. Continuous meaningful feedback will assist learners and teachers as they identify areas of difficulty for further support.

7.3.3 Recommendations to learners

1. Learners should be encouraged and motivated to ask questions where they do not understand so that their comprehension can develop.

2. Learners should not only wait for an assessment task to engage with visual texts; rather, they should explore multiple texts and practise interpretations as they work, justifying their view with factual visual evidence. Practising with a variety of visual texts will improve their language use and augment interpretive skills to build confidence in responding to all questions appropriately without leaving any unanswered.

7.3.4 Recommendations to society and parents

Visual literacy is not merely a school curriculum concept, as it is part of everyday new literacies. It is for that reason that it is recommended that society at large should contribute to visual literacy by encouraging critical utilisation of media and promoting discussions that challenge the responses that do not require critical thinking. To support schools and teachers, parents can engage learners by discussing images they see in their everyday life in order to develop people who reflect on their meaning and have factual reasons to support any proposition they make.

These recommendations aim to create a conducive environment to develop learners who understand and interpret visual texts meaningfully for both academic and real-world contexts.

7.4 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to analyse the interpretations of visual texts to establish Grade 9 learners' ability to comprehend and interpret visual texts. The study set out to evaluate the correctness of learners' inferences and identify difficulties that they encounter in interpreting visual texts.

The findings of the study revealed significant challenges, including poor comprehension, limited prior knowledge, and difficulties in identifying implicit and explicit meanings in a visual text. Participants also struggled to understand and apply visual elements like captions, a difficulty that was an obstacle in their attempt to construct meaningful

interpretations. Notably, the challenges were revealed across the different performance levels (weak, average, and good performers).

The themes that emerged as challenges in the interpretation of visual texts brought up insights and, consequently, recommendations for an intentional and structured approach to teaching visual literacy in schools. The study generated recommendations for curriculum advisors, teachers, learners, and the entire society aimed at fostering a collaborative curriculum framework to bridge the gap between visual information and learner understanding. The recommendations to teachers are not only for EFAL but for all teachers, as different subjects expose learners to visual texts.

In conclusion, the study highlighted that the ability to interpret visual texts is essential in today's visually driven world, as the text used in the study (Appendix F) was drawn from a real-life context, reinforcing the practical relevance of visual literacy. As revealed, Grade 9 participants deal with challenges in comprehending and interpreting visual texts. Addressing the difficulties and challenges revealed requires a collaborative effort from curriculum advisors, teachers, parents, and the community. It is notable that with appropriate teaching, scaffolding, and support, learners can be guided towards developing visual literacy skills that will serve them academically and in everyday life. The collaborative effort can nurture the necessary competencies early in order to build a strong foundation for learners to be critical, reflective, and informed readers of visual texts around them.

APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF VENDA ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Ms MH Nedzamba

STUDENT NO:
8702630

PROJECT TITLE: **Interpretation of visual texts: a case of
Hlanganani North Circuit, in the Vhembe West district-
Limpopo Province.**

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: **FHSSE/24/EMS/38/0801**

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr TE Skellime	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies and Linguistics	Supervisor
Prof EK Kju	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies and Linguistics	Co-Supervisor
Ms MH Nedzamba	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies and Linguistics	Investigator -Student

Type: **Masters Research**

Risk: **Minimal risk to humans, animals, or environment (Category 2)**

Approval Period: **January 2025 – January 2026**

The Research Ethics Social Science Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

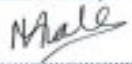
- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the RESC:
 - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
 - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event for any matter that infringes sound ethical principles during the course of the project.
 - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of those changes at the RESC. Would there be deviation from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made for the RESC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the RESC retains the right to:
 - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project.
 - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
 - Withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
 - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the RESC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
 - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately.
 - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: **January 2025**

Name of the RESC Chairperson of the Committee: **Prof M. Mwale-Marjoro**

Signature: 



APPENDIX B: APPROVAL LETTER: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: 2/2/2

Enq: Makola MC

Tel No: 015 290 9448

E-mail: MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

NEDZAMBA MH
52 CRONJE STREET
LOUIS TRICHARDT
0920

hulgerned@gmail.com

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.

1. The above bear's reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to undertake research titled: **"INTERPRETATION OF VISUAL TEXTS: A CASE OF HLANGANANI NORTH CIRCUIT, IN THE VHEMBE WEST DISTRICT- LIMPOPO PROVINCE"** has been approved
3. The following conditions should be considered:
 - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
 - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the School concerned.
 - 3.3 The conduct of research should not in any how disrupt the academic programmes at the school(s).
 - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations, especially in the fourth term.

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: NEDZAMBA MH Page 1

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel: 015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

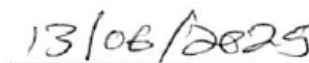
The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

- 3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected and treated with dignity).
- 3.6 Upon completion of the research, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.
- 4 Additionally, you are expected to produce this letter at School(s)/Office(s) where you intend to conduct your research as evidence that permission has been granted for access to the research site(s).
- 5 The Department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

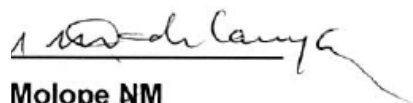
Best wishes.



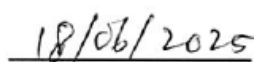
MC Makola PhD



Date



Molope NM



Date

Acting DDG: CORPORATE SERVICES

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: NEDZAMBA MH Page 2

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel: 015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1, **Mulalo Hulger Nedzamba**, a Master's student in English Language Teaching at the University of Venda, am involved in a research titled '**Grade 9 Interpretation of visual texts: A case of Hlanganani North Circuit, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province.**'

I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr T.E. Sikitime and Prof E.K. Klu. The aim of the study is to analyse the interpretations of visual texts as a reading skill by selected Grade 9 learners in Hlanganani North Circuit in order to detect their challenges in interpreting visual texts. The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To establish learners' ability to interpret and comprehend visual texts.
2. To evaluate the correctness of inferences that learners make when decoding visual texts.
3. To examine the difficulties that learners encounter when decoding visual texts.

Grade 9 learners' answer sheets for the 2024 June Examination English FAL papers will be used to achieve the indicated objectives. Your cooperation in selecting the six learners' scripts (answer sheets) representing good, average, and low performers will enable the researcher to analyse and answer research questions. All ethical considerations will be upheld completely in this study. There is no need for learners' consent as there will be no contact with them.

Your participation in this study will enlighten different levels of the curriculum in English language teaching. English educators like yourself and curriculum advisors will gain insights for teaching visual texts in a way that develops learners' aspects identified in the policy document, like critical thinking and inference.

In view of the above, you are requested to participate in this research project.

For further information, please contact:

Mulalo Nedzamba

Tel.: 082 090 6629

E-mail: hulgerned@gmail.com

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form – Educators on behalf of Grade 9 learners

I have read the participant information sheet, and the nature and purpose of the study have been explained to me by Mrs. Mulalo Nedzamba, a master's student at the University of Venda, South Africa.

I agree that my learners' responses to advertisement questions as participants are paramount to the success of this study. I also agree that their answer sheets will be used on the condition that the information provided will be treated as confidential and used for research purposes only.

To facilitate the study, I shall ensure that the scripts are available when requested.

I understand that while the information gained during the study may be published, the learners will not be identified anywhere in the study by their real names.

Furthermore, I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary as I and my learners are under no obligation to take part. I understand that we may withdraw at any stage without providing a reason if, at any time, I feel uncomfortable with the use of my learners' tests or any part of the process. It is clear that if I decide to withdraw, there will be no negative consequences.

Educator's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

For further information, please contact:

Mulalo Nedzamba

Tel.: 082 090 6629

F-mail: hulgerned@gmail.com

APPENDIX E: DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Extract from Grade 9 2024 June examination Paper

SECTION B: VISUAL LITERACY

QUESTION 2A: ADVERTISEMENT

Instructions:

Refer to the advert below to answer questions 1-7



1. Who is the target audience of this advertisement? (1)
2. Choose the correct answer to complete the following sentence. ONLY write down the letter of the correct answer next to the question number.
The name of the organization that made the advertisement is....
A. SABC
B. DA

- C. ANC
- D. EFF (1)
3. Which Company has been used in the advertisement?
4. What is the first thing that can attract you to look at the advert? Give a reason for your answer. (2)
5. Who should the target audience contact for more information? (1)
6. How does the DA use Shell petrol stations to gain voters? (2)
7. Do you think that it is fair for the DA to accuse other parties of making Shell leave South Africa? Motivate your answer. (2)
- (10)**

APPENDIX F: VISUAL TEXT USED FOR GRADE 9 JUNE 2024 EXAM



BREAKING NEWS

**Stop divestment,
start job creation**

Shell has become the latest major firm to leave South Africa under the ANC. Thousands of jobs are at risk because of ANC-EFF policies.

Vote for investment. Vote for jobs.

 **VOTE**  **DA**

Visit RescueSA.org.za for solutions 

APPENDIX G: EDITING CONFIRMATION LETTER

Office No. 06

Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics

University of Venda

P/Bag X 5050

Thohoyandou

0950

21 June 2025

To Whom It May Concern

This serves to confirm that I proof-read and edited the dissertation titled “Grade 9 Learners’ Interpretation of Visual Texts: A Case of Hlanganani North Circuit, Vhembe West District -Limpopo Province” by Mulalo Hulger Nedzamba, Student Number: 8702630.

Regards



Vincent N. Demana (PhD)



University of Venda

Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

University of Venda

Tel: +27- 015 962-8363 Cell: +27-739912237

E-mail: Vincent.demana@univen.ac.za

Website: <http://www.univen.ac.za/>

A quality driven, financially sustainable, rural-based comprehensive university

APPENDIX H: TURNITIN REPORT

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 16-Jun-2025 11:25 SAST
ID: 2700316492
Word Count: 28801
Submitted: 1

Similarity Index	Similarity by Source
5%	Internet Sources: 5% Publications: 3% Student Papers: 4%

Grade 9 learners' interpretation of visual texts: A case of Hlanganani North Circuit, Vhembe West District -Limpopo province By Nedzamba Mulalo Hulger

1% match (Internet from 23-Nov-2020)
<http://www.politicseastasia.com/studying/guide-to-the-theory-of-semiotics/>

1% match (Internet from 16-Jul-2020)
https://mafiadoc.com/social-semiotics_5b7pf1ad097c47e1768b4749.html

1% match (Internet from 14-May-2025)
<https://univendspace.univen.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/f50a9223-5c68-46ed-9e92-841a0024d32b/content>

< 1% match (student papers from 21-May-2025)
Class: 2025 ELT PhD students
Assignment: Turnitin percentage
Paper ID: 2681303646

< 1% match (student papers from 31-Jan-2024)
Class: Postgraduate supervisions 2024
Assignment: Similarity check
Paper ID: 2282858979

< 1% match (Internet from 11-Oct-2020)
https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?lng=en&qid=S0103-18132016000100129&script=sci_arttext&lng=en

< 1% match (Internet from 29-Oct-2022)
<https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/CD/National%20Curriculum%20Statements%20and%20Vocational/CAPS%20SP%20%20FAL%20%20L9%20%20WFB.pdf?ver=2015-01-27-155732-820>

< 1% match (Internet from 25-Jun-2013)
<http://www.oxford.co.za/page/schools/curriculum-information/index>

< 1% match (student papers from 26-Nov-2022)
Submitted to University of Pretoria on 2022-11-20

< 1% match (Internet from 25-May-2016)
http://ulr.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/13678/dissertation_hlaethwa_bd.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1

< 1% match (Internet from 21-Apr-2025)
https://repository.uq.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/102058/Ruder_Needs_2024.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1

< 1% match (Internet from 27-Apr-2022)
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322350536_Expressive_Typography_as_a_Visualisation_of_Ideas

< 1% match (Internet from 30-Sep-2022)
<https://www.academypublication.com/issues/qast/lttrvol04/06/lttr0406.pdf>

Grade 9 learners' interpretation of visual texts: A case of Hlanganani North Circuit, Vhembe West District -Limpopo province by MULALO HULGER NEDZAMBA Student Number: 8702630 Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education UNIVERSITY OF VENDA MA ELT Code: HSMELS 6300 Supervisor: Dr T.E. Sikitime 1 Co-Supervisor: Prof E.K. Klu DECLARATION I, Mulalo Hulger Nedzamba, hereby declare that this thesis of MA degree in English Language Teaching, hereby submitted at the University of Venda, has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other university and that it is my own work in design and execution and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged. Signature June 2025 Date ACKNOWLEDGEMENT I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my amazing supervisor, Dr T.E. Sikitime, and co-supervisor Prof E.K. Klu, for their professional guidance, patience, and support during my study. I extend my gratitude to the schools that participated in this study, providing valuable responses that shed light on the research. I acknowledge the significant role my friends played in encouraging and supporting me throughout. Special thanks to Dr T.G. Neluvhola and Prof S. Mukhola for shedding light when all was still dark. I would like to express my gratitude to Hlekani Mahlaule for the assistance in e-communication with the university. I cannot forget friends who believed in me and fuelled my determination: Mr T.E. Mudau, Dr A. Nemaungane and Ms T.J. Thivhafuni. Special thanks to Mr R.O. Nthangeni for the technical assistance and motivation. Special thanks to my son Muruli for his understanding and enduring support. All this would not have happened without God's grace. I am thankful that He saw me through this study against all odds. Thank You DEDICATION To My Sub A teacher, my Mother, the late Mrs T.C. Lalumbe My father, Mr T.E. Lalumbe, who ignited in me the love of reading by writing plays for radio broadcasting. And my children Pfaniso, Rotondwa and Muruli ABSTRACT The use of linguistic and non-linguistic variables like images, colours and symbols is increasingly becoming a common practice in the contemporary communicative domain. In deviation from previous instances when non-linguistic variables were mainly viewed in separate genres and interpreted as decorative and aesthetic ornaments, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for English First Additional Language brought a shift that acknowledges and elevates the role of visuals in contemporary communication practices. With these developments increasingly manifesting, proponents of multi-literacy question the capacity of contemporary readers to decode meaning presented with multiple modes. Predicated on the theory of Social Semiotics, Grammar of Visual Design, and Relevance Theory, the study primarily aims to critically analyse the interpretations of selected visual texts by selected Grade 9 learners under Hlanganani North

REFERENCE LIST

- Alexander, R. (1997). *Policy and Practice in Primary Education: Local Initiative, National Agenda*. London Routledge.
- Alharahsheh, H.H. and Pius, A., (2020). A review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3), pp.39-43.
- Ally, N. and McLaren, D. (2016). *Fees are an issue at school, too, not just at university. Project rise in partnership with Nelson Mandela Foundation*. City: Ground Up, Press Council Fair.
- Andersen, T.H, Boerii, S.M, Maagero, E and Tonnessen, S. (2015). *Social Semiotics Key Figures, New Directions*. London: Routledge.
- Anderson, R. (2021). *Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). Descriptive Presentation of Qualitative Data*.
- Andrews, T. (2012). What is social constructivism? *The Grounded Theory Review*, 11 (1). 39-46.
- Babbie, E. (2016). *The Practice of Social Research* (14th ed). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Baguley, M., Pullen, B. and Short, M. (2009). In the book *Multiliteracies and Technology Enhanced Education*. pp 1-17.
- Bezemer, J. and Jewitt, C. (2010). *Multimodal analysis, Key issues*. In: I Litosseliti (ed). *Research methods and linguistics*. London: Continuum: pp180-197.
- Birmingham, P. and Wilkinson, D. (2003). *Using research instruments: A guide for researchers*. Routledge.
- Bloom, L. and De Lorenzo R. (2017). Cognitive psychology and visual literacy, *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 29(5), 531-544.

- Blue. J. (2024). Developing students' visual literacy skills. InFocus. Available at: <https://onfocus.enltnl.com/2024/06/18/developing-students-visual-literacy-skills/>
- Bowen, G.A. (2019). Document analysis as a qualitative research method, *Qualitative Research Journal*, 19(2). 123-134 DOI: 10.3316/QRJ0902027
- Braun, V. and Clarke V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Bruner, J.S. (1978). 'The role of dialogue in language acquisition', in Sinclair, A., Jarvella, R.J. and Levelt, W.J. (eds). *The Child's Concept of Language*. New York: Springer, pp. 241-256.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- Burck, C. (2005). Comparing Qualitative Research Methodologies for Systemic Research: The Use of Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis and Narrative Analysis. *Journal of Family Therapy*. 27, 237-262.
- Burmark, L. (2002). *Visual literacy: Learn to see, see to learn*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Callahan, D. (2019). Ethical considerations. In *Basic Benefits and Clinical Guidelines* (pp. 33-44). Routledge.
- Callow, J. (2011). When image and text meet- teaching with visual and multimodal texts. PETTA Paper 181.
- Canterbury Christian Church University. (2014). *An Introduction to Ethics issues and principles in research involving human and animal participants*.
- Cappello. G. (2017). Visual Text as Meaning-Making Tools in Literary Instruction. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 61(2), 167-175.

- Carcamo, M., Cartes, R., Velasquez, N. and Larenas, C. (2016). *The Impact of Multimodal Instruction on the Acquisition of Vocabulary*. Ling. Aplic. Campinas, n (55.1):129-154, 2016.
- Chafe, R. (2024). Different Paradigm Conceptions and Their Implications for Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23 (1), 1-10.
- Chandler, D. (2017). *Semiotics: The basics*. London: Routledge.
- Coetzer, T., Livingston, C. and Barnard, E. (2023). Using visual representations to enhance isiXhosa home language learners' mathematical understanding. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*. 13(1), a1297.
- Connelly, L.M. (2014). *Ethical Consideration in Research Studies*. Medsurg Nursing. Search.proquest.com
- Cooper, D.R., & Schindler, P.S. (2014). *Business research methods* (12th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Creswell, J.W. (2004). *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. United States of America: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches*. 4th ed. SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2020). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2022) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2022). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Dawson, C., (2007). *A Practical Guide to Research Methods* 3rd Edition. Oxford, United Kingdom.
- De Vos, A.S. (ed.). (2001). *Research at grass roots: a primer for the caring professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Department of Basic Education. (2011). *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement*. Grades 7-9. English First Additional Language. Pretoria. South Africa.
- Department of Basic Education. (2014). *Report on the annual National Assessment of 2014 Grades 1 to 6 & 9*. Pretoria: South Africa.
- Department of Education. (2015). *Annual National Assessment of 2014 Diagnostic Report. First Additional Language and Home Language*. Pretoria. South Africa.
- DeSanto-Madeya M.A. and Henly S.J. (2022). Descriptive research design: *A review of the literature and implications for nursing research*. Volume 78, Issue 1, pp14-24.
- Djonov, E. (2018). Social semiotics and multimodal analysis, In J. Bateman et al. eds, *Multimodality* (pp35-53). De Gruyter.
- Dressman, M. (2016). Reading as the Interpretation of Signs. Vol.51, No.1, *Literacy or Literacies?* pp.111-136. International Literacy Association.
- Drezdzon, B.T. (2019). Visual texts and critical thinking: An analysis of student responses. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*, (28 1-2), 75-92.
- Eco, U. (1979). *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Edwards, S.J.L. (2005). *Research participation and the right to withdraw*. Bioethics 19(2):112-30 DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8519.2005.00429.x University College London.

- Elkins, J. (ed.). (2008). *Visual literacy*. London: Routledge.
- Fadel, C. (2008). *Multimodal learning through media. What the research says*. San Jose, CA: Cisco Systems.
- Freedman, K. (2013). Visual literacy: Learning to see. In R.W. Proctor and A. Colombo (eds). *New developments in visual literacy* (pp. 11-25).
- Frick, P., Kendeou, P. and Schuler. (2024). Knowledge revision processes during reading: How pictures influence the aviation of outdated information. *Memory & Cognition*, 53(2), pp. 547-567. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13421-024-01586-9>.
- Garrison, C., and Ehringhaus M. (2018),
- Grant, C. and Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a Theoretical Framework in Dissertation Research: Creating the Blueprint for Your House. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Educating, Practice, and Research*, 4(2), 12-26.
- Graziano, A.M. and Raulin, M.L. (2020). *Research Methods: a Process of Inquiry*. United States of America: Pearson.
- Gualberto, C. and Kress, G. (2018). 'Social Semiotics', *Chapter in International Encyclopaedia of Media Literacy*, edited by Rence Hoob and Paul Mihailidis, NY: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Guba, E.G., and Lincoln, Y.S. (2016). *Competing paradigms in qualitative research*. In N.K. Dezin and Y.S Lincoln (eds). *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp 105-117). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E.E. (2012). *Applied Thematic Analysis*. SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.
- Gumperzt, J. (1999). On International Sociolinguistic method in S. Saranghi and C. Roberts (eds). *Talk, work, and institutional order. Discourse in medical, mediation, and management settings*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 453 – 471

- Gunther, K. (2005). *Literacy in the New Media Age*. New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Guthrie, J.T. & Klauda, S.L. (2014). Effects of classroom practices on reading comprehension, engagement, and motivations for adolescents. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 49 (4), 387-416.
- Hardwick, C.S. (1977). *Semiotic and Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. pierce and Victoria Lady Welby*. Indiana University Press.
- Hasan, N., Rana, R.U., Chowdhury, S., Dola, A.J. and Rony, M.K.K. (2021). Ethical considerations in research. *Journal of Nursing Research, Patient Safety and Practise (JNRPSP)*, 1(01), pp.1-4.
- Hassan, M. (2024), Descriptive research design-Types, methods and examples, ResearchMethod.net.<https://researchmethod.net/descriptive-research-design/>
- Hativa, N. (2013). *Student Ratings of instruction: Recognizing Effective Teaching*. Oron Publications.
- Hesse-Biber, S.N. (2016). *Mixed methods research: A mixed method reader*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Hoopes, J. (1991). *Peirce on Signs-Writings on Semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce*. Chapel Hill & London: The University Of North Carolina Press.
- Jewitt, C. (2013). The visual in learning and teaching: A social semiotic approach. *Journal on Visual Literacy*, 32(1), 1-18.
- Jewitt, C. (2020). *An introduction to multimodality*. London: Routledge.
- Jewitt, C., Kress, G., Ogborn, J. and Tsatsarelis, C. (2001). Exploring learning through visual, actional and linguistic communication: the multimodal environment of a science classroom. *Educational Review*, 53(1), pp.5-18.
- Johnson, B. and Christensen, L. (2004). *Educational Research. Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*. United States of America: Pearson Education.

- Kay, L. Sabine T. and Marissa, K.L.E. (2017). *Multimodal analysis for critical thinking. Learning, Media and Technology*, 42:2, 147-170, DOI:10.1080/174398884.2016.1101003.
- Khan, Z., Lew, Y.K. and Sinkovics, R.R. (2024). Paradigms in qualitative IB research: trends, analysis and recommendations. *Management International Review*, 64, pp.1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-024-00529-5>
- Kim, H., Sefcik, J.S. and Bradway, C. (2017). Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: A systematic review. *Research in nursing & health*, 40(1), pp.23-42.
- King, N. (2004). *Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In Cassell C. (Eds), essential guide to qualitative methods in organisational research* (pp. 257-270). London, UK: Sage.
- Kouam, A.W.F. (2024). Interpretivism or Constructivism: Navigating research paradigms in social science research. ResearchGate.
- Kress, G and Van Leeuwen T. (1996). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, London: R: Routledge.
- Kress, G and Van Leeuwen T. (2001). *Multimodal Discourse-The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold.
- Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the New Media Age*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design* 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2017). What is mode? In C. Jewitt (ed). *The Routledge Handbook of multimodal analysis* (pp.54-74).
- Kress, G. and van Leeuwen T. (2020) *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design*. 3rd edn. London: Routledge.

- Kress, G. (2021). *Multimodality: A social Semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge.
- Lawson, M.J. and Mayer, R.E. (2024). Generative learning activities for online multimedia learning: When summarizing is effective but drawing is not. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, Article 1452385. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1452385>
- Leedy, P.D. and Ormrod, J.E. (2005). *Practical Research Planning and Design*. Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Liu, J. (2013). *Visual Images Interpretive Strategies in Multimodal Texts*. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol.4, N0.6, pp.1259-1263. Academy Publisher.
- Machin, D. & Mayr, A. (2012). The case for multimodal critical discourse analysis. *Visual Communication*, 11(3), 291-306.
- Macken-Horarik M. (2016). Building a metalanguage for interpreting multimodal literature: Insights from systemic functional semiotics in two case study classrooms. Australia.
- Maguire, M., and Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars. URL: <http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/335>.
- Martins, F.S, da Cunha, J.A. and Serra, F.A.R (2018). Secondary Data in Research – Uses and Opportunities. *Ibero American Journal Of Strategic Management (IJSM)*, 17(4), 01-04.doi:10.5585/ijsm.v17i4.2723
- Martyn, S. (2008). Descriptive Research Design. Retrieved Oct 05, 2022 from Explorable.com: <https://explorable.com/descriptive-research-design>
- Mayer, R.E. (2003). Elements of a science of e-learning. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 29(3), pp 297-313.

- Mayer, R.E. (2014). Multimedia learning. In J.M. Spencer et al. (eds), *Encyclopedia of Educational Technology* (pp 477-483). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Mayer, R.E. (2021). Multimedia learning. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, K.S. and McNamara, D.S. (2021). Multidimensional Knowledge in Text Comprehension Framework. *Educational Psychologist*, 56(3), pp.196-214.
- Merriam, S.B. (2018). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mills, G. E. (2018). Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher. 5th ed, Boston: Pearson. (Ch.2)
- Nieswiadomy, R.M. (1993). *Foundations of nursing research* 2nd ed. Norwalk, CT: Appleton & Lange.
- Nowell L.S., Norris J.M., White D.E and Moules N.J. (2017). *Thematic Analysis. Striving to meet the Trustworthiness*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Ntshikila, N., Condry, J.L., Meda, L. and Phillips, H.N. (2022). Five Grade 7 learners' understanding of comprehension skills at a quintile 5 school in South Africa. *Reading & Writing*, 13(1), a324.
- O'Donnell, A. M. (2006). The role of scaffolding in PBL environments. In H.G. Schmidt & T.D. Koschmann (Eds.). *New directions for teaching and learning*.
- Ogbonnayan, U. I., & Awuah, F. K. (2019). Quintile ranking of schools in South Africa and learners' achievement in probability. *Statistics Education Research Journal*, 18(1). 106-119.
- Olifant, E. (2015). Exploring the effects of a reading intervention programme on the reading skills of Grade R learners. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 5(2). 1-12.

- Olshansky B. (2008). *The power of pictures: Creating pathways to literacy through art*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Omwirhiren, E.M. (2015). Enhancing academic achievement and retention in senior secondary school chemistry through discussion and lecture methods. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(21),155-161.
- Oranga, J. and Matere, A. (2023). Qualitative research: essence, types and advantages. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10, e1001. [hptt://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111001](https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111001).
- Panofsky, E (1995). *Meaning in the visual arts*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Peterson, M. A. (2012). *Visual semantics: A cognitive approach*. Oxford University Press.
- Phanthpongdam, L. and Charumanee, N. (2019). The use of Visual literacy strategies to enhance reading & critical thinking abilities. *Journal of liberal arts Price of Songkla*, 11(2), 44-67.
- Picciano, A. (2009). Blending with purpose: The multimodal model. *Journal of the Research Centre for Educational Technology*, SCD, pp.4-14
- Piggot-Irvine., E., Ferkins, L., Rowe, W. and Sankaran, S. (eds.), (2021). *The Evaluative Study of Action Research: Rigorous Findings on Process and Impact from Around the World*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ponelis, S.R. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop interpretive understanding. *International Journal of qualitative Methods*, 22.pp. 1-14. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- Postman, N. (1985). *Amusing ourselves to death*. Public discourse in the age of show business. New York: Penguin Books.
- Pourhossen, A, Nisan, H and Masoumech, S. (2011). *The effect of Multimodal Learning Models on language teaching and learning. Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. Vol 1. No 10, pp1321 – 1327. Resnik D. B. (2020). What is ethics in

research & why is it important? National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Pretorius, E. J. (2002). Reading ability and academic performance in South Africa. An update. *Journal for Language Teaching*, 36(1), 67-78.

Rehman, A.A. and Alharthi, K., 2016. An introduction to research paradigms. *International journal of educational investigations*, 3(8), pp.51-59.

Rice, M., Wijekurmar, K.K., Lambright, K., and Stack, A. (2024). Promoting Inference Generation: Using Questions and Strategy Instruction to Support Upper Elementary Students. *The Reading teacher*, 78(2), 121-130.

Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. Sage Publications. Pp. 12-15, 23-25.

Saldana, J. (2021). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 4th ed. SAGE Publications.

Saussure, F. (1916/1983). *Course in General Linguistics*, transl. Roy Harris. London: Duckworth.

Scott, L.M. (1994). *Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric*.

Schneider, B. (2013). Meaning-making in educational contexts: The role of narrative and identify. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 45 (8), 845 – 857. <https://doi.org/10.00131857.2012.715385>.

Seiter, E. (1992). "Semiotics, Structuralism, and Television", in Allen, Robert C. (ed). *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd ed., London: Routledge: 31-66.

Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R. (2020). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach*. John Wiley & Sons.

Serafini, F. (2011). Expanding perspectives for comprehending visual images in multimodal texts. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54(5): 342-350

- Serafini, F. (2014). *Reading multimodal texts: Perceptual, cognitive, and socio-cultural considerations*. Teacher College Press. New York
- Serafini, F. (2017). Visual literacy. In *Oxford research encyclopaedia of education*.
- Sibanda, M. Dippenaar, H. and Swart, A. (2024). 'The teacher's role in teaching reading comprehension skills to Grade 9 English Home Language learners', *Reading & Writing*, 15(1), pp1-11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v15i1.495>
- Singer, E. & Vinson, L. (2017). *Research ethics in the real world: Issues and solutions for health and social care*. London: Routledge.
- Sithole, A. (2024). Choosing a qualitative research paradigm for social sciences: A literature review for educational researchers. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 8(12), pp3945-3954.
- Smith, R., Snow, P. C., Serry, T. A. and Hammond, L. (2021). The Role of Background Knowledge in Reading Comprehension: A Critical Review. *Reading Psychology*, 42(3), pp214-240.
- Snow, C. E. (2002). *Reading for understanding: Toward an R&D program in reading comprehension*. RAND Corporation.
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and cognition*. Harvard University Press.
- Sturken, M. and Cartwright, L. (2001). *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual culture*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Sullivan, H. M., Fenstermacher, K., & Hudson, K. (2020). Sampling in qualitative research: A guide to best practices. *Journal of Nursing Research*, 28(1), 25-34.
- Swayne, L.E. & McKenzie J. (2022). *Marketing research: An applied approach*, 7th ed. Cengage Learning. Melbourne.
- Sweller, J. (2013). Cognitive load theory in Hattie & E.M. Anderman (eds.), *International guide to student achievement* (pp.230-232). London: Routledge.

- Tegan, G. (2023). Exploratory Research | Definition, Guide, & Examples.
<https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/exploratory-research/>
- Tracy, S. J. (2020). Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact (2nd ed). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Tshetshe, Z.R. (2024). Coding from data to themes: An iterative journey through constructivist grounded theory. Doctoral thesis, University of Cape Town.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- Unsworth, L. (2014). Evaluating visual literacy: Image analysis and interpretation for humanities. Peter Lang.
- Vasquez, V.M. (2017). Negotiating critical literacies with young learners. London: Routledge.
- Vladimirova, G. (2017). Typography as a determining factor in the visual communication design. *KNOWLEDGE-International Journal*, 19(3), pp.1333-1337.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wells, I. and Giacco, D. (2024). Theoretical framework used to inform qualitative mental health research: a focus on positivism, interpretivism, and critical realism. *BJPsych Advances*, 31(5).
- Woodrow, L. (2022). *Introducing Researching English for Specific Purposes*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Yin, R.K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. USA: Sage Publications. California.