

**THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH ACADEMIC  
LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AMONG GRADE 7  
LEARNERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS**

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

in the subject

**COMPARATIVE EDUCATION**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**PROMOTER: PROF EM LEMMER**

**MARCH 2007**

## Declaration

I declare that: THE ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references

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# Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to express my sincerest thanks to my promoter, Professor E.M. Lemmer. Her keen interest, objective yet friendly criticism, ability to enhance the researcher's desire to present original ideas were greatly appreciated.

I also acknowledge with thanks the generous assistance and contributions made by:

- Professor E. Pretorius from the Linguistics Department, for her assistance with data collection;
- Professor Kamper, for his assistance with the research methodology;
- Dr. Nicolaas Claassen for his assistance with data analysis;
- The Unisa library staff for their assistance with literature search and material supply;
- The principals, educators and learners who participated in the study and for their willing co-operation.

The ultimate thank you goes to my husband Peter for encouragement throughout my studies, to my children Nzalama, Sagwata and Matimu for your understanding and support and to my mother Elizabeth Ntombizodwa, for always being there for me.

Tintswalo Vivian Manyike

# Abstract

Language proficiency in the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) is essential for academic success. In South Africa and elsewhere, many secondary school learners lack the required academic proficiency in English, the language of learning and teaching. The English language proficiency of Xitsonga speaking Grade 7 learners was evaluated in order to suggest ways in which these learners could be helped to maximise academic success. The author investigated theories of first and second language acquisition by means of a literature study and presented an overview of language policy in South African schooling before and after 1994.

A sample of Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners was selected from three secondary schools in the Tshwane metropolitan area, Gauteng Province. Language proficiency levels were determined by means of the Human Sciences Research Council's Standardised English Reading and Writing Proficiency Tests. These tests were also translated into Xitsonga and administered to the learners. The tests were administered a month apart in each of the schools.

The tests revealed that:

- there is a significant correlation between the learner's performance in the reading and writing performance test for both languages
- the learners' reading and oral skills in both languages correlate
- irrespective of the level of language proficiency, most learners performed poorly in their reading skills, such as, recognising inferences related to tone, punctuation, different types of discourse as well as the prevailing atmosphere.

The greatest weaknesses were in learners':

- failure to understand instructions, which meant that their responses to task demands were inadequate
- inappropriate use of tone register and spelling errors
- incorrect use of punctuation and verb tenses.

The analysis of the learner's performance in both English and Xitsonga showed that these learners were generally not capable of handling the requirements of the Grade

7 curriculum. It was recommended that the learners be guided to make optimal use of existing facilities, such as, libraries. This could enhance the learners' language development. Using learners' L1 as a medium of instruction for cognitively demanding texts and intensive in-service and pre-service training for language teachers are also recommended.

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APPENDIX A  
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APPENDIX D

# Chapter 1

## Background, Problem Formulation and Aims

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the author presents a brief history of the South African education system so as to provide a background to the research problem. This is followed by the problem statement, the aims of the study and the research methods used in the data gathering. An assessment of the selection of the research participants as well as the research instruments is included. This is followed by a discussion of the instruments used for data gathering, the test administration procedure and how the data was analysed. An evaluation of the test validity and reliability follows with the conclusion thereafter.

In order to understand the nature of education in South Africa, it is vital to examine the development that has taken place in the field of education. South Africa has a long and involved educational history and consequently the discussion focuses on the relevant factors only. Due to colonialism and growth of mining in South Africa, a number of social groups emerged (Claassen 1996:460). Social relations based on colour and class developed which directly affected education. White children were given free, compulsory education. Education for black people was left in the hands of the missionaries who constantly experienced a shortage of funds. As a result education became unequal and segregated.

Although a Commission of Enquiry was set up in 1936 in order to identify problems in black education, no improvements were made. As the South African population grew, the need for schools increased. The National Party then introduced the so called 'homeland' policies and pass laws, which placed restrictions on black people in urban areas. This controlled freedom of movement for black people as well as making access to education difficult by establishing separate education departments. According to Christie (1991: 67), black people were confined to residential areas with poor service maintenance.

In 1953 the Bantu Education Act was passed (Van Zyl 2002:6). All schools had to be registered with the government. This led to a number of schools closing down. Schools were controlled by the state which meant that the curriculum was also manipulated by the state. This was seen as the beginning of apartheid education. Prior to the Bantu Education Act of 1953, mother-tongue education took place during the first four years of schooling. Subsequent to this Act, mother-tongue education was extended to the first eight years of schooling (Van Zyl 1997:69).

The apartheid system entrenched the patterns of educational inequality. This contributed to the emergence of stronger patterns of social class. From the late 1970's, according to Van Zyl (2004), there was a huge increase in the numbers of black learners enrolling in Bantu education. There was however a high drop- out rate in the lower grades. As society expanded, the education system grew and changed. In 1975 black learners were expected to make a change from English as a medium of instruction to the 50-50 policy in standard five (Grade 7), where half of the school subjects were taught in English and the other half in Afrikaans (Heugh 2000:46). This, according to Van Zyl (2000:14), played a role in the Soweto uprising which took place in 1976.

Heugh (2000:48) claims that the apartheid years led to the formation of separate goals: social and economic development for the dominant minority, and social and economic underdevelopment for the marginalised majority. Schools were viewed as instruments of ideological oppression. Until 1996 nineteen separate education departments existed.

Two major problems have arisen from the language policy during the apartheid period. The change from mother-tongue education to English caused many problems as many learners did not have sufficient proficiency in English to cope with the syllabus. According to Macdonald (1990:70), a vocabulary of at least 5000 English words is required to cope with the curriculum, whereas learners were reported to have only 800 English words. Another documented problem is the nature of the syllabus. The African language learners were subjected to cognitively impoverished curriculum making it difficult for them to cope with the English curriculum. Bantu education resulted in resistance to first language (L1) education and an overestimation of the role of English as the key to success

in education. According to Booysse (2000:34), in 1981 the De Lange Commission's report recognised the education crisis and recommended a move towards equality in education.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the African National Congress (ANC) began to develop policies in order to address the past discrimination towards African people. The un-banning of the ANC, the release of Nelson Mandela, and the first democratic elections in 1994 changed the mood to one of hope. Black learners had high expectations regarding the developments in education, but poverty has continued to affect most schools. The inequalities that existed in education still need to be rectified. According to Chisholm (2005:15), the majority of rural and township schools still reveal great deprivation.

In post-apartheid South Africa, eleven official languages have been promulgated: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, isiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, English and Afrikaans. According to Pluddemann (2001:26), isiZulu is the most common language spoken in South Africa. This is followed by isiXhosa and Afrikaans. Sepedi is third whilst English is the fourth most commonly spoken language. In 1995, the Language Task Action Group (LANGTAG) was established. This was in order to investigate the needs and priorities of the country (Adler 2001:10). According to Adler (2001:27), LANGTAG recommended a multilingual policy for South Africa, as well as widespread use of the African languages, in order to counter-balance the effects of English instruction. Education in South Africa has begun to focus on multilingualism resulting in a changing language policy.

### **1.1.1 Language diversity in South African schools**

South Africa is a multilingual, multicultural country whose various languages and cultures interact in all spheres, including education. Recently there has been a shift in language policy in favour of education in the home tongue. Due to lack of appropriate resources and large numbers of learners in the classrooms this change has not always been implemented. According to Kapp (2000:23), recent research has shown that many African language speakers believe that English is the most important medium of instruction in schools. A combination of language attitudes and socio-economic conditions of learners has led to various problems in the education system. Historically the



inequality that existed in education has had a negative impact as have the numerous policies that have been implemented.

Many learners have been subjected to subtractive bilingualism which is a decline in L1 development as a result of the acquisition of the L2. Few learners have had the opportunity of additive bilingualism. Additive bilingualism refers to a form of bilingualism which occurs when learners add L2 to their intellect while continuing to develop their first language conceptually and academically. According to researchers, the type of bilingual programme used will have an effect on first language (L1) and second language (L2) development (Pluddemann 2001:28).

Cognitive academic language proficiency is the language proficiency which is required in order to succeed in an academic setting (Cummins 2001:58). It is different from conversational language where clues are used. Academic language proficiency occurs in context reduced situations, and is required in higher order thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis (Cummins 2001:58).

The Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis formulated by Cummins (2001:71) describes the interdependence between the development of (L1) and (L2). Cummins (2001:34) states that this hypothesis is crucial in understanding bilingual learners' academic development as well as in the planning of appropriate programmes for learners. According to the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis, the learners' L2 competence is dependent on the level of L1 development at the time when L2 is introduced. Furthermore, Cummins (2001:39) states that a child, who is subjected to intensive exposure to L1 in their home environment, as well as L2, will have high levels of competence in the L2 without adverse effects on the L1. However, if the L1 is poorly developed, intensive exposure to L2 will interfere with the continuing development of L1. Cummins (2000:13) suggests that there are two levels of communicative competence. The first level is Basic Interpersonal Skills (BICS), which is said to occur in context embedded situations, which are rich in non-cues. The second level is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which occurs in context-reduced academic situations and is required in higher order thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis. It takes two to three years of being immersed in a language to acquire BICS, and six to seven years to acquire CALP. A number of researchers agree that the acquisition of cognitive academic

language proficiency in L2 may take six to seven years, before adequate levels of proficiency comparable to that of L1 learners are attained (Met 1994; Cummins 1984; Ramirez 1992).

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Against this background, the main research question is formulated: How effective is the acquisition of English language proficiency among Xitsonga speaking Grade 7 learners in South African schools?

In endeavouring to address the main research question, the following sub-questions were formulated:

1. How is language proficiency described in a linguistically diverse society? What models of language proficiency exist and how are they critiqued?
2. What is the policy and language practice in South African schooling with reference to the democratic period?
3. What is the English academic language proficiency of selected Xitsonga speaking Grade 7 learners in the Tshwane metropolitan area? How does this compare with their Xitsonga language proficiency?
4. What recommendations can be made to improve the acquisition of English academic language proficiency among Grade 7 learners in South African schools?

## **1.3 AIMS OF STUDY**

The study aims to:

- explain what language proficiency entails in a linguistically diverse environment and to discuss the various models of language proficiency which are used
- describe the language policies and practices in South African education with reference to the democratic period from 1994
- determine the English academic language proficiency of Xitsonga speaking Grade 7 learners in selected schools in the Tshwane metropolitan area
- compare the English academic language proficiency with Xitsonga academic language proficiency of Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners

- make recommendations on how to improve on the acquisition of English academic language proficiency among Grade 7 learners in South African schools.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The problem is explored using a literature review as well as an empirical investigation. The literature review entailed the identification, tracing and analysis of documents containing information relating to the stated problem. These documents were professional journals, books, dissertations and papers delivered at conferences. The aim of reviewing literature is to provide a theoretical framework for the empirical investigation.

##### **1.4.1 Empirical investigation**

In the empirical investigation a quantitative approach was used. The focus of the study was to determine the level of acquisition of English and Xitsonga academic language proficiency among Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners in selected schools.

###### *1.4.1.1 Selection of schools and respondents*

Three township schools were selected in the Tshwane metropolitan area. Two schools are situated in Atteridgeville and the other school is situated in Mamelodi. Two classes of Grade 7 learners were tested in School 1, and one Grade 7 class from the other two schools as there was only one Grade 7 class in the two schools respectively. The number of learners who participated in the study was 160.

The criteria used to select the three schools were:

- accessibility to the researcher
- availability of information rich participants
- Xitsonga being offered both as a subject and the language of learning from Grade R to Grade 3.

a) Criteria for sample selection

The subjects selected for this study were Grade 7 learners. All subjects were L2 English speakers and their L1 was predominantly Xitsonga. This included learners who speak Xitsonga as their L1 in their home and social environment, even if they have acquired other African languages. Within the urban context, it was difficult to locate learners who speak only Xitsonga because of the large number of different languages spoken within a small area. Often the speakers in these areas tend to use a variety of different languages that occur within the community. Information about the home language of the learners was obtained from the teachers and then confirmed with the learners who were selected for the study. Xitsonga was chosen as it is one of the minority languages in South Africa and it is government policy to promote all eleven languages.

Grade 7 learners were chosen because:

- Grade 7 represents an important stage in the development of academic language proficiency; it was therefore chosen in order to determine the learner's ability to cope with the language demands of the curriculum, which requires Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 2004); five to seven years is needed to develop CALP in a L2, by the time learners reach Grade 7 they should have had sufficient exposure to both the academic content and to English L2
- Grade 7 is also the final year of primary school before the learner progresses to senior school level where the demands and complexity of the curriculum increases; there is often more use of de-contextualised forms of language; there is therefore less opportunity to foster language learning in high school due to the classroom being less facilitative; it may be too late for the L2 learners.

*1.4.1.2 Data gathering*

Data was gathered by means of a standardised language test, that is, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Achievement Tests for English Second Language in Grade 7. The use of standardised tests was aimed at establishing the learners' present level of proficiency and competence.

In order to collect data whereby the questions posed, as well as the statement of the research problem of this study, could be answered the following instruments were used:

- Reading Proficiency Test in English (RPT)
- Writing Proficiency Test in English (WPT).

Moreover, translated versions of the above tests were also used:

- Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test
- Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test.

Each of these instruments and the rationale for the use of each are described in the next paragraphs.

#### a) Reading Proficiency Test in English

The Reading Performance Test (RPT) in English is a standardised test incorporating the aims of an achievement test, as well as a proficiency test. The use of the test was aimed at determining the learners reading performance level within the range of junior secondary level (that is Grades 7, 8 and 9). This test is designed for L2 speakers.

These tests were used because they served as an objective, valid and reliable indicator of the learners reading proficiency, that is, the ability to get meaning from print. The use of a reading proficiency test was based on the assumption that the learner's ability to indicate a correct answer from the options given in written form was a valid indication of their reading ability in English (Chamberlain et al. 1992:16).

The English Reading Proficiency Test was translated to Xitsonga by the researcher in order to test the learner's performance in their L1. Full details on the translation process are given in 4.5.4.

## b) Writing Proficiency Test

The Writing Performance Test (WPT) in English is a standardised test incorporating the aims of the research (Roux 1997:i). The use of a writing performance test was aimed at determining the learners writing performance level at Grade 7. The test is applicable to L2 learners.

The use of the Writing Performance Test was based on the assumptions that:

- English proficiency could be demonstrated through receptive skills (reading and listening), as well as productive skills (speaking and writing); the Reading Proficiency Test was used to measure Grade 7 learner's receptive skills, and the Writing Proficiency Test was used to measure their productive skills; these two instruments therefore complement each other
- English language proficiency could be accurately assessed in terms of the learner's overall ability to communicate in writing by using:
  - an appropriate register for the situation or task, linguistic cohesion and ease of expression
  - correct words, phrases and sentence structure
  - being original and able to employ emotive and figurative language
  - giving a correct and apt response to a given assignment, as well as demonstrating richness and logical flow of thought and argument
  - appropriate punctuation, spelling, paragraphing and format.

The primary aim of the test was to provide an objective, valid and reliable measurement of Grade 7 learners' general achievement in L2 by means of multiple choice questions.

The second objective was to diagnose possible weaknesses in the learner's language proficiency. For example, specific aspects where the application of knowledge of writing related skills could be used were introduced as well as language structures which are clustered were used to provide for the diagnostic properties of the test. This test gave an insight into the language development of Grade 7 learners. It helped the researcher to determine the level of proficiency of the learners in selected schools in the Tshwane metropolitan area. The tests provided a base for a more detailed description of the learners' skills, rather than a means of proving something.

The English Writing Proficiency Test was translated into Xitsonga by the researcher in order to test the learners' performance in their L1.

Full details of the translation process are provided in section 4.5.4.

#### *1.4.1.3 Test administration procedure*

The English Reading and Writing Proficiency Tests were administered by the researcher and a colleague, Professor E. Pretorius, who is a lecturer in the Linguistic Department at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The Xitsonga Reading and Writing Proficiency Tests were administered by the researcher, who is a Xitsonga L1 speaker, with the assistance of a colleague, also a Xitsonga L1 speaker. The testers were familiar with the classroom situation as well as the nature of classroom testing. The tester was trained by the researcher in terms of the test protocol. Assessments were carried out at each school during the school day. The assessment took a maximum of one hour and 30 minutes to complete at each school.

The test was administered in the following sequence: Section 1, the English Reading Proficiency Test, was completed first within the maximum time of 40 minutes. Learners were then given a five minutes break after which Section 2, which is the English Writing Proficiency Test, was written within a maximum period of 30 minutes.

In order to reduce the effect that testing in one language may have had on the results of the other language test, learners in the first two schools received assessment in English first and later in Xitsonga whereas the third school wrote the Xitsonga proficiency test first and the English test later. There was approximately one month between testing of each language. A month's delay is considered enough time to avoid the learning effect (Macmillan & Schumacher 1993: 65).

#### *1.4.1.4 Data analysis*

Data analysis was done with the help of an expert, Dr Nicolaas Claassen, who is responsible for Research and Development at the Human Sciences Research Council. In the past Dr Claassen was responsible for the development of psychological tests, especially cognitive assessment tests, and their standardisation and analysis for the Human Sciences Research Council.

Dr Claassen, who is an experienced researcher, employed the following statistical procedures to analyse data:

- descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations, minimum and maximum score and ranges) were calculated for the total test score and each section of the English and Xitsonga tests within each school context assessed
- total score and scores for each section of the test in English and Xitsonga were compared within each group of subjects using a paired sample t- test (Howell 1997: 67)
- results obtained on each section of the test for English and Xitsonga were compared within each school using descriptive statistics (means)
- on both the English and Xitsonga tests, the MANOVA was also used to assess the contextual effect of each school
- a paired sample t-test was used to assess the significance of the differences between English and Xitsonga. This analysis was intended to establish the relative proficiency in English and Xitsonga in each of the learner groups.

Trustworthiness of the data was established by re-checking and comparing the data from the different sources. This was followed by data interpretation. This enabled the researcher to attach significance to particular results and put patterns into an analytical framework.

#### *1.4.1.5 Validity and reliability of the tests*

The research instruments used were validated and their reliability tested by using experts' opinions and pilot testing. Reliability was addressed by the researcher, with Professor Pretorius's help, by going through a few selected scripts and guidelines on how to



effectively mark the scripts without discrepancies. The results were rechecked by the researcher with Dr Claassen's help to see if they were correctly entered and to check if there had not been mistakes in the manner in which these marks were entered.

#### *1.4.1.6 Limitations*

The main limitation of the study is that the researcher was unable to test learners in different learning contexts, such as, rural, township, and suburban schools. In the South African context the geographic position of the schools determines the quality of education which the learner receives. This is exemplified in the unchanging demographics in both rural and township schools which represent the apartheid past.

Another limitation of the study lies in the fact that the researcher was unable to test the learners' communicative competence empirically to determine their proficiency levels in this regard. Research shows the importance of testing learner's communicative competence. However, financial and time constraints prevented the researcher doing this. Moreover, the researcher felt that academic language proficiency, which is essential for academic success, can best be assessed by using both the reading and writing performance tests.

The research instrument used in empirical investigation is another reason for concern. The researcher used the only available standardised tests available in South Africa from the Human Sciences Research Council. These materials, which are only available in English, are outdated.

Nonetheless the test results obtained give a clear enough indication of what is happening in South African schools. The results cannot, however, be generalised as learners from different geographic contexts were not tested.

## **1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **1.5.1 Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS)**

Basic interpersonal communicative competence is the first level of communicative competence which deals with face to face conversations. In face to face conversation meaning is supported by a range of contextual cues provided by the concrete situation, gestures, intonations and facial expressions. This type of proficiency allows learners to function in everyday life such as playing with friends and expressing hunger. Cummins (2000:46) claims that it takes two to three years of being immersed in a language to acquire BICS.

### **1.5.2 Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)**

Cognitive academic language proficiency is the second level of communicative competence, which occurs in context, reduced academic situations, and is required in higher order thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis. Cognitive academic language proficiency is less visible in its semantic and functional aspect and relates to skills which are required outside the immediate everyday communicative situations. CALP skills are said to show a high correlation with verbal sections of intelligence tests. CALP skills indicate the language skills the learners are suppose to have in order to cope with academic tasks, where the medium of instruction is different from their L1. According to Cummins (2000: 47), it may take six to seven years for the L2 learner to acquire cognitive academic language proficiency.

### **1.5.3 First language (L1) acquisition**

This is the language one learned first, knows best, uses most and identifies with whilst being identified as a native speaker of it by others. This definition implies that a child's L1 may not be his/ her native language. A person can have more than one first language depending on the linguistic environment in which he/she finds himself/ herself.

#### **1.5.4 Second language (L2) acquisition**

A second or additional language is any language learned after the age of three years, or learned in a formal setting for example at school or kindergarten

#### **1.6 CHAPTER DIVISION**

This thesis is organised accordingly:

In Chapter 1 the background to the study is presented as are the formulation of the research questions and the study aims.

In Chapter 2 the theories of L1 and L2 acquisition are presented, as well as a description of how language proficiency is defined in a linguistically diverse environment. Factors influencing L2 acquisition and the different language proficiency models used in schools are also included.

In Chapter 3 a discussion on language policies in South African schooling, with reference to the democratic period, takes place.

In Chapter 4 the research methods used for data gathering are described as well as the selection of standardised tests. An account of these tests, their administration and scoring procedures, data analysis, including their validity and reliability is also given. Assumptions of the research and ethical considerations are presented.

The results of the empirical investigation are revealed in Chapter 5. In addition there is an examination and conclusion concerning these results.

Recommendations on how to improve on the acquisition of English academic language proficiency among Grade 7 learners in South Africa is presented in Chapter 6, as well as a conclusion.

## **1.7 CONCLUSION**

The study attempts to investigate the acquisition of academic English language proficiency among Xitsonga speaking Grade 7 learners in three selected township schools in the Tshwane metropolitan area. In the following chapter the background to the research is presented, together with an outline of the research methods used in the investigation. The research methods used were mostly quantitative using standardised tests.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theories of First and Second Language Acquisition**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the author seeks to give a clear definition of what it means to be proficient in a language and also to discuss the various L1 and L2 acquisition models and how they are critiqued. Theories of L1 acquisition will be discussed in order to get a clear understanding of what learning a L2 entails. Second language learning in the classroom environment will then be considered in order to show how L2 theories were influenced by L1 learning in a natural environment.

This chapter draws on theories surrounding bilingualism and learning which presents bilingualism as either adding to children's learning abilities or subtracting from them; depending on both the social and learning situation in which children find themselves.

#### **2.2 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY DEFINED**

Language proficiency has been defined as the ability to use a language accurately and appropriately in its oral and written forms in a variety of settings (Cloud et al. 2000:60). This definition incorporates the four aspects of language namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. The first two aspects represent oral language and the last two aspects represent written language. Although the four aspects of language are closely related, they can develop independently of one another, especially when it is not the learner's L1. Thus oral proficiency is in most cases developed outside the school environment without any exposure to written language.

On the other hand it is also possible to learn English as a foreign language in the home country without having much exposure to or practice with spoken English. While listening

and reading represent receptive skills, speaking and writing represent expressive skills. Receptive skills develop ahead of expressive skills because receiving information is easier than giving it (Cummins 2003:15). Most learners understand more than they can express. The essential aspect of academic language proficiency is the ability to make complex meanings explicit in either oral or written modalities of language itself, rather than by means of contextual or paralinguistic cues, for instance, gestures and intonations.

Proficiency in all these aspects of language is rarely equal in both the languages that a bilingual person uses. The person who is equally proficient in all aspects of both native and second language is called a balanced bilingual. Cummins (2001:37) claims that balanced bilingualism is an exception than a rule. Most bilinguals have more proficiency in some aspects of one language than the other, and it is not always the native language that is the more proficient one (Cummins 2001:36). Proficiency also varies depending on the function, and context of communication. The extent to which language is conceptualised makes a difference on how easily it is processed.

Language that is highly conceptualised is easier to use and is learned more quickly than language that is experienced in a reduced context. Proficiency also varies depending on the function, purpose and context of communication (Lamberger 1997:176). Language used in informal social settings, particularly about concrete topics, may be easier to master than language that is used in more formal settings especially when the content is more abstract and cognitively demanding (Cummins 2001:68).

### **2.3 FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Common knowledge about language acquisition is based on the two viewpoints that,

- a) parents teach language to their children and
- b) children acquire language by imitating the language that surrounds them.

These are the answers to how children acquire their L1 and different theories emphasise either (a) or (b). It is therefore, the aim of a psycho-linguist to find out how much of human language ability is innate and how much is shaped by the environment. This question is known as the nature-nurture debate. Most scholars today agree that both

innate and environmental factors play a role in language development but are divided as to which is the more important of the two.

### **2.3.1 Stages of first language development**

Before children learn to match words to the concepts they refer to, they have to go through several important preliminary stages to familiarise themselves with non-linguistic forms of communication such as facial expressions, gaze and gestures (Brown 2000:16).

During their first year children are often heavily dependent on the non-linguistic cues involved in communication such as gestures, actions, facial expressions, gaze and tone of voice. Some of the earliest sounds include involuntary grunts and sighs. Smiling begins within the first few months as an involuntary muscle spasm (Brown 2000:17). Gradually, children realise that smiling and crying can elicit responses from other people and begin using them as conscious behaviour. From the second month children start using voluntary contented cooing sounds. Months 4-7 are characterised by vocal play. According to Brown (2000:18), babies start experimenting with their vocal organs, producing shrieks, murmurs, growls and shouts.

Children acquire their L1 uniformly irrespective of the diverse cultural backgrounds in which they find themselves. During the language acquisition process several stages take place.

#### *2.3.1.1 Cooing*

There is strong biological evidence that indicates that children are born with the ability to perceive human speech sounds. Researchers like Berko Gleason (1989:42) claims that children as young three days can hear and distinguish their mothers' voice from other voices. This ensures that babies are receptive to the speech sounds of the person who is most likely to interact with them the most, that is, their mothers.

Even though the ability to produce speech sounds is present from birth, the ability to produce sounds that resemble human speech only emerges gradually as a result of

maturational changes during the first two months. It is only during the third and fourth month that consonants start to appear in babies' cooing sounds.

### *2.3.1.2 Babbling*

The babbling stage begins when children are six months old. At this stage they begin to explore the ability of their vocal organs and soon discover that they can make loud and soft noises. The early period of babbling is unintentional and therefore not communicative. This early stage of babbling often involves re-duplication of sounds, like reproducing vocalisations containing repeated sequences of consonants and vowels such as baba or dada (Brown 2000:20).

From about nine months babies' babbling becomes variegated, that is, consonants and vowels are not repeated, but vary from syllable to syllable. During this stage children also learn to imitate the stress or intonation patterns of sentences they hear around them. Babbled strings of sounds are produced with a variety of stress and intonation patterns that resemble those of simple sentences, for example, rising intonation at the end of a sequence to signal a question. Children often babble like this in play situations, for instance, when paging through books. From their vocalisation they appear to be talking to someone or commenting on the pictures in the book.

During the later stages of babbling Brown (2000:21) claims that certain forms start being used fairly consistently in certain contexts, accompanied by eye-contact with the caretaker and gestures like reaching, pointing, grasping and rejection movements. These word-like forms are known as the pro-words and are basically idiosyncratic words invented by the child rather than modelled on actual adult words.

### *2.3.1.3 One word*

The one-word stage is the period from the child's first word to the time when the child starts to put two words together. This period can last from one to two years, and is universal, confirming the nativist theory that children are born with innate language abilities (Brown 2000:22).



One of the major problems in the study of the one-word stage, according to (Brown2000:22), is determining what the child actually means when she uses a word. Because context, gestures and intonation patterns always accompany early word use, they provide the caretaker with cues as to what the child might possibly be talking about. Even so Foster-Cohen (1999:30) claims that it is hard to be sure of the child's meaning.

Children's first words follow the same articulatory patterns of babbling, that is, a preference for duplication and open syllables, with the difference that words have a fairly stable form and are used to communicate a particular meaning. Children's pronunciation improves gradually and their words come to sound more and more like the adult target words. Foster-Cohen (1999:35) claims that sometimes children's pronunciation gets worse before it gets better.

Children's first words refer to objects in their environment, actions or states and words that facilitate social interaction. The most common of these words includes objects and living things. Objects, that the child can manipulate, function as words such as no and please. Children however use less common words like names for clothing because they cannot easily manipulate names of places or objects in the environment (Cohen-Foster 1999:37).

Evidence from children's early words show that children do not merely imitate the language used in their environment. If they did it would be expected that they first use the most frequently used words occurring in the adult language (Foster-Cohen 1999:58).

#### *2.3.1.4 Two words*

The period between fifteen months and two years marks the beginning of the two-word stage. Children now tune into the unique structural properties of the language they hear around them but often come up with creative utterances like "all gone milk". This kind of evidence suggests that children are unconsciously constructing utterances according to some pattern, although this pattern may differ from the rules and patterns of adult grammar (Cohen-Foster 1999:38).

Like one word utterances, two word utterances consist mainly of combinations of content words like nouns and verbs. These are the kinds of words that carry the main semantic load in sentences. Functional words such as the, is, in, and that, are omitted, as they would be in a telegram. Hence their speech is sometimes referred to as telegraphic speech as it includes only the words that carry the main message.

#### *2.3.1.5 Sentences*

Once children start to put words together, their utterances quickly begin to include two-word sentences, three word sentences and even longer sentences. Brown (2000:27) claims that the length of children's sentences increases gradually throughout pre-school and early school years as they learn the syntactic rules necessary for using functional words and creating more complex sentences. According to Brown (2000:29), children from different linguistic backgrounds achieve linguistic competence at roughly the same age, usually at six years old, in spite of structural differences between languages. By the time children start school they have internalised the majority of the rules of the language of their environment.

The order of acquisition of complex constructions seems fairly consistent with English-speaking children although it may differ slightly in other languages. The typical order of English acquisition is, according to Foster-Cohen (1999:40), present progressive - ing, prepositions, plurals, irregular past tense, possessive, copula verb, regular tense, third person singular and auxiliaries.

Over-generalisation is a common strategy used by all children, irrespective of the language they are acquiring. This occurs when children apply the rules too widely. Over generalisation occurs once children start analysing the forms and work out the rules. Eventually children learn that there are exceptions to the general rules and start to use correct forms.

### **2.3.2 Approaches to first language development**

Language scholars differentiate between acquisition and learning. Acquisition deals with picking up a language from birth, to pre-school age. During these stages a child learns a

language unconsciously, whereas from primary school on language is learned both consciously and unconsciously.

Two major questions being asked in language acquisition are: do children learn a language by imitation or are they taught by their mothers? The second question deals with whether children are born with the ability to learn or whether there are environmental influences.

Research on language acquisition and its use can be divided into L1 and L2 learning settings. The literature on L1 learning is most relevant to child development while L2 learning pertains primarily to adult learning, although most general theories of language learning apply to both (Brown 2000:21). While it is not clear whether different psychological processes are involved in first and second language learning there are differences in the way children and adults learn and this has important implications in teaching. Linguistic oriented theories of language learning tend to emphasise genetic mechanisms, for example, the use of universal grammar in explaining language acquisition (Crystal 1997:102).

#### *2.3.2.1 Behaviourist approaches*

In the 1950s most explanations of child language development was dominated by a behaviourist or structuralist interpretations. This was especially true in Western societies and the United States in particular. The behaviourist approach focuses on the immediately perceptible aspects of linguistic behaviour, that is, the publicly observable responses and the relationships or associations between those responses and events in the world surrounding them (Brown 2000:22). A behaviourist might consider effective language behaviour to be a production of correct responses to stimuli, if a particular response is reinforced then it becomes habitual or conditioned. Consequently children produce linguistic responses which are reinforced.

One of the best known attempts to construct a behaviourist model of linguistic behaviour was embodied in B.F. Skinner's classic, *Verbal behavior* (1957). Skinner was commonly known for his experiments using animal behaviour. His contribution to education is through teaching machines and programmed learning which he designed (1957:14).

Skinner's theory of verbal behaviour is an extension of his general theory of learning by operant conditioning. Operant conditioning refers to conditioning in which an organism emits a response without a necessarily observable stimulus. Skinner (1957:15) maintains that the operant is maintained by reinforcement for example, a positive verbal or non-verbal response from another person. He argues that verbal behaviour, like other behaviour, is controlled by consequences. When consequences are rewarding, behaviour is maintained and is increased in strength and perhaps in frequency. When consequences are punishing, or when there is a total lack of reinforcement, the behaviour is weakened and eventually extinguished.

In an attempt to broaden the base of behaviourist theory some psychologists proposed a modified theoretical position. One of these positions was mediation theory in which meaning is accounted for by the claim that the linguistic stimulus (a word or sentence) elicits a mediating response which is self-stimulating. Brown (2000:11) called the self-stimulation a representational mediation process. The mediation theory attempts to account for abstraction.

The mediation theory still leaves many questions about language unanswered. The abstract nature of language and the relationship between meaning and utterance remain unresolved. All sentences have deep structures which are intricately interwoven in a person's total cognitive and effective experience. Such depth of language is not addressed by the mediation theory.

### *2.3.2.2 Nativist approaches*

Nativist approaches emphasise the natural factor in the acquisition of language. This view is known as nativism. The nativist approach is derived from the fundamental assertion that language acquisition is innately determined, that people are born with a genetic capacity that predisposes them to systematic perception of language around them resulting in the construction of an internalised system of language (Chomsky 1959:94). It was during the 1960s that the generative transformational school of linguists emerged through the influence of Noam Chomsky. The generative linguists were interested in arriving at an explanatory level of adequacy in the study of language that

is, the principled basis, independent of any particular language for the selection of the descriptively adequate grammar of each language.

Chomsky (1959:104) criticised the behaviourist approach of B.F. Skinner who suggested that language development is largely determined by training based on trial and error, and not by maturation. Instead, Chomsky (1964:65) emphasised that humans have biological endowment, which he called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which enables them to discover the framework of principles and elements common to attainable human languages. The LAD includes basic knowledge about the structure and nature of human language which is termed Universal Grammar (UG). Although the grammatical rules of sentence structures are limited no one could exhaust all possible sentences of a language.

Chomsky (1964:67) hypothesised that, in their language acquisition, children move from the initial state to the steady state as if by flipping a series of switches. The linguistic revolution originated by Chomsky has exerted enormous influence on contemporary studies such as Slobin (1986:2); Wanner and Gleitman (1982:30). Crystal (1997:220) stresses the rule of natural language acquisition saying that if the behaviourist theory were applied to language acquisition it would be assumed that the child's behaviour is reinforced by the caretaker's approval only when the child follows the caretaker's lead. Crystal (1997:236), while acknowledging the role of the environment or parental interactions, such as when mothers modify their speech to their child's by simplifying, repeating and paraphrasing, emphasises that the process of language acquisition cannot be explained by behaviour stimuli response reinforcement alone.

Crystal (1997:238) pays special attention to three processes that characterise the child's acquisition of syntactic structures. Analysing toddler's language acquisition she concluded that mother-child interaction, which is a cycle of imitations, reductions and expansions, helps the inductive processing of the latent structure of the target language.

Similarly, Chomsky (1969-1972) when examining elementary school children's language development between the ages of 6-10, found a relationship between language development and reading. With a particular emphasis on the innate mechanism of language learning he suggests that this natural process of children's language

development continues actively into the elementary school years. According to Chomsky (1972:59), the degree of sophistication in language acquisition is reflected in the ability to understand complex sentences. Crystal (1997:240) claims, that despite individual differences in terms of the rate of development, all children construct implicit grammatical rules and pass through a developmental sequence of linguistic stages.

Carroll's (1966:56) study, which was conducted in elementary schools in the Boston area, does not take into consideration the socio-cultural differences nor does it emphasise conversational or social interactions. Influenced by Chomsky's (1964:79) conception of an innate LAD, his study focuses only on inborn linguistic competence and analyses the underlying rule governing the natural acquisition of the target language. However, the socio-cultural differences and the social interactions play a major role in the school environment in relation to a realignment of the function of language from oral language used in everyday life to written language with fewer non-linguistic and situational cues. Because of the need to address these issues, studies of a more socio-linguistic nature emerged in the 1970s.

The behaviourist approach, with its emphasis on empirical observations and the scientific method, only began to explain the miracle of L1 acquisition. It left untouched genetic and interactions domains that could be explored only by approaches that probed more deeply.

To conclude, while the behaviourists believe that language is acquired mainly by imitation and reinforcement, the nativists view is that imitation is only of limited use in the language acquisition process. Children often make up words that they would not have heard before and use sentences that they are unlikely to have heard. This suggests that children have an innate capacity to learn a language. Imitation would place a large burden on memory since every utterance would have to be memorised separately. In addition children do not seem to be able to imitate utterances that are far more complex than their present level of development (Crystal 1997:245). These observations suggest that imitation alone cannot explain all the features of language acquisition.

All the approaches within the nativists' framework (language acquisition device and universal grammar) have made at least three significant contributions to understanding the first language acquisition process. These are:

1. Freedom from restriction of the scientific method to explore the unseen, unobservable, underlying, abstract linguistic structures being developed in the child.
2. Systematic description of the child's linguistic repertoire as either rule governed or operating out of parallel distributed processing capacities.
3. The construction of a number of potential properties of universal grammar.

### *2.3.2.3 Social interaction and language development*

According to the social interaction theory, children's communicative competence reflects certain cultural identities and develops in accordance with socially acceptable rules. This communicative style will be important when considering children's entry into schools which may require a realignment of language use. This realignment is often necessary because there is a difference between the language use of the primary speech communities and the language use of secondary community which is the schools.

Studies of language development and language skills acquisition have increasingly focused on communicative social interactions in the earliest stages of children's speech patterns (Crystal 1997:249). Since there are remarkably wide individual as well as cultural differences, researchers have come to conceptualise that children are not passive beneficiaries of their environment, but active agents in their socialisation throughout life. This is based on the belief that individuals and society construct each other through interactions (Crystal 1997:250).

### **2.3.3 Selected theorists**

Constructivism is built upon specific assumptions about teaching and learning. The constructivist approach makes clear that individuals with their experiences, frame of reference, knowledge and cognitive structures will understand information differently. Constructivists believe that learners need to construct their own knowledge, and that

learner's understanding of concepts will depend primarily on their mental construction of those concepts (Brown 2000:11).

A constructivist perspective goes beyond the innate and the cognitive psychological perspective in its emphasis on the primacy of each individual's construction of reality. Piaget and Vygotsky are both commonly described as constructivists who differ in the extent to which each emphasises social context. Their different perspectives will be discussed. Piaget (1972:45) stressed the importance of individual cognitive development as a relatively solitary act. For Piaget (1972:50) biological timetables and stages of development are basic. Social interaction was claimed only to trigger development at the right time. On the other hand Vygotsky (1978:23), described as a social constructivist by some researchers, maintained that social interactions were foundational in cognitive development and rejected the notion of predetermined stages.

### *2.3.3.1 Piaget*

Piaget (1972:98) studied changes in the quality of development of growing children. According to him, as the child matures his/her intellect also matures. This growth in brain power occurs in accordance with a biological pattern of growth, universal to all children. The child's reasoning capacity is also accompanied with such growth. This happens as a result of direct response of the child to other human beings, ideas, situations and objects in the environment. With these experiences the learner matures through a sequence of predetermined developmental stages.

To Piaget (1972:100), the processes of learning and development are independent of each other. Learning utilises development but does not shape its course. Piaget believes that maturation precedes learning. Educational philosophy based on Piaget's (1972:100) notions of how the child intelligence develops is based on the following assumptions:

- learning should be matched to the child's developmental level; this means that the child should be taught only what he or she is capable of doing and understanding; this seem obvious, but more often than not parents are surprised by the insight shown by children in certain matters or their ability to perform a



variety of mental actions that go beyond the limits of their own capabilities, especially when they are in a group or under the guidance of an adult

- by using standardised tests we can determine the mental development level of the child, which implies that, if you can establish the intellectual development level of the child, then you can design your lessons and teaching materials to match that level; an educator who adheres to this idea emphasises the readiness principle where input must be at the actual level of the child's development.

Piaget (1972:110) discusses four stages of development. These are:

- 1) The sensory motor stage, which occurs during the first eighteen months of the child's life. This is a stage in which practical knowledge is developed, which constitutes the sub-structure of later representational knowledge. An example is the construction of schema of permanent objects. To an infant at this stage the object has no permanence.
- 2) The pre-operational representation when language development begins its symbolic function - thought. Here there is a reconstruction of all that was developed on the sensory motor level. The principle of conservation does not yet exist, which is the psychological criterion of the presence of reversible operations. For example, if liquid is poured in a glass and transferred to another glass of different shape, the child will not see that the amount of liquid has not changed.
- 3) The concrete operational stage. Children at this stage operate on objects and not yet verbally expressed hypotheses.
- 4) The abstract reasoning stage where children, at round about the age of twelve, develop abstract thinking skills. From this notion the school draws a seemingly correct conclusion that children should only be taught using concrete, look and do methods. But it turned out that a teaching system based solely on concreteness not only failed to help retarded children overcome their handicaps, but also reinforced their handicaps by trapping them in exclusively concrete thinking. This method of teaching then suppresses the advanced abstract thought that children might have (Brown 2000:62).

A central feature of Piaget's view is the premise that learning and thinking involve learner's participation whether in relation to objects or social relationships. Knowledge

must be constructed and reconstructed by the learner. In a teaching and learning environment the learner goes through a process of absorbing his experiences and integrating them into his cognitive structure. Piaget (1978:29) emphasises the importance of activity in learning. For Piaget (1978:40) to know something is to see it, modify it and change it, transform it and to act on it in the same way as the child's biological development occurs through organisation and adaptation to the environment.

Piaget (1978:50) claims that facts are not as important as the thinking process. He maintains that thinking and intelligence are synonymous. Thinking begins before a person can speak and is not limited by language.

Accordingly Brown (2000:62), commenting on Piaget's four stages, says four main factors explain development from one set of structures to the other. These are:

1. Maturation which is due to biological development which takes place in every transformation that occurs during a child's development. However, maturation does not explain everything because children mature according to the different communities in which they find themselves.
2. The role of experience and the effects of the physical environment on the structures of intelligence. Experience with the object is the basic factor in the development of cognition.
3. The third is social transmission which includes the social and educational factors.
4. The last factor is equilibration or self-regulation.

Piaget's analysis of knowledge, his observations and interpretations of children's knowledge and understanding uses a theoretical framework derived from logic and mathematics. This led him to analyse and interpret children's development in terms of systems of logical operations that are taken to be the basis for rational understanding of the physical world and of mathematical systems for representing reality.

In responding to Piaget's development stages Vygotsky (1978:86) says that concreteness is necessary only as a stepping stone for developing abstract thinking. It is a means and not an end in itself. Similarly, in normal children, learning which is oriented towards developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective in terms of the child's

overall development. It does not target the new stage of the developmental process but stays confined to the levels already achieved.

The lesson to learn from Piaget and Brown is that educationists cannot limit themselves merely to determining developmental levels if they wish to determine the relationship of the child's intellectual development. The child's potential level of development must also be taken into account. What children can do for instance, in collaboration with others, might in some sense be even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do on their own. Vygotsky's (1978:87) theory deals with how children develop cognitively. He convincingly showed that passing through the various stages of cognitive development is more complex than growing up and responding to stimuli from the environment.

### 2.3.3.2 Vygotsky

Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist whose approach to problems of language and thought was far ahead of his time. He saw the focal issue of human psychology as the interrelation thought and language (Carroll 1991:128). His major work, *Thought and Language*, was published only after his death. Two translations of his work appeared in 1962 and 1989.

Piaget and Vygotsky are both described as constructivists by Nyikos and Hashimoto (1997) who differ in the extent to which each emphasises social context. Piaget stressed the importance of individual cognitive development as a relatively solitary act. Biological time-tables and stages for development are basic. Social interaction was claimed to only trigger development at the right time (Piaget 1972:126).

On the other hand Vygotsky (1962:44), described as a social constructivist by some, maintained that social interaction was foundational in cognitive development and rejected the notion of predetermined stages. Researchers studying L1 and L2 acquisition have demonstrated constructivist perspectives through studies of conversational discourse, socio-cultural factors and interactions theory. Constructivist perspectives are a natural successor to cognitive studies of universal grammar, inter-language and

systematicity. All three positions are, however, necessary in creating a balanced description of human linguistic behaviour.

Vygotsky (1978:92) agrees with the notion that children pass through several developmental stages in their growing, but says that these stages are not necessarily where learning takes place. He maintains that learning only takes place in what he calls the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978:95), this ZPD represents intellectual functions that have not yet matured and are in the process of maturation. The actual development level that Piaget identified is indicative of mental development that has been accomplished, while the ZPD refers to mental development that is possible.

According to Vygotsky (1978:86), ZPD is the distance between actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development which is determined through problem solving under the guidance of an adult or in collaboration with more capable peers.

This implies that the child's mental development can only be determined by clarifying the two levels, which are:

- i) the actual developmental level and
- ii) the Zone of Proximal Development.

- i) The actual developmental level

The first level of the ZPD represents the child's mental functions that have been established as a result of biological cycles. These levels or stages are the ones that have been identified by Piaget (1972:110). Therefore, when determining the child's intellectual ability by using tests, we are almost always dealing with the actual developmental level. These tests presume that only those things that children can do on their own, without the assistance of others and without demonstration or clues or guiding questions, are indicative of their mental abilities. This means that the child's actual developmental level indicates functions that are already mature which are the products of development (Kuzolin 1998:50).

## ii) The Zone of Proximal Development

The second level of the ZPD is the potential level of development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

Vygotsky (1978: 94) claims this is achieved when:

- clues are offered to the child
- helping the learner with guiding questions
- showing the learner how the problem is to be solved and subsequently the learner solves it
- the solution is initiated and the child completes it or the child solves the problem in collaboration with other children.

How the child arrives at a solution is regarded as indicative of the child's mental capacity. This means that the child's ZPD shows that the intellectual functions are maturing. The potential development level becomes the next actual developmental level, which presupposes the specific nature and process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them.

According to Vygotsky (1978:90), learning is a cognitive function that occurs in a social context. It does not occur naturally as it occurs in association with other people. The notion of the ZPD helps to propound a new formula which states that good learning is in advance of the child's natural cognitive development and occurs in a social context.

While Piaget stresses biology as the determining factor in the universal stages of development, Vygotsky (1978:95) stresses society as the determiner of development although the resulting stages are the same. Piaget (1972:233) believed that intelligence matures from the inside and directs itself outwards whilst Vygotsky (1978:97) believed that intelligence begins in the social environment and directs itself inward. He refers to this directing inward as internalisation. People observe something taking place in their external environment then reconstruct the experience for themselves and so internalise it and thus have learned it and can benefit by it.

Learning is something that starts outside people, in the society around them, and then is transferred inwardly. What happens inside a person first happens between people.

Intelligence therefore, does not begin in a person but rather in the relations between a person and the outside world (Vygotsky 1978:95).

The social relationship between the teacher and the learner informs the development of the child, creates new mental formulations and develops higher processes of mental life. This assumption therefore, places the child's intellectual development squarely in the hands of the adults in the child's life (Brown 2000:38). The child's mind will not develop on its own but can only develop depending on the level of interaction between the child and the adult in his/her life.

Learning, therefore, is not just a thing one does before a test or examination. It is essential for cognitive development and for the child's development as a whole person. The responsible adult moves the child beyond the stage into the Zone of Proximal Development, where learning takes place. This learning then awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting and co-operating with people in his environment (Vygotsky 1978:85). Once this process is internalised they become part of the child's independent development. Inter-personal relations, therefore, play an important role in any teaching situation. Teaching, according to Vygotsky, is nothing other than the social transaction of meaning.

It is for this reason that Vygotsky (1978:89) refers to teaching, not as teaching but mediation. He referred to pupils as learners, and discusses the importance of mediating a learner's learning experience. An adult acts as a mediator between the child's actual development and the child's ZPD. Adults structure activities for the child so that, the child gradually gains control over the activities that he needs to perform. The mediator's role is that of scaffolding so that the learner can become independent. The adult helps the child by setting problems to be solved and then by providing clues to the solutions. With the help of the mediator or group the learner is assisted to work out an individual and personal solution to the problem. Through discussions, mediation and negotiation, learners gain mastery. They discover for themselves and therefore, can internalise new concepts and gain conscious control over their interactions.

Vygotsky (1978:87) differentiated between spontaneous and scientific concepts. Scientific concepts originate in the highly structured and specialised activity of classroom instruction

and are characterised by hierarchical logical organisation. The concepts themselves do not necessarily relate to scientific issues. They may represent historical, linguistic or practical knowledge but their organisation is scientific in the sense of formal, logical and de-contextualised structures. Everyday concepts emerge spontaneously from the child's own reflections on immediate, everyday experiences. They are experientially rich and highly contextual. In this sense they are complex (Kozulin1998:48).

Vygotsky's (1969:25) ideas form a point of departure for the view of language as a socio-culturally mediated product. He hypothesised that children's cognitive skills first develop through social interaction with more mature members of the society and then become internalised after long practice. In addition he recognised the role of language in the child's learning.

Studies on language development and language skills acquisition have increasingly focused on communicative social interactions in the earliest stages of children's speech patterns (Kozulin 1998:50). Since there are remarkable individual and cultural differences researchers have come to conceptualise that children are active participants in their socialisation. This is formulated according to the theory that individuals and the society construct each other through their mutual interaction (Ochs 1982:79).

### *2.3.3.3 Cognition and language development*

Crystal (1997:240) criticised the nativists theory and pointed out that the relationships in which telegraphic words occur in telegraphic utterances are only superficially similar, for example, in the utterance "Mommy sock." which nativists would describe as a sentence consisting of a pivot word and an open word, Crystal (1997:242) found at least three possible underlying relations: agent-action (Mommy is putting on the socks) agent-object (Mommy sees the socks) and possessor – possessed (Mommy's socks). By examining data with reference to contexts Crystal (1997:244) concluded that children learn underlying structures and not superficial word order.

Crystal's (1997:240) research, along with that of Piaget (1969), Slobin (1986:10) and others, paved the way for a new wave of child language study, this time centring on the relationship of cognitive development to first language acquisition. Piaget (1969:102)

described overall development as a result of children's interaction with their environment, with a complementary interaction between their developing perceptual cognitive capacities and their linguistic experience. What children know about language, Piaget claims, is determined by what they already know about the world. According to Gleitman and Wanner (1982:13), children appear to approach language learning equipped with conceptual interpretive abilities for categorising words. Learners are biased to map each semantic idea on the linguistic unit, that is, a word.

Slobin (1971, 1986) demonstrated that in all languages semantic learning depends on cognitive development and that the sequence of development is determined more by semantic complexity than by structural complexity. Slobin (1986:89) claims that there are two major pacesetters to language development involved with the poles of function and of form. On the functional level development is paced by the growth of conceptual and communicative capacities operating in conjunction with innate schemas of cognition. On the formal level development is paced by the growth of perceptual and information processing capacities operating with the innate schemas of grammar. Bloom (1978:37) claims that an explanation of language development depends upon the cognitive underpinnings of language. What children know will determine what they learn about the code for both speaking and understanding messages. Researchers must, therefore, begin to tackle the formulation of rules of the functions of language in conjunction with the relationships of the forms of language.

#### *2.3.3.4 Conclusion: Piaget and Vygotsky*

Piaget's theory has its contribution and limits when applied to education practice. Its contribution to education is to use his development stages in the modification of the curriculum without emphasising them to the degree that they circumscribe one's approach.

The most important contribution of Piaget's theory to learning is that several principles concerning children's learning and understanding can be derived from his theory of learning and understanding as active processes. According to Piaget (1978), learning is not simply imposed by environmental forces. Learning is not shaping. The child takes an



active role in his learning. The child assimilates environmental events into his own cognitive structures which result in active learning.

His theory provides a general rationale for active approaches which have existed for many years. The principle appears simply to be that to know something in depth requires one to rediscover the matter for oneself. The teacher may guide the child in the direction of rediscovery but the active learning involved in the rediscovery itself is important.

Teachers should, however, realise that Piagetian rationale alone cannot solve educational problems. It needs to be supplemented with specific techniques derived from the art of being the teacher. Furthermore, there are possibilities of error in the application of Piagetian theory such as the misrepresentation of Piaget's notion of active learning. Ginsburg and Opper (1982:20) for example, in applying Piaget's theory, maintain that children learn best from concrete activities, also that teachers should not teach as such but should rather encourage children to learn by manipulating objects. This is a misrepresentation as Piaget's important idea that activity is not necessarily concrete activity.

Piaget's theory fails to account adequately for receptive learning which a significant aim of education is. Piaget (1970:137-138) claims that memory, passive obedience, imitation of the adult and receptive factors in general are all as natural to the child as spontaneous activity.

a) Cognitive conflict and equilibration

Piaget claims that cognitive development is promoted when there is a moderate degree of discrepancy between the child's cognitive structure and some new events which he encounters. When applied to education, this notion can create difficulties. Firstly, the theory itself is not yet fully developed. Secondly, the appropriate application of the equilibration theory to schooling and learning are unclear. Although the informed pursuit of cognitive conflict is at least a useful theory for education it is not clear in which circumstances this idea will be most appropriate. Piaget's principle of cognitive conflict offers therefore at most at this stage, a useful educational alternative to receptive

teaching procedures. The identification of the precise nature of educational conflict is not guaranteed by the knowledge of the Piagetian structures

b) Self-directed learning

Piaget's theory proposes that the sensory motor and cognitive structures develop in a spontaneous and self-directed fashion. The child takes a major role in directing the course of cognitive development which does not depend on instruction. Piaget demonstrates most convincingly that children can learn by themselves. The co-ordination of schemata for example, is not taught, it is learned spontaneously and parents are oblivious of it (Kuzolin 1998:49).

Piaget's theory of spontaneous, self-directed development of cognitive structures has been generalised to education where children are allowed to engage in extensive self-directed learning. However, self-directed learning in schools does not always occur and then other forms of learning also appear to be useful. Freedom to learn principles may be effective in some cases and may even be an ideal to which education should aspire. Yet common experience says that the principle does not apply under all these circumstances. The theory does not attempt to disentangle the social, ecological and political factors which seem to play an important role in determining whether self-directed learning is possible in a given school situation. Those who apply Piagetian theory must become aware of the realities of the schools, but to learn of these realities they must look beyond Piaget's theory.

When applied to the use of language the social interaction paradigm suggests a culturally ideal adult child relationship. In terms of L1 acquisition, for example, children acquire a language through interaction with more competent others usually their mothers (Kuzolin 1998:58).

When applying the social interaction approach to the classroom context an ideal situation can be conceptualised as one in which, through constructive dialogue between teacher and student, the teacher fully understands the student's needs and assists in the internalisation of the subject matter. In multicultural settings the teachers' questions

scaffold the child's construction process of knowledge based on his/ her own cultural identities (Kozulin 1998:55).

The acquisition of language can reveal the entire relation between learning and development. Language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and people in the environment. Language releases the learner from dependency on immediate and concrete experiences and allows for thinking about people, objects and events that are not immediately present. Only subsequently, upon conversion to internal speech does it start organising the child's thought, that is, it becomes an internal mental function. Language and thought both develop as the learner matures.

Vygotsky (1978:85) saw the development of language as taking place together with the learner's practical activities. According to Vygotsky (1978:87), a child's speech is as important as action in attaining solutions to problems, that is, talking about a math problem is as important as knowing how to do calculations. The more complex the problem the more important the speech becomes (Kozulin 1998:65). The zone of proximal development seeks to explain, in part, the cognitive operations involved in language acquisition (Vygotsky 1962:110).

#### **2.3.4 Issues in first language development**

From the discussion on L1 acquisition a number of issues and problems' that are being addressed by researchers in the field, have surfaced. These eight issues will be discussed next in order to have an overall understanding of the nature of children's language acquisition.

##### *2.3.4.1 Competence and performance*

The corrective emphasis on biology was an oversimplification just as extreme as a Skinnerian one, though on the opposite end of the nature-nurture continuum. Generative grammar represented by Chomsky was challenged by socio-linguists because of the necessity of re-conceptualising childhood environments in other societies and cultures. Chomsky (1958:50), using a language parole distinction originally proposed by

Ferdinand de Saussure (1915/1959), presented the dichotomy of competence (a person's internalised grammar of a language) and performance (the actual use of a language in concrete situations). Challenging this dichotomy of competence and performance, Dell Hymes (1974:86) introduced the concept of communicative competence, the ability not only to apply grammatical rules of a language in order to construct a grammatically correct sentence, but also to know when, where and with whom to use these correct sentences in a given socio-cultural situation.

Claiming that Chomsky's dichotomy of competence and performance is misleading Hymes (1974:90) suggests, that unlike the nativist or innate position that tends to disregard socio-cultural differences, these differences affect the process of language acquisition and later language skills development at a variety of levels. While Chomsky focuses on the universal nature of language acquisition, Hymes stresses characteristic features of the outcome of language acquisition in specific socio-cultural context.

Accordingly Hymes (1974:97) suggests that language development is considered to be the ability to participate fully in a set of social practices. Those who support generative grammar still explain the process of language acquisition differently. Tyrone (1988:79) claims that all of the child's slips and hesitations and self-corrections are potentially connected to what he calls heterogeneous competence. These are language abilities in the process of being formed.

#### *2.3.4.2 Comprehension and production*

Comprehension and production can be aspects of competence and performance. Production is more directly observable but comprehension is much more than performance. When children speak most observation and research evidence points to the general superiority of comprehension over production. Children seem to understand more than they actually produce which is also true as far as adults are concerned (Brown 2000: 28).

It is necessary to distinguish between comprehension and production as they both accounts for both same modes of performance. This helps in understanding the lag that exists between comprehension and production. The lag between comprehension and

production helps in explaining the language developmental process at work in L2 teaching and learning situations. This implies that there is a comprehension competence and a production competence. Linguistic competence has four modes. These are speaking, reading, writing and listening. These are all separate modes of performance.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for the separation of competence into comprehension and production comes from research that appears to support the superiority of production over comprehension. Gathercole (198:23), for example, reported on a number of studies in which children were able to produce certain aspects of language they could not comprehend.

#### *2.3.4.3 Universals*

Much of the recent universal grammar research is centred on principles and parameters. The child's initial language learning stage is supposed to consist of a set of universal principles which specify some limited possibilities of variation, expressible in terms of parameters which need to be fixed in one of a few possible ways (Saleemi 1992:58). This means that the child's task of language learning is manageable because of certain naturally occurring constraints. The principle of structure dependency, for example, states that language is organised in such a way that it crucially depends on the structural relationships between elements in sentence such as words, morphemes and such like (Brown 2000:35).

Universal grammar argues that languages cannot vary in an infinite number of ways. Parameters determine ways in which they can vary.

#### *2.3.4.4 Systematic and variability*

One of the assumptions of a good deal of contemporary research on children's language is that the acquisition process is systematic. From pivot grammar to three word utterances, to full sentences of indeterminate length children exhibit remarkable ability to infer the phonological, structural, lexical and semantic system of language (Brown 2000:37).

There is also an aspect of variability in the process of language learning. Researchers do not agree on how to define the various stages of language acquisition. In both first and L2 acquisition the problem of variation is being addressed by researchers such as Tyrone (1988) and Bailey and Preston (1996). One of the major problems of contemporary research is to account for this variability.

#### *2.3.4.5 Limitations*

It is a common informal observation that children are good imitators. Because children are imitators, people tend to make an inaccurate conclusion that imitation is one of the important strategies used by children in language acquisition. Research has shown, however, that echoing is a particularly salient strategy in early language learning and an important aspect of early phonological acquisition. Moreover, imitation is in line with the behaviourist principles of acquisition which is relevant during the early stages of acquisition (Brown 2000:72).

The behaviourist assumes surface imitation, but for language acquisition a deeper level of imitation is far more important in the process. In the surface structure the child repeats or mimics the surface string, attending to a phonological code rather than a semantic code. It is this level of imitation that enables the adult to repeat random numbers or nonsense syllables. The semantic data, if any, underlying the surface output are perhaps, only peripherally attended to. In foreign language classes' rote pattern drills often evoke surface imitations (Brown 2000:30).

The earliest stages of child language acquisition may manifest a good deal of surface imitation since the baby may not possess the necessary semantic categories to assign meaning to utterances. But as children perceive the importance of the semantic level of language they attend more to the meaningful semantic level, which is the deep structure of a language.

#### *2.3.4.6 Practice*

Closely associated with imitation is the nature of practice in child language acquisition. Practice is usually thought of as referring to speaking only. There is also comprehension

practice which is usually considered under the rubric of the frequency of linguistic input to the child. Is the acquisition of particular words or structures directly attributed to their frequency in their environment? There is evidence that certain frequent forms are acquired first, for example, what questions, irregular past tense forms, certain common household items and persons. Brown (2000:40) found that the frequency of occurrence of a linguistic item in the speech of mothers was a strong predictor of the order of emergence of those items in their children's speech.

#### *2.3.4.7 Input*

The role of input in the child's language acquisition is undeniably crucial. Whatever one's position is on the innateness of language, speech that young children hear is primarily the speech heard in the home and much of that speech is parental speech or the speech of elder siblings. Linguists once claimed that most adult speech is basically semi-grammatical, that children are exposed to a chaotic sample of language, and only the innate capacity can account for their successful acquisition of language. However, Crystal (1997:123) found that speech addressed to children was carefully grammatical and lacked the usual hesitation and false starts common in adult-adult speech.

What is important from recent research is that adult and peer input is far more important in child language acquisition than it was originally stated by the nativist. Adult input seems to shape the child's acquisition and the interaction patterns between child and parent change according to the increasing language skill of the child. Nature and environment are tremendously important, although it remains to be seen just how important parental input is as a proportion of total input.

#### *2.3.4.8 Discourse*

While conversation is a universal human activity performed routinely in the course of daily living, the means by which children learn to take part in conversation appears to be very complex. Crystal (1997:260) proposed that conversation be examined in terms of initiations and responses. The child learns not only how to initiate a conversation but how to respond to another's initiated utterance. Questions are not regarded as questions but requests for information, for action or for help. At a relatively young age children learn

subtle differences between, for instance, assertions and challenges. They learn that utterances have both a literal and an intended or functional meaning. However, much remains to be studied in the area of the child's development of conversational knowledge. The barrier of discourse is one of the most difficult for language learners to break through.

### **2.3.5 Conclusion concerning theories of first language acquisition**

In this section the present state of child language research is looked at and a few key concepts emerge in the formation of an understanding of how babies learn to talk and eventually become sophisticated linguistic beings and are highlighted. There is much to be learned in such an understanding. Every human being who attempts to learn a L2 has already learned a L2 to some degree.

The exploration reveals how theories change over time as new questions are asked, new research evidence emerges or new techniques for investigating the human mind are invented. Each of the theories discussed stressed one side of the nature-nature continuum at the expense of the other. However, it is acknowledged that both nature and nurture influence the process, and that none of the theories can account for how language is acquired.

According to Crystal (1997:237), it is impossible in the present state of knowledge to choose between these various approaches. Imitative skills, a general language learning mechanism, cognitive awareness and structured input all play their part in guiding the course of language acquisition. Unravelling the interdependence of these factors constitutes the main goal of future language research.

## **2.4 SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Classroom instruction is predicted upon knowledge and beliefs about what students must learn, what they can do and what methods will be best for individual learners. When communication is limited by language differences teachers may find their task more challenging than usual. By becoming familiar with theoretical concepts and research



findings relating to L2 acquisition regular classroom teachers can better understand the abilities and needs of language minority students.

### **2.4.1 Language and development**

The process of language learning differs markedly between children and adults. For this linguists use two different terms. The unconscious and informal process by which a child learns a language from birth to pre-school years is called language acquisition. Language learning refers to the more conscious or formal learning process that takes place when people learn a second language or additional language after puberty. At primary school level children learn through a combination of conscious and unconscious processes, that is, partly through language acquisition and partly through language learning (Pereira 1984:50).

#### *2.4.1.1 Framework for language development*

Language plays a primary role in children's mental development, particularly in terms of developing scientific concepts and systematic thought. This makes it important for schools to offer home language instruction as a language of learning and teaching (LOLT). The most important question to ask is what happens when children do not use their home language as language of learning?

In order to establish the baseline of language development, work on English language acquisition is included which synthesises research on children's language development and its effects on literacy. It is acknowledged that this research reflects children's language development in optimum situations where they are using their home language as language of learning in highly literate situations. However, this research reflects the levels of learning to which a language in education policy should aspire and helps in framing age appropriate levels of competence (Pereira 1984:58).

Research on language development shows that most children come to school with a fairly advanced competence of language (Cummins 2003:45). By the time they come to school they have mastered the sound system of their language, a large vocabulary and are able to systematically link it up. They have also gained the social conventions

associated with their home language. Although language develops at a very fast pace during the first few years, children continue to acquire language throughout their life time although at a much slower rate. Pereira (1984:60), for example, in his research on English speaking children both in the USA and the UK, discovered that as children mature they use language with greater fluency. Pereira (1984:65) claims that, in terms of comprehension, there are still grammatical constructions which many children do not understand.

The period of active language acquisition is during the early school years and around the age of eleven years (Cummins 2000:7). This is indicated by a large increase in new grammatical constructions and high error rates on some kind of constructions. This is due to children's growing literacy and experience of language. Children become aware of the difference between spoken and written language, the situational, functional, formal and grammatical differences, as well as discourse patterns, all of which, in turn impact on their developing control over language. According to Pereira (1986:76), reading and writing help children to gain grammatical patterns which are not used in oral speech. Children who cannot read are denied this valuable stimulus to their linguistic development. This could be of relevance for bilingual learners who do not use their home language for learning and whose LOLT is not well established, as it can be predicted that they will have difficulty reading in it. Similarly, if they are not expected to read in their own language, they are denied the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to process language not found in speech.

Children can only develop meaningful meta-linguistic knowledge when they can distinguish between language and experience. Sealey (1996:40) claims that this faculty begins to develop at the age of six years. This links closely to Vygotsky's belief in the crucial role played by school learning.

Lager's (1986:17) research provides an insight into children's developing discourse knowledge. While it is generally accepted that children have some knowledge of story or narrative structure by the time they reach school (Goodman 1990:87), Lager proposes that they also have some knowledge of exposition, based on their ability to share information. She claims that by the age of eight years old children can distinguish between stories and reports. They are able to distinguish the different uses of the two

types of texts, select different topics for the two and organise them differently. They also demonstrate differences through using markers such as sequence, sentence length and tense. This awareness and the ability to control these features develops with age, with children of thirteen years demonstrating the ability to orchestrate linguistic and communicative forms to suit their own ends.

Vygotsky (1986:89) ascribes a special role to the development of writing. According to Vygotsky, while children learn to speak through everyday experience, this is not true for writing. He maintains that when writing instruction begins, children have not yet developed the necessary psychological systems. This indicates that the psychological development necessary for writing depends on instruction and does not precede it. While both speech and writing require symbolisation, in oral speech this occurs spontaneously but in written speech it is mastered consciously. Writing is more difficult than speech and it is more abstract, being removed from the listener and the context in which it will be perceived. Unlike speech it also requires a conscious knowledge of the relationship between sound and symbol, between speech and its representations.

Vygotsky (1986:90) links the ability to write to the development of inner speech. He proposes that inner speech be established in order to translate thought into words. But this is only a first step, as inner thought is abbreviated and condensed and needs to be encoded further so as to produce coherent sentences on paper. Writing in turn enhances the child's intellectual development, as it is further removed from thought and requires greater consciousness, not only of the ideas one wants to impart but also conscious knowledge of how to connect these ideas in language.

This is further supported by Konopak and Drum (1987:67) who found that writing tasks result in richer understanding of knowledge and thus can be used to develop children's understanding of content. Kroll (1987:20) divided the process of the acquisition of writing skills into four stages:

- 1) Preparation learning.
- 2) Consolidation which begins round about six or seven years.
- 3) Differentiation starts at nine or ten years as children begin to use grammatical structures in their fourth year of schooling.

#### 4) Integration.

These are estimations which should still be tested in the South African context taking children's bilingual learning environment into account.

After nine years Pereira (1984:68), claims that children start using a higher proportion of complex sentences and structures which do not occur at all in speech, indicating that their linguistic development is influenced as much by reading as by speech. This supports her notion that gaining literacy is a powerful stimulus to language development.

##### *2.4.1.2 Conclusion*

When looking at the framework of language development suggested by Lager (1986:10), Sealey (1996:80) and Pereira (1984:48), one needs to take into account further research which investigates the issue of bilingualism in terms of language and cognitive development, given that the majority of children in South Africa do not use their home language as their LOLT and need to learn a language of wider communication. The gains made from school learning and growing literacy for children learning through their home language cannot be expected because their research supposes the availability of rich and varied reading resources which are not yet available for African home language speakers.

#### **2.4.2 Krashen's contributions**

Krashen (1976, 1982) was the first researcher to give an account of the differences between deliberate learning of a language at school and the acquisition of a language in a social environment where language is used for communication purposes. His theoretical models are discussed below.

##### *2.4.2.1 Krashen's monitor theory*

The most widely discussed theoretical model of language acquisition in recent years has been Krashen's Input Hypothesis which continues to evolve as new research studies are carried out to verify it. Krashen's most recent version of the theory (2000) is comprised of

five hypotheses. During the years 1977, 1981 and 1982 his hypothesis underwent different names such as the Monitor Model and the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, were popular terms. In recent years the Input Hypothesis has come to identify a set of related hypotheses which the researcher will discuss.

#### *2.4.2.2 Natural order hypothesis*

Language acquisition occurs in a predictable way. The discovery of clear examples of developmental stages led a number of researchers such as Chomsky (1959:17), Corder (1967:30) and Krashen (1996:7) to conclude that it was mistaken to advocate the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, that is, to say L2 acquisition was determined by innate principles similar to L1 acquisition.

This hypothesis was formulated by Krashen (1978:56) who hypothesised that people acquire the rules of language in a predictable way, some rules tending to manifest earlier than others. The pattern appears to be independent of the order in which rules are taught in language classes. However, it soon became clear that the Natural Order Hypothesis needed to be supplemented by an ancillary hypothesis. This was after it was revealed by Krashen (1981:8) that, while natural sequences were often displayed in spontaneous unplanned productions, when the task was not a spontaneous production but a grammar or drill exercises, those orders could change. In addition learners typically display different degrees of approximation to target language norms under different conditions.

#### *2.4.2.3 Acquisition learning hypothesis*

This variability in L2 performance in tasks led Krashen (1982:90) to supplement the Natural Order Hypothesis with the hypothesis that L2 learners are capable of developing two types of distinct grammatical knowledge about the acquired L2 knowledge, which develops subconsciously in learners as a result of exposure to the L2, and the learned L2, which L2 learners acquire consciously, either through learning about the language from the textbooks or teachers, or through forming their own rule of thumb. According to Krashen (1999:5), real L2 knowledge of the kind found in learners' spontaneous meaning

production can be initiated only by the acquired system which develops as a result of the learner being involved with the L2 in spontaneous meaningful interactions.

#### *2.4.2.4 The Monitor Hypothesis*

The monitor is involved in learning not in acquisition. The monitor is a device for checking one's output, for editing and making alterations or corrections as they are consciously perceived. Only after fluency has been established should an optimal amount of monitoring or editing be employed by the learner (Krashen 1981a).

The acquired system of knowledge is the one which displays natural sequences of development. Under certain circumstances, however, knowledge about the L2 which has been consciously learned can be used by L2 learners to monitor the output initiated by the acquired system, to check for discrepancies and to correct the output where such discrepancies are found. The circumstances in which such monitoring can occur, is where the learner has enough time to access the learned knowledge which she possesses and where the learner is focused on the form of what he is producing. Putting the naturally acquired order together with learned knowledge and monitoring results in the first three hypotheses of Krashen's (1983:261) model for second language acquisition.

#### *2.4.2.5 The Input Hypothesis*

The input hypothesis claims that an important condition for L2 acquisition to occur is that the acquirer understand (via reading or hearing) input language that contains structure which is a bit beyond his existing level of competence. If an acquirer is at a stage or level  $i$ , the input that she understands must contain  $i + 1$  Krashen (1981:100). The implication is that learners should be exposed to the language so that they can understand most of it but are still challenged to make progress. The input should neither be so far beyond their reach that they are overwhelmed nor so close to their present stage that they are not challenged at all.

Krashen recommends that speaking not be taught directly or very early in the language classroom. Speech will emerge once the acquirer has built up enough comprehensible

input (i +1).The Input Hypothesis specifically relates to the kind of L2 exposure which will optimally allow learners' acquired knowledge to develop.

#### *2.4.2.6 The Affective Filter Hypothesis*

Krashen adds a fourth hypothesis which is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. This is part of the internal processing system that subconsciously screens incoming language based on the affect, which are the learners' motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states which set in around puberty. It determines whether a person is more or less inhibited in situations of L2 use. Where people are inhibited, the filter is high and prevents a lot of L2 input from being converted into acquired knowledge. Where people are less inhibited, the filter is lower, allowing a greater proportion of L2 input to be converted into acquired knowledge (Krashen 1996:100).

The affective filter hypothesis allows some account to be given of individual differences between L2 learners who, although they receive the same input, can show wide differences in their development of both acquired and learned knowledge. The affective filter hypothesis explains that less successful learners have a higher filter than the more successful ones. This hypothesis also enables some account to be given of incompleteness in L2 acquisition. Learners who fail to achieve native like intuitions of grammaticality have been hampered by their affective filters, which have not allowed them to take in the range of input necessary for the acquired system to develop fully. In this way the acquired system is, in principle, as powerful in L2 acquisition as it is in L1 acquisition. The difference in the completeness between L1 and L2 learners arises because infants do not have an affective filter (Brown 2000:280) and are, therefore, untroubled by inhibitions. .

#### *2.4.2.7 Evaluation of Krashen's Input Hypothesis*

Krashen's system of hypotheses attracted enormous interest in the 1980s, as it was one of the first attempts to provide an integrated account of some of the core observations about L2. Although Krashen's three hypotheses fail in crucial ways to make the right prediction, the account was pioneering, and helped to focus thinking about what the key issues requiring explanation in L2 learning are (Brown 2000:278).

Krashen's hypotheses are able to deal with the five core observations of L2 acquisition which are transfer, staged development, systematicity, variability and incompleteness. Transfer has disappeared from the account. All L2 phenomena are either acquired or learned.

Although staged development and systematic acquisition have been given a label which is acquired knowledge, it is a mysterious phenomenon in Krashen's system. Why learners go through these stages is not explained by Krashen's theory. To say that L2 knowledge is acquired through meaningful interaction involving the L2 is to observe the stages of development and that learners are systematic in going through these stages. A serious approach to L2 learning needs to be clear about development and more systematic than Krashen's theory (McLaughlin 1990a:627).

Variability in performance of the diverse tasks is crucially dependent on Krashen's system of the learned component of knowledge which given the right conditions monitors the output initiated by the acquired system, checks for discrepancies between it and the learned knowledge and corrects where there are such discrepancies. However, there are good reasons to believe that L2 learners vary in their tasks performance even where they do not appear to consciously know the rules and even though they are under time pressure.

To conclude, Krashen believes that it is much better to acquire a L2 than to learn it in a formal situation. However both the acquisition and the learning are important and educators should try to find a balance between the two.

### **2.4.3 Cummins' contributions**

Jim Cummins is a full professor at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. He did extensive work in L2 teaching and learning. He has written 88 articles in refereed journals, 107 chapters in books and fifteen books. Sections 2.4.3.1 – 2.4.3.2 provide a background to Cummins' work.



#### *2.4.3.1 Bilingualism and learning*

During the first half of the twentieth century, it was generally accepted that bilingualism had a negative effect on learning and development. Researchers, Gathercole and Montes (1992:51) as well as Rubin and Turner (1989:106), presented monolinguals as performing better in intelligence quotient (IQ) tests administered and thus, concluded that bilinguals were mentally confused and at a disadvantage in thinking compared to monolinguals (Baker 1994:108). Theoretically it was proposed that language learning could be compared to balloons. Monolinguals have one large well-filled balloon whereas bilinguals had two half or less filled with no interchange. This attitude resulted in practices which aimed at the eradication of the learner's bilingualism and included punishment for those children speaking their home language at school.

On the other hand, research conducted by Baker (1994:120) indicated that these conclusions were inaccurate and that there could well be cognitive advantages to bilingualism. Baker (1994:122) expanded the measurement by which cognitive performance was graded. His sample consisted of French children from Montreal. He claimed that bilingualism led to greater mental flexibility and the ability to think more abstractly and thus more independently of words. This indicated that a more enriched bilingual and bicultural environment benefits the development of IQ; that there is a positive transfer between a bilingual person's languages which facilitates the development of IQ.

Further research by Bialystok et al. (2003) and Bruck and Genesee (1995) pointed to cognitive gains in bilinguals while the work by Hakuta and Bialystock (1987: 60) reports that bilingualism reveals meta-linguistics gains. Clark (1978:36) and Tunmer and Myhill (1984: 89) claim that bilingual children demonstrate communicative sensitivity that monolinguals lack. Briton et al. (1989: 8) note that bilingual education is successful with majority children due to adequate input and support for continued mother-tongue development. Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976:18) noted that bilingual children suffer academic difficulties when their home language is replaced by the L2. From this we can conclude that cognitive gains are only made when bilingualism is additive that is when the L2 is learnt while the children's home language is maintained.

This research led to Cummins (1976; 1978; 1980; 1984; 2000; 2002) developing a number of hypotheses in order to understand the relationship between bilingual proficiency and academic success or failure. While Cummins (2002:23), specifically states that his writings are not aimed at explaining learning problems experienced by bilingual learners in post-colonial Africa, his hypotheses are helpful in understanding the learning situation of children in South Africa who do not use their home language for learning.

#### *2.4.3.2 Subtractive bilingualism*

Lambert (1975:69) first coined the term 'subtractive bilingualism' when he realised that the more prestigious English L2 was gradually replacing a large majority of immigrant students' Spanish L1. This was after he discovered that these students proficiency in both languages at any point in time was likely to reflect some stage in the subtraction of L1 and its replacement by L2. Research by Skutnubb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976:38) shows that the decline in L1 happens at a considerably faster rate than L2 development. Considerable variation across social and educational contexts is, however, likely in this regard. Subtractive bilingualism is experienced mostly by minority language learners with educational difficulties. These learners' proficiency in both languages is less likely to be well developed than among native speakers.

#### *2.4.3.3 Additive bilingualism*

The term 'additive bilingualism' refers to the form of bilingualism that occurs when students add a L2 to their intellect while continuing to develop their L1 conceptually and academically (Cummins 2000:45). There are close to 150 empirical studies that have been carried out during the past 30 years and more that have reported a positive association between additive bilingualism and students' linguistic, cognitive or academic growth. The most consistent findings among these research studies are that bilinguals show more developed awareness of language (meta-linguistic abilities) and they have advantages in learning additional languages.

Learners with well developed L1 achieve additive bilingualism like anglophone children, in French immersion programmes. Language minority children can also develop additive bilingualism if the school also promotes their L1. A majority of studies, reporting cognitive

advantages associated with bilingualism, have been carried out in contexts where children have attained an additive form of bilingualism, that is, relatively high level of proficiency in both languages (Matthews 1997:314).

This analysis suggest that the levels of proficiency bilingual children attain in two languages may be an important intervening variable mediating the effects of bilingualism on children's cognitive and academic development (Baker 2000:87). Specifically, it has been hypothesised that there may be a threshold level of linguistic proficiency bilingual children must attain in order to avoid cognitive deficit and allow the potentially beneficial aspects of becoming bilingual to influence their cognitive growth.

#### *2.4.3.4 The Threshold hypothesis*

The Threshold hypothesis assumes that those aspects of bilingualism that might positively influence cognitive growth are unlikely to come into effect until the children have attained a certain minimum or threshold level of proficiency in the L2. Bilinguals who attain low levels of proficiency in both or one of the languages tend to experience academic failure. Their long term interaction with the greater academic environment through this language, both in terms of input and output, will be greatly impoverished.

Cummins (2001:99), as well as Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukamaa (1977:25), claims that there are two threshold levels of linguistic proficiency, namely the higher level threshold and the lower level threshold. The first threshold is an age appropriate level of language development in one of the bilingual learners' languages. As long as they use this language for learning, children experience neither gains nor problems. The attainment of the lower threshold level of bilingual proficiency would be sufficient to avoid any negative effects, but the attainment of a second high level threshold of bilingual proficiency might be necessary to lead to accelerated cognitive growth. Although the Threshold hypothesis is generally consistent with the research data and has considerable heuristic impact, it does not elaborate on the nature of language proficiencies that comprise the threshold or on the relationship that exists between the development of L1 and L2 proficiency.

Several studies have reported findings consistent with the Threshold hypothesis. Some of these are Cummins (2001:71), Lasgabaster (1998), Ricciardelli (1992) and Deavila (1979, 1980). They found that language minority students with high levels of L1 and L2 proficiency performed significantly better than monolinguals and other sub-groups of bilinguals, for instance partial-bilinguals or those who perform well in one of the languages, or were limited in both languages when applying a battery of cognitive tasks. Kessler and Quinn (1980) found that Hispanic bilingual children, who had participated in bilingual programmes, outperformed monolinguals in science problem tasks. While Cummins and Malcohy (1978:57) found that Ukrainian-English bilingual children outperformed monolingual English children in detecting ambiguities in English sentence structures. Diaz's study on Hispanic children further indicated that the levels of children's proficiency positively influenced the rate of intellectual development.

Cummins (2001:108) concurred with Baker's criticism (1994:145) that the Threshold theory does not define the aspect of proficiency that is being referred to and that initially learners with limited academic knowledge were referred to as semi-linguals as if they were deficit rather than the system of education in which they found themselves. Cummins (2001:109), clarifies what he meant by age appropriate proficiency. He refers to research which supports the notion that continued development of academic skills in two or more languages has positive cognitive consequences if cognitive is seen as including verbal cognitive abilities such as vocabulary/concepts knowledge, meta-linguistic knowledge and deductive verbal reasoning.

Cummins (1999:268) argues that children benefit from learning through the home language, provided that the instructional programme is effective in developing academic skills, in particular, literacy skills which need to be taught in a meaningful, interactive context, so as to promote broader academic skills. The importance of gaining academic skills is supported by Pereira (1984:79) and Vygotsky's (1986:99) view that literacy plays a major role in both language and concept development.

One of the most frequently cited examples of the importance of literacy in language and concept development is a project in Southern Nigeria, called the Six Year Plan Project (Fafunwa 1998:70). In this project five experimental groups were studied. Two groups used their home language while the others changed to English instruction in their fourth

year of schooling as per the language policy at the time. Longitudinal studies shows that those who received home language instruction of the first six years of schooling performed better at both secondary and university level and that their grasp of Yoruba, English and mathematics was better than their peers.

Further research by Gonzalez (1986, 1989), Verhoeven (1991), Ramirez (1992), Umbel and Oller (1995), Williams (1996), Durgunoglu (1998), Wagner (1999) and Cummins (2000:3), indicates that well developed home language skills lead to enhanced additional language learning. This ability develops out of learners' cognitive and meta-linguistics skills. This suggests that home language proficiency plays an important role in making input in additional languages comprehensible. Once this has been strongly established, it then transfers to the learners' additional language, usually with positive effects.

In summary the research findings refute the assumption that bilingualism per se is the cause of minority students academic difficulties, rather it is the difficulty in developing students L1 for conceptual and analytic thought that contributes to cognitive confusion. When language minority learners' L1 is strongly promoted by the school programme the resulting additive bilingualism appears to entail some subtle linguistic and cognitive benefits.

#### *2.4.3.5 Linguistic interdependence*

##### 2.4.2.5.1 The relationship between L1 and L2

The proposal that children's L2 competence is partly built on the level of competence achieved in their L1 led Cummins to develop the Interdependence theory (1995:73) and the Common Underlying Proficiency Hypothesis (2001:38). He (2000:69) suggests that these are of greater educational importance than his Threshold theory. In order to support the idea of transfer of knowledge and skills between languages Baker (1996:18) suggested that there is a common underlying proficiency through which bilingual children can access concepts and skills developed in their home language to use them in their additional language and vice versa.

The Interdependence Hypothesis expresses the point that experience with either language can promote development of proficiency underlying both languages, given adequate motivation and exposure to both, either in school or the wider environment (Cummins 2001:71). Cummins' Interdependence hypothesis and common underlying proficiency are similar to the idea of concept building as proposed by Vygotsky (1986), or the development of operational structures proposed by Piaget (1968, 1969) although Piaget does not ascribe their development to language. Cummins' standpoint supports views expressed by Vygotsky (1986) that learning of a second language necessitates learning new words but not new concepts. This presupposes that children's concepts are well developed in their home language. However if scientific concepts do not exist in the home language of the child then he or she has words with no concepts in which to house them. Accordingly Cummins (2001:74) warns that children whose academic proficiency in the language of instruction is weak will tend to fall behind unless the instruction they receive enables them to comprehend the input (both written and oral) and participate in class. One way to achieve this, given that the conceptual goalposts are continually moving, is that home language instruction should be continued for as long as possible.

Research data shows that within a bilingual programme, instructional time can be focused on developing students' literacy skills in English. Furthermore, the relationship between L1 and L2 literacy skills suggests that effective development of primary language literacy skills can provide a conceptual foundation for long term growth. English literacy skills do not mean that transfer of literacy and academic language knowledge will happen automatically. There is a need for formal instruction in the target language to realise the benefits for cross-linguistic transfer.

#### *2.4.3.6 Criticism of the interdependence hypothesis*

Cummins' idea of the interdependence of language skills has been criticised by a number of authors. Rivera (1984:49) states that the principal idea that emerged from this theory was that he neglected the role of social factors in language acquisition. Edelskys (1990:61) also argued that linguistic and cognitive variables are insufficient to account for differences in school progress in a bilingual context.

Genesee (1984:14) claims that it is better to conceive of language proficiency as an intervening effect than as a causal factor. He claims that language alone is not likely to explain the developmental lag that some minority language children experience in the acquisition of school related linguistic proficiency. He argued that it is unclear whether it is L1 proficiency or age that predicts L2 proficiency. On the whole children with more advanced L1 academic skills are also likely to be older and consequently, cognitively more mature.

Edelsky (1990:65) claims that cognitive skills can be strictly test skills. He claims that Cummins' model poorly defined the notion of context. He argues that Cummins collapsed a number of features of context which are distinguished by socio-linguists, into a single continuum. Factors such as familiarity and acceptance of language tasks can be seen as distinct contextual aspects.

There are also several criticisms that can be made of the empirical studies that have been conducted to test Cummins' interdependence hypothesis. First of all, given the conditions of exposure and motivation, the hypothesis has been defined so broadly that it can hardly be tested empirically. The Interdependence Hypothesis presupposes a causal relationship between L1 and L2 skills whereas most empirical studies follow a correlation design. The problem of causality remains unsolved. A correlation only indicates a relationship between two variables without providing information about the causal direction, if any (Verhoeven 1998:130).

In cross-sectional studies language proficiency can be an intervening effect rather than a causal factor. In these studies, it is unclear whether L1 proficiency or age predicts L2 academic proficiency. Such studies usually found that children with more advanced academic skills are also likely to be older and consequently more cognitively mature. There is, therefore, an urgent need for longitudinal studies. Very few studies have followed children's L1 and L2 development. Empirical studies relating to L1 and L2 skills have often failed to allow for the learners' socio-economic background. Brent Palmer (1989:34) proclaims that the notion of interdependence of linguistic skills be rejected because linguistic abilities can be explained by macro-social factors.

#### *2.4.3.7 The BICS/CALP continuum*

Cummins (2001:58) suggests that while children can pick up oral proficiency in as little as two years, as measured in standardised tests, it may take five to seven years to acquire de-contextualised language skills required for academic success. To represent the two separate skills Cummins (1981a:68) proposed the concepts Basic Interpersonal Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1981a, p.68) claims that BICS is the communicative capacity needed to function in everyday life thus, contextualised or content embedded context, whereas, CALP is related to the higher-level language skills required for cognitive demanding content such as literacy because it is de-contextualised.

The CALP-BICS distinction is intended to explain that academic deficit of minority language learners which is often created by teachers and psychologists who fail to realise that it takes minority language speakers longer to attain grade or age appropriate levels of English academic skills than it does for English face-to-face communicative skills. Essentially the developmental interdependence framework tries to integrate an earlier distinction between CALP and BICS into a more general theoretical framework. More recently Cummins (2003:188) has toned down his linguistic claims and is also pointing to socio-cultural learning contexts.

There are two reasons why such major differences are found in the length of time required to attain peer-appropriate levels of conversational and academic skills. Firstly, considerably less knowledge of language itself is usually required to function appropriately in interpersonal communicative situations than is required to function in academic situations. The social expectations of the learner and sensitivity to contextual and interpersonal cues, such as eye contact, facial expression, intonation and so on, greatly facilitate meaning in communication. These social cues are largely absent in most academic situations that depend on knowledge of the language itself for successful task completion. In comparison to interpersonal conversation the language of the text usually involves greater frequencies of vocabulary, complex grammatical structures and greater demands on memory, analysis and other cognitive processes.



The second reason is that English L1 speakers are not standing still waiting for the English language learners to catch up. A major goal for schooling for all children is to expand their ability to manipulate language in increasingly abstract academic context. Every year English L1 students gain more sophisticated vocabulary and grammatical knowledge and increase their literacy skills (Cummins 2001:179). Thus, English language learners must catch up with a moving target. It is not amazing that this formidable task is seldom complete in one or two year's time.

By contrast, in the area of conversational skills, most native speakers have reached a plateau relatively early in schooling in the sense that a typical six year old can express himself as adequately as an older child on most topics he is likely to want to speak about. She can adequately understand most of what is likely to be addressed to her (Brown 2000:43). While some increase in conversational sophistication can be expected with increasing age, the differences are not particularly notable in comparison to differences between literacy related skills. Compare, for example, the difference in literacy between a twelve and a six year old student and the differences in their conversational skills.

Cummins' hypothesis concerning BICS and CALP is supported by the research findings of Cook and Gumperz (1982:79), who also claim that contextualised language, mainly used for conversation purposes, is quite different from de-contextualised language used for school learning. According to Argyle (1985:7), context-embedded communication exists when there is a good degree of support in communication particularly via body language. By pointing at objects, using the eyes, head nods, hand gestures and intonation people give and receive plenty of clues and cues which help them in understanding the content of the message. In context reduced communication there will be fewer cues to the meaning that is being conveyed (Lindholm-Leary 2003:54). In the context of bilingual education children become conversationally fluent in English before they develop the ability to use English in academic situations. According to Olson (1977:30), conversational skills are less important in achievement than are academic skills. Cummins (1990:58) uses the BICS and CALP distinction to emphasise the need for maintenance bilingual education programmes. Cummins (1991:102) later dropped the BICS and CALP distinction and now uses the term Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP).

#### *2.4.3.8 Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP)*

Cummins (2000:59) argues that there is an interdependent relationship between L1 and L2 proficiency. According to Cummins, a strong L1 foundation acts as support in the learning of English, making the learning easier and faster. Using the concept of CUP he argues that since most of the learning that goes into the L1 transfers readily to a L2 then transfer of academic language from the first to second language in an educational setting is highly probable. On the other hand if the child's L1 is not well developed the more difficult the achievement of bilingualism will be (Lindholm-Leary 2003:55). Cummins' theory suggests that L2 competency, that is BICS, develops relatively independently of L1 surface fluency. In comparison, context reduced, cognitively demanding communication develops interdependently and can be promoted by either language or both languages in an interactive way (Lindholm-Leary 2003:56). Cummins' theory, therefore, suggests that bilingual education programmes will be successful when children have enough first or second language proficiency to work in the cognitively demanding situation of the classroom. His theory also suggests that children operating simply at the context embedded level in the language of the classroom may fail to understand the content of the curriculum and fail to engage in the higher order cognitive processes of the classroom such as synthesis, discussion, analysis, evaluation and interpretation (Cummins 2001:182; Fitzgerald 1995:181).

Similarly, once the basic principles of reading are mastered in the home language, such reading skills transfer quickly to second language. Collier (1987:60) found that five, six, and seven year old arrivals in the USA tend not to adequately acquire academic skills in the L2 because of their limited skills in the L1. This is compared to older arrivals who can transfer their reading skills in their native language to reading in English. Studies in the USA generally confirm that students in late exit programmes perform better than those who exited bilingual programmes earlier (Ramirez 1991:38). The premise of interdependence between two languages supports additive bilingual programmes that develop proficiency in English while maintaining minority children's L1. The younger group did not develop and maintain their L1.

Becoming fluent in the L2 does not mean having to lose one's L1. Conversely, maintaining the L1 does not retard the development of a L2. However, many people still believe that if children have not mastered the L2 by early school years they never will. Lambert et al. (1993:86) divided bilingual programmes into two, namely, *additive* bilingualism in which children's L1 is developed and maintained and *subtractive* bilingualism, in which the language of instruction is likely to replace children's L1. The erroneous belief that children are fast additional language learners constitutes a logical foundation for the emergence of subtractive bilingualism (Lindholm-Leary 2003:181). Most black children in township-, rural- and farm-schools then are going to end up with two languages, each poorly developed. In other words they will be semi-lingual.

The result of bilingual education research on bilingual programmes shows that minority languages can be promoted in school at no cost to the development of the majority language. In other words, the educational arguments against bilingualism are invalid. Evidence shows that well executed bilingual programmes have had considerable success in developing English academic skills, despite the fact that students received less exposure in English than in monolingual programmes (Cummins 2001:193).

In conclusion the evaluation and research data reviewed refute the maximum exposure hypothesis and linguistic disparity with regard to minority language learners' underachievement. This does not mean that exposure to language is not important nor that it is not more difficult to learn through a medium of L2 than through L1; rather, the data indicates that the influence of exposure and linguistic mismatch is considerably modified by other factors, inasmuch as predictions about the influence of these factors on their own is not possible.

The data reviewed shows that there is no evidence that language minority learners' are at risk because of two languages of instruction. The opposite appears to be the case as found in Malherbe (1946:36) and Bruck (1982:98). There is no justification to force language minority parents in South Africa to use English at home. Not only is the switch to English unnecessary, but it can also backfire by lowering the quality of parent-child interaction in the home and exposing the child to poor models of English.

An experiment conducted by Belyayev (1963:107) on the relationship between thought and language skills can be used to support Cummins's proposition that the more complicated the task at hand, the greater difficulty learners have in carrying it out. In timing the amount of time it took subjects to respond to tasks involving naming, giving opposites, associations and making generalisations Belyayev (1963: 110) established that the more complicated the thought process, the more slowly it was carried out in the foreign language. The less competent the learner was, the greater time the task took.

Cummins' (2001:192) notion, that school demands abstract, scientific language can be related to Vygotsky's (1962:110) ideas of scientific concepts. It extends Vygotsky's ideas in relation to school adding scientific concepts by focusing on the language skills necessary to manipulate and present concepts in academic tasks. In line with this Cummins (1984:141), proposes that one of the major aims of schooling is to develop students' ability to manipulate and interpret cognitively demanding, context-reduced text. Cummins' (2001:286) BICS/CALP continuum provides a more in-depth understanding of language skills necessary for successful learning and is supported by Pereira (1984:18). Pereira suggests that through literacy, children are exposed to language not used in speech (BICS) and because of this, children learn to use increasingly more complex sentences and structures.

Several obvious implications of these data can be noted. First, educating bilingual and English language students is the responsibility of the whole school staff and not just the responsibility of and the L2 or bilingual teacher. The second implication is that school language policies which address the needs of all students should be developed for those who require support in English academic language learning (Corson 1998:34). This also implies that administrators in schools should be competent enough to provide leadership in addressing issues of underachievement in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts.

In short the difference between conversational and academic proficiency and the length of time required to catch up academically have major consequences for a variety of curricular and assessment issues. In particular this data suggests that we should be looking for interventions that will sustain L2 learners' long term academic progress rather than expecting any short term 'quick fix' solutions to learners' academic underachievement in English. The implication for instruction of L2 learners is that

language and content will be acquired most successfully when students are challenged cognitively as well as being provided with contextual and linguistic support or scaffolds required for successful task completion.

#### *2.4.3.9 Conclusion*

In this section research findings on how long it takes minority language learners to acquire English proficiency were reviewed and interpreted within a theoretical framework concerned with the nature of language proficiency and its cross-lingual dimensions. The reality that immigrant students require, on average, 5-7 years to approach grade norm in L2 academic skills. At the same time the findings suggest that peer appropriate L2 conversations within two years of arrival indicate that the conversational and academic aspects of language proficiency need to be differentiated.

Some of the reasons why minority children acquire L2 conversation skills more rapidly than age appropriate academic skills are apparent from the dimensions hypothesised to underlie the relationship between language proficiency and academic development. Considerably less knowledge of L2 is required to function appropriately in a conversational setting than in an academic setting because of greater contextual support available for communicating and receiving meaning.

A large amount of data suggests that L1 and L2 context reduced cognitively demanding proficiency are interdependent or a manifestation of common underlying proficiency. This theoretical principle accounts for the fact that instruction through a medium of a minority language does not result in the lower levels of academic performance in the majority language.

Consequently there is little justification for the frequent scepticism expressed by educators and parents about the value of bilingual or mother-tongue education programmes, especially for the students with potential language or learning difficulties. It is for this reason that South African learners will benefit more from mother-tongue instruction, promotion of literacy skills, and the development of an additive form of bilingualism.

The CUP principle shows that instruction in mother-tongue will benefit learners. Moreover it is not advisable for schools to switch to English before learners L1 skills are fully developed. The English policy results in damaging learners emotionally and cognitively because of the lower quality and quantity of interaction that primary-school teachers, in the South African context, provide. For minority language students who are academically at risk there is evidence that strong promotion of L1 proficiency represents an effective way of developing a conceptual and academic foundation for acquiring English literacy skills.

## **2.5 MODELS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

The question to ask is under which conditions does instruction in L1 and L2 respectively lead to a high level of bilingualism? To answer this question it is important to distinguish between three basic models of education recognised in the literature on bilingualism. These are the transitional model, the maintenance model and the enrichment Model.

### **2.5.1 Transitional model**

Transitional bilingual education can further be divided into two: early exit and late exit (Ramirez 1990:28). In earlier programmes learners were taught in their L1 for a period of two years. Whereas late exit allows learners to use their first language for 40 per cent of the time until they reach the sixth grade. We do not have such programmes in South Africa.

In transitional bilingual programmes teachers are bilingual. They are able to switch from the learners' home language to English according to the learners' needs. It is valuable, if not essential, to have a bilingual teacher in assisting learners through the transition.

Transitional bilingual education is used in most bilingual programmes in the USA (Crawford 1989:25). Its purpose is to familiarise students with the subject matter temporarily through the use of student's L1. However, the aim of the programmes is not just to develop student's L1 and does not necessarily guarantee the mastery of English. In fact it may prevent L2 learners from attaining proficiency in either their L1 or English (Hakuta 1990:100). The quantity of transitional bilingual education programmes in the

USA serves as an indication of the strong conviction concerning maximum exposure hypothesis.

### **2.5.2 Maintenance model**

Maintenance model refers to bilingual education programmes which aim towards language maintenance, the strengthening of cultural identity and the affirmation of civil rights. The maintenance model is not well established in the United States of America. The aim of this programme is to assist language minority learners acquire English and also maintain their home languages (Lindholm-Leary 2003:18). This programme usually lasts longer than the transitional programme and works towards a situation of additive bilingualism whereby the new language is added to the speakers' L1. An example of this type of programme is the heritage language programme in Canada for minority language speakers where the students' home language is used as a medium of instruction for 50 per cent of the school curriculum (Baker 1996:98). According to De Meija (2002:40), a maintenance bilingual education programme uses content-subject instruction in both home language and the L2 to achieve a goal of strong literacy in both languages.

In maintenance bilingual education or two ways bilingual education programmes there are an equal number of minority and majority language learners in the classroom. Two languages are used interactively in the classroom. Since both languages are used for learning and instruction the aim of this programme is to produce relatively balanced bilinguals (Lindholm-Leary 2003:180). Bi-literacy is also the intention of this programme, that is, bilingualism with full literacy in both languages either simultaneously, or with the initial emphasis on native language literacy.

Lindholm-Leary (2003:148) claims that a two way bilingual programme must have the following four characteristics:

- non-English language is used for 50 per cent of the instruction
- in each period of instruction only one language is used
- both English and non-English speakers are present in balanced numbers
- English and non-English speakers are integrated in all lessons.

According to Lindholm-Leary (2003:150), two-way bilingual programmes have the following goals:

- learners should attain high level of proficiency in their L1 and L2
- learners' academic performance should eventually be at or above grade level on both languages
- learners should demonstrate positive cross-cultural attitudes and competence; schools should have programmes of academic excellence for language majority and language minority learners.

Communities and society at large should benefit from having citizens who are bilingual and bi-literate and who are positive towards people of diverse cultural backgrounds as well as meeting national needs for language competence. This could mean more peaceful co-existence with people of other nations.

Lindholm-Leary (2003:153) claims that there is language separation and compartmentalisation in this programme. In each period of instruction only one language is used. Language boundaries are established in terms of time, curriculum content and teaching. Switching of languages within lessons has been found to be counterproductive.

In contrast to segregation mother-tongue maintenance programmes, which use learners' mother-tongue as medium of instruction, show a high level of success because the linguistic goal of bilingualism and that of societal goal equity and integration are the same. A speaker who is able to function in two or more languages either in monolingual or bilingual communities in accordance with the socio-cultural demands, the individual's communicative and cognitive competence as expected by the community as well as by the individual herself/himself, at the same level as the native speaker and who is positively able to identify with both or all language groups and cultures or parts of them is said to be bilingual (Skutnabb and Kangas 1993).

### **2.5.3 Submersion model**

Another type of bilingual programme is submersion or sink or swim. In this programme language minority learners are placed in mainstream education. The main aim of this



programme is not first language development, but its replacement with majority language. Teachers in this programme use a simplified English form of the majority language and may initially accept learner's contributions in their home language.

An example of submersion programmes for the majority is found in many African countries where education is through the medium of the former colonial languages. This is also the case in South Africa. For the vast majority of the population the results are poor, both academically and linguistically (Africa 1990:27). The linguistic goal achieved is dominance in English for the elite. The masses remain with their underdeveloped mother-tongue languages and limited English proficiency.

Submersion may occur with or without pullout classes to teach the minority language learners. Language minority learners in mainstream classes may be pulled out for compensatory lessons in the majority language. Such withdrawal classes are provided as a way of keeping language minority learners in mainstream schools. However withdrawn children may fall behind the curriculum content delivered to the remaining others not in the withdrawal classes. Also, there is a stigma attached to being withdrawn. The withdrawn learners are viewed by their peers as being disabled (Lindholm-Leary 2003: 130).

This is the most common type of bilingual education in the USA. Its aim as cited by Baker is assimilation. Assimilation, according to Lemmer (1997:444), is a mono-cultural policy which has prevailed until recently in most multicultural Western societies. Its main aim is to minimise cultural differences and encourage social conformity and continuity. Learners in these programmes are temporarily allowed to use their L1 and are often being taught in their L1, until they are thought to be proficient enough in the majority language to cope in mainstream classes. The aim is to increase majority language usage in the classroom while gradually decreasing the learners' L1 use in the classroom.

Teachers in submersion classes are monolingual and usually do not know the children's L1. It is for this reason that learners are forced to speak an additional language before they are ready. According to Krashen (1999:62), learning a second language engenders a level of anxiety. This may be one of the reasons why these learners end up failing to master a L2.

#### **2.5.4 An enrichment model**

An enrichment model of bilingual education shares certain characteristics in common with the maintenance model but goes beyond it. The main aim of this model is to maintain the speakers' L1 as well as developing and extending it. This model encourages cultural pluralism and the development of the social autonomy of cultural groups and refers to both the language minority and language majority speakers. Immersion programmes in Canada and dual language programmes in the USA are examples of this type of model where both first and second language and foreign languages are seen as important resources to be used and developed by the individual speakers. According to Horn-Berger (1991:56), the enrichment model provides the greatest potential benefit not only to language minority speakers but to the national society as a whole.

In conclusion the enrichment model of bilingual education is not synonymous with immersion programmes, although the two are closely linked. The enrichment model is defined as the whole range of programmes. It provides bilingual education to majority language speaking groups who are highly educated and usually of a high socio-economic status.

#### **2.5.5 Immersion programme**

Immersion is a method of foreign language instruction in which the regular school curriculum is taught through the medium of a second language. Immersion programme originated as a community experiment in the 1960's in Quebec, Canada. There are a number of alternative forms of the immersion approach. Two factors serve to differentiate among the existing variations of immersion:

- 1) The amount of instruction provided in the L2 (total or partial immersion).
- 2) The grade level at which immersion commences, that is, early, delayed or late immersion (Cloud et al. 2000:35).

In the total immersion programme, 90-100 per cent of the students' instructional day is taught through a medium of the foreign language during Grades K-1. In Grades 2 and 3 about 80 per cent of instructional day is devoted to teaching content through the foreign

language. By Grade 4 through to 6 at least 50 per cent of instruction continues to be offered in the L2.

This type of a programme is a success in Canada and Skutnabb-Kangas (1991:234) claims the success of the programme can be attributed to the following factors:

- an English speaking Canadian learner chooses to be educated in English as a medium of instruction or French; immersion programmes give both parents and learners a choice
- teachers in these programmes are highly qualified bilinguals; although these teachers speak only French to the learners they do understand English
- learners in these programmes are allowed to use their first language until they are ready; according to Krashen (2000:67), learning a second language engenders a low level of anxiety which may be one of the reasons why these learners are able to achieve a high level of proficiency in both languages.

#### *2.5.5.1 Early partial immersion*

In this programme less than 100 per cent of curriculum instruction during the primary grades is provided in the L2. The amount of L2 instruction varies from programme to programme, but 50 per cent first language and 50 per cent second language instruction is the most common formula from Kindergarten through to Grade 6 (De Meija 2003:78).

According to De Meija (2003: 79), both immersion programmes have the following goals in common:

- functional proficiency in L2
- ability to communicate in L2 on topics appropriate to age level
- mastery of subject content material of the school content which is taught through the L2
- achievement in the English language comparable to or surpassing the achievement of students in English only programmes
- cross- cultural understanding.

The Canadian immersion classes in which English speaking majority children are taught through a L2, French, leads to a high level of bilingualism and success in schools (Lambert & Taylor 1982:57). The societal goal includes linguistic and cultural enrichment for the power majority as well as increased employment prospects and other benefits.

In conclusion those programmes which achieve high levels of success are those in which linguistic goals have been bilingualism for all and the societal goal has been acceptable to the group concerned. Those programmes which fail to achieve bilingualism are the ones in which the linguistic goal has been dominance in one language and no or very little mother-tongue instruction. Alternatively, mother-tongue has been badly taught and the societal goal has been to keep the group, or at least most of them, in a subordinate position (Skutnabb-Kangas 1998:40).

#### **2.5.6 Success and failure of various programmes**

High success programmes offer enough cognitively demanding subject matter to promote common underlying proficiency for all languages Cummins (1984:79), Skutnabb-Kangas (1988: 38). Cognitively demanding subject matter is provided in most high degree of success (HDS) programmes. This is done through the medium of L1 in maintenance and through L2 in immersion programmes. Immersion programmes should ensure that those learners who understand can transfer their knowledge about L1 to that of L2 (Swain & Lapkin (1982:105). In submersion programmes where both language and subject matter are unfamiliar it is less likely that the learner will know how to use that language as an effective instrument for thinking and problem solving.

In addition to L2 development in school learners need to develop their mother-tongue outside the school in linguistically demanding formal contexts otherwise they are restricted to being able to discuss everyday things in informal settings only. A more general factor which influences whether a language learning situation is additive or subtractive is the degree to which L2 teaching supports or harms L1 development. Only submersion programmes threaten mother-tongue in that way (Garcia & Baker 1995:42).

Absence of the opportunity to practice the L2 in peer group contexts outside the school may be due to practicalities or to racism. Examples of this is the absence of L2 native

speakers as found in South Africa, or the exclusion of black children by white children and vice versa as is the case at high and/or secondary school level. Exposure of L2 native speakers to linguistically demanding formal contexts depends on the existence of L2 institutions staffed by native speakers (Baker 1996:58). South Africa has, over all, 8 per cent native English speakers. South Africans are therefore mostly exposed to non-native English speakers.

Measures which under different less oppressive conditions would be positive, for instance for mother-tongue instruction, can in the hands of an oppressive regime become an instrument for segregation. High levels of bilingualism benefit every child but for minority language learners it is a necessity. It is possible to achieve if the main principles are followed and applied to different situations. Language support by institutions is likely to develop cognitively demanding de-contextualised environments for learning (Garcia & Baker 1995:43).

To summarise then, for all the HDS programmes the linguistic goal has been bilingualism and the societal goal has been positive for the group concerned. In all low degree of success (LDS) contexts the linguistic goal has been dominance in language and no mother-tongue instruction. Alternatively mother-tongue has been badly taught. The societal goal has been to keep the group, or at least most of them, in a subordinate position (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988:40).

### **2.5.7 Conclusion**

Several studies have shown that the use of the L1 is not in itself a handicap to children's academic progress (Cummins 1989:40). There is evidence that in some situations exclusive use of the majority language in the home may be associated with poor academic progress in that language. Cummins (1989:63), for example, examined academic progress of 172 Italian immigrant children in an English medium elementary school in Montreal and the L2 spoken at home and with friends and siblings. He reported that children who used L1 exclusively with parents and sibling performed significantly worse than those who used both L1 and L2. It seems likely though that those who use L1 exclusively were recent immigrants. Length of residence was not considered. Skutnabb-

Kangas' (1984:260) research document describes how rapidly the switch to majority language occurs among siblings.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress in the USA (1983:10) provided the most comprehensive data on the implications of a minority language use at home. It was found that although students from other dominant language homes tended to lag behind students from English dominant homes in reading achievement, the patterns of the findings could not be attributed to any simple relationship between linguistic disparity and achievement.

## **2.6 FACTORS INFLUENCING SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

### **2.6.1 Socio-political factors**

While Cummins' hypotheses (1978, 1980, 2000, 2001, 2003) provide a theoretical framework for understanding bilingualism and learning, without the examination of socio-political factors involved in learning they have been interpreted as portraying the learners as deficit and not adequately describing the learning situation of children who are forced to use a language other than their own. Aware of this misinterpretation Cummins (2000:195; 2001:75) is at pains in to include factors beyond the learners which contribute to academic difficulties. He (2001:76) argues that "language issues represent surface structure issues which are more central than deep structure issues" (2001:76). While the promotion of learners' academic language proficiency is seen as important, he suggests socio-political factors are more crucial. These include the extent to which interactions between students and teachers affirm the learners' academic and cultural identities and the extent to which the school programmes challenge and reverse the historical patterns of coercive relations of power. Cummins (2000:189) accuses schools of communicating a sense of shame with regard to children's language and cultural backgrounds. This position is strongly affirmed by Brunner (1996:38) who says that "Any system of education... that diminishes the school's role in nurturing its pupils' self esteem fails at one of its primary functions."

If students feel alienated and demotivated they will not engage in the effort of learning. Therefore it is necessary that the education with which they are presented, and the manner of its presentation, should strive to affirm students who are at risk.

Skutnabb-Kangas (1988:46) also sees the role played by socio-political factors in bilingual education as determining the success of such programmes. She suggests that it is only programmes that confront existing prejudices, fight for the learners human rights and aim for bilingualism that succeed. Through an examination of bilingual programmes of learning, from countries as diverse as Namibia, Uzbekistan and Canada, Skutnabb-Kangas suggests that the abovementioned factors are present in those programmes which she deems as having a high degree of success.

Some educational programmes for minority and majority children achieve HDS in making children bilingual and giving them a fair chance of achieving at school. Some other programmes show a LDS. Many of the children do not learn any of the languages at the same level as the monolinguals or they become strongly dominant in one of the languages, that is, they fail to become fully bilingual. They also show, as a group, a low level of achievement in schools (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:39).

One of the most discussed features in attempting to explain the difference between the two groups is which of the two languages has been used as the medium of instruction. Paradoxically instruction through the medium of mother-tongue can lead to either HDS or LDS. Likewise instruction through the medium of an additional language can lead to HDS or LDS. It is therefore, important to look at both societal aspects, which determine the type of programme chosen for different types of people as well as the cognitive, pedagogical, linguistic and socio-cultural factors, which determine the outcome of the instruction.

### **2.6.2 Parental involvement**

Differences in parental background distinguish various levels of parental involvement. One important factor is the socio-economic status (SES) and the parent's level of

education in particular. According to Levine and Lezotte (1995:530), “involvement is so highly correlated with the socio-economic background such that controlling the SES in regression studies frequently eliminates its relationship with achievement”.

Considerable research demonstrates the importance of parental involvement on successful outcomes with language minority students (Cadzen 1992). Cloud et al. (2000:67) claims that children in immersion programmes have highly motivated parents. These parents take responsibility for organising language enrichment programmes for their children.

According to Gardner (1985:78), supported by Colleta and Gartner (1983:109), parents' active and passive roles have a dual influence in the education of their children. A casual modelling analysis suggests that parental support mediates L2 proficiency through its influence on students' motivation. In many situations these active and passive roles correspond to each other, as parents encourage the child to work harder and to learn the language and display attitudes and behaviour that indicate that they value the language. However, if parents actively motivate their children to learn a language but are critical of the other language community they limit the possibility of children ever fully learning the other language (Cloud et al. 2000:45).

While parental involvement may clearly benefit students, many parents experience barriers that prevent them from being actively involved in their children's education. These barriers include a sense of alienation, distrust, and for some parents a perception that their low educational skills are not sufficient for them to assist in the classroom. Many parents feel they lack the appropriate English language skills to help their children or to assist in the classroom. Some parents also lack understanding of how the school system operates and are unaware that their views are considered in decision-making. Parents also feel discriminated against by the school personnel.

### **2.6.3 Language distance**

An additional aspect that may be important in determining L2 achievement is the relative presence of L2 in that community. Research suggests that a person's degree of



contact with the L2 group will have an influence on the extent to which a L2 is learned (Clement 1979, 1980 and Hartshorne 1991).

One explanation of this relationship stems from the evidence suggesting that a high proportion of members from the L2 group in a community tend to increase their ethno-linguistic vitality which tends to have a positive effect on the maintenance of the language and therefore the extent to which that language might be learned by the host community. This is not always the case, however, as a lot of L2 learning also occurs in monolingual settings. This is the case in South Africa where some black people are obtaining relatively high levels of proficiency in English. Gardner and Smyth (1975:98) also claim that anglophones learning French in English monolingual settings attained relatively high level of proficiency in L2. This suggests that it is possible to learn a L2 in a formal setting where the L2 group is not present in the community. According to Gardner and Clement (1990:10), in monolingual communities other contextual aspects such as the L2 learning situation and parental involvement may play a large role in the students' motivation and achievement.

#### **2.6.4 Motivation**

Motivation and language anxiety will have an influence on how successful one is in learning another language. Motivation has a positive effect whereas anxiety has negative effect. By demonstrating the significance of the socio-cultural milieu in the process of second language learning this study suggests that language attitudes are sensitive to the contextual conditions of the learners' environment.

A number of personality characteristics when using L2 play a role in L2 learning such as risk taking, extroversion, introversion, field dependence/independence and anxiety. As yet we are not sure how well developed these traits are with young L2 learners (Brown 2000:161).

Some students are willing to take risks when using a L2; they seem less inhibited and do not bother much when making mistakes during communication. Brown (2000:150) claims that, risk taking accounted for 9 per cent variance in L2 achievement. He concludes that class discomfort negatively affects risk taking in a language class.

Learners who experience discomfort, or who are anxious, in class take fewer risks. Nevertheless an investigation on extroversion and introversion does yield inconsistent results. According to Brown (2000:153), some studies have found that success in L2 learning is highly related to characteristics such as introversion and assertiveness, while others failed to show such a relationship. One possible explanation for this inconsistency might be the nature of the language course being taught, since it could determine whether extroverted learners outperformed introverted learners or vice versa. The relationship between extroversion and communicative ability in L2 learning might differ from the relationship between extroversion and learning tasks where grammatical accuracy and knowledge of linguistic rules are required (Brown 2000:155).

Magiste (1992:267) conducted a study on German immigrant children learning Swedish in school to test the prediction of the critical period hypothesis for L2 acquisition. Her study indicated that elementary school learners achieved a balanced form of bilingualism two years earlier than high school learners at the same stage of L2 learning using the same picture naming tasks. These results were interpreted as supporting the critical period hypothesis for L2 acquisition. Interestingly the published data also showed that, after several years of residence in Sweden, both group of learners showed faster response time on picture naming task in L2 than in L1. Although the L1 and L2 trade off were not the focus of inquiry, Magiste's data clearly show that balanced bilingualism was simply a point in time and that L2 does have an impact on lexical and semantic processing in L1.

With regard to age it appears that younger children acquire a L2 with greater ease and in a more natural way than adolescents and adults. Older learners, on the other hand, possess better cognition abilities and learning strategies with which certain aspects of L2 such as, translation, syntax, grammar and vocabulary, can be mastered more efficiently. Nonetheless, in a study conducted with learners of all age group who studied a L2 under the same circumstances, it was shown that older learners were more successful in acquiring the L2.

### **2.6.5 Age**

Most discussion about the age and acquisition highlights the question of whether there is a critical period for language acquisition or not? Is there a biologically determined period

of life when language can be acquired more easily and beyond which time language is increasingly difficult to acquire? The Critical Period Hypothesis claims that there is such a biological timetable. Initially the notion of a critical period was connected to only L1 acquisition. Researchers like Lenneberg (1967) and Bickerton (1981) have made strong arguments in favour of a critical period before which and after which certain abilities do not develop.

According to L2 researchers, such as Bialystock (1987), Singleton and Lengyel (1995) and Scovel (1999), the critical period for L2 learners occurs around puberty, beyond this people seem to be relatively incapable of learning a L2. This has led to the arbitrary assumptions that by the age of twelve or thirteen it becomes difficult to acquire a L2. Such assumptions are based on people's subjective view of what it means to be successful in learning a language

To wrap up the discussion then, while the focus of this chapter has been on both the L1 and L2 acquisition process from the perspective of the language, the learner and the learning process, it is important to point out that the larger social and cultural context of L2 development also has a tremendous impact on L2 learning. The status of the learners' ethnic group in relations to the larger culture can help or hinder the acquisition of the language of mainstream society.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

Research on language acquisition and use can be divided into L1 and L2 settings. The literature on L1 learning is most relevant to the child development while L2 learning pertains primarily to adult learning. Most general theories of language learning apply to both. While it is not clear whether different psychological processes are involved in L1 and L2 learning, there are differences in the way children and adults learn and this has important implications. Theories of adult learning (such as Krashen's 1999; 2000 & Cummins' 2000; 2004) and literacy are more likely to provide an appropriate framework for L2 learning compared to those concerned with child development (like Piaget & Vygotsky).

Linguistically oriented theories of language learning tend to emphasise genetic mechanism (universal grammar) in explaining language acquisition. Behavioural theorists argue that association, reinforcement and imitation are the primary factors in the acquisition of language. Cognitive theorists suggest that schema, rule structures and meaning are distinctive characteristics of language learning. Theories of discourse argue that interaction with other speakers is critical dimension in language learning. That is syntactic structures develop from conversations. Vygotsky, for example, argues that all cognitive processes, including those involved in language, arise from social interaction.

Research and theory on L1 learning tends to be closely entwined with the development of cognition Brown (2000). Theoretical framework for L2 learning presents a number of different perspectives, for example, Brown (2000:120) argues that an analysis of errors made by in language learning reveals the development of inter-language. What is the set of rules made up by the learner that maps the new language in his native language? According to Brown, correction of errors is important in helping the student understand the grammar of the new language. Krashen (1999, 2000) distinguishes between acquisition and the learning processes; the former involve understanding and communication while the latter are concerned with the conscious monitoring of language use (meta-cognition). Krashen (2000:132) argues that acquisition processes are more critical than the learning processes and should be encouraged through activities that involve communication rather than vocabulary or grammar exercises. Many language researchers emphasise the inter-relationships between listening, speaking reading and writing processes (Vygotsky 1978, Cummins 2001 and Brown 2000).

The significance of the learner variable in language learning has been studied extensively. This includes abilities, motivation, cognitive styles and learning strategies. Theories of learning intelligence clearly indicate that there are distinct linguistic abilities that differ among individuals. Research on learning strategies indicates that a student's performance could be improved by following certain strategies but that the results are highly dependent upon the nature of the task and differs between learners.

While the focus of this chapter has been on both L1 and L2 acquisition processes from the perspective of language development, the learner and the learning, it is important to point out that the larger social and cultural context of L2 development also has a

tremendous impact on L2 learning. The status of the learners' ethnic group in relations to the larger culture can help or hinder the acquisition of the language of mainstream society.

## Chapter 3

# Language Policies on Education in South Africa

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Language of instruction, or the language in which education is conducted, has far reaching consequences in all education systems. The language of instruction in any society is also the language of hegemony and power (Lemmer 1998:230). It is the language in which basic skills and knowledge are imparted to the population and the medium in which the production and reproduction of knowledge is taught.

Where the medium of instruction is the same as the learners' home language, it does not only affirm the developmental capacity of the mother-tongue to grow as a language of culture, science and technology, but it also gives confidence to people with reference to their historical and cultural heritage (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988, Baker 2000, Macdonald 2002). When learners are learning in a second or foreign language as is the case for the majority of people in South Africa, cultural freedom and emancipation can neither be expanded nor cultivated. Where the language of instruction is different from the language of the mass society, those who work in the language of instruction become culturally removed and alienated from the masses (Baker 2000:217).

Struggles and process for the revision of the LOLT policies mirror larger political and social struggles. Changes in the status planning of languages are frequently not a parallel cultural response to political and socio-economic transformation. According to Kamwangamalu (2001:37), the pre-apartheid years in South Africa were culturally and linguistically defined by the struggle of the Afrikaner against the British policy of Anglicisation. The dominance of English in all areas of social life was contested with slow but steady erosion of its dominance until 1948 when the Afrikaner political elite gained the ascendancy.

This chapter is a historical review which covers the background against which the present language in education policies in South Africa has developed. This historical background helps in understanding the level of learner's linguistic competence in both their L1 and L2 language. The major question is what implications does the language policy in education have on the learner's academic achievement?

Language policies in education in South Africa are discussed to explain the current problems experienced by learners learning through a medium of instruction which is not their mother-tongue. The language policies in education are discussed against the background of theories about language acquisition.

The focus of the debate is on the contrast between policy and reality concerning the issues of language. In describing the language education policy in South Africa, Alexander (1989:52), quotes the passage by American linguist Herbert Kerman,

The deliberate use of language policies for the purpose of creating a national identity and fostering sentimental attachments is usually not desirable, rather language policies should be designed to meet the needs of and interest of all segments of the population effectively and equitably.

According to Alexander (1989:55), the main goal of language policy in South Africa should be to facilitate communication between different language groups that comprise South Africa so as to work against the effects of apartheid.

### **3.2 LANGUAGE POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLING: A POLITICAL HISTORY**

The history of language policy in South African schooling will be discussed in the ensuing paragraphs. This history is divided into two separate periods for easy discussion: the period between 1948 and 1994, and the period from 1994 to the present.

### **3.2.1 Language policy (1948 – 1994)**

Each country's education reflects the society in which it is placed as well as the politics of the country. That is, education cannot be separated from the society which it is supposed to serve. Education in South Africa also represented the political ideology of the government of the day (Lemmer 1998:228).

The National Party Government, which came into power in 1948, instituted an apartheid policy, which is separate development based on race. Schools were therefore segregated according to a racial divide. White children received free and compulsory education (Heugh 1995:43). Education for the black people was left in the hands of the missionaries who were constantly short of funds. As the population grew there was a shortage of schools for black people in particular and so relatively few black people received adequate schooling. The National Party then introduced the pass laws and homeland systems which placed restrictions on African people in urban areas (Lemmer 1998:228).

In 1953, the Bantu Education Act was passed which required all schools to be registered with the government. This meant the closure of most missionary schools. Schools became state controlled. The state decided on the curriculum content to be offered in these schools. Prior to the Bantu Education Act of 1953 mother-tongue education was applied during the first four years of schooling. The Bantu Education Act extended mother-tongue instruction to eight years. However, the main aim was not proficiency in mother-tongue, since mother-tongue was so badly taught that learners ended lacking proficiency in all languages taught at school (Heugh 2000:35).

Lack of proficiency in the learner's L1 was the result of the less cognitively demanding materials which were used to teach African languages and also shortage of books as is attested to by Lemmer (1998:255). The methods used to teach these African languages were also not up to standard.

Another documented problem was the nature of the syllabus. During apartheid education, black learners were subjected to cognitively undemanding mother-tongue curriculum making it difficult to cope with English and Afrikaans curriculum (Macdonald & Barrow 1991:15). The Bantu Education Act produced resistance to mother-tongue



education and an over-estimation of the role of English as the key to success in education. The De Lange Commission, which was constituted to investigate Bantu education, recognised the education crisis and recommended a move towards equal education for all.

In 1975 learners were expected to make a change from mother-tongue instruction to 50 per cent English and 50 per cent Afrikaans (Van Zyl 2002:13). According to Van Zyl (2002:13), this is one of the most important causes of the 1976 Soweto uprisings - protest action against the enforcement of Afrikaans as the language of instruction in Bantu education. These riots gave momentum to the liberation struggle. Chisholm (2005:200) claims those apartheid years led to the formation of separate goals, social and economic development of the dominant minority and the social and economic underdevelopment of the dominated majority. Schools were viewed as instruments for ideological oppression.

In response to the 1976 uprisings the State initiated educational reforms. According to Van Zyl (2002:15), these reforms were initiated in a framework of political reformism and separation. The Department of Bantu Education, renamed the Department of Education and Training in 1977 (DET), governed schools in the townships. Reforms included reverting to mother-tongue during the first four years of schooling in DET schools (Kapp 2000:411).

The change from mother-tongue instruction to English caused many problems. Many learners lacked sufficient proficiency to cope with the English syllabus. Macdonald (1993: 70) claims that a vocabulary of at least 5000 English words is required to cope with the curriculum, whereas, second language learners were reported to have only 800 English words. Macdonald (1993:73) claims that for African learners to be effectively taught in a L2, which in this case is English, certain conditions have to be in place, namely:

- learners should have sufficient opportunities to develop their mother-tongue; the major problems being experienced by African children in using English as a medium of instruction is that their L1 is not sufficiently developed, that is, they are unable to accomplish cognitively demanding tasks in their L1
- there should be sufficient opportunities to develop mother-tongue outside of school in a linguistically demanding formal context; African learners lack the necessary resources for learning the language outside the school context mainly because of poverty, especially in rural areas; most parents in these communities

are struggling to get basic commodities, such as three meals a day, and lack the necessary funds to buy books

- there should be appropriate academic and community support for the learning of English, that is, both effective language teaching and exposure to informal and authentic English context.

Teachers in both rural and township schools often lack proficiency in English and they are not well qualified. These schools also lack the necessary infrastructure such as, electricity, libraries and other audio-visual equipment necessary for the effective teaching of the language. English proficiency among black people in a South African context remains a privilege for the elite who are able to send their children to independent and international schools (Lemmer 1998:234).

During the 1980s and 1990s the African National Congress (ANC) began to develop policies in order to address the past injustices towards black people. The un-banning of the ANC, the release of Nelson Mandela, and the 1994 elections changed the mood to that of hope for the black majority of South Africa (Heugh 1995:45). For the first time, in March 1990, ministerial permission was granted to open white state schools to black learners. In May 1990 the Committee of Educational Heads initiated an investigation with the view to comprehensive educational reforms and proposed a strategy. The Educational Renewal Strategy (ERS) was produced in 1991. In 1993, the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) published its own comprehensive policy document framework for a new educational dispensation in post apartheid South Africa (NEPI 1993). In January 1994 the ANC produced its first national policy framework for education and training. The Government of National Unity led by the ANC was established in April 1994. However, black learners woes will not end overnight as poverty continues and the inequalities that existed in the past in schools remain. Christie (2001:150) states that the 1996 School Register of Needs showed the deprivation of the majority of black schools especially in rural areas.

### **3.2.2 Language policy after 1994**

In post-apartheid South Africa, eleven official languages have been recognised. These include Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu, siSwati, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans. When the ANC came to power they established a Language Task Action Group in order to establish the needs of the country (RSA 1996:Education Act).

The change in the language policy of South Africa, which occurred alongside the new Constitution in 1996, meant the recognition of several indigenous languages as a resource in building a democratic South Africa. It indicates a will to alter the distributions of power amongst the language groups (Adler 2001:92). The Language Task Group (LANGTAG) recommended a multilingual policy for South Africa as well as a wide spread use of African languages in order to counterbalance the effect of English instruction. Education in South Africa has begun to focus on multilingualism, resulting in changes in the language policy. The Constitution imposes a duty upon the state to recognise the historically diminished use and status of indigenous languages. The state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status of these languages (Lemmer 1998:228).

Language has become a major focus in South African education. There has been a move from enforced use of language in schools as found during apartheid years to a more liberal approach to language use in schools. There has been a major move towards multilingualism in schools as shown by our education policy (see 3.2). Pluddemann (2001:38) maintains that the promotion of multilingualism in education is the defining feature in the language in education policy. This policy was introduced in 1997 by the Ministry of Education and is coupled with the South African School's Act (1996).

These policies have given schools the right to choose their own language policies subject to the provincial and national norm and standards. The aim of this move is to promote multilingualism, aid in the development of the eleven official languages and instil respect for all languages. According to Pluddemann (2000:40), this policy endorses *additive bilingualism* with the underlying principle being the maintenance of the home language while also promoting the successful acquisition of the L2.

The new language policy represent a paradigm shift, towards multilingualism, recognises the centrality of choice, favours the maintenance and development of the learners' home language, has interim status and is in line with the new National Curriculum 2005. The new National Curriculum 2005 (Suzman 2002:12) was introduced in 1994 in order to address the past imbalances in education. Though there are a number of criticisms against, it provided a foundation from which changes could emanate.

In South Africa, the use of English as a medium of instruction is dependent upon the area in which the school is located. Learners in schools come from different primary languages as indicated by the eleven official languages. There is heavy emphasis on the acquisition of English as it is regarded as the language of economic mobility (Suzman 2002:14). Many children are expected to acquire English at the same time as learning through English academic content. There is a disparity in the proportion of English and home language time used in the classrooms.

It appears that the reasons used to promote mother-tongue instruction are not because learners will learn better if instructed in their L1. Economic, political, cultural and technical reasons are often used for not allowing learners, in a multilingual context, to be instructed in their mother-tongue especially if these languages are not languages of power (Lemmer 1998:230). On the economic front it is often assumed that it is the question of either first language or languages of wider communication.

The importance of acquiring English proficiency in South Africa for interaction at particular levels with the outside world cannot be underestimated. But it is a mistake to make the possibility of such interaction the basis for designing language in education policies for the majority of the people (Desai 2003:50). This decision results in learners lacking proficiency in both English and their first language as shown by researchers (Cummins 2002, Lemmer 1998, Macdonald 2002 and Skutnabb-Kangas 1998 amongst others).

It is argued that all languages develop through use and the more one uses a language the more likely it will develop (Pluddemann 2002:55). All languages have to develop new terms for the new concepts and terminology concerning technological development that has exploded around us. Developing terminology does not have to be a problem for

any language. Speakers of the language might decide to coin new terms or to borrow terms from other languages, whichever option best facilitates communication and understanding among its speakers. Heugh (1995:48) states that English is what it is today because of borrowing from other languages.

Pressure to reduce costs of public education is likely to have an impact on language policies in a context where resources invested in African languages are minimal. It is therefore likely that the tension between promoting English and African languages will continue to exist.

### *3.2.2.1 The South African Constitution*

Since 1996, the Republic of South Africa has had a democratic constitution. The Constitution is the highest authority in the country and all other law and conduct must be in accordance with the Constitution. The Constitution of 1996 (RSA 1996:114) sets out certain important values on which the democratic state is based.

According to Carrim (2001:99), equity features prominently in the Constitution. It is listed as the first substantial right in the Bill of Rights. Section 9 subsections (1) and (2) of chapter 2 in the Constitution provides a mechanism whereby specific denials of equity arising from discrimination may be challenged. It states:

- (1) Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.
- (2) Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote achievement of equality legislative and other measures, designed to protect or advance persons or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination, may be taken.

In chapter two of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, a number of fundamental social and human rights are set out. Section 29 of the Bill of Rights deals with issues such as the right to education, redressing past discriminatory practices and language in education (Carrim 2001:99).

Although the Constitution relates to many aspects of the governance of South Africa and is not specifically directed at education, it does provide the basis on which the national and provincial government can act in the field of education.

Section 29(2) of the Bill of Rights states that:

Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in the public educational institutions, where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure access to, and implementation of this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions taking into account:

- equity
- practicability
- the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practice (RSA 1996:114).

The provision of education to the citizens of South Africa is set out in Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No 108 of 1996 (RSA: 1996(d):13) Section 29 states that everyone has the right to:

- a basic education including adult basic education
- further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.

Lemmer (2001:39) maintains that internationally the right to education is recognised as a precondition for the enjoyment of many civil and political rights, such as freedom of information, freedom of expression, assembly and association. The right to vote and to be elected, or the right to equal access to public service, depends on at least a minimum level of education. Similarly many economic, social and cultural rights can only be meaningfully exercised after a minimum level of education has been achieved.

The Constitution also provides for the right of individuals to establish and maintain, at their own expense independent educational institutions, provided such institutions do not discriminate on the basis of race, colour gender and sex. They must also be registered

with the state, and maintain standards comparable to public educational institutions (Carrim 2001:103).

Despite what may be regarded as a progressive language education policy, which in principle enables learners or their guardians to choose the language of instruction, English is used as the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards. The transition to English is only a policy decided upon by individual schools and reflects the 1979 apartheid policy. The official government policy fails to mention when a change of language of instruction should take place. According to this policy, the whole primary and secondary schooling could be conducted in African languages as the language of instruction (Howie 2004:5).

According to Heugh (2000:5), an education language policy will not succeed unless it is integrated with and is in synchrony with the national education policy and plan. Curriculum and language policy continue to be treated separately for example, the Department of Education (DoE) announced the new Curriculum 2005 before the Language in Education Policy of 1997. It is for this reason that Alexander criticised Curriculum 2005 for being based on an uni-lingual system, that is, an English medium system of Education (DoE 2000:6).

### *3.2.2.2 South African Schools' Act (84 of 1996)*

The South African School Act (SASA), 84 of 1996, was promulgated to guide transformation in schools and to regulate the democratisation of schooling. This Act introduced a new system of schooling that gives everyone an equal opportunity to develop their talent. It does this by regulating admission policies in public schools. Schools can no longer discriminate against learners of a particular race. This provision is consistent with the students' right to basic education and freedom from unfair discrimination embodied in Section 9 and 29 of the Constitution Act of 1996.

The South African Schools Act (1996) is aimed at the creation and management of a new national school system. This system must, as far as is reasonably possible, give everyone an equal opportunity to develop his or her own talents. In such a system there can obviously be no place for racism, sexism or intolerance.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) covers the funding, organisation and governance of schools. It went through a series of draft white papers, discussions and debates before it was passed as an Act. The SASA outlines the powers and duties of school governing bodies, the nature of their composition and the procedures they need to follow in their official activities. This momentous legislation redressed the imbalances in state schooling brought about during apartheid education. Its content is divided into chapters, namely: matters relating to learners, public schools, funding of public schools, independent schools, transitional and general provisions. The South African Schools Act No 84 was amended by the Education Laws Amendment Act No 53 of 2000. This new Act deals with the governance of the newly established public schools until a new governing body is established and provides for safety measures at public schools (Jansen 1999:100).

The Act stipulates that every parent is accountable for the school attendance of every learner for whom he is responsible. School attendance is compulsory from the first school day of the year in which the child reaches the age of seven until the last day of the year in which the child reaches the age of fifteen or Grade 9 which ever occurs first. The ministry must determine the ages of compulsory attendance for learners with special educational needs by a notice in the Government Gazette. The head of an education department may exempt a learner partially from school attendance if it would be in the best interest of the learner. A register for such cases need to be kept. The provision of compulsory primary education has been achieved in South Africa. Both levels of universal primary education and gender balance in schools go beyond the requirements and targets set to be achieved by 2015 (Prinsloo 2002:51).

The Act stipulates that public schools must admit learners and meet their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way. The application of admission tests by the school's governing body is prohibited. Also the learner may not be refused admission to a public school on the grounds that a parent is unable to pay the school fees, thus fulfilling the individual's right to basic and further education in terms of Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1999 (Prinsloo 2002:51).

Despite the legislative changes vast disparities still exist between black and white education. The legacy of apartheid is conspicuous in townships and rural schools. These



schools are still inadequately resourced despite equity laws introduced. Students are still without books, classes are still overcrowded. Consequently parents, who have the means, take their children to better schools (Meier 2002:149). More black learners are sent to former Model C schools. Consequently the quality of African schooling is continuously under pressure to keep students in their classrooms. This migration of learners to former Model C schools continues despite quantitative gains made during the last decade (Carrim 1998:306).

The South African Schools Act repeals all apartheid legislation pertaining to schools. It abolishes corporal punishment and admission tests. Compulsory education for children between ages of seven and fifteen is codified. Provision is made for the framework of a unified schooling system.

### *3.2.2.3 Language in education policy*

The Constitution (Section 13) determines that every person has the right to receive education in a public school in the official language of his or her choice wherever this is reasonably practicable. All reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, must be considered by the state in keeping with the principles of equity, practicability and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices. Subject to the Constitution, the Act stipulates that norms and standards for language policy in public schools must be determined by the Minister of Education by notice in the Government Gazette and after consultation with the Council of Education Ministers. The governing body may determine the language policy of the school subject to the Constitution, the Schools' Act and any applicable provincial law (SASA 1996).

Norms and standards for language policy in public schools have been determined by the minister in terms of the National Education Policy Act No 27 of 1996. Language in education policy operates within the following principles:

- the promotion of multilingualism, the development of the official languages and the respect of all languages including the South African Sign language
- the maintenance of home language while providing access to the effective acquisition of additional languages.

The right to choose the language of learning is vested in the individual within the framework of the education system. The policy indicates requirements for languages as subjects, the languages for teaching and learning, the protection of individual rights, the rights and duties of the schools and the rights and duties of the provincial education departments.

Heugh (1995:44) states that the following constitutional clauses are important and therefore need to be taken into consideration by the national and provincial departments of education and all the schools in the country:

3(1) Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, seSotho, siSwati, Xistonga, Tshivenda, isiXhosa and isiZulu shall be the official South African languages at national level and conditions must be created for their development and for the promotion of their equal use and enjoyment.

3(4) Regional differentiation in relation to language policy and practice shall be permissible.

3(9) Legislation, as well as official policy and practice, in relation to the use of languages at any level of government shall be subject to and based on the provision of this section and the following principles:

- creating conditions for the development and promotion of the equal use and enjoyment of all South African languages
- extending those rights relating to language and the status of languages which at the commencement of this constitution are restricted to certain regions
- preventing the use of any language for the purpose of exploitation, domination or division
- promoting multilingualism and the provision of translation facilities
- fostering respect for languages spoken in the Republic other than the official languages and the encouragement of their use in appropriate circumstances.

8(2) No person shall be unfairly discriminated against directly or indirectly ... on one or more of the following grounds in particular; race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture of language...

3.2 Every person shall have the right to:

- basic education and equal access to educational institutions
- instruction in the language of his or her choice where this is

- reasonable and practicable
- establish, where practicable, educational institutions based on a common culture, language or religion, provided that there shall be no discrimination on the grounds of race (Republic of South Africa 1993).

The basic principles in the clauses are that:

- each person must have equal access to education
- no language should be used for the purpose of domination and discrimination, either directly or indirectly
- multilingualism must be promoted.

All children have the right to education based on the same fundamental principles. This means that as far as language and planning in education policy is concerned children should be in subtractive/transitional programme or they should be in additive programmes. If the subtractive/transitional route is followed this would mean the replacement of English and Afrikaans by an African language as a medium of instruction for English and Afrikaans- speaking children at the same point that African language speaking children switch over to English.

Although the learners are in principle able to be educated in their L1 throughout their schooling career in practice this is not happening. English continues to be used as a medium of instruction from Grade 4. The transition to English is decided upon by the individual school and reflects the apartheid language policy (Howie 2002:3). This is because the policy fails to mention when the transition to English medium should take place.

The implementation of the eleven official languages has not materialised as expected. According to Heugh (2000:5), for language in education policy to succeed it must be integrated and synchronise with the National Education Policy and plan (2000:5). Besides the Constitution, language policy in schools is derived from the National South African Schools Act and from the National Department of Education's 1997 policy document regarding Language Policy in Education. Provincial schools acts and regulations as well as governing bodies' policies on language are bound by these national frameworks and legislation. In short they state:

- language competency testing shall not be used as an admission requirement to a public school
- learners in public schools shall be encouraged to make use of the range of official languages
- no learner at a public school or private school which receives subsidy... shall be punished for expressing himself or herself in a language which is not the language of learning of the school concerned.

#### *3.2.2.4 The Norms and Standards Act of 1998*

The norms and standards, for language policy in public schools, have been determined by the Minister in terms of the National Education Policy Act No 27 of 1996. The act stipulates that:

- the minimum number of learners deemed to be practical for any official language to be requested as a language of learning is 40 for Grade 1 to Grade 6 and 35 for Grade 7 to 12
- the governing body is obliged to outline how the school will promote multilingualism; this is spelt out as a variety of measures such as offering more than one language of learning and teaching, offering additional languages as fully fledged subjects or the use of special immersion or language maintenance programmes
- the minimum number of languages to be learnt is two, and at which level, that is, second or third level
- the educational promotion criteria attached to language are, one official language as a L1 up to Grade 9 and two languages for Grades 10-12 one of which is an official language; according to Heugh (2003:18), learners can choose one language from the approved list of languages as their L2 option throughout their education.

#### *3.2.2.5 Curriculum 2005*

The need for transforming the old school curriculum and developing a new curriculum which reverses the authoritarian, racist and sexist content and processes of the past was understood long before the 1994 democratic elections. Outcomes based education is

being put into practice in South African schools by means of Curriculum 2005. This curriculum was introduced into South African schools from 1998 in phases. The medium for the implementation of this curriculum is OBE in its transitional OBE mode (DoE 1997:1). This is aimed at addressing equity in education so that the quality of learning opportunities afforded to all learners is the same.

Transformational OBE, propounded by Spady (1994:1-2), is manifested in the curriculum development process in South Africa resulting in the promulgation of Curriculum 2005. Spady distinguishes critical outcomes and specific outcomes. Critical outcomes relate to the broader intended results of education and training, whereas specific outcomes are linked to a particular context or learning area. In South Africa eight learning areas are identified for the general education and training band (Grades 1-9). These are language, literacy and communication, mathematics and mathematic sciences, natural sciences, arts and culture, economics and economic management and life orientation.

The main aim of the introduction of the new curriculum by the new South African Government was to “normalise teaching and learning”. This involves a paradigm shift from the traditional aims and objectives of teaching to outcome based education (DoE 1997:2).

The key principles guiding curriculum development across all learning areas include: integration, holistic development, relevance, participation and ownership, accountability and transparency, learner oriented approach, inclusion of learners with special educational needs, quality standards and international comparability (DoE 1997:3).

Although it is a progressive curriculum and offers better opportunities to both the learners and teachers, many South African researchers, such as Jansen (1998), De Clerq (1997) as well as Vally and Spreen (1996: 45), have expressed their doubts about the success of such major curriculum reforms. Curriculum 2005 has been criticised by Jansen (1998:330) and De Clerq (1997) for its top down implementation plan. They claim that the mode of implementation was conceived and developed at the top of the hierarchy and implemented at the grassroots by means of further policies and directives. Jansen (1998:321) traced the background of its conception to the pre- democratic era when the government started negotiations with the political parties and other stakeholders

towards a smooth transition to democracy. Curriculum 2005 was intended to replace the apartheid curriculum with its offensive and outdated content. The new government, according to Jansen, also wanted to introduce continuous assessment in schools and lastly they wanted to introduce outcomes based education in schools. Jansen (1998: 322) makes a critical assessment of the claims, assumptions and silences underpinning the official policy on OBE.

De Clerq (1997:127) states that the curriculum reform policy proposals are flawed in their conceptualisation of the problems and misjudge the educational context and dynamics on the ground, that is, in the classroom, the teachers and the learners. She sees the policy provisions and implementation strategies as favouring the rich and socially privileged class rather than the disadvantaged for whom they are mainly intended. De Clerq claims that the policy proposals are based on problematic assumptions about policy and policy process and the relationship between policy and practice with an inappropriate understanding of the change and the change processes that are likely to bring in the required reforms that favour the disadvantaged.

Outcomes Based Education was introduced, according to Jansen (1998:322), to displace an emphasis on content coverage. It makes explicit what learners should attend to, directs assessment towards specified goals, signals what is worth learning in a content heavy curriculum and can be used as a measure of accountability at school level. However genuine these claims may appear to be there has not been sufficient evidence from countries such as Australia and New Zealand about its success. According to De Clerq, the idea of life-long learning and integrated education was borrowed from these countries without an attempt by government to learn from the experiences of societies in transition with similar socio-political, democratic agendas and aspirations. According to Jansen (1998:323), there is little chance of OBE becoming successful in resource poor schools which forms the majority of South African schools.

According to De Clerq (1997:334), there is a need to revise the assessment policies and practices for OBE to be implemented in its intended form. There is insufficient motivation for alternative forms of assessment when the existing OBE systems still adopt the traditional methods of assessment and progression. A complete overhaul of the curriculum is required. This is unlikely to happen within a short timeframe.

Thus according to Jansen (1998:330) and De Clerq (1997:140), OBE was ill- conceived technically, without adequate structures and mechanisms in place for its implementation. It was a political move by government to win credibility with its electorate. Teachers who are central players in this plan should have been directly involved. There ought to be a shift towards more evolutionary policy planning. Conditions at the implementation level are supposed to fit with the planning and intentions of policy-makers. There must be continuous interaction among all policy actors.

a) Evaluation of Curriculum 2005

In 1998 the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the Gauteng Institute of Curriculum Development (GICD) commissioned research in order to obtain feedback on the first year of the implementation of the then new Curriculum 2005 (DoE 1997a). It also aimed to provide a baseline profile of the abilities of Grade 2 learners who had not yet started with the new curriculum. Although this research also involved the study of grades lower than those under consideration some of their findings are relevant particularly those relating to the teachers' abilities to implement a new curriculum and the effects of a new curriculum on the teaching styles. The baseline abilities profile of Grade 2 learners further extends our understanding with regard to children's language abilities.

The Khulisa Management Services (KMS 1999:12) research reveals substantial differences between the schools administered by the different departments of the old regime. Most teachers are reported as being positive about the changes to the curriculum but black schools performed consistently below the others. The differences are due to poorly resourced schools, language disparity between learner's home and school language and insufficient communication between parents and schools. Lack of experienced teachers is another problem that was noted.

Black schools still lag behind others in terms of space, equipment and learning materials, although a marked improvement in class size is recorded. In terms of the teaching methods used, black schools appear to be moving away from the transmission mode of teaching to the one required by the Curriculum 2005, which is learner centred. It is

suggested that teachers in these schools need to plan more relevant activities in order to integrate learning. The research also shows that they use teamwork to a lesser extent than their white counterparts and that they provide fewer opportunities for learners to practice and apply the new concepts to their daily life experiences. Black schools appear to be unable to vary work to accommodate differences in rates of learning. They are not able to produce their own materials. In documenting assessment, a crucial element of the new curriculum, the KMS (1999:24) report notes that assessment techniques used in black schools still rely on old methods with classroom performance and testing being the predominant modes. On the positive side, black teachers demonstrated that a problem solving approach to learning was being employed. They scored higher on articulating outcomes to learners than teachers in the other systems. Their ability to use multiple languages when presenting work was much higher than from the former white schools. The report, however, states that the former black schools predominantly use the transmission mode.

In assessing the effects of Curriculum 2005 (DoE 1997) on Grade 1 learners the KMS (1999:26) report notes that all learners demonstrated the ability to be co-operative and helpful. All stakeholders interviewed reported that their children are more actively engaged in learning. Learners in former black schools also demonstrated an ability to give innovative and creative responses. Good teacher learner relationships are recorded. Former black schools are underperforming when compared with their counterparts. This is a result of teachers failing to ensure that the learners understand what they are saying, possibly because these learners are not learning through their home language.

In their evaluation of Grade 2 learners the report states that these learners are able to recognise and copy written material and that verbal comprehension and story memory are their best cognitive skills. But learners' written comprehension, organising information and reasoning scores were below the expected level. In a breakdown of scores of learners from former DET schools, they performed far below former white schools. KMS (1999:27) attributed this poor performance to both language problems and poor quality teaching.

The Khulisa Management Services' (KMS 1999:30) report, with regard to poor literacy skills, is confirmed by further research conducted by Macdonald (1999:68) in Benoni. She



found that by the end of their third year of schooling, Grade 3 learners were barely able to read in either their home language or in English and were bound to experience learning difficulties as they progress through school.

b) Review of Curriculum 2005

In response to difficulties raised by the KMS (1999) report, a review committee was established to examine how to improve curriculum implementation in the schools. The review committee was appointed by the then Minister of Education to investigate the structure of the new curriculum as well as the level of understanding of OBE (Pretorius 2002:94). Its report was published on May 31, 2000. The report committee (Chisholm et al. 2000) found that the implementation of Curriculum 2005 (DoE 1997a) has been hampered by the burdensome structure and design of the new curriculum, a lack of alignment between the curriculum and the assessment policy, inadequate teacher preparation and inadequate learning materials among other problems. In an attempt to address these problems the committee suggested that:

- the number of learning areas be reduced from eight to six in the general education and training band
- the curriculum be streamlined and simplified
- the curriculum be better integrated in terms of coherence
- teacher education be better co-ordinated
- the implementation process be slowed and better managed
- greater attention be paid to human rights issues such as anti-discriminatory, anti-racist, anti-sexists and special needs issues (Chisholm et al. 2000:93)
- of particular relevance is that language, seen as a gateway learning area, was recommended to have more time allowed for language literacy.

The report confirms the suspicion that increasingly more foundation phase (0-3) teachers are opting for a straight for English policy. Curriculum 2005 has consequently been interpreted as promoting an English medium of instruction. In terms of the LOLT issues the report makes no recommendations except that the minister has called for a review of language in education policy (Chisholm et al. 2001:94). This information indicates that things have not changed much as far as the educational success of the majority of black

South Africans is concerned. Language can still be seen to be playing a major role in inhibiting children's cognitive development and capacity to learn.

In terms of student-teacher interaction research points to some shift in the way in which African language children were taught in townships and rural areas. There needs, nonetheless, to be more notable change and teachers must move into a genuinely more collaborative mode. In terms of community involvement in schools, there is not enough research available yet to know whether the new governing bodies have promoted a positive working relationship between the school and the community (Pretorius 2002:95). On the macro-level South African society is still in a state of social flux. At the same time it should be noted that an aspect of the development of the new black middle-class is that these parents tend to remove their children from township schools and place them in either private schools or former Model C schools. The standard of teaching is perceived to be better in these schools and learners have greater access to English. This results in township and rural schools catering to the needs of the poorest members of the community only (Sunjee 2005:34).

The medium of instruction continues to be English despite the recommendations of the revised National Curriculum Statement (NCS DoE 2002:26) that learners' home languages be put into service wherever possible. So that these learners can succeed academically they need to have academic language proficiency in their L1 so as to be in a position to transfer these skills to L2 learning. Langhan (1996:18) lays out what he thinks should be covered in home language teaching in an additive bilingual education model. This includes learning about language; general communication and language as a vehicle for developing linguistic, cognitive and conceptual skills for broader learning. According to Langhan (1996b), African languages have to be developed to become a vehicle of meaningful learning for its speakers, thus making additional languages supplementary in the learning process. He recommends that new materials be produced so that African home language courses can fulfil the role of a proficient channel for learning and that these materials include a guide for the teachers so that teachers can expand their skills.

Langhan's (1996:14) position fails to take into account the different status of English and Afrikaans in relation to African languages. African home language courses should run

ahead of the rest of the curriculum in order to develop concepts and cognitive skills in children's home language as suggested by Macdonald and Burroughs (1991:68).

The draft of the NCS (DoE 2001) and the revised NCS overview (DoE 2002) has made considerable improvements to the language, literacy and communication learning area of Curriculum 2005 (DoE 1997a). They clearly distinguish between learners' home languages and additional languages whereas Curriculum 2005 (DoE 1997a) made no distinction between the two. Furthermore, they exhort teachers to focus on the socio-political issues of right and justice. Nonetheless it is suggested that a further distinction could be made between home languages that are used as LOLTs and home languages which are not. Ideally one would wish to separate learning programmes drawn from home languages which are not to be used for academic learning. These would have to be more concentrated so as to focus on the development of academic language proficiency, cognitive skills and concepts which learners will encounter in their content subjects. While acknowledging that to have one home language course for all South Africa's languages is a real boost for African languages, it is not enough if African children continue to learn through a language that is not their own.

#### *3.2.2.6 Revised National Curriculum 2005*

In South Africa the Revised National Curriculum 2005 is the most up to date educational policy that has been introduced in an attempt to move away from apartheid education.

The current educational policy is learner centred as it hopes to achieve:

- active learner participation, ongoing assessment, critical thinking skills,
- integration of knowledge to real life situations
- learning programmes intended only as a guide
- learners taking responsibility for their learning by emphasising outcomes
- flexible time frames
- comment and input regarding the curricula for wider community.

Consequently, language proficiency is more central to this approach to education.

Bengis (2001:4) analysed the language demands of a published Grade 7 OBE curriculum. He found that Grade 7 teachers regarded frequently occurring key words in the English

material used as appropriate. As a result of these findings it was decided that learners be tested on the most frequently occurring words in the published curriculum. It is claimed by various authors such as, Cummins 2001, Baker 2002 and Rodriguez 1998, that the best way of determining L2 learners' language proficiency is assessing them in both their L1 and L2. This claim is the starting point of this research, which is to determine the level of academic English proficiency among Grade 7 learners.

The Department of Education considers that assessment should be continuous and should include various forms of evaluation apart from the usual examination and test. This may include peer assessment, self-assessment, projects and use of portfolios (DoE 2002).

Assessment provides information regarding the learner's background and perhaps strategies and processes used in classroom learning. In order for evaluation to be valid, the task should be selected from the objectives taught in the classroom. The skills, concepts and knowledge described in the curriculum need to be considered. In other words assessment should be curriculum based.

Although the move towards Curriculum 2005 and multilingual education is aimed at outcomes, there are many problems. Curriculum 2005 for example, has no prescribed syllabus and the various resources used by teachers differ in approach and complexity. Some of the terminology used is confusing to English Second Language (ESL) learners. Education publishers are attempting to produce textbooks in alignment with Curriculum 2005. According to Pludemann (2001:42), the production of textbooks and learning materials has been focused on the foundation phase (Grades 1-3). Curriculum 2005 specifies that the materials should be suitable for use in multilingual situations and should be unbiased. The efficiency of learning materials to enhance both the learning and teaching is an area of ongoing research (Pluddemann 2002). According to Pluddemann (2001:45), teachers from poorer economic areas and former Model C schools report that there are few books and materials available. This forces teachers to produce their own materials. Often teachers need to translate the materials themselves. A number of disparities have therefore occurred in the application of Curriculum 2005. It has been reported that some publishers have provided materials in all official languages.

Due to the focus on multilingualism, various methods have been employed for its promotion. A common method involves translating and adapting English language materials into African languages. However it is important to note that no standard African language exists. This leads to problems when rural versus urban dialects are used (Pluddemann 2001:55). According to General Education and Training (GET1999:3), it is essential for the department to appoint more translators for the African languages. It is postulated that with translated materials teachers will be able to work effectively.

The problems experienced with the implementation of this curriculum have led to its revision. A revised Curriculum 2005 policy document has been approved with these major differences:

- a) The learning areas for the GET band have been reduced from eight to six for the revised curriculum. The learning programmes in GET for intermediate and senior phase are languages, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, arts and culture and life orientation. The main aim of this rationalisation is to have enough time allocated for teaching knowledge and skills.
- b) Only three learning areas should be provided in the foundation phase and six learning programmes for intermediate phase.

Learning areas will be presented as learning programmes. The learning programme will integrate various contents, concepts and values of the learning area. In intermediate and senior phases each of the six learning areas is presented as learning programmes. The time allocation for the six learning areas is: languages - 30 per cent, mathematics -20 per cent, natural sciences -15 per cent, social sciences -15 per cent, arts and culture -7 per cent, life orientation- 8 per cent and flexible time -5 per cent. It is ironic that the same amount of time is allocated to the sciences and social sciences whereas a lot of learners experience more problems with natural sciences.

- c) Time allocation for language learning is 70 per cent in the foundation phase and 50 per cent for intermediate and senior phase.

The revised curriculum includes the integration of human rights education in all learning areas. Learners also are to be supposed to utilise the knowledge gained from their learning in authentic situations. There is very little research regarding the effects that language in education has on the children within different school systems in South Africa. According to Pluddemann (2001), there is a need for research into multilingual education in South Africa.

The complexity of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), as embodied in Curriculum 2005, has been a disaster for teachers, requiring levels of skills and experiences that only exist among the best teachers, as well as access to resources not easily available in both rural and urban context.

### **3.2.3 Linguistic realities in the South African Education System since 1994**

The different types of schools in the South African education system will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

#### *3.2.3.1 Desegregated public schools (Ex-Model C and independent schools)*

A separate education system in South Africa was established in order to keep the culturally diverse population divided, protect the position of the dominant group and further its political interest. It became a means of maintaining control over any potential development and advancement of subordinate groups. This was achieved through the creation of separate structures of education for each race group, control of black education by white administrators and control over the curriculum (Chisholm 2004: 218).

South African education system had schools which were specifically reserved for white learners which were and still are well resourced and have qualified teachers who use English or Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. These schools are located in cities and suburbs. Whereas schools reserved for black learners were and remain characterised by poor resources, and were understaffed with unqualified teachers. These schools are

situated in townships and rural areas (Heugh 2000:78). One of the indigenous languages and English were used as medium of instruction.

After the 1994 democratic elections public schools were opened to all racial groups. Between 1994 and 1996 a host of policy documents, reports and Acts were published, which integrated previously separate education departments and outlawed discrimination in education (Van Zyl 2000:20). Education was redesigned to serve all South Africans in the new dispensation. Subsequently schools have become increasingly desegregated.

However this desegregation of schools did not happen rapidly or comprehensively. Historically separate living areas for different racial groups have hindered the physical process of desegregation (Alexander 2004:45). Although learners are bussed from townships to formerly white schools, it is costly and not all families are able to afford this.

In October 1990 the former Minister of Education, Piet Clase, announced the possibility that schools for white pupils might start admitting black learners if white parents approved. Schools were required to achieve an 80 per cent poll out of which they needed to obtain a 72 per cent majority. Schools were given the option to vote for one of the three models namely A, B or C. These became known as the Clase models.

In April 1992 the former Minister of Education, Piet Clase, announced that all schools for white learners would be converted to Model C status. This move was an attempt by the minister to cut the costs by shifting the financing and control of schools for white learners onto their parents. The vast majority of black parents were excluded from enrolling their children largely because of the high fees. Many black parents were turned away after failing selection measures, admissions tests and other criteria (Block 2006:5).

These schools generally have good infrastructure with well equipped libraries, highly qualified and dedicated teachers. They also serve learners from *literate* middle class backgrounds that have reading materials at home. The teacher pupil ratio in these schools can be as low as 15:1 and as high as 20:1 (Block 2006:6). Learners in these schools use English as a medium of instruction from the first year of schooling and are reported to provide better standard of English teaching or Afrikaans teaching depending on the

school's medium of instruction. Consequently they are in a position to improve the life chances of their learners. This is mainly because the learner's ability in English and Afrikaans partially determines the learner's academic success and entry into tertiary institutions (Pluddemann 2004:37).

Although educators in formerly white schools are often bilingual that is, proficient in the two official languages of the apartheid era, English and Afrikaans, few are proficient in black South African languages (Laufer 2000:12). The result is that educators cannot adequately support the language development of learners who speak other languages. This situation impacts on the academic and social relationship between the educators and the learners. It also impacts negatively on effective communication among learners in these schools (Van Heerden 1998:98).

Furthermore, the indigenous South African languages are commonly viewed as unsuitable to be medium of instruction because they do not have the necessary scientific and technological vocabulary. The legacy of apartheid, where policies were specifically designed to ensure the indigenous languages did not develop, contributed toward not all languages spoken in South Africa having the same capacity. There is however, a commitment from the government to put resources into developing these languages. Moreover, there is a perception among English and Afrikaans educators that indigenous South African languages are difficult to acquire (Laufer 2000:31). Another obstacle is the existence of discrimination attached to speaking a non-dialect or variety of languages of learning. The learner whose home language is different from the dominant group at school is made to feel that his or her language is inferior. This claim by Du Plooy and Swanepoel (1997:143) leads to poor self-esteem among these learners.

Similarly, black learners in a predominantly white school feel it is expected of them to assimilate and adopt the existing ethos of the dominant culture. Research by Jansen (1998) indicates a tendency among black learners in desegregated schools to deny and reject their racial and cultural identities. These learners tend to adopt their teachers and classmates' ways of talking, dressing and behaving and ridicule and reject that which they regard as black, illiterate and therefore inferior.



Language and culture are inextricably linked. The mother-tongue of most African learners is one of the country's nine indigenous African languages. For coloured learners it is Afrikaans. While for whites it varies with their background and is typically either English or Afrikaans. Although some schools do offer instruction in two languages a good number rely on one, and the SGB's choice in this regard often makes the school more attractive to learners of one race than another. Crude efforts to exclude black learners have been ruled unconstitutional but more subtle efforts are possibly a common practice in these schools.

According to the South African Human Sciences Research Council (SAHRC 2004:69), the average percentage of black learners for all grades who attend these schools is 31 per cent. Although post 1994 education legislation sets out the policy framework for full integration of public schooling, social, economic and demographic realities reduce its practical implementation. For example, school fees in most former white institutions are very high for most black parents and this cost is compounded by that of transport. School Governing Bodies are encouraged to levy obligatory school fees to supplement revenue from the state (Block 2006:8). These fees are important for various reasons one possibility being that high fees probably provide a means of excluding black learners from applying to these schools, since many black families are likely to have less disposable income than white families.

In 1998 the Government tried to reduce the adverse impact of high fees on black enrolment by providing full or partial fee waiver to low income families. This change did not fully solve the problem because it gives these schools a new incentive to try to restrict their application pool to those who are likely to be able to pay full fees. Desegregation fails to either address the material needs of the majority of the learners or change the racial patterns of the past. It does however provide urban black learners with the access to better resourced facilities.

In all the desegregated schools the staff component tends to be predominantly from the same group as the majority learners. Few black educators have been appointed in these formerly white schools, which results in the absence of black role models for black learners. In these situations conflict and misunderstandings may occur between educators and learners due to lack of cross-cultural knowledge. Further hurdles to overcome could

be the lack of readiness of different groups of staff to learn about each others cultures. Also on the whole educators in desegregated schools lack the skills to handle the racial incidents (Skuy & Vice 1996:144).

In conclusion the rapid changes in the linguistic profile of schools were not accompanied by changes in the language policies of the schools or by changes in the teaching staff. This has meant that in many classes teachers do not speak the language of the majority or significant minority of their pupils. This is particularly problematic at foundation phase where teachers understand perhaps only half a dozen words or phrases in Xhosa and the learner knows only enough English or Afrikaans to follow the basic instructions and so answers in monosyllables. This hinders interaction between the teacher and the learner (Skuy & Vice 1996:147).

High schools also experience variance in languages between teachers and learners. According to Murray (1998:76), in dual medium (English & Afrikaans) schools his study compared the performance of African language speakers placed in English medium classes with their peers in Afrikaans medium classes with Afrikaans speaking teachers. He found that progress through the learning programmes in various subjects has been affected by the language difficulties experienced in the English medium classes and so African learners started to fall behind in the Afrikaans medium classes.

In an attempt to meet the needs of African learners to learn English and to adjust to this language as a medium of instruction, these schools have introduced bridging classes for non-English speakers, while others have employed African speakers as assistant teachers. The presence of a teacher assistant is reported by PRAESA (1998) as having improved communication between teachers and learners. The assistants have also daily introduced the home language of the majority of learners.

An alternative approach to using a teacher assistant is for teachers to learn the African language used by the majority of the learners in their area. Incentives need to be put in place to encourage teachers in multilingual classes to learn an African language. The recently produced norms and standards for teachers are inadequate when it comes to the requirements for the language competencies of teachers. The document makes no reference to the importance of respect for learners, the need to be able to mediate

learning in multilingual classes, and the need to understand and take into account the socio-cultural, racial, language and gender differences in the classroom.

### *3.2.3.2 Township public schools*

These are schools which are located in semi-urban areas in South Africa. Like their rural school counterparts they serve predominantly African learners. Prior to 1994, township schools were run by the former Department of Education and Training (DET). Although in these schools English is officially the medium of instruction from standard 3 upwards, research shows that much classroom teaching was in the L1 rather than in English. This was mainly because most African language teachers themselves lacked proficiency in English and still do, of excessively large classes, of unavailability of textbooks and resources in general, and inadequate teacher training to support the demands of English as a medium of instruction (Chisholm 2004:218).

Despite the vastly greater number of black learners enrolled in these schools their per capita expenditure is still lower than it is in former white schools. A related factor to this is the economically disadvantaged learners incapacity to afford school and examination fees. Education finance has a direct influence on the number of facilities that schools offer their learners. Learners in township schools have, in addition to shortage of classrooms, a critical shortage of textbooks. This, according to Desai (2004:49), is due to failure of learners to return books at the end of the year. According to NFT sub- committee, nearly 30 per cent of the textbooks are not returned at the end of the year (Desai 2004:49). There is very little doubt that learners studying in an environment which is without books and classrooms are bound to experience educational difficulties.

In 2003, according to the Human Sciences Research Council (2004:146), the learner-teacher ratio in some township schools was 60:1. According to van Zyl (2002:62), the high learner-teacher ratios in township schools came as a result of rapid urbanisation which caused very large squatter settlements mushrooming overnight. This means that suitable classrooms structures for such settlements have to be hurriedly provided for. According to Desai (2004), in the Western Cape the then Minister of Education was shocked to find a township school wherein one teacher had a class of 106 standard six learners. South

African township and rural schools are characterised by large classes with a pupil teacher ratio of 50:1. The teacher plays a central role in the classroom.

Many parents of learners in township schools favour the introduction of English as early as possible. This is mainly because of the low status of African languages and the obvious social and economic benefits of being fluent in English. Setati's study (2000:45) suggests that school teachers in the townships are interpreting the exodus of pupils to former Model C schools as the parents' desire for their children to learn English. These schools are therefore forced to introduce English as the medium of instruction earlier in order to meet the needs of parents who are unable to send their children to these schools. According to Setati (2000:46), teachers themselves perceive English as the language of power and socio-economic advancement in South Africa. Therefore using English as the language of learning is in the interest of their learners.

The language in education policy is applied differently in rural and township schools. They tend to phase in English in during the first four years of schooling, using both the learner's indigenous language and English as medium of instruction. Evidence from recent studies suggests that despite the desegregation of white, Indian and coloured schools and significant demographic improvements over the last decade and a large number of learners being bussed from townships to suburban schools, the large majority of schools remain uni- or mono-cultural. This emerges most clearly when tracking trends in Gauteng during the period 1996 to 2002. Mda (2004:45) shows that in 2002, 74 per cent of learners in Gauteng were black, 18 per cent were white, and 4.9 per cent were Indians and only 0.2 per cent non-South Africans. According to Mda (2004:46), only 25 per cent of black learners have moved from former township schools to other departments since 1996. Of this number Mda (2004) claims, only 7 per cent are in former white schools.

The fact that more than 75 per cent of African learners are still in township schools means that improving the quality of education in township schools should be the governments' top priority. Township schools still bear the brunt of the apartheid education legacy with its continued barriers to learning which include limited curricula, inadequate teaching and learning resources and a host of other constraints (HSRC 2004:210).

Comparative scores for maths, numeracy and literacy in South Africa are consistently among the worst in the world. Recent national tests showed that while some 65 per cent of 6th Grade learners in Model C schools performed at Grade 6 level which is not good, former DET schools performance was at 0.1 per cent (Block 2006:10). Recent scores showed that only 20 per cent of sixth graders could do maths at the appropriate grade level, with an average score of 27 per cent, and scored only 38 per cent in language of instruction. According to Block (2006:11), the average score for sixth grade maths in the lowest fee paying schools, where 72 per cent of learners are located, was 22 per cent. Only 5 per cent of these learners do higher grade maths and science for matric while the matric exemption rate in South Africa is static at 17 per cent (Block 2006:11).

Numbers of learners matriculating are no greater than in 1994, with similarly poor higher grade maths and university exemption passes. For example in 1994, the total number of matric exemptions was 18 per cent; in 1999 matric exemption dropped to 12 per cent. The number of learners passing maths and sciences improved marginally in 2004 (Block 2006:11). Most learners in township and rural schools are not effectively taught. This effects higher education as poor school results means poor university preparation and high dropout rates. When these learners gain access to universities they struggle to obtain academic support and adequate financing (Block 2006:14).

According to Block 2006 (16), 50 per cent of learners in township and rural schools do not make it through the schooling system and dropout before completion. One recent study claims that only 32 per cent of 2003 Grade 10 learners passed their examinations. It is for these reasons that the government has prioritised the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning ensuring that learners in township schools have access to key subjects such as mathematics, science and technology as well as the economic sciences. On the agenda is the improvement of these learners' results at Grade 12 level (Chisholm 2004:100).

In terms of the norms and standards for school funding more money has been spent in these disadvantaged schools than during the apartheid era. Gauteng, which is most populous province in South Africa, is in a unique position as all eleven official languages are spoken in the province in addition to other European languages. These eleven official languages are therefore being taught mainly in township schools. Former Model C schools

offer mainly English and Afrikaans as first languages. One of the priorities within the coming year is the introduction of one African first language in these schools (Chisholm 2004:102).

An important project to develop all official languages in township schools is a short story competition in African languages sponsored by the Iwisa Maize Meal. The project is piloted in primary schools in Atteridgeville, Tshwane metro, with the winning stories being published and distributed to schools across the provinces and the royalties paid to teachers (Mda 2004:50).

### *3.2.3.3 Rural public schools*

Rural public schools in the South African context are located in areas that were reserved for black people by the apartheid regime. From 1910 onwards education for black people was as far as possible under missionary control and situated in the reserves (Truscott 1994:45). Policy evolved towards the transfer of educational responsibility to local authorities under strict government control. Mission schools were considered subversive and so were constantly under attack by the National Party government in the 1950s. These rural schools were taken over by the Department of Bantu Education and with the formation of the homelands, were handed over to their respective governments (Vinjevold 1998:207). New schools were started as communities were forced from one area to the next. In many cases, desperately limited resources meant that communities met the need for new schools by building them themselves (Peterson 2004:90).

Rural communities live in areas with the highest levels of poverty, unemployment and rely on meagre sources of income derived mostly from social grants or migrant labour. Despite these desperate conditions there is a deep underlying support amongst parents and communities for the schooling of their children. Nonetheless this support is undermined by the conditions of poverty and unemployment (HSRC 2004:38).

The advent of democracy, through rural development, has opened up the possibility of better life for all. In the short term formal democracy has not yet resulted in development in these areas whose history has been to serve as labour reservoirs for the mines and factories of white South Africa. The education challenge within South Africa is largely

framed by the economic challenges facing the country and slow economic growth (Chisholm 2004:208). The process of educational reform since 1994 has been the articulation of new goals of access, equity, redress, quality and efficiency.

A fundamental requirement is the need for adequate schooling facilities in all communities and capable, well trained teachers in all classrooms. According to Chisholm (2004:230), the following features influence the capacity to provide quality education for all South Africans:

- the increasing number of children in the country
- the high level of poverty (37 per cent of the population live below breadline)
- slow economic growth (an annual growth rate of 3 per cent is necessary to alleviate employment creation and the provision of equal education opportunities for all; since 1996 the gross domestic product growth rate has remained below this figure; the instability of the rand, the dramatic increase in the inflation rate, the First World's association of South Africa with the developing countries and the escalating influx of illegal and poorly skilled immigrants have a detrimental effect in education.

Lack of basic services influences every aspect of community life, daily living schools and clinics and recreational facilities. This has bearing on the access to schooling and quality education. Schools without electricity are not in a position to offer evening classes to adults. Many buildings in rural areas are in serious need of repair, with doors, windows, flooring and toilet facilities being highest on the list of needed repair.

a) Improving rural classrooms

Rural communities often differ on whether the medium of instruction should be English or the learner's first language. Some argue for mother-tongue instruction others for English and yet others for Afrikaans. The language of teaching and learning has historically been a highly contested matter. Many international and national reports on learners' performance, mainly in rural areas, point to the importance of mother-tongue instruction, particularly in the early years, followed by proficiency in the language of teaching and learning (Macdonald 1990; Cummins 2004; Desai 2004). Currently, the policy in schools promotes additive bilingualism in order to realise the national policy of

multilingualism. In other words learners must start studying in their L1. They begin to study additional languages as they progress from the foundation to intermediate and senior phases (SASA 1996).

One of the requirements of the South African Schools' Act is that the school governing bodies are to develop formal language policies that describe the strategies that will be employed to promote multilingualism. Brown's (1999) study of KwaZulu-Natal found that schools made ad hoc decisions on language policy but that none of these decisions constituted formal school level language policy as stipulated in the new legislation.

Teachers and learners in these schools share the same home language. The English language infrastructure in the rural schools and communities are extremely limited. Learners typically only speak, read and write in English in the formal school context. Reading materials are limited to textbooks and in some schools learners have few opportunities to use these (Chisholm 2005:238).

English for rural school communities is, therefore, not a L2 but a foreign language because it is not spoken in the immediate environment of the learner. Mass media such as TV and radio may provide the only opportunities for the learner to use the language in communication settings.

It is important to differentiate English language infrastructure levels and subjects in and with teachers work. There is a need to disaggregate schools and classrooms along three different axes. Programmes and infrastructure need to be tailored according to whether they are in English foreign language or English second language, whether they are primary or secondary school classrooms and finally whether they are about language as a subject or language as a medium of instruction (Pretorius 2000:98). Without specific attention to these aspects educational inequalities will only be exacerbated and leave some of the learners and teachers stranded at some point of their educational journey.

The school governing body is required to decide on the language of learning and teaching, which can be the same or different to the mother-tongue. Alexander (2004:15) says that most rural schools in South Africa are monolingual because of continuing regional concentration of languages of speech varieties. Only in a few cases is regular



contact with English and Afrikaans prevalent. It is also correct to say that most primary school teachers who are prepared to live and work in rural areas tend to be those who are less articulate in the languages of power and high status which are English and Afrikaans.

The implication is that there is neither an English speaking environment or any good L1 or proficient L2 English role models in most such areas. The possibility of extramural reinforcement is minimal or totally absent. Consequently the normal benefit of L1 medium of instruction is vitally important under these conditions. Moreover, as rural school learners seldom go beyond the foundation phase, it can be accepted that whatever cognitive development and stimulation they do receive at school will come by means of L1 instruction. This does not mean that an additional language, specifically English or Afrikaans, should not be taught as a subject.

Alexander (2004:65) maintains that it is educationally unsound to want to use an additional language as a medium of instruction in rural areas as it is unlikely that proficiency will be obtained in the additional language.

The use of L1 medium of instruction among African learners is also not without problems. Some of the complexities are underlined by dialectical differences in rural areas. Whether English or the learner's first language is used, the challenges of the relationship between the language of teaching and learning and the languages spoken by the teachers and learners at home remain fundamental. The recognised African official languages have many dialects which implies that there are learners who speak an unofficial dialect which is not recognised and therefore unacceptable at school (HSRC 2004:138). Pedagogically all African learners in rural areas are expected to master their L1 standardised grammar in both its spoken and written form. Educators examine learners on the basis of their mastery of these standardised languages and expect them to have acquired the specific skills by the end of the year. Many learners who do not speak the dominant language find it difficult to cope when, for instance, they write essays. They get penalised for using the language they know. Outside the school environment learners revert to their dialects.

Both parents and learners in rural areas associate poor quality rural schools with the lack of English proficiency. Teachers in these areas also feel that they are unfairly judged for the quality of their teaching on the basis of their use of English.

#### *3.2.3.4 School phases*

In order to achieve an integrated system of education and training the White Paper on Education and Training no 1 (1996) introduced the National Qualification Framework (NQF). This was aimed at providing a single, coherent and unified approach to education and training.

The NQF is the set of principles and guidelines by which a record of learners' achievements are registered so as to facilitate national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge. This is expected to ensure an integrated system that encourages lifelong learning.

Prinsloo (2002:51) claims that the NQF organises learning into three bands consisting of eight levels which are:

1. The general education and training band.
2. Further Education and Training Certificate.
3. Higher education and training.

In the new education dispensation, schooling covers two bands of the National Qualification Framework, namely:

- General Education and Training band (GET)
- Further Education and Training band (FET).

The General Education and Training band is further divided into three school phases, which correspond to learners maturational stages (DoE 1995:20).

#### *Band 1: General Education and Training Certificate (GERTC)*

This is made up of four phases which are:

- early childhood development centres
- the foundation phase
- intermediate phase and
- senior phase.

a) Early childhood development centres

South African learners who are between nought and nine years of age are accommodated in early childhood development centres, few of which are subsidised by the state. According to the Republic of South Africa (2000:15), only 9 per cent of South African learners have access to early childhood development centres. During the course of 2001 the Department of Education increased access to early childhood development programmes as well as their quality (Education White Paper No 5 of 2001). ECD refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years with active participation of parents and caregivers. The purpose is to protect children's rights to develop their full potential.

The South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 makes provision for a reception year before formal school starts at the age of six or seven. The progressive provision of the reception year (Grade R) began in 2002. According to Prinsloo (2002:52) the formal schooling sector provides education for children in Grades 1, 2 and 3.

Since most of the early childhood development centres are privately owned, the language of instruction in these centres tends to be either English or Afrikaans. Admission to these centres is dependent on the learner's residential address. Although most of these centres accommodate learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, African languages are not used as the medium of instructions. The quality of instruction in these centres also depends on their geographic location. Tuition in these centres can be as much as over R1000.00 per month in suburbs, which also serves to limit access for the lower socio-economic groups (Prinsloo 2002:60).

In explaining the inequality of access to early childhood development centres in 1995 the following was reported:

- only 2 per cent were provided for by full day care or home-based private or community funded facilities
- one in three white infants and children received ECD services compared with one in eight Indian and coloured children and one in six African children
- in urban and rural areas full day care facilities, community-based crèches and pre-schools for children of black working mothers are scarce, generally unsubsidised and poorly resourced
- twice as many urban as rural infants and children receive ECD provision
- only 2000 infants with disabilities attend ECD facilities; half of these are white children; there is a serious lack of provision of ECD service for black children with disabilities.

Not only are few infants and children catered for, but fewer receive an appropriate ECD experience and therefore have an abrupt introduction to formal learning. This situation is exacerbated by the inadequate funding of ECD services and the previously discriminatory funding by prior education departments. The inadequate funding of ECD services for black communities has resulted in ECD provisioning for these communities being characterised by:

- lack of financial resources for salaries of practitioners and for equipment and food for the children
- demotivation of ECD staff and a high turnover of non-formally trained ECD practitioners
- unavailability of appropriate physical structures for ECD services resulting in multi-purpose halls and informal structures being utilised as ECD centres
- difficulties arising from unrealistic regulations relating to norms and standards such as physical requirements for facilities and state recognised qualification for practitioners, thereby making subsidisation of community efforts difficult (RSA 2000:18).

In an attempt to increase access to ECD centres government have extended existing child care practices and choices which are affordable to parents and therefore require active funding partnership between government, private donors, parents and local communities.

b) Foundation phase (1-3 years)

Prinsloo (2002:52) states that the first three years of formal schooling occurs at this level. According to the South African Constitution (1996), learners are expected to be educated in their mother-tongue during this stage. The medium of instruction continues to be mother-tongue while English is taught as a compulsory subject.

Schools are encouraged to provide at least two languages of instruction from the inception phase of which at least one should be the first language of a considerable number of learners (Heugh 2002:67). Strong emphasis is placed on a multilingual approach in teaching and learning. The South African Schools Act (1996) makes a provision for the learners, where practicable, to be taught in the official languages of their choice. No racial discrimination may take place in the implementation of the schools' language policy which is to be determined by the governing body of each public school. A practical challenge to the implementation of a more multilingual approach in schooling however lies in popular attitudes, particularly among African communities, which favour an English only approach in schooling. Many black parents associate upward mobility with proficiency in English and demand English to be taught (HSRC 2004: 210). This is an obstacle to the implementation of the educationally sound principle of home language instruction for the first years of schooling.

Learners are promoted from Grade 1 to Grade 4 according to their performance in one language and mathematics. The first General Education and Training Certificate was offered in 2002. This band also includes one to four years of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). Learners who successfully complete the nine years of compulsory education or the fourth level of ABET obtain the required credits for the General Education and Training Certificate which is an equivalent of level 1 of the NQF.

c) Intermediate phase: Grades 4-6

In this phase teaching and learning is highly contextualised and largely integrated. The selection of learning content and teaching and learning activities is underpinned by the fact that learners in this phase are beginning to understand detailed relationships between materials, incidents and circumstances and people. They are also able to infer

the consequences of such relationships. Learners in this phase are able to work together and perform group projects. This is mainly because peer acceptance is significant to them (DoE 1995:25).

Learners from Grade 3 onwards are introduced to a L2 besides the medium of instruction. This language is offered as a subject. All language subjects will receive equitable time allocation. To be promoted to the next level Grade 5 learners are expected to pass at least one language (DoE 200:45).

The overall enrolment for primary school is over 90 per cent. During this phase the gross enrolment rates are much higher (105 per cent) which is an indication of many under age learners. Although the enrolment is high only 8.8 per cent of these learners complete the primary school phase. Low standards in the schooling system are reflected in the results of Senior Certificate Examination which is written at the end of Grade 12 and has become a subject of public scrutiny and criticism. The percentage of learners passing this examination has dropped from 58 per cent in 1994 to 49 per cent in 1999 (RSA 2000:17).

d) Senior phase (Grade 7 - 9)

Learners in this phase are increasingly able to reason independently of concrete materials and experience. They are able to accept multiple and differing solutions to a single problem. The learning content is therefore more abstract and more area specific than in the previous two phases. Learning content aims at preparing learners for the world of work, opportunities at institutions for further learning and for adult life in general (Prinsloo 2002:58).

Learners spend the tenth to twelfth year of schooling at this level. The final year of schooling is concluded with the matriculation examination. School curricula are academically oriented and Eurocentric. They are based upon a Western ideal of liberal education which is of questionable relevance to a country with both first world and second world characteristics (Lemmer 1997:317). Teaching at this level tends to be characterised by passive rote learning and single textbook examination oriented approaches. An excessive emphasis on academically oriented education at the expense of technical and career oriented education contributed to a failure to equip the young with

the necessary work and entrepreneurship skills needed to meet the requirements. This is especially in the engineering and technical fields. Only 9 per cent of white and 1 per cent of black matriculants followed a technical course in 1992.

e) Band 2: Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC)

The FETC consists of Grades 10, 11 and 12. It provides learners who completed their GET band with opportunities to enter the FET band (Lemmer 1997:339). The FETC will enable learners to have access to either the work places or to the higher education institutions in the higher education and training band. The Further Education and Training band is compulsory. It represents the largest and most complex phase of learning with about three million learners and eight thousand providers. There are a number of non-governmental organisations, private colleges, industry training boards and state funded providers, such as the training scheme that operates on this band. At FET level learners are prepared for higher education, career directed education, and employment. Learners should be able to accumulate credits from different institutions such as schools, technikons and the work place. The development and implementation of registered standards at the National Qualifications Framework level is necessary for the success of the integrated approach to education and training which takes the central place in this band.

From Grade 10 to Grade 12 two languages must be passed, one on the L2 level, and the other on at least the L2 level. It is deemed to be reasonably practicable to provide education in a particular language of learning and teaching if at least 35 learners in Grade 7 to 12 request it in any particular school (RSA 2002:59).

The provincial departments must explore ways and means of sharing scarce human resources. They must also investigate ways and means of providing alternative language maintenance programmes in schools and school districts which cannot be provided with and or offer additional languages of teaching in the home languages of learners.

In this band occupational content areas and higher education and training disciplines influence what is to be offered and the ways in which these are assessed. The principles of progression drive the development of the outcomes statements at these levels and lay the foundational building blocks required by the higher education and training sector.

Content is diversified to allow for specific learning or career pathways and means of provision.

f) Higher Education and Training (HET) band

The higher education and training band is the third and last band on the NQF. The band provides for all learning related to diplomas, degrees and post-graduate learning achieved by the acquisition of the required credits which are obtained by undertaking programmes offered by professional colleges, professional institutions, technikons and universities. This band follows the FET band and admission to this band is based on the successful completion of the FET band. The NQF provides for eight successive levels which increase in learning complexity and make meaningful progression possible through a variety of routes (Prinsloo 2002:54).

The medium of instruction at this level resembles the apartheid language policy in that the medium of instruction is either English or Afrikaans. Despite Government initiatives to develop all South African languages, the number of students registered in African language modules continues to dwindle. Because of this most of the African language departments are on the brink of closure because of lack of students.

*3.2.3.5 Classroom interactions in English language classes*

The President's Education Initiative (PEI) is result of President Mandela's call in 1996 for the international community to assist South Africa with the re-skilling and support of educators (Taylor and Vinjevold 1999:67). According to Pluddemann (2001:92), the critical areas in which international assistance should be sought are:

- upgrading and re-skilling of serving teachers in science, maths and technology
- improvement of the quality of education in schools, including the improvement of teaching large classes and/or multi-grade classes at small farm schools
- establishing best practices in the teaching of maths and sciences or English with particular reference to Curriculum 2005
- investigating the availability and use of teaching materials in primary schools.



PEI research conducted in 1998 provided information with regard to language skills and development as well as the external factors affecting learning such as community involvement and teaching practice.

PEI found that few schools had followed the language policy outlined in the norms and standards regarding language policy (Taylor & Vinjevold 1999:213). The only evidence of governing bodies voting on language policy came from the work done by Pile and Smythe (1998:14) who noted that of the eight schools used in their study, four had voted for English as a medium of instruction as from Grade 1 onwards. None of the eight schools had drawn on the multilingual policy, as was laid down by the norms and standards document, to say how the school would promote multilingualism.

Pile and Smythe (1998:18) claim that in their discussions with Grade 4 teachers, it seems that although they supported the idea of English as the LOLT, they are in fact not implementing it. Most of their work is still conducted in Sesotho because they claim that pupils do not have sufficient English to understand them when they teach or use it. Unfortunately the way that the teaching is conducted fails to build learners' academic language skills in either language. Explanations are given orally in Sesotho but all written work is completed in English, reinforcing the divide between scientific concepts delivered in English and everyday concepts in Sesotho rather than bridging it. Evidence from other studies points to language as a problem and the lack of English skills in both the teachers and the learners as impeding learning (Pile and Smythe 1998; Skuy and Vice 1996). Pile and Smythe report (1998: 24) that learners are unable to engage in calculating and conceptual discourse without using their main language which, in this case, is Tswana. According to Vinjevold (2004:19), there has been a decline in the use of home language instruction in junior classes.

Most studies mention that the task set in the classroom remains at the most at a rudimentary level with little attempt being made to develop learner's academic language or cognitive skills. According to Setati (2000:78), there is little discussion going on in the classrooms, which indicates a failure to link new knowledge with the learners' actual abilities. The failure to integrate what is taught in the classroom with children's experience to other learning areas is also noted by Pile and Smythe (1999:22).

It would seem that the status of African languages as LOLTs has, as Macdonald (1993:108), predicted declined. According to Vinjevold (1999:231), in one school African language had been banned by the governing body as its use was held responsible for discipline problems at school. She also cites an example from independent research conducted by Brown in 1998 of an ex- Model C school which tried to introduce Zulu as a subject so as to bring the languages offered more in line with the profile of the learners. The school had to drop Zulu due to the resistance encountered from Zulu speaking parents. This shows a social disjuncture of African language learners between school and home which is repeatedly brought out by PEI. This disjuncture is further exacerbated by lack of parental involvement in schools which is also cited by HSRC (2004:187).

Macdonald (1990: 80) reports that classroom interaction between the teachers and the learners remains as it was in the past. Many of the studies conducted in recent years still regard the teacher's lack of content knowledge and English skills as inhibiting factors in improving learning opportunities in classrooms. Macdonald (1990:100) concluded that this lack results in teachers being unable to link school knowledge to local circumstances. This indicates that the transmission mode of teaching is still being used in most South African classrooms. Classrooms remain overcrowded, short of appropriate resources with frequent disruptions caused by either teachers or learners attending non school events (Chisholm 2004:89).

It seems that the situation has not changed much since the Threshold project was undertaken and conditions in schools are still far from perfect. However, the earlier shift to English and the devaluing of African languages as LOLTs mean that educationists are probably facing a situation where learners are less developed than those whom Madonald (1990), studied in the Threshold project.

#### *3.2.3.6 Teacher's language competency in multilingual settings*

The language competency of teachers in multicultural settings still resembles the apartheid era language policies. Teachers in former white, coloured and Indian departments were required to be proficient in the two apartheid era official languages. Although the South African Constitution and SASA have declared eleven official languages most of these schools continue to use these two languages as mediums of

instruction despite the changing demographics of the student population (Chisholm 2004).

Staff language proficiency seem to determine the language policy of former white, Indian and coloured schools. Very few of these schools offer instruction in an African language. The inflow of African learners into these schools was also not accompanied by the redeployment of appropriately qualified African language teachers to these schools, especially, in situations where there were many learners. Teachers in these schools are unable to communicate effectively with these learners because most of them lack proficiency in the learners' L1.

Chisholm (2004) finds evidence of staff language proficiency in townships determining the language in schools situated in peri-urban areas. Children from at least five language groups namely: Zulu, Tsonga, North Sotho, Ndebele and South Sotho, were accommodated in a particular grade. These learners were divided in to two main language groups, Zulu and Tswana. The teaching staff did not have command of other languages.

The de facto policies and practices of schools are also influenced by perceptions of the values of English as a language of socio-economic power and mobility. According to PREASA (1999: 98), most township primary schools in the Western Cape are reported to be using English as the medium of instruction. A similar finding was made by Setati (2000) in Gauteng. Despite this move towards English medium of instruction teachers continue to teach in one of the official African languages because most of them lack proficiency in the language of teaching and learning.

In township and other working class areas there is an absence of a reinforcing English or Afrikaans environment, in spite of radio and television. African communities in townships tend to tune into programmes in African languages. These communities are also characterised by shortages of well trained English teachers particularly in former DET schools (HSRC: 2004:120).

The quality of teaching in specific subjects is also a cause for concern. Where there are severe teacher shortages in subjects like mathematics, the natural sciences and English,

schools are compelled to make use of under- or unqualified staff. Poor academic performance of learners can therefore be directly attributed to the shortage of adequately trained teachers in these subjects at secondary schools. According to Chisholm (2004:238), only 43 per cent of all mathematics and English teachers have had more than two years training and only 33 per cent were qualified to teach biology. In 1993, 57 per cent of all black teachers were under-qualified that is they had fewer than three years post matric training (Chisholm 2004:239).

The poor results obtained by black learners in English, math and science could be traced to poorly qualified teachers in primary schools who are unable to provide proper foundations for learning these subjects. According to Chisholm (2004:240), in addition to professional and academic inadequacies of teachers and limitations in their training, many teachers lack a work ethic.

Hofmeyr (2003:55) believes that in-service training for teachers (INSET) is a critical area for reconstruction in education for the purposes of, among others, upgrading under-qualified teachers, language development of teachers and training in new teaching and learning methods. She points out that upgrading qualifications for black teachers is often pursued for the purpose of salary increases. This results in teachers staying away from work or using class time to complete their assignments while learners sit idly by.

According to the Human Sciences Research Council (2004:165), poor English teaching methods used by teachers in black schools aggravate the situation, HSRC (2004:168) emphasises the inadequacy of classroom practice and teacher training with regard to English as a L2 in South Africa and, for that matter, the rest of Africa. The inability of black teachers of English to initiate the kinds of classroom interactions required for the acquisition of communicative competence as well as the authoritarian style of teaching and the predominance of teacher centred instruction was also noted by PREASA (1998).

Mawasha (1999:67), acknowledging that the vast majority of the school population in South Africa who learn English as a second language has been taught by those for whom English is not their first language, describes ways in which black people have been disempowered by various negative connotations of an ethnic culture. He urges that these

teachers start believing in themselves and to strive for professional competency rather than attempting to be models of standard English as used by native speakers.

There is little doubt that both language policy and the state of English second language teaching in former DET schools have helped to cause the language problems which disadvantaged African learners continue to experience. The challenge, which is the essence of this study, is how best to address these deficiencies to afford these learners a chance of academic success.

### *3.2.3.7 Teacher training and professional development*

Prior to 1994 the system of teacher education was fragmented by being racially and regionally determined. This state of affairs was also a reflection of the South African society at that time. After the 1994 elections there was a need to reconstruct policies for teacher development, utilisation and supply. This task was made impossible due to a general lack of up to date and comparable data on teacher demand and supply and the provision of teacher education in the country (Chisholm 2004: 260).

In 1993 the National Education Policy Investigation (Nepi 1993) examined teacher policies in its framework report. This lack of information led to a major step to reform policies concerning teacher demand, supply and utilisation as well as teacher education. This has been the first national teacher audit.

The national teacher audit in South Africa which transcended racial, regional, departmental, provincial and institutional division was completed in December 1995. Subsequently a discussion paper entitled: National policy on teacher supply, utilisation and development (Department of Education 1996) was released in August for the public and stakeholders to comment on. From this audit and resulting debate relevant policy planning for teacher development can take place.

Pre-service teacher education in South Africa was provided primarily by teacher training colleges or colleges of education which fell under the administration of the former four provincial authorities. In addition to teacher training colleges faculties or schools of

education have also trained teachers. In an attempt to solve the education crises in black education a lot of teacher training colleges were established in the 1980's.

Since the system of teacher education has been reviewed, the draft White Paper on Higher Education (Republic of South Africa 1997) and the discussion document on National Policy on teacher supply, utilisation and development (DoE 1996) recommended that teacher education should be seen as a unified system which belongs in a system of higher education. This recommendation has led to the closure of various teacher colleges and the incorporation of these colleges into the system of university governance.

The discussion document also recommended an integrated approach to the policies of teacher supply, utilisation and development which require close co-operation between those engaged in teacher education and those engaged in conditions of services. The curriculum, including that for in-service, should be congruent with the Committee on Teacher Education Policy (COTEP) and NQF, and should include training, vocational education and education for learners with special needs. A coherent funding strategy was devised for teacher education.

In order to develop an integrated national policy on teacher education the committee on teacher education policy was established. This committee produced a document entitled Norms and Standards for Teacher Education (Act 27:1996). This document constitutes a radical departure from previous policy. The norms and standards are based on competencies presented in the form of outcomes and coincide with the National Qualifications Framework. The principles guiding teacher education curricula are sensitive to the diverse contexts in which teachers work; lifelong learning which seeks to increase access to education, curricula containing the Constitution principles; and greater communication concerning teacher education programmes.

Mechanisms should be established to define quality and put into place quality assurance procedures for all educators. Finally, capacity building, that is, the development of necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills is required by the staff in the system of teacher education at both provincial and national level.

There are limitations in teacher training institutions with regard to multilingual education. Until the publication of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2002) the colleges of education now integrated into higher education institutions and which trained most South African teachers were mainly ethnically based. According to Mda (2004:150), even institutions which accommodated learners from diverse cultural backgrounds had different methodologies for the different languages. For example there were Afrikaans methods, English methods, Xitsonga and Sesotho methods. The language in education policy distinguishes between home language and second additional language and provides a framework for each of the eleven official languages. According to DoE (2002:12), few institutions offer an African language as a training requirement of undergraduate and postgraduate study. Most programmes on multilingual and multicultural teaching are developed and facilitated by non-governmental organisations (NGO) and not by the Department of Education.

Adequate provision for appropriate teacher training and teacher development are essential to the successful introduction of a new medium of instruction. Nevertheless a large number of South African teachers are under-qualified and lack the English proficiency necessary for effective teaching in that medium. According to the HSRC report (2004:80), African teachers in both rural areas and townships are unable to teach effectively in English due to lack of English proficiency. Neither the teachers nor the learners have sufficient exposure to interact with English native speakers who are also in the minority in South Africa.

### *3.2.3.8 Conclusion: linguistic realities in education*

In the transition from apartheid to a democratic society in South Africa after the first democratic elections in 1994, the government promised to provide equal education opportunities for all racial groups (Republic of South Africa 1996a, 1996b). However, as the information shows, there are still wide variations among children from the different population groups.

Differences between black and other schools affect learners' achievement as it did under the apartheid era. The ratios of learners to educators in public primary and secondary schools statistically differ between black and white groups. Strikingly, during the period

1996 -2000, the overall distribution has not changed, and in some secondary schools the gaps have increased (Heugh 2003:379).

The dynamics of school education also demonstrate strong inequality between the population groups. Changes in the number of educators respond to changes in the number of learners in all population groups at primary school level. However, the dynamic adjustment of educators is significantly larger for former white, coloured and Indian schools. On the other hand, at secondary school level, the results do not display significant apartheid-type inequity. In the case of white schools, the number of educators does not respond to changes in the learner size, probably because of the superior initial condition.

After the abolition of apartheid white schools increased their fees so as to exclude black children (Bloch 2006:10). This screening mechanism partially explains the changes in class size. For black schools to succeed the government needs to come up with a stronger policy support for black primary schools which promises the human capital based reduction of apartheid-created poverty, and inequality in South Africa.

While formerly white Model C schools produce uniformly better results, rural and township schools merely survive, mainly through the efforts and influence of good and committed teachers. Over half of the learners that start school don't see it through, with Grade 9 being a major point of dropout. Evidence has shown that improving resources, surprisingly, seems to have little effect on outcomes in poorer schools. It is not only money that is important or even physical infrastructure but how the education process is ordered, managed and translated into classroom practice. The solution is not a simple one. Teacher brain drain and where possible, student flight or desertion from township schools, are a consequence of these difficult and stressful conditions. The upshot of all this is that only a small number of black learners acquire education of a meaningful quality. Rural and township schools continue to enhance the poverty cycle of poor learners who constitute 75 per cent of the learner population in South African schools.



### **3.3 IMPLICATIONS OF LANGUAGE POLICY AND RESEARCH**

Although the choice of English has obvious benefits if spread efficiently the introduction of English for national unity poses major problems in South Africa. Its effect is discriminatory as it continues to advantage only a few sectors of South Africa. These are the English and Afrikaans speakers which include a few elite black people who received excellent education from private and international schools. Although the new language in education policy is enthusiastically endorsed it has raised unrealistic expectations about English as a gateway to social, political and economic opportunity.

Actual practice in South African schools is incongruent with the intended outcomes of language in education policy. Instead of extending equal opportunities the English only approach adopted by many schools advantages mainly the affluent particularly those living in urban areas. Moreover the proposed equal treatment of African languages embodied in the Constitution documents has not coincided with practice or demand and thus their tangible decline in the light of their impotency to compete with the popularity of and the perceived advantages associated with English as the lingua franca. The future of the indigenous languages may require special protection as well as programmes consciously designed to use them, rather than mere official status, together with English.

It remains to be seen if government will be in a position to achieve its goal of promoting the indigenous languages, while at the same time promoting English. It should be reiterated that the failure to promote indigenous languages lies partly in the unwillingness of most black parents to accept mother-tongue education. Past experience and foreign donors, like US aid, who favour the transitional mode and as such are eager to only fund such programmes, compounds the issue.

In the early grades it is vital for learners to use their home language as a medium of instruction for establishing early cognitive development in reading and writing and then for English to be introduced gradually. The transitional model, as proposed by Macdonald 1990, Hartshorne 1992 and NEPI, cannot be accepted. This is because African learners tend to regard their home language as inferior and therefore, not worth studying. If the main aim of education, as described by the Constitution, is multilingualism it then follows that learners should continue to learn their mother-tongue

as well as English throughout their schooling programme. The effects of balanced bilingualism, the multicultural nature of South Africa require the government to allocate enough resources to achieve this goal.

Gradual transition to English possesses problems as the majority of South Africans are unable to use English at the level of functional literacy. English has tended to be a possession of the elite who have benefited from secondary and tertiary education. There is a need to establish effective English programmes outside the school environment

African languages need to be developed and actively promoted among all sectors of South African society so as to elevate their status. In order to provide effective education in a linguistically diverse country like South Africa, it is essential that the goals of language in education policies are carefully established and the means of implementation be meticulously selected. This implies that a new language in education policy should be critically appraised, and attempts should be made to reconcile political agendas with the educational realities. To help realise this aim, policy makers, teachers and parents should be informed of the difficulties inherent in and possible outcomes of new language policies.

Lemmer (1997:220) maintains that the value given to English in the National Language Policy fails in practice to cater for the economic, social and political aspirations of the majority of the population. Since well paid jobs in the public and private sectors, as well as political careers at national level, are dispensed in English it is inevitable that children of the elite who have access to better equipped private and international schools will benefit from this situation. This results in only a minority receiving equal access to quality education. Thus in reality the language policy erects a barrier against upward mobility for the masses.

### **3.4 CONCLUSION**

The majority of learners in South Africa which, according to Heugh, is 88 per cent (2002:18) are denied multilingual education on the grounds that most black parents are opting for English. However it should be noted that the majority of researchers who

present this as an argument are not basing their arguments on reality. These researchers are, among others, Ridge, Taylor and Vinjevold and Deumer. It is not as if there is no basis for their arguments. It is indeed so that there are parents who choose English above their home language, but there are also many more parents who do not make such choices. Yet these authors are using the preference of the minority as if they were valid for the majority of black population.

The major question to ask, therefore, is who are the parents who choose English and what are their reasons for doing so? Bloch (2006:27) shows that most middle class black parents opt for former Model C schools and private schools because they are dissatisfied with conditions at local schools. While legislation is in place to uplift and support African languages no noticeable difference is evident in most former state-schools for black learners. Here the legacy of apartheid still lingers on in the form of inefficiency and incompetence exacerbating an already inadequate educational system. Bloch (2006: 29) explores beyond superficial evidence for reasons why black parents opt for former Model C schools and does not ascribe the shift of a minority parent with middle class background to an English medium school as an outright rejection of mother-tongue instruction.

Block (2006:30) states that those who are opting for English constitute a minority of parents in the country as evidenced by the PANSLAB- MarkData survey report (2000). The report shows that 12 per cent of South Africans over the age of sixteen believe in English only instruction. Given that 9 per cent of South Africans are English first language speakers and are most likely to opt for English, then the degree of support from African language speakers is very small. To say that then that the majority of black parents are opting for English is an overestimation and therefore misleading. If the preferences and perceptions of a relatively tiny middle class are taken as a point of reference for educational decisions then the status quo will be presented as an attractive option.

Those who advise the government should consider their sources most carefully. Currently 83 per cent of learners in South Africa are African language speakers (SAIRR 2000:127). This means over a quarter of schools in the country have pupils who are African language speakers. Given that the number of pupils in classrooms in rural and township schools is higher than in urban and independent schools then the percentage of black

learners in schools which are not mixed is greater than 70 per cent. The percentage of schools which are not mixed is higher in certain provinces like the Northern Province 95 per cent, Eastern Cape 92 per cent, Kwazulu-Natal 86 per cent. The metropolitan areas have fewer schools which are not mixed; 54 and 52 for Gauteng and Western Cape respectively (SAIRR 2000:129). Thus the high incidence of multicultural school communities in these provinces is not indicative of the situation across the country. The reality of the situation, where children come from largely homogenous black communities, is that teaching and learning through English is neither viable nor taking place (Desai 2004:49).

There is an equally disturbing belief that there are not enough materials written in African languages. However a closer look at the implementation of Bantu education shows that textbooks and terminology were made available for teaching in African languages for the first eight years of schooling. Only in the ninth year of schooling were black learners expected to switch to having subjects taught in English and Afrikaans (Heugh 2000:89). Terminology and textbooks still exist and continue to be adapted during code switching in the classrooms. What the architect of Bantu education did not realise was that in ideal conditions it takes learners six to eight years to learn a L2 so as to be proficient in it.

From the above discussion it is clear that for African learners to make qualitative gains in education the language question needs to be reopened. The Department of Education needs to take home language instruction more seriously than just saying that it needs to be taught wherever possible and used for as long as possible. Ideally instead of having two levels at which languages can be studied, either as primary or additional languages, a further distinction needs to be made which takes into account which home languages are used as LOLTs all the way through school and which are not. Those languages that are not used as LOLT courses should be developed and so establish a solid foundation upon which children can learn both the academic language and cognitive skills necessary for further language development. This will also enable successful learning throughout the curriculum.

# Chapter 4

## Research design

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the author describes the methodological procedures adopted to acquire the data required to describe the academic English language proficiency level among Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners in selected schools in Gauteng. This includes a description of the methodology, method and assumptions. It concludes with an explanation of the relevance of the different research techniques used in the data collection for this study.

Research is used to facilitate understanding of the world around us. Macmillan and Schumacher (1993: 370) define research as a critical process for asking and attempting to answer questions about the world. In research different techniques such as questionnaires, interviews and experiments are used to question and to try to find answers. A critical evaluation of the findings is made. The method used is heavily influenced by the research goals, which are to explore, describe, predict, explain or act.

In this study an attempt is made to determine Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners' academic English language proficiency levels. For this study, like others, there is an aim and a selected population from which the data will be gathered using various techniques. The aim influences the selection of the research methodology, which in turn provides a point of departure for the research method (Macmillan & Schumacher 1993: 371). Hypotheses stated or assumptions made are dependent on the method used. Finally the results are interpreted critically.

There are two research methods used in this study. They are literature review and empirical research, each of which is discussed below.

## **4.2 LITERATURE STUDY**

The literature review, which was presented in chapters 2 and 3, gave the theoretical context for this research. The literature study generated theoretical information to guide the author's reflections, decisions and activities in practice (Macmillan & Schumacher 1993:472).

The literature study seeks to penetrate beyond fact finding, to the discovery of applicable generalisations or principles. This implies that a literature study is more than just organising a summary of pertinent information; the researcher needs to contribute something new and significant too. The documents considered, besides the research findings, included interpretations of other research and available authoritative sources. The bibliography indicates the range of literature reviewed for the study of the acquisition of academic English language proficiency, language policy and its influence on education, the differences between policy and practice and classroom interactions where language teaching takes place.

The literature review entailed the identification, tracing and analysis of documents containing information related to the stated problem. These documents were professional journals, books, dissertations and papers delivered at different conferences. The aim of this review was to gain insight into the development of English language proficiency among L2 learners and to provide a theoretical background for the design and evaluation of the empirical investigation. Literature review helped elucidate the theory that the firmer foundation learners have in the L1, the greater their ability to learn a L2 (section 2:10).

## **4.3 EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

In the empirical investigation a quantitative approach was used. The focus of the study was to determine the level of acquisition of English academic language proficiency among Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners.

### **4.3.1 Sampling**

Three schools in the Tshwane metropolitan area were selected (4.4) and Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners from these schools participated in the research (4.3.1.2).

#### *4.3.1.1 Sampling methods*

In this study a combination of two purposeful sampling strategies was used. Purposeful sampling refers to the selection of information rich cases for an in-depth study, specifically, when the researcher wants to understand the phenomena without needing to generalise the results (Leedy 1993:201). Purposeful sampling was done on site selection. Three schools in the Tshwane metropolitan area were selected. The criterion for site selection was the school's geographical context and that Xitsonga was the first language for most of the learners. The assumption was that learners with good foundation in L1 would be able to transfer their L1 skills into L2 learning. Learners were selected based on their home language background, that is, Xitsonga. The schools selected for the study are Xitsonga medium schools (from Grade 0 to Grade 3) for Xitsonga L1 speakers. It was decided by the researcher to test all Grade 7 learners in all the three schools chosen in order to have a comprehensive sample.

#### *4.3.1.2 Criteria for sample selection*

The subjects selected for this study were Grade 7 learners. All subjects were L2 English speakers with their L1 being predominantly Xitsonga. This included learners who speak Xitsonga as their first language in their home and social environment, even if they have acquired other African languages. Within the urban context, it was difficult to locate learners who speak only Xitsonga due to the large number of different languages spoken within a small area. Often the speakers in these areas tend to use a variety of different languages that occur within the community. Information about the home language of the learners was obtained from the teachers and then confirmed with the learners who were selected for the study. Xitsonga was chosen as it is one of the minority languages in South Africa and it is government policy to promote all the languages.

The three schools were selected according to their

- accessibility to the researcher,
- availability of information rich participants,
- offering Xitsonga as both a subject and a LOLT from Grade R to Grade 3.

Grade 7 learners were chosen for the following reasons:

- Grade 7 represents an important stage in the development of academic language proficiency; this grade was therefore chosen in order to determine the learner's ability to cope with the language demands of the curriculum, which requires Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 2004); as 5 -7 years is needed to develop CALP in an L2, Grade 7 was chosen as these learners should have had sufficient exposure to both the academic content Xitsonga and English L2
- Grade 7 is also the final year of primary school before the learners progress to high school where the demands and complexity of the curriculum increase; there is often more use of de-contextualised forms of language; there is therefore less opportunity to foster language learning in high school due to the classroom being less facilitative; it may therefore be too late for the L2 learners.

#### **4.4 DESCRIPTION OF SELECTED SCHOOLS**

Subjects were selected from three primary township schools in the Tshwane Metropolitan area: Atteridgeville and Mamelodi. A total of 160 learners were selected.

The following description of the three schools is based on personal observation during three visits to the schools to apply the questionnaire. Information gathering discussions were held with:

- the principal
- language teachers responsible for teaching English and Xitsonga for Grade 7 learners in all three selected schools
- the project leader and members of a project team implementing in-service teacher training programmes at the schools; team members are lecturers at the



Department of Linguistics at Unisa; these team members were able to give insightful information regarding language teaching at schools.

#### **4.4.1 School 1**

School 1 is situated in Atteridgeville, a township in Tshwane Metropolitan area. The total number of teachers in this school was eleven and the learner enrolment figures 550.

##### *4.4.1.1 Medium of instruction*

Learners at this school were Xitsonga speakers. They were also fluent in a number of African languages because of the language mix in townships. The language of instruction in this school was English, and most of their teachers were Xitsonga speakers, who were also fluent in other African languages. Their qualifications consisted of a Bachelor of Education and a Remedial Education Diploma. Xitsonga was the medium of instruction from Grade R to Grade 3 and English was taught as a subject. However, English became the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards and Xitsonga was taught as a subject. According to the language teachers interviewed, few of these learners had access to books at home.

##### *4.4.1.2 The school's teaching and learning culture*

This school had a school policy and a detailed learner's code of conduct. This code of conduct was worked out by the school management team, teachers and learners represented by the Learner's Representative Council.

Although it was a relatively well resourced school, it did not have a library. Learners in this school came from the squatter camps and were therefore in a government-funded feeding scheme. Most of the learners received their meal of the day at school and some of them were 'child parents', that is, older siblings who are heading families after losing their parents due to HIV/AIDS related illnesses.

The school had a mission statement which towards which every teacher and learner worked. The school conducted its business of teaching in an orderly manner.

The whole management team had a common goal, that is, effective teaching and learning. Almost all learners at this school wore their school uniform in accordance with the learners' code of conduct. Learners discipline as defined by their level of co-operation with teachers and the management team. Punctuality was good. It was also observed that the learners' discipline was a reflection of the teamwork between the school management team and the teaching staff.

#### *4.4.1.3 Learners' attitude towards school*

Most learners manifested a positive attitude towards school. This attitude was evident in the low rate of truancy and absenteeism. This was established through the researcher's own observation during testing sessions and informal interviews with the responsible teachers. In instances where a learner was found absent, the teacher could furnish reasons for absence according to the report provided by the learner, guardian or parent.

Learners showed a high level of respect for their teachers who appeared to be dedicated as it can be attested to by their interest in what the researcher observed during the testing period and the presence of the relevant language teacher during the testing period. If learners saw a teacher coming into the classroom, they immediately lowered their voices and as soon as the teacher entered the classroom, they all stood up and greeted the teacher.

#### *4.4.1.4 Availability and use of educational resources*

Of particular relevance to this empirical investigation was the availability of reading materials such as prescribed books, additional reading materials as well as the library. Unfortunately this school did not have a library where learners could study or read.

#### *4.4.1.5 Professionalism of teachers*

The majority of the teaching staff was decently dressed and could be regarded as exemplary to learners. The appearance of some teachers was however, unacceptable in the school context. A few male teachers were in jeans with takkies. It is the researcher's

opinion that this kind of dress code could not command respect for the teaching profession, nor does it contribute to instilling in learners proper motivation and commitment to do their schoolwork.

Teacher discipline was satisfactory as almost all teachers came to school on time, responded timeously to the changes of teaching periods indicated by the siren at the end of each teaching period. There were, however, a few teachers who were not punctual.

A number of teachers were committed to their work. However, some teachers were clearly indifferent to their work. According to the Head of Department for languages, no day in this school passed without a teacher or teachers being absent. He also pointed out that it was difficult to determine the teacher's attendance rate because even those who were present did not sign the attendance register. Some teachers did not go to class to teach even if they were present at school. As a result the learners became disinterested and resorted to such activities as playing in the corridors and making noise.

#### **4.4.2 School 2**

School is situated in Atteridgeville, a township in Tshwane Metropolitan area. The number of learners enrolled was 438 and altogether there were eleven teachers.

##### *4.4.2.1 Medium of instruction*

Learners at this school were Xitsonga speakers; however they were also fluent in a number of African languages because of the language mix in townships. The language of instruction in this school was English, and most of their teachers were Xitsonga first language speakers, who were also fluent in other African languages. Their qualifications consisted of a Further Diploma in education and a Junior Secondary Certificate. Xitsonga was the medium of instruction from Grade R to Grade 3 and English was taught as a subject. However, English became the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards and Xitsonga was taught as a subject. It emerged during an informal interview with some language teachers that few of these learners had access to books at home.

#### *4.4.2.2 The school's teaching and learning culture*

These learners came from a low socio-economic background and received their first and main meal of the day from the government funded feeding school programme. It was a well resourced school with a library and an administration block with administration staff. The school also had a computer room where learners could do computer studies. The school was well maintained and the learners well behaved.

The learners had minimal difficulties in understanding and following instructions during the testing period. Their teachers appeared to be relieved to have someone taking over their classes and thus having some free time. No one at the school showed an interest in what was going on during the testing period or what the test was all about.

The classrooms although neat had no teaching aids. Even the school reception area had absolutely nothing on the wall to tell a visitor what the school is all about. The older staff members showed little dedication as shown by their lack of interest in either the result of the first test conducted or the type of testing that was being done the second time by the researchers.

Despite the orderly nature in which the school conducted the business of teaching and learning there was no explicitly written mission statement towards which every teacher and learner worked. The whole management team had a common goal, that is, effective teaching and learning. At the start of the school day and after recess, all or some of the members of the management team were observed at different points of entry to the school gates encouraging learners to hasten to their classrooms in order to save time.

All members of the management team carried an air of authority, which enabled them to discharge their duties with confidence. The principal and the deputy principal shared some managerial and administrative traits such being principled, strict and fair to both learners and teachers. They acted immediately against any teacher whose actions were perceived to be incongruent with creating, improving and maintaining the teaching and learning culture of the school.

The teaching staff's way of dressing varied from casual to formal. The teachers dressed well enough to command respect deserved by their profession and to be exemplary to learners.

#### *4.4.2.3 Learners' attitude towards school*

Almost all learners in this school wore their school uniform in accordance with the learner's code of conduct. Any learner not wearing the school uniform was immediately reprimanded by the deputy principal.

Learners' discipline as defined by their level of co-operation with teachers and the management team, as well as their punctuality, was good. It was also observed that the learners discipline was a reflection of the co-operation between the school management and the teaching staff in respect of the maintenance of learner discipline.

Most of the learners manifested a positive attitude towards school. This attitude was evident in the low rate of truancy and absenteeism. In instances where a learner was found absent the teacher could furnish reasons for the absence according to the report provided by the learner, guardian or parent.

Learners in this school had respect for the teachers and when they saw a teacher coming to class they lowered their voices. As soon as the teacher entered the classroom they all stood up and greeted the teacher. The rate of subject specific truancy was minimal.

#### *4.4.2.4 Availability of educational resources*

Of particular relevance to this empirical investigation was the availability of reading materials such as prescribed books, additional reading materials as well as a library. This school had a library where the learners could study or read, although the library appeared to be infrequently used. Teachers themselves did not use the library and as such never referred these learners to the library. Although the school had a computer laboratory, these teachers were not well versed in the use of the internet so as to get the latest information on the various subjects. Neither were they able to introduce learners to its use.

#### *4.4.2.5 Professionalism of teachers*

Teachers' discipline was satisfactory as they all came to school on time and responded timeously to the changes of teaching periods indicated by the siren at the end of each period.

Despite a number of good points about this school, a certain degree of negative attitude towards work was observed. At any given time one or two classes were found unoccupied. An absence of teachers in class could be explained in several ways: the teacher was reluctant to go to class because it was the unpopular life orientation period, or they had an emergency staff meeting.

This school was one of the most crowded schools in the area. This became apparent during testing when the researcher was told that the school had two Grade 7 classes with altogether 100 learners. After some calculations the researcher found that the learner educator ratio in this school was at 50:1.

#### **4.4.3 School 3 (school Z)**

This is situated in Mamelodi, a township in Tshwane Metropolitan area. The school has total of 354 learners and 18 teachers.

##### *4.4.3.1 Medium of instruction*

Learners at this school were Xitsonga speakers who were also fluent in a number of African languages because of the language mix in townships. The language of instruction in this school was English, and most of their teachers were Xitsonga speakers, who were also fluent in other African languages, because of language contact in big cities. Their qualifications consisted of a Bachelor of Education and a Higher Diploma in Education. Xitsonga was the medium of instruction from Grade R Grade 3 and English is taught as a subject. However, English becomes the medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards and Xitsonga is taught as a subject. It was established during an informal interview with the teachers that few of these learners had access to books at home.

#### *4.4.3.2 School's teaching and learning culture*

The school starts at Grade R and ends at Grade 7. The school had no written school policy, and was run on the assumption that all teachers were professionals who knew what they were employed to do.

There appeared to be a lack of a common vision, which in the researcher's opinion manifested itself in the school operating without a mission statement and school policy document. This is contrary to the provisions of the South African School's Act (SASA 1996c).

There was no observable collaboration between the principal, deputy principal and the Heads of Departments (HODs). The principal and the HODs had two contrasting management styles. The deputy principal was authoritarian whereas the principal was soft and lax with both the teachers and the learners.

#### *4.4.3.3 Learners' attitude towards school*

Most learners were neat and always in their school uniform. There were few learners who did not conform to the school uniform rules. Although the principal alleged that the wearing of school uniform was part of the school policy, nothing appeared to be done to discourage the negative tendency towards violating the provisions of the school policy. This could be attributed to the low socio-economic status of the learners. Although the school is located in a black township, the majority of learners came from the informal settlement. Most of their parents were unemployed.

In the researchers' view the learners discipline in this school was not conducive to effective teaching and learning. Firstly, learners were always late for school. The first teaching period of the day, which is at 08:00, was unusable as learners kept trickling into the class. These learners had walk for more than six kilometres to school as most of them cannot afford the transport money to school. Even those who can afford transport do not avail themselves of it to get to school on time. The teaching periods that come after the two

breaks are also not effectively used because either the learners or teachers are late for lessons.

The learner's negative attitude towards school manifested itself in high levels of truancy and absenteeism. At recess time a significant number of learners were observed taking their school bags home which was an indication that they would not be returning to school for the rest of the day. Learners left school because they knew teachers would not come to class after break. Learners in this school had varying degrees of respect for their teachers.

#### *4.4.3.4 Availability and use of educational resources*

This school had a library which was located in one classroom where learners could use, borrow books as well as sit and read. Nevertheless it was observed that the library was never used by the learners. Although the teachers talked about its existence they never referred the learners to the library. Teachers themselves appeared not to use the library frequently.

#### *4.4.3.5 Professionalism of teachers*

Teachers' self-discipline showed some apparent shortcomings as only the deputy principal was observed coaxing the learners to hasten to class after the early morning bell rang. On other occasions he locked the school gates to refuse access to learners who arrived late after break. His attempts were, however, thwarted by the absence of teachers in the classrooms.

All the teachers were neatly dressed their attire commanded respect for the teaching profession. A major problem experienced by the school was teacher's lack of discipline, which manifested itself in some teachers ignoring the siren used to mark the beginning and end of teaching periods. They either did not go to class or failed to leave the class for the next teacher. Generally, there appeared to be no difference between the learners' and teachers' attitudes towards time management and self-discipline.



Some teachers at this school were committed to their work. Unfortunately there were others who were indifferent towards their work. This manifested itself in the high rate of teacher's absenteeism. Even those who came to work made very little difference as they did not go to class to teach. As a result learners became disenchanted and resorted to such activities as playing in the corridor and making noise.

#### **4.5. PHASE 1: SELECTION OF STANDARDISED TESTS**

It was decided to use the standardised English Language Performance Tests developed by Reinecke (1992) for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The HSRC developed a series of tests namely: Reading Proficiency Test English Second language, Writing Proficiency Test English Second language, Listening Proficiency Test English Second language and Speaking Proficiency Test for English Second Language. Similar tests were also compiled for English first language learners by various authors. Reneicke (1992) developed the tests for the HSRC for Grade 7, 8 and 9 English second language learners. These standardised tests, which were developed for both English L1 and L2 learners, have been used since 1992.

In this study the Achievement Tests for English Second language in Grade 7 were used (see Appendix 1). Two tests were chosen:

- Reading Proficiency Test in English (RPT)
- Writing Proficiency Test in English (WPT).

The use of the standardised tests was aimed at establishing the learners' present level of proficiency and competence in English and translated into Xitsonga respectively (see 4.6). The Reading Proficiency Test consisted of multiple choice questions aimed at measuring these language skills. The Writing Proficiency Test consisted of creative writing and spelling tasks. These two tests, in the researcher's opinion, efficiently test academic language proficiency since both reading and writing represents a de-contextualised form of language.

The primary aim of the test was to provide an objective, valid and reliable measurement of Grade 7 learners' general achievement in L2 by means of multiple choice questions.

The second objective was to diagnose possible weaknesses in the learner's language proficiency. Specific aspects for example, the application of knowledge of writing related skills and the usage of language structures are clustered to provide for the diagnostic properties of the test. This test gave an insight into the language development of Grade 7 African learners.

#### **4.5.1 Validity and reliability of standardised tests: language proficiency for Grade 7 learners**

Reliability refers to the consistency of scores, that is, the extent to which a test will provide consistent results on repeated applications to the same group of learners (Leedy 1993:42). Reliability coefficient of 0.80 or higher for achievement tests can be regarded as satisfactory. The reliability coefficient for this test is 0.93 and therefore considered satisfactory.

Validity refers to the extent to which the test serves its purpose, that is, the degree to which a set of test scores measure what it ought to measure (Leedy 1993:40). Content validity is the most important single attribute of a good test although it is not statistical. Since not all possible items relating to the test domain can be included in one test, the validity of the test depends on the representativeness of its contents. The test then becomes a sample for the whole domain. The content validity of this test was accepted by a committee of subject' experts after the specification table had been drawn up and a thorough study had been made of the suitability of items to test the reading and writing proficiencies (Roux 1997:5).

According to Roux (1997:4), a reliable coefficient of 0.80 or higher is acceptable for this kind of a test. The actual reliability coefficient for this test is 0.952 and 0.950 for the L1 and L2 norm groups respectively and therefore satisfactory. The implication of these coefficients was that the test could be used to reliably measure the learner's academic English language proficiency and to make important decisions about the learners' language production skills. Each of these instruments is described below and the rationale for the use of each will be discussed.

#### **4.5.2 Reading Proficiency Test in English**

The Reading Performance Test (RPT) in English is a standardised test incorporating the aims of an achievement test as well as a proficiency test. The use of the test was aimed at determining the learners' reading performance in Grades 7. It is designed for L2 learners.

These tests were used because they served as an objective, valid and reliable indicator of the learners' reading proficiency, specifically, the ability to get meaning from print. The use of a reading proficiency test was based on the assumption that the learner's ability to indicate a correct answer from the options given in written form was a valid indication of their reading ability in English (Reinecke 1992:16).

The test is based on the assumption that achievement in English second language is validly assessed in terms of learner's overt ability to recognise the following aspects:

- correct meaning of words, phrases, sentences and passages
- correct spelling, punctuation, paragraph construction and other writing related skills
- acceptable usage of language structures.

##### *4.5.2.1 Test administration procedures*

The test is a paper and pencil test that must be completed within an hour. In order to write the test, the learners have to be in possession of a pencil, eraser and answer sheet (no) and a test booklet (2976). A typical question asks the learners to read a passage and to answer a set of questions based on that passage. Answers to all the questions are in multiple choice form and the learners choose the correct answer from options A, B, C or D. They respond by shading with a pencil the oval that contains the correct option (Reinecke 1992:16).

##### *4.5.2.2 Scoring methods*

The test was scored with a scoring stencil, No. 2977 and was provided by the HSRC. It was essential to do the scoring and allocation of marks carefully. Dr N. Claassen, who is responsible for research and development at the Human Sciences Research Council,

assisted with data analysis. He was responsible for the development of psychological tests, especially the cognitive assessment test, its standardisation and analysis, for the Human Sciences Research Council. Dr. Claassen was helpful in checking the scores and the analysis of the test results.

The following aspects were considered for both the scoring and allocation of marks:

- whether two or more ovals had been shaded in next to any number on the answer sheet; such answers were crossed out with a red pen so that learners did not receive credit for these, even if one of the answers was correct
- placing of the scoring key on top of the answer sheet so that the word Test was fully visible in the relevant openings of the scoring stencil
- counting of the pencil marks visible through the holes in the stencil and whether each total was written in the space provided.

#### *4.4.2.3 Sub-sections of the English Reading Proficiency Test*

For the purposes of clarity and organisation the researcher has distinguished between two sub-tests of the RPT. These are comprehension and grammar.

These distinctions are her own made to facilitate analysis. The same was done with the translated Xitsonga test (4.5.6:32).

#### *4.5.2.4 Sub-test: comprehension*

The comprehension test consists of a 22 questions. Learners read a passage and answer questions based on the passage or story read.

The content included those tasks that fall within the capabilities of English second language learners at Grade 7 level. An attempt was made to make the tests widely applicable by avoiding specific scholastic learning content.

All questions were in multiple-choice form consisting of four options per item. A classification of the test content is given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 gives the content of sub-test which is comprehension. It must be noted that the numbers indicated in the third column represent the actual question numbers in the test (see Appendix 4).

Table 4.1: Content of sub-test: comprehension

Skills being tested	Number of items tested	Question Numbers
Recognising denotative meaning of words	1	26
Understanding the details of content	9	1,3,4,5,6,8,10,15,31
Making general inferences based on the given text	6	2,7,9,11,21,22
Making inferences related to the writer's intention	1	17
Making inferences related to the main idea	2	12 and 14
Making inferences related to atmosphere	1	13
Recognising expanded meaning of summarised text.	2	23,25

Source: Chamberlain et al. (1992:17).

#### 4.5.2.5 *Sub-test: grammar*

This second subtest of the RPT consists of eighteen grammar related questions. In this part of the test learners were required to either choose a word in order to complete a sentence or to select a precise word to describe something in context.

Table 4.2 gives the content of the sub-test: grammar. It must be noted that the numbers indicated in the third column represent the actual question numbers in the test (see Appendix 4).

Table 4.2: Content of sub-test: grammar

Skills tested	Number of Items Tested	Question Numbers	
Recognising expanded meaning of summarised text	2	23, 25	
Selecting appropriate language for a situation	1	24	
Selecting Precise words to describe something in context	3	27,28;29	
Recognising denotative meaning	1	26	
Selecting correct use for parts of speech	10	30-40	

Source: Chamberlain et al. (1992:17).

#### 4.5.3 Writing Proficiency Test in English

The Writing Performance Test (WPT) (see Appendix 2) is a standardised test incorporating the aims of an achievement test as well as a proficiency test (Reinecke 1992:10). The use of the Writing Performance Test was aimed at determining the learners' writing performance level in Grade 7. The test is applicable to L2 learners.

The use of the WPT was based on the assumptions that:

- English proficiency can be demonstrated through receptive skills (reading and listening), as well as productive skills (speaking and writing); the RPT was used to measure the learner's receptive skills, and the WPT was used to measure their productive skills; these two instruments complement each other
- English language proficiency could be accurately assessed in terms of the learner's over all ability to communicate in writing by:
  - using the appropriate register for the situation or task, linguistic cohesion and ease of expression
  - using correct words, phrases and sentence structure

- being original and able to employ emotive and figurative language
- giving a correct and apt responses to a given assignment, as well as demonstrating richness and logical flow of thought and argument
- using appropriate punctuation, spelling, paragraphing and formatting.

The test consists of three tasks that entail a description of a picture, the writing of short sentences and the writing of a short structured essay. Details of the tests are discussed below.

#### *4.5.3.1 Test administration procedure*

Learners were supplied with a test booklet to write on as well as a pen and blank paper for planning answers. Answers to all questions were written in the spaces provided in the test booklet. Although there was no time limit for this test, thirty minutes was the maximum time allowed to complete all the tasks.

#### *4.5.3.2 Scoring methods*

The English Writing Performance Test was evaluated using the scoring scale below. The total number of points for each question is tabulated first then a description of the task involved is shown.

#### A. Labelling of pictures

Questions 1-4 and questions 11-16 dealt with labelling of pictures.

#### Question 1 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (bag or case or satchel).

Question 2 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (jersey or sweater or pullover).

Question 3 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (clock or watch or timepiece).

Question 4 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (tie).

Question 11 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly (bike).
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (bicycle).

Question 12 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (rag, cloth or chamois).

Question 13 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (wiper/s or windscreen wipers).

Question 14 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (cap).



Question 15 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correctly, that is, spelt correctly (number plate or registration number).

Question 16 (0-2 point scale)

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: answer is acceptable, but is spelt incorrectly.
- 2: completely correct, that is, spelt correctly (rubbish bin or dustbin or garbage can/bin).

B) Sentence completion: questions 5-9

Questions 5-9 dealt with completing sentences.

Question 5 – 8 (0-4 point scale)

Sentence completion

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: grammatically poor, but has the idea.
- 2: average.
- 3: communicating content well though not perfectly, that is, there might be spelling errors.
- 4: grammatically perfect; spelling correct and fits the context.

Question 9 (0-1 point scale)

- 0: wrong.
- 1: I do my homework in the study.

C) Creative writing: questions 10 and 17.

Questions 10 and 17 dealt with writing of a short structured essay.

Question 10 (0-4 point scale).

Creative writing

- 0: totally wrong.
- 1: grammatically poor, but has the idea.
- 2: average.
- 3: communicating content well though not perfectly, that is, there might be spelling errors.
- 4: grammatically perfect; spelling correct and fits the context.

Question 17 (0-9 point scale).

Creative writing

- 0/1: only able to produce a few letters; scrawl insignificant message (none writer).
- 2: only a rough mastery of writing; much is unintelligible; writes some recognisable words; not easy to understand.
- 3: produces a string of sentences bearing on the topic, but little logical structure; poor layout and cohesion; poor spelling.
- 4: conveys simple short messages, several errors in usage; marginal standards in spelling.
- 5: although broadly conveying the message, the structure and flow is lacking coherence; errors in usage; spelling not perfect.
- 6: message fully conveyed with occasional gaps/ redundancies; flows reasonably well; layout acceptable with occasional spelling errors.
- 7: message effectively conveyed; clear presentation; complete coverage of the topic; accurate grammar vocabulary and spelling apart from slips; handwriting clear.
- 8: nearly at full competence level.
- 9: expert writer; fully effective handling of written communication.

*4.5.3.3 Sub-sections of the English Writing Proficiency Test*

For the purposes of clarity and organisation the researcher has distinguished between two sub-tests. These are spelling and creative writing. However, these are her own distinctions made to facilitate analysis. The test is distinguished accordingly in the ensuing paragraphs. The same has been done with the translated Xitsonga test (4.5.6).

#### 4.5.3.4 Sub-test: spelling

The English Spelling is the second sub-test of the English Writing Proficiency Test. This sub-test had a possible maximum score of 37. The sub-test involved picture naming.

Table 4.3 gives the content of sub-test: spelling. It must be noted that the numbers indicated in the third column represent the actual question numbers in the test (see Appendix 4).

Table 4.3: Content of sub-test: spelling

Skills being tested	Number of items tested	Question numbers
Using denotative meaning of words	12	1-4; 8; 11-16
Correct word order	1	9

Source: Bernard et al. (1992:19).

The content included those tasks which fall within the performance range of English second language learners at senior primary level. Preference was however given to tasks demonstrating general writing proficiency. This means that there was an attempt to select tasks that are relevant to the learner's world. The test progressed from the mere naming of objects to the writing of two short paragraphs which are highly structured, for example, questions 10 and 17. A classification of the test content is given in the table 4.4 below:

#### 4.5.3.5 Sub-test: creative writing

This is the second sub-test of the Writing Proficiency Test. The test had a possible maximum raw score of 14. This sub-test required learners to write short paragraphs of events on the picture.

Table 4.4 gives the content of sub-test: creative writing. It must be noted that the numbers indicated in the third column represent the actual question numbers in the test (see Appendix 4).

Table 4.4: Contents of sub-test: creative writing.

Skills being tested	Number of Items	Question Numbers
Describing details of content	2	5; 6
Creative writing	2	10; 17

Source: Bernard et al. (1992:19).

#### **4.5.4 Phase 2: Translation of English test material; into Xitsonga**

The standardised tests, that is, the English Reading Proficiency Test and Writing Proficiency Test from the HSRC were translated into Xitsonga, (see Appendix 3), in order to determine how the learners understood the concepts in English in relation to their home language, and to provide information regarding the effects of English instruction on home language competence. Translation was carried out by the researcher who is a first language Xitsonga speaker. The editing of the test materials was conducted by two professional translators from the Linguistic Department at Unisa, as well as a Xitsonga L1 lecturer who is an experienced author.

It is important to note that a number of concerns arise when dealing with translation. Areas of concern include the effects of translation on test items, the interpretation of responses on test items and any cultural bias that may inadvertently or otherwise occur (Macmillan & Schumacher 1993:334). Other problems that may occur with translation include the length of time taken to translate, translation problems such as inaccurate and imprecise translation, unknown lexical items, and slight changes of emphasis leading to distortion and recording issues. Any translation may alter or totally change the desired emphasis of a phrase or sentence. Furthermore, it is not always possible to find English equivalents. Although there are limitations, translated assessment does provide additional vital information. Once the assessment tool was translated further inappropriate items were deleted. These were words which had no equivalent Xitsonga translation or had multiple meaning in Xitsonga.

#### **4.5.5 Phase 3: Piloting translated Xitsonga test material**

The translated assessment tools were pilot tested in order to test their feasibility, as well as their adequacy and appropriateness. Subjects, not participating in the actual study, were randomly selected from Grade 7 learners at Soshangane School in Mamelodi. A number of Grade 7 teachers were also consulted. Piloting allowed the researcher to identify if questions were worded correctly, and to assess whether any areas of interference occurred. Teachers reported the test to be appropriate for Grade 7 learners in terms of content, the tasks and the time given to complete the test. It should be noted that these aspects could also not be changed by the researcher as the test was to be exactly in the same format as the English standardised test. The completed Xitsonga standardised tests, therefore, resembled those of the English Reading and Writing Proficiency Tests.

#### **4.5.6 Reading Proficiency Test in Xitsonga**

The RPT in Xitsonga is a standardised test incorporating the aims of an achievement test, as well as a proficiency test. The use of the test was aimed at determining the learners' reading performance in Grade 7 and is designed for L2 learners. The Xitsonga RPT had a maximum raw score of 40 marks and learners were given an hour to complete the test.

This test was used because it served as an objective, valid and reliable indicator of the learners' reading proficiency, that is, the ability to get meaning from print. The use of the RPT was based on the assumption that the learner's ability to indicate a correct answer from the options given in written form was a valid indication of their reading ability in Xitsonga (Reineke 1992:16).

The test is based on the assumption that achievement in Xitsonga first language is validly assessed in terms of learner's overt ability to recognise the:

- correct meaning of words, phrases, sentences and passages
- correct spelling, punctuation, paragraph construction and other writing related skills
- acceptable usage of language structures.

#### *4.5.6.1 Test administration procedures*

The test was administered by the researcher, who is a Xitsonga L1 speaker, and a colleague, also a Xitsonga L1 speaker. The testers were familiar with the classroom situation as well as the nature of classroom testing. The tester was trained by the researcher in terms of the test protocol. Assessments were carried out at each school during the school day. The assessment took a maximum of one hour and 30 minutes to complete at each school.

The test was administered in the following sequence:

Section 1, which is a RPT, was completed first within the maximum time of 40 minutes; learners were then given a five minutes break.

Section 2, which is a WPT, was written within a maximum period of 30 minutes.

Section 1 of the test was more challenging as was attested to by most of the learners not completing it by the end of 40 minutes. Learners were not allocated additional time as these are standardised tests. However the WPT proved to be easier as most of the learners completed their work on time, that is, before a period of 30 minutes elapsed.

In order to reduce the effect that testing in one language may have had on the results of the other language test, learners received assessment in English first in the first two schools and later in Xitsonga whereas the third school wrote the Xitsonga Proficiency Test first and the English test later. There was approximately one month between testing in each language. A month period delay is considered enough time to avoid the learning effect (Macmillan & Schumacher 1993:65).

#### *4.5.6.2 Scoring methods*

The same scoring methods for the English RPT were used. Full details of the scoring methods are provided in paragraph 4.5.2.2.

#### 4.5.6.3 Sub-sections of the Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test

For the purpose of clarity and organisation the researcher has distinguished two sub-tests of the Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Tests. These are a comprehension and grammar test. However these are her own distinctions made to facilitate analysis. The test is discussed accordingly in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### 4.5.6.4 Sub-test: comprehension

The comprehension test consists of 22 questions. Learners read a passage and answer questions based on the passage or story read.

The content included those tasks that fall within the capabilities of Xitsonga first language learners at Grade 7 level. An attempt was made to make the tests widely applicable by avoiding specific scholastic learning content.

All questions were in multiple-choice form consisting of four options per item. A classification of the test content is given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.5 gives the content of subtest: comprehension. It must be noted that the numbers indicated in the third column represent the actual question numbers in the test (see Appendix 4).

Table 4.5: Contents of the sub-test: comprehension

Skills being tested	Number of items tested	Question Numbers
Recognising denotative meaning of words	1	26
Understanding the details of content	9	1,3,4,5,6,8,10,15,31
Making general inferences based on the given text	6	2,7,9,11,21,22
Making inferences related to the writer's intention	1	17
Making inferences related to the main idea	2	12 and 14
Making inferences related to atmosphere	1	13
Recognising expanded meaning of summarised text	2	23,25

Source: Chamberlain et al. (1992:17).

#### 4.5.6.5 Sub-test: grammar

This is the second sub-test of the RPT consisting of eighteen grammar related questions. In this part of the test learners were required to either choose a correct word in order to complete a sentence or to select a precise word to describe something.

Table 4.6 gives the content of sub-test: grammar. It must be noted that the numbers indicated in the third column represent the actual question numbers in the test (see Appendix 4).

Table 4.6 Content of the sub-test: grammar

Skills tested	Number of Items Tested	Question Numbers
Recognising expanded meaning of summarised text	2	23, 25
Selecting appropriate language for a situation	1	24
Selecting Precise words to describe something in context	3	27,28;29
Recognising denotative meaning	1	26
Selecting correct use of parts of speech	10	30-40
Making inferences relating to atmosphere	1	13

Source: Chamberlain et al. (1992:17).



#### *4.5.6.6 Test administration procedure*

The RPT in Xitsonga was administered by the researcher who is a Xitsonga L1 speaker with the assistance of a colleague also a Xitsonga L1 speaker. The testers were familiar with the classroom situation as well as the nature of classroom testing. The tester was trained by the researcher in terms of the test protocol. Assessments were carried out at each school during the school day. The assessment took a maximum of one hour and 30 minutes to complete at each school.

The test was administered in the following sequence:

Section 1, which is a RPT, was completed first within a maximum time of 40 minutes; learners were then given a five minutes break.

Section 2, which is a WPT, was written within a maximum period of 30 minutes.

Section 1 of the test was more challenging as was attested to by most of the learners having not completed by the end of 40 minutes. Learners were not allocated additional time as these are standardised tests. However the WPT proved to be easier as most of the learners completed their work on time, that is, before a period of 30 minutes lapsed.

In order to reduce the effect that testing in one language may have had on the results of the other language test, learners received assessment in English first in the first two schools and later in Xitsonga whereas the third school wrote the Xitsonga Proficiency Test first and the English test later. There was approximately one month between testing in each language. A month period delay is considered enough time periods to avoid the learning effect (Macmillan& Schumacher 1993:65).

#### *4.5.6.7 Scoring methods*

The Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test was scored the in same way as the English Reading Proficiency Test in section 4.5.1.1.

### **4.5.7 Writing Performance Test in Xitsonga**

The WPT (see Appendix 2) is a standardised test incorporating the aims of an achievement test as well as a proficiency test (Roux 1997:1). The use of the WPT was

aimed at determining the learners writing performance level in Grade 7. The test is applicable to L2 learners.

The use of the Writing Performance Test in Xitsonga was based on the assumptions that:

- Xitsonga proficiency could be demonstrated through receptive skills (reading and listening), as well as productive skills (speaking and writing); the RPT was used to measure the learner's receptive skills, and the WPT was used to measure their productive skills; these two instruments therefore complement each other
- Xitsonga language proficiency could be accurately assessed in terms of the learner's over all ability to communicate in writing by:
  - using appropriate register for the situation or task, linguistic cohesion and ease of expression
  - using correct words, phrases and sentence structure
  - being original and able to employ emotive and figurative language
  - giving a correct and apt response to a given assignment, as well as demonstrating richness and logical flow of thought and argument
  - using appropriate punctuation, spelling, paragraphing and formatting.

The content of the writing proficiency tests in Xitsonga includes those tasks which fall within the performance range of Xitsonga first language learners in Grade 7. Preference was however given to tasks demonstrating general writing proficiency. This means that there was an attempt to select tasks that are relevant to the learner's world. The test progressed from the mere naming of objects to the writing of two short highly structured paragraphs, for example, questions 10 and 17.

#### *4.5.7.1 Test administration procedure*

Learners were supplied with a test booklet to write in as well as a pen and blank paper for planning answers. Answers to all questions were written in the spaces provided in the test booklet. Although there was no time limit for this test, 30 minutes was the maximum time allowed to complete the task.

#### 4.5.7.2 Scoring methods

The Xitsonga WPT was scored the same way as the English WPT in section 4.5.3.1.

#### 4.5.7.3 Sub-sections of the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test

For the purposes of clarity and organisation the researcher has distinguished between two sub-tests of the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test. These are spelling and creative writing. However the distinctions are her own made to facilitate analysis. The test is distinguished accordingly in the next sections.

#### 4.5.7.4 Sub-test: spelling

The Xitsonga spelling is the first sub-section of the Xitsonga WPT. This sub-test had a possible maximum score of 37. This sub-test involved picture naming, which the researcher refers to as spelling test.

Table 4.7 gives the content of sub-test: spelling. It must be noted that the numbers indicated in the third column represent the actual question numbers in the test (see Appendix 4).

Table 4.7: Contents of the sub-test: spelling

Skills being tested	Number of items tested	Question numbers
Using denotative meaning of words	12	1-4; 8; 11-16
Correct word order	1	9

Source: Bernard et al. (1992:19).

#### 4.5.7.5 Sub-test: creative writing

This is the second sub-test of the WPT. The test had a possible maximum raw score of 14. This sub-test required learners to write short paragraphs of events on the picture.

Table 4.8 gives the content of sub-test: creative writing. It must be noted that the numbers indicated in the third column represent the actual question numbers in the test (see Appendix 4).

Table 4.8: Content of sub-test: creative writing

Skills being tested	Number of Items	Question Numbers
Describing details of content	2	5; 6
Creative writing	2	10; 17

Source: Bernard et al. (1992:19).

#### **4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical issues are invariably an integral part of research, especially when the research is conducted within the learning context. The test that will be used in the study to elicit data will require a lot of time which learners could otherwise have used in meaningful learning enterprises. The subject's participation in this study depends on their willingness as they have a choice not to participate.

Working on the assumption that research has value in contributing to knowledge and ultimately, to human improvement, Macmillan and Schumacher (1993: 243) identify four considerations that need to be taken into consideration when dealing with educational research:

- the right of subjects to privacy
- the right of subjects to remain anonymous
- the right of subjects to confidentiality and
- the right of subjects and the community to expect the researcher to be responsible.

These rights were respected by the researcher throughout the research process by providing the participants with the rationale for the study and giving an outline of the reasons for each of the tests that would be conducted. Learners were not forced to write the tests or participate in the study. Permission was sought from their parents or

guardians to participate in the study. Marks obtained from individuals were grouped together and reported as average. Furthermore the data remained confidential.

All participants were informed that the results of the research would feed back, directly or indirectly, into teaching and course design materials at their level which is Grade 7.

#### **4.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis was done with the help of an expert, Dr Claassen, who is in addition an experienced researcher. He employed the following statistical procedures to analyse data:

- descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations, minimum and maximum score and ranges) were calculated for the total test score and each section of the English and Xitsonga tests within each school context assessed
- comparison: the total score and scores for each section of the test in English and Xitsonga were compared within each group of subjects using a paired sample t-test (Howell 1995:67)
- comparison: the results obtained on each section of the test for English and Xitsonga were compared within each school using descriptive statistics (means)
- assessment of contextual effect: for both the English and Xitsonga tests, the Multivariate analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to assess the contextual effect of each school; on the whole the statistics revealed a highly significant school effect on the tests; the Multivariate analysis of variance is used to establish relationships of multiple variables
- assessment of relative proficiency: a paired sample t-test was used to assess the significance of the differences between English and Xitsonga; this analysis was intended to establish the relative proficiency in English and Xitsonga in each of the learner group.

Trustworthiness of the data was also established by re-checking and comparing the data from the different sources. This was followed by data interpretation. This enabled the researcher to attach significance to particular results and put patterns into an analytical framework.

#### **4.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY IN THE MARKING OF THE TESTS**

The research instruments used were validated and reliability tested by using experts' opinion and pilot testing. Reliability was addressed by the researcher with the expert help a colleague who is professor in the Linguistic Department at Unisa. We examined a few selected scripts and agreed upon guidelines on how to effectively mark the scripts without discrepancies. The results were rechecked by the researcher assisted by the same expert to see if they were correctly entered and to check if there were not mistakes in the way in which the marks were entered. Dr Claassen, an expert in the field of standardised testing, assisted with data analysis.

#### **4.8 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the researcher discussed the rationale for focusing the empirical investigation on the acquisition of academic language proficiency. This was followed by the design of the empirical investigation and the research instruments. Findings are presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Findings of the Empirical Investigation

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The main aim of the study was to describe the level of development of academic English language proficiency among Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners in selected schools in Tshwane. The researcher has already discussed the following aspects of this research in previous chapters, for instance in Chapter 2 - requirements for language proficiency, various language proficiency models and related critiques; in Chapter 3 - language policies in South African schools after 1994 and the difference between policy and practice and in Chapter 4 - research methods and techniques used in data collection.

In Chapter 5 results of the empirical investigation, which were guided by the following research questions, are presented (see 1.2):

- a) What is the English academic language proficiency of selected Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners in the Tshwane metropolitan area? How does this compare with their acquisition of Xitsonga language proficiency?
- b) How can Xitsonga speaking learners be assisted to enhance their English language proficiency?

The results of the empirical investigation are presented and discussed in two interlinked sections: the quantitative description of the results for the three selected schools (section 5.2) and the general examination of the results (section 5.3).

#### **5.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The *Statistica* statistical program was used for descriptive statistical analysis to determine the learners' English and Xitsonga proficiency levels. Analysis was conducted by an outside consultant, Dr Claassen (see 4:26). The English Performance Test has been divided

into English Reading Performance Test and English Writing Performance Test. The Xitsonga Performance Test was also divided into Reading Performance Test and Writing Performance Test.

The English Reading Performance Test was divided by the researcher into two sub-tests:

- comprehension
- grammar.

The English Writing Performance Test was divided by the researcher into two sub-tests:

- spelling
- creative writing.

The same sub-division of the two main sections, that is, the English Reading and English Writing Performance Tests was done for Xitsonga (see 4.5.2.3).

Table 5.1: Summary of descriptive statistics for all learners in the different sub-sections of the tests: English Reading, English Writing, Xitsonga Reading, and Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Tests

Main Sections	Valid N	Mean	Minimum obtained	Maximum obtained	Std.dev.	Standard error	Range
English Reading	162	9.31	2	19	3.42	0.27	0-40
Xitsonga Reading	153	10.84	0	31	4.78	0.39	0-40
English Writing	161	24.07	0	44	9.18	0.72	0-50
Xitsonga Writing	151	25.70	0	40	9.17	0.75	0-50

The data have been pooled from three selected schools in each sub-test. There is a difference in the number of learners who wrote the tests because it was written on separate dates and separate times, and some of the learners were absent when some of the test sub-sections were tackled.

The first column of Table 5.1 indicates the various sub-sections of both the English and Xitsonga Performance tests. The second column indicates the number of learners who wrote the various sub-sections of the test. The third column indicates the mean scores



obtained out of the possible maximum score of 40 for reading and 50 for writing. The mean of the test is calculated by adding up all the scores and dividing by the number of tested learners. The third column indicates the minimum scores obtained and column four indicates the maximum scores obtained. Column five indicates the standard deviation. Column six indicates the standard error of the mean which helps in expressing the reliability of the test. It provides useful information regarding the interpretation of raw scores. The last column indicates the range namely that marks for English and Xitsonga reading proficiency test ranged from 0 to 40 respectively whereas the marks for both English and Xitsonga Writing Proficiency tests ranged from 0 to 50 respectively.

### **5.2.1 English Reading Proficiency Test results**

The results of the English Reading Proficiency Test, which consists of the two sub-tests comprehension and grammar as described in chapter 4 (see 4.5.2.3; 4.5.2.4) are presented. The total number of learners who wrote the English Reading Proficiency Test was 162. The findings are presented in Table 5.2. Learners obtained scores ranging from 2 to 19 out of a possible maximum score of 40, with a mean of 9.31 and a standard deviation of 3.42.

Table 5.2 gives the frequency data for the English Reading Performance Test.

Table 5.2: Results for English Reading Performance Test

Raw scores	No of obs	Cum obs	% Obs	Cum % obs	% Grps of 5
2	1	1	0.62	0.62	
3	6	7	3.70	4.32	
4	3	10	1.85	6.17	
5	12	22	7.41	13.58	13.58
6	11	33	6.79	20.37	
7	14	47	8.64	29.01	
8	23	70	14.20	43.21	
9	27	97	16.67	59.88	
10	8	105	4.94	64.81	51.23
11	14	119	8.64	73.46	
12	17	136	10.49	83.95	
13	5	141	3.09	87.04	
14	7	148	4.32	91.36	
15	6	154	3.70	95.06	30.25
16	4	158	2.47	97.53	
17	2	160	1.23	98.77	
18	1	161	0.62	99.38	
19	1	162	0.62	100	4.94
TOTAL	162		100.00		100
Missing	10				

The structure of the table is explained in the ensuing paragraph. This structure applies to Tables 5.3 to 5.13.

Table 5.2, which is a frequency table's first column, indicates the total number of scores obtained by learners. The second column indicates the number of learners who obtained a particular score. The third column indicates cumulative observations. The percentage of learners observed in a particular score is indicated in column four, whereas column five shows cumulative percentage. The last column gives percentages of scores in groups of five for easy analysis.

Figure 5.1 gives the tabulated results (Table 5.2) in the form of a histogram.

**Figure 5.1: Histogram for English Reading Proficiency**

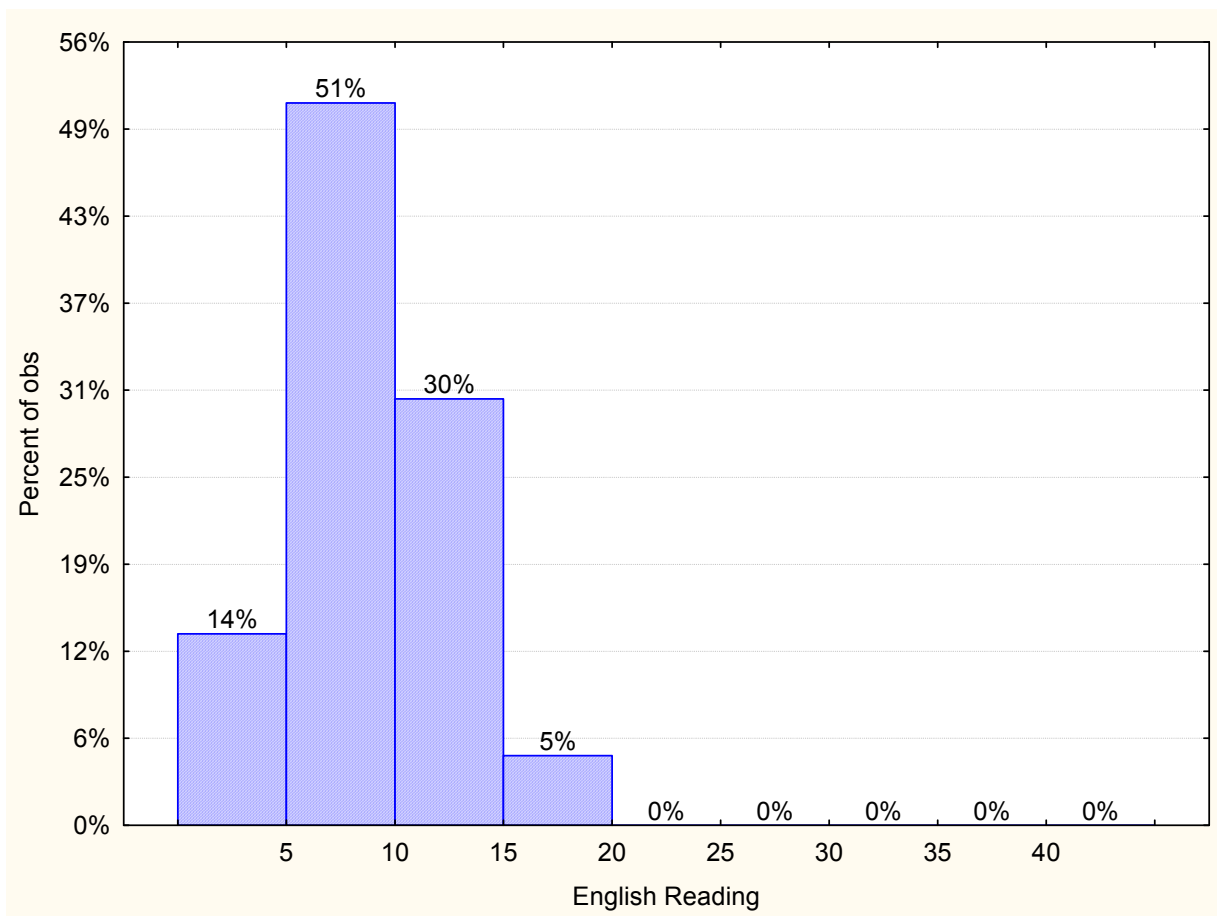


Figure 5.1 shows results of English reading proficiency levels. The overall learner' scores fell below the 50 percentile rank, and the top 4.94 per cent of the raw scores fell between the 32 and 44 percentile rank (equivalent to a Stanine of 4 to 5, which indicates low average to average scores). The majority of the scores, 51.23 per cent, ranged from the 1 to 9 percentile rank (equivalent to a Stanine of 1 to 2 which indicates very poor to poor scores). The very poor Stanine score of 1 was observed in 13.58 per cent of the learners.

**5.2.1.1 Results of sub-test: comprehension**

This is the first sub-test of the English Reading Proficiency Test. The sub-test comprehension had a possible maximum score of 22.

Table 5.3 gives the results of the English comprehension test for the three schools.

Table 5.3: Results of sub-test: English comprehension test

<b>Frequency table: English comprehension</b>				
Obtained scores	Count	Cumulative	Percent	Cumulative
<b>1</b>	6	6	3.23	3.23
<b>2</b>	11	17	5.91	9.14
<b>3</b>	18	35	9.68	18.81
<b>4</b>	32	67	17.20	36.02
<b>5</b>	36	103	19.35	55.38
<b>6</b>	19	122	10.22	65.59
<b>7</b>	13	135	6.99	72.58
<b>8</b>	11	146	5.91	78.49
<b>9</b>	7	153	3.76	82.26
<b>10</b>	7	160	3.76	86.02
<b>12</b>	1	161	0.54	86.56
<b>13</b>	1	162	0.54	87.10
Missing	24	186	12.90	100.00

N.B: Missing data due to learners being absent or not writing the second section of the test.

Figure 5.2 gives the tabulated results of the English comprehension test (Table 5.3) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.2: Histogram for sub-test: English comprehension

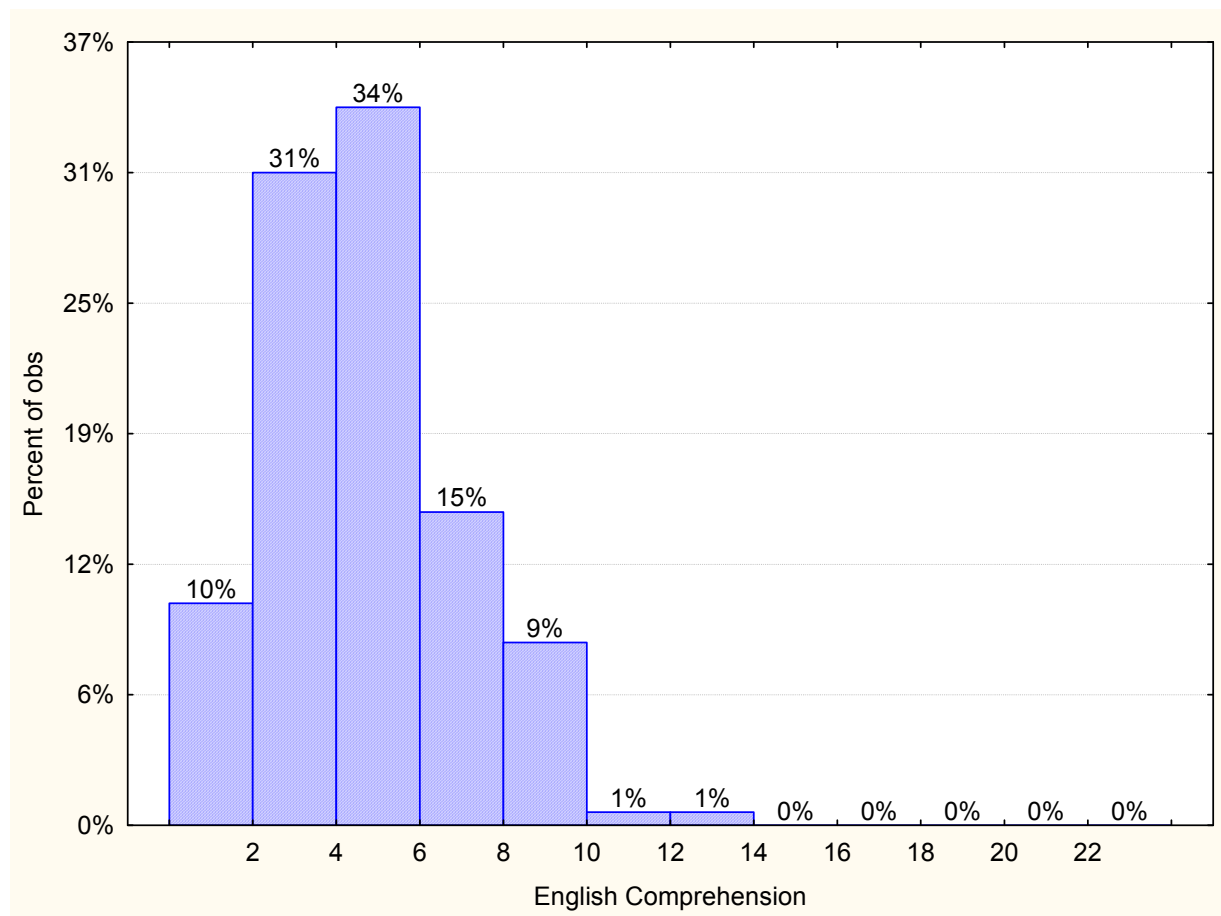


Figure 5.2 shows results of the sub-test comprehension proficiency levels. The overall learner's score shows poor English comprehension proficiency levels, with 75 per cent of the scores below the 50 per cent mean average, and only 2 per cent of the raw scores between 10 and 14 out of the possible maximum score of 22. Only 11 per cent obtained raw scores between 0 and 2 out of the possible maximum score of 22 which indicates poor English comprehension proficiency levels.

#### 5.2.1.2 Results of sub-test: grammar

The second sub-test of the English Proficiency Test consists of the sub-test grammar. The English grammar test has a possible maximum score of 18.

Table 5.4 gives the following data: results of the grammar sub-test in three selected schools.

Table 5.4: Results of sub-test: English grammar

	Count	Cumulative	Percent	Cumulative
<b>0</b>	9	9	4.84	4.84
<b>1</b>	8	17	4.30	9.14
<b>2</b>	27	44	14.52	23.66
<b>3</b>	21	65	11.29	34.95
<b>4</b>	33	98	17.74	52.69
<b>5</b>	20	118	10.75	63.44
<b>6</b>	17	135	9.14	72.58
<b>7</b>	14	149	7.53	80.12
<b>8</b>	8	157	4.30	84.41
<b>9</b>	4	161	2.15	86.56
<b>11</b>	1	162	0.54	87.10
Missing	24	186	12.90	100.00

Figure 5.3 gives the tabulated sub-test grammar results (Table 5.4) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.3: Histogram for sub-test: English grammar

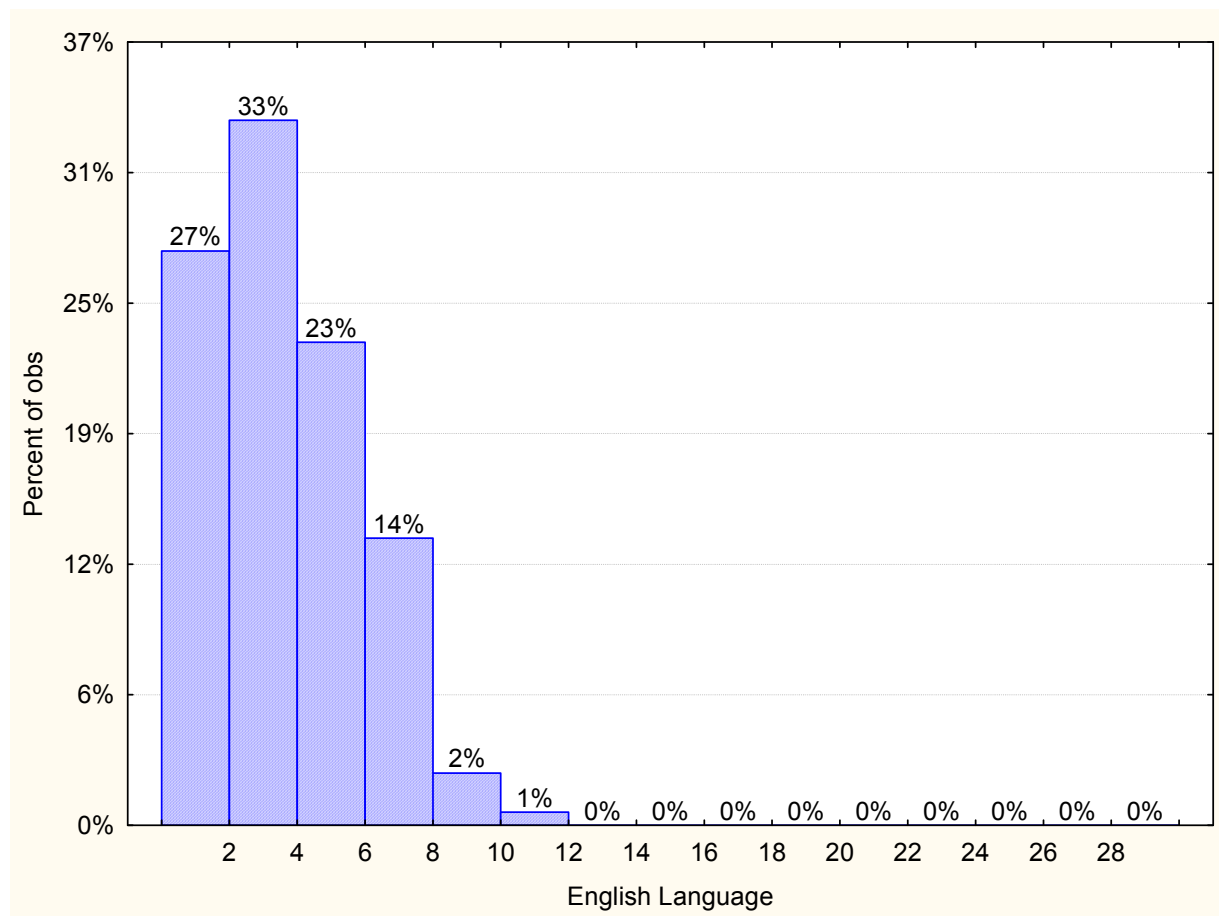


Figure 5.3 shows results of sub-test grammar proficiency levels. The overall scores were below the 50 per cent mean average out of a total of 28 being the maximum score. The highest 1 per cent of the raw scores was between 11 and 12, which is below the 14 level corresponding to the 50 per cent average mean. The majority of the scores, 33 per cent, ranged from 3 to 4 out of the possible maximum score of 28. 83 per cent of the scores fell below a raw score of 7, corresponding to 25 per cent mean average, with 4.84 per cent having scored zero. This showed a complete lack of English grammar skills.

### 5.2.2 English Writing Proficiency Test results

Altogether 161 learners wrote the English Writing Proficiency Test which combined the sub-tests of spelling and creative writing (see chapter 4). The scores obtained for both the sub-tests ranged from 0 to 44 out of a possible maximum score of 50, with a mean of 24.07 and a standard deviation of 9.18.

Table 5.5 gives the results for the English Writing Proficiency Test for 161 learners in the three schools tested.

Table 5.5: Results for English Writing Performance Test

Raw scores	No of obs	Cum obs	% obs	Cum % obs	% Grps of 5
0	2	2	1.24	1.24	
3	2	4	1.24	2.48	
4	1	5	0.62	3.11	3.11
6	3	8	1.86	4.97	
7	2	10	1.24	6.21	
9	2	12	1.24	7.45	4.35
11	3	15	1.86	9.32	
12	3	18	1.86	11.18	
13	1	19	0.62	11.80	
14	5	24	3.11	14.91	
15	7	31	4.35	19.25	11.80
16	2	33	1.24	20.50	
17	5	38	3.11	23.60	
18	3	41	1.86	25.47	
19	7	48	4.35	29.81	
20	6	54	3.73	33.54	14.29
21	3	57	1.86	35.40	
22	6	63	3.73	39.13	
23	8	71	4.97	44.10	
24	7	78	4.35	48.45	
25	6	84	3.73	52.17	18.63
26	7	91	4.35	56.52	
27	10	101	6.21	62.73	
28	10	111	6.21	68.94	
29	2	113	1.24	70.19	
30	4	117	2.48	72.67	20.50
31	9	126	5.59	78.26	
32	6	132	3.73	81.99	
33	5	137	3.11	85.09	
34	5	142	3.11	88.20	
35	7	149	4.35	92.55	19.88
36	1	150	0.62	93.17	
37	4	154	2.48	95.65	
38	1	155	0.62	96.27	
39	1	156	0.62	96.89	4.35
42	1	157	0.62	97.52	
43	3	160	1.86	99.38	
44	1	161	0.62	100.00	3.11
TOTAL	161		100.00		100.00
Missing	3				



Figure 5.4 gives the tabulated results of English Writing Proficiency Test (Table 5.5) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.4: Histogram for English Writing Proficiency Test

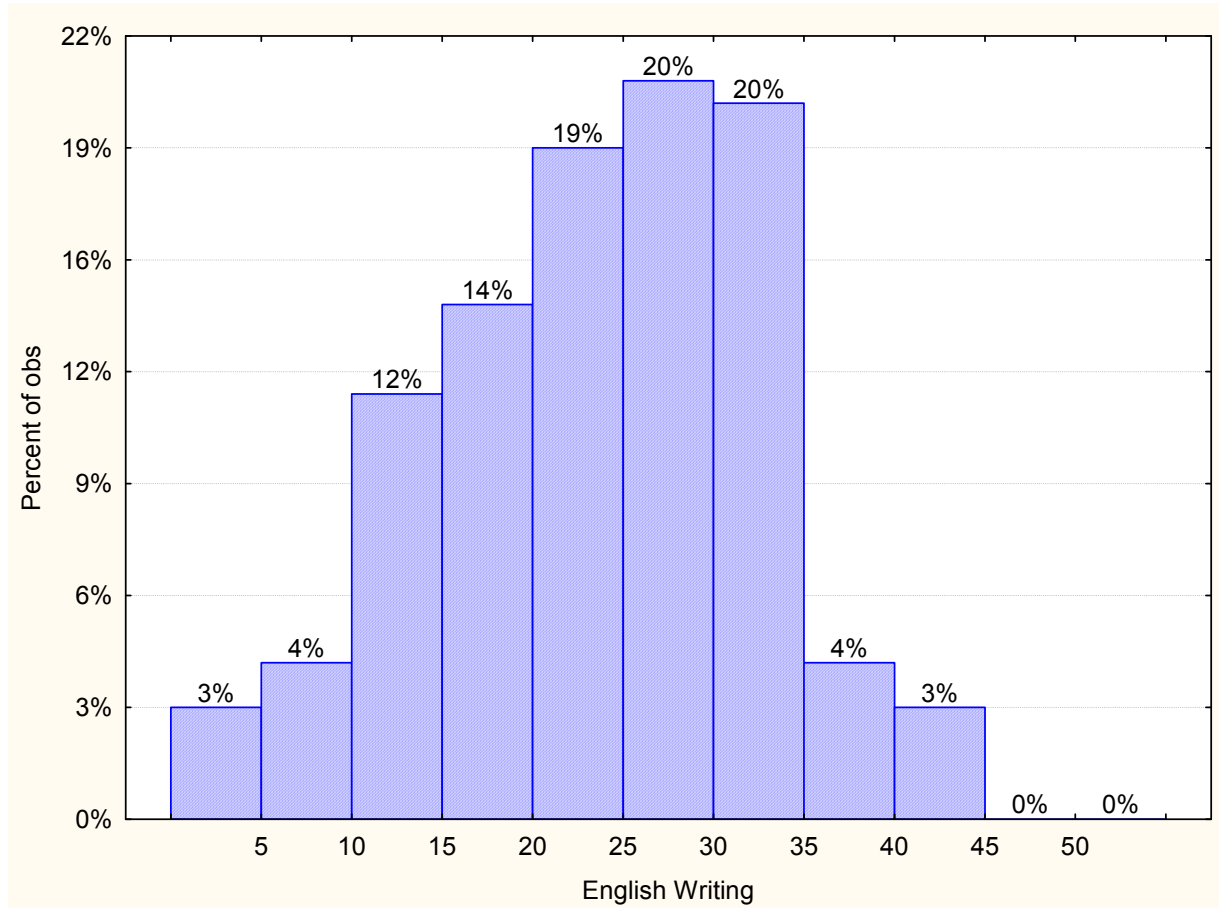


Figure 5.4 shows results with a wide variation from low to satisfactory levels of English writing proficiency. Altogether 27.34 per cent of the learner' overall scores were above the 53 per cent percentile rank, and the top 7.44 per cent of the raw scores fell between 93 and 100 percentile rank (equivalent to a Stanine of 8 to 9) which indicates good to very good scores. In total 20.85 per cent ranged between the 20 to 53 percentile rank (equivalent to a Stanine of 3 to 5) which indicates below average, low average and average scores. The very poor Stanine score of 1 was observed in the majority of respondents, 38.65 per cent.

### *5.2.2.1 Results for sub-test: spelling*

The second sub-test of the English Writing Proficiency Test is spelling. This sub-test had a possible maximum score of 37.

Table 5.6 gives the following data: results of sub-test spelling in three selected schools.

Table 5.6: Results of sub-test: English spelling

	<b>Count</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>
<b>0</b>	3	3	1.61	1.61
<b>2</b>	2	5	1.08	2.69
<b>3</b>	3	8	1.61	4.30
<b>4</b>	1	9	0.54	4.84
<b>5</b>	2	11	1.08	5.91
<b>6</b>	2	13	1.08	6.99
<b>7</b>	3	16	1.61	8.60
<b>8</b>	7	23	3.76	12.37
<b>9</b>	4	27	2.15	14.52
<b>10</b>	3	30	1.61	16.13
<b>11</b>	4	34	2.15	18.28
<b>12</b>	9	43	4.84	23.12
<b>13</b>	5	48	2.69	25.81
<b>14</b>	6	54	3.23	29.03
<b>15</b>	4	58	2.15	31.18
<b>16</b>	2	60	1.08	32.26
<b>17</b>	12	72	6.45	38.71
<b>18</b>	11	83	5.91	44.62
<b>19</b>	8	91	4.30	48.92
<b>20</b>	11	102	5.91	54.84
<b>21</b>	6	108	3.23	58.06
<b>22</b>	6	114	3.23	61.29
<b>23</b>	6	120	3.23	64.52
<b>24</b>	6	126	3.23	67.74
<b>25</b>	13	139	6.99	74.73
<b>26</b>	4	143	2.15	76.88
<b>27</b>	5	148	2.69	79.57
<b>28</b>	4	152	2.15	81.72
<b>29</b>	3	155	1.61	83.33
<b>30</b>	1	156	0.54	83.87
<b>31</b>	1	157	0.54	84.41
<b>32</b>	1	158	0.54	84.95
<b>33</b>	1	159	0.54	85.48
<b>34</b>	1	160	0.54	86.02
<b>35</b>	1	161	0.54	86.56
Missing	<b>25</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>13.44</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Figure 5.5 gives the tabulated results of sub-test spelling (Table 5.6) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.5: Histogram for sub-test: English spelling

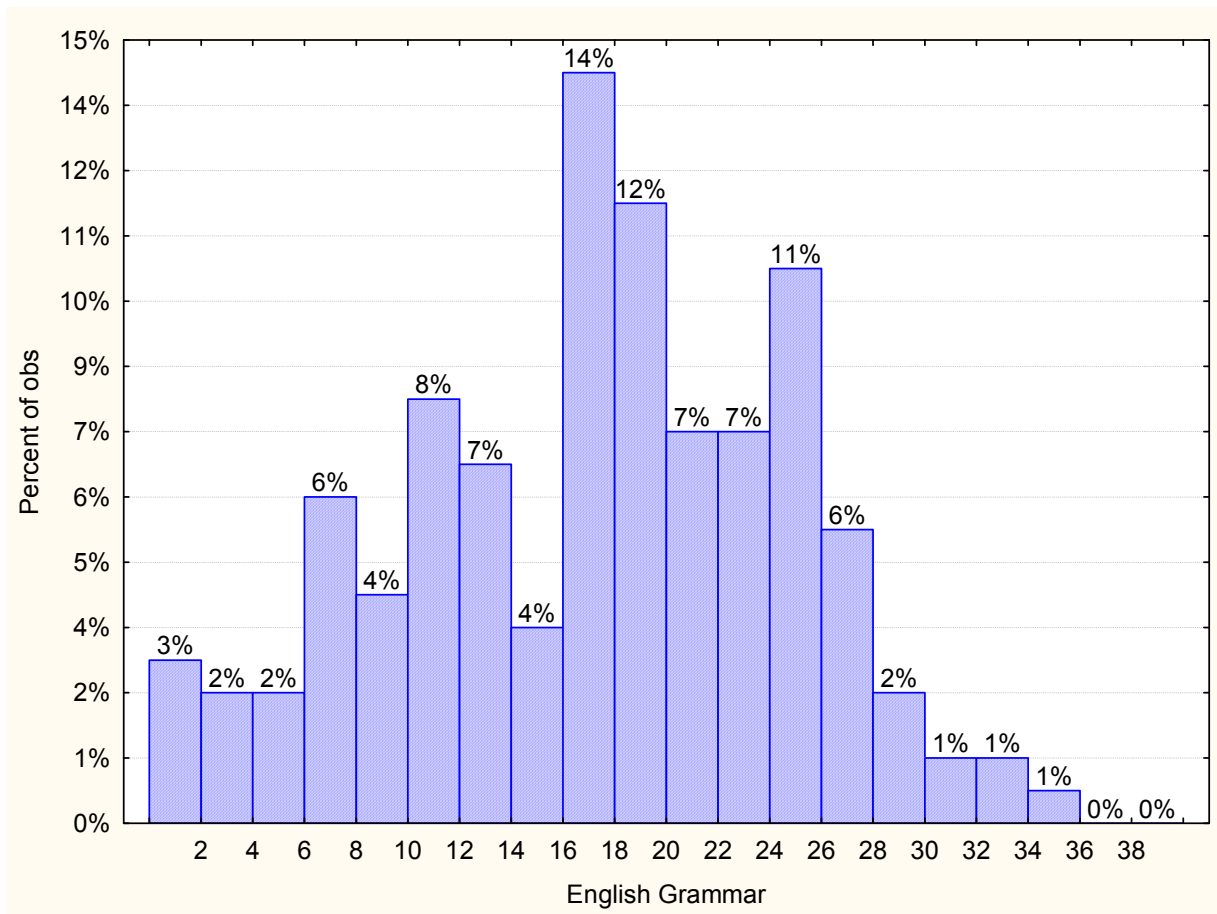


Figure 5.5 shows results of the sub-test spelling proficiency levels. The overall learner' scores were almost evenly distributed from zero to 37 of the possible raw score range. Altogether 48 per cent of the scores were above the 50 per cent mean average, with an even 5 per cent of the raw scores being between 29 and 36 of the possible maximum score of 37. A proportion, 11 per cent, of the scores were below the 25 per cent mean average, with 0.61 per cent obtaining zero score, and indication of a complete lack of English spelling proficiency skills.

*Results of sub-test: creative writing*

The English Writing Proficiency Test is further divided into two sub-sections for detailed analysis of the results of the spelling and creative writing. Creative writing had a possible maximum score of 13.

Table 5.7 gives the results of the sub-test creative writing in the three selected schools.

Table 5.7: Results for sub-test: English creative writing

<b>Frequency table: English creative writing</b>				
Obtained scores	Count	Cumulative	Percent	Cumulative
<b>0</b>	8	8	4.30	4.30
<b>2</b>	2	10	1.08	5.38
<b>3</b>	5	15	2.69	8.06
<b>4</b>	6	21	3.23	11.29
<b>5</b>	17	38	9.14	20.43
<b>6</b>	45	83	24.19	44.62
<b>7</b>	33	116	17.74	62.37
<b>8</b>	18	134	9.68	72.04
<b>9</b>	17	151	9.14	81.18
<b>10</b>	9	160	4.84	86.02
<b>12</b>	1	161	0.54	86.56
Missing	25	186	13.44	100.00

Figure 5.6 gives the tabulated results of sub-test creative writing (Table 5.7) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.6: Histogram for sub-test: English creative writing

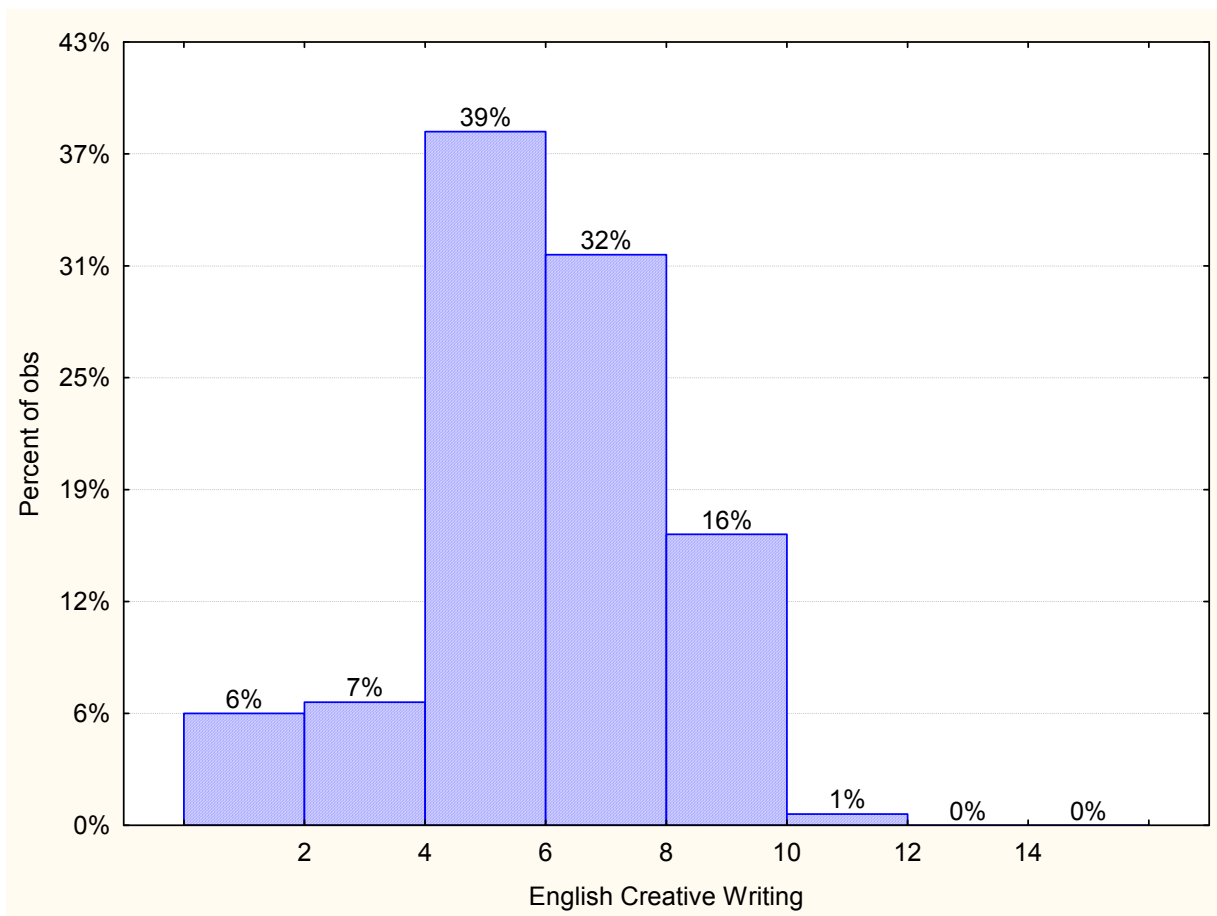


Figure 5.6 shows results of the sub-test for creative writing proficiency levels. The overall learner' scores were almost evenly distributed through zero to 14 possible raw score range. Altogether 49 per cent of the scores were above the 50 per cent mean average, with an even 1 per cent of the raw scores being between 11 and 12 of the possible maximum score of 14. In total 11 per cent of the scores were below the 25 per cent mean average, with 4.30 per cent obtaining zero score, an indication of lack of creative writing skills.

### 5.2.3 Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test results

A total of 153 learners wrote the Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test (see chapter 4), with scores ranging from 0 to 31 out of a possible maximum score of 40, with a mean of 10.84 and a standard deviation of 4.78.

Table 5.8 gives the results for the Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test for the 153 learners in the three schools tested.

Table 5.8: Results for Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test

<b>Raw scores</b>	<b>No of obs</b>	<b>Cum obs</b>	<b>% obs</b>	<b>Cum % obs</b>	<b>% Grps of 5</b>
0	1	1	0.65		
1	1	2	0.65	0.65	
2	1	3	0.65	1.31	
3	2	5	1.31	2.61	
4	3	8	1.96	4.58	
5	6	14	3.92	8.50	8.50
6	15	29	9.80	18.30	
7	10	39	6.54	24.84	
8	16	55	10.46	35.29	
9	9	64	5.88	41.18	
10	11	75	7.19	48.37	39.87
11	13	88	8.50	56.86	
12	15	103	9.80	66.67	
13	11	114	7.19	73.86	
14	11	125	7.19	81.05	
15	6	131	3.92	84.97	36.60
16	3	134	1.96	86.93	
17	8	142	5.23	92.16	
18	2	144	1.31	93.46	
19	3	147	1.96	95.42	
20	1	148	0.65	96.08	11.11
21	1	149	0.65	96.73	
22	2	151	1.31	98.04	1.96
26	1	152	0.65	98.69	0.65
31	1	153	0.65	99.35	0.65
TOTAL	153		100.00		100.00
Missing	12				

Figure 5.7 gives the tabulated results of Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test (Table 5.8) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.7: Histogram for Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test

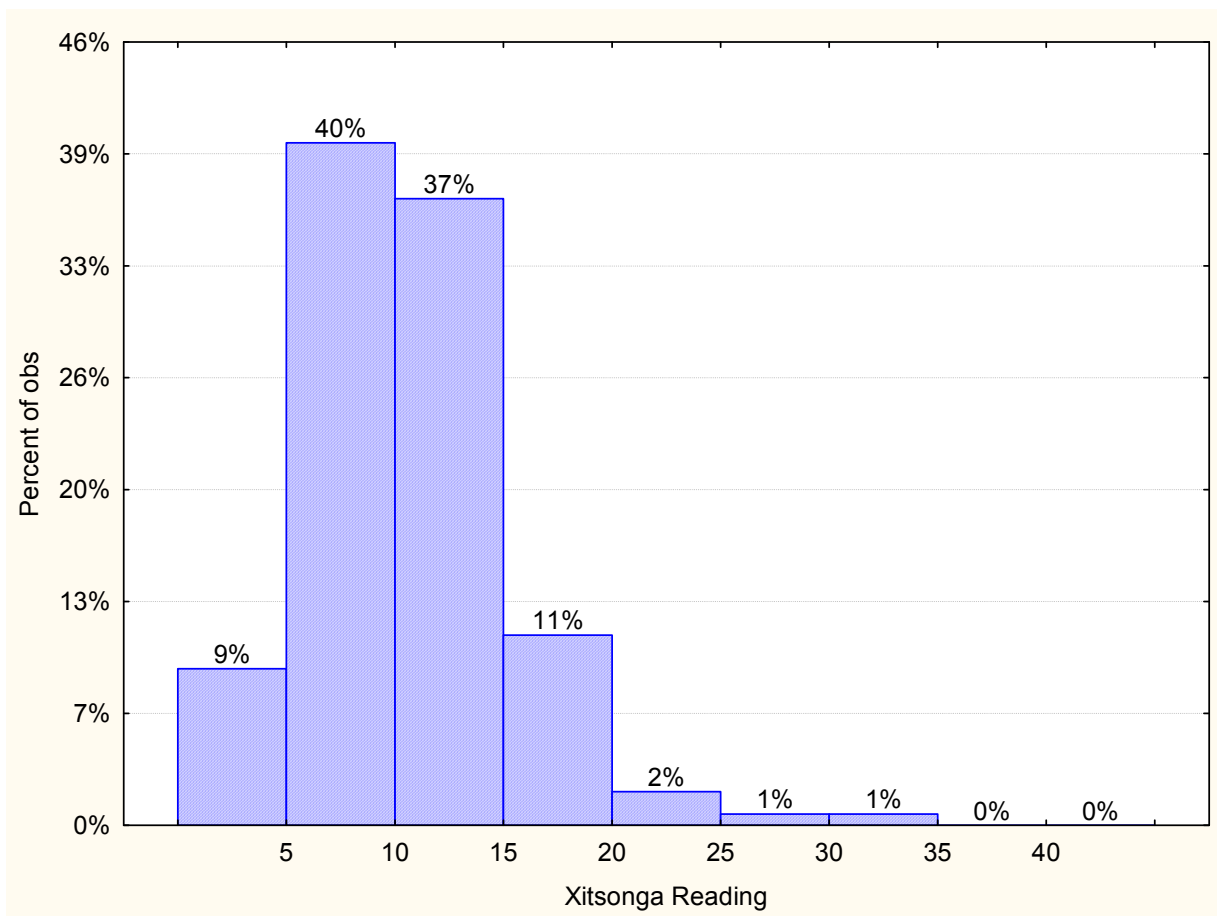


Figure 5.7 shows the results for Xitsonga reading proficiency. A portion of 3.07 per cent of the top 3 Xitsonga Reading Proficiency learners score were above the 53 percentile rank, and ranged between 53 and 86 percentile rank (equivalent to a Stanine of 5 to 7) which indicates average, high average and above average scores. The majority of the scores, 40 per cent, ranged from the 1 to 9 percentile rank (equivalent to a Stanine of 1 to 2) which indicates very poor to poor scores. The very poor Stanine score of 1 was observed in 49 per cent of the learners.

### 5.2.3.1 Results sub-test: comprehension

The Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test was divided into two sub-sections for detailed analysis:

- comprehension
- grammar



The sub-test for comprehension had a possible maximum score of 22.

Table 5.9 gives the results of the sub-test for comprehension for the three selected schools.

Table 5.9: Results of sub-test: Xitsonga comprehension

	Count	Cumulative	Percent	Cumulative
<b>0</b>	1	1	0.54	0.54
<b>1</b>	2	3	1.08	1.61
<b>2</b>	8	11	4.30	5.91
<b>3</b>	19	30	10.22	16.13
<b>4</b>	26	56	13.98	30.11
<b>5</b>	23	79	12.37	42.47
<b>6</b>	24	103	12.90	55.38
<b>7</b>	19	122	10.22	65.59
<b>8</b>	10	132	5.38	70.97
<b>9</b>	8	140	4.30	75.27
<b>10</b>	4	144	2.15	77.42
<b>11</b>	1	145	0.54	77.96
<b>12</b>	2	147	1.08	79.03
<b>13</b>	4	151	2.15	81.18
<b>14</b>	1	152	0.54	81.72
<b>17</b>	1	153	0.54	82.26
Missing	33	186	17.74	100.00

Figure 5.8 gives the tabulated results of the sub-test for comprehension (Table 5.9) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.8: Histogram of the sub-test: Xitsonga comprehension

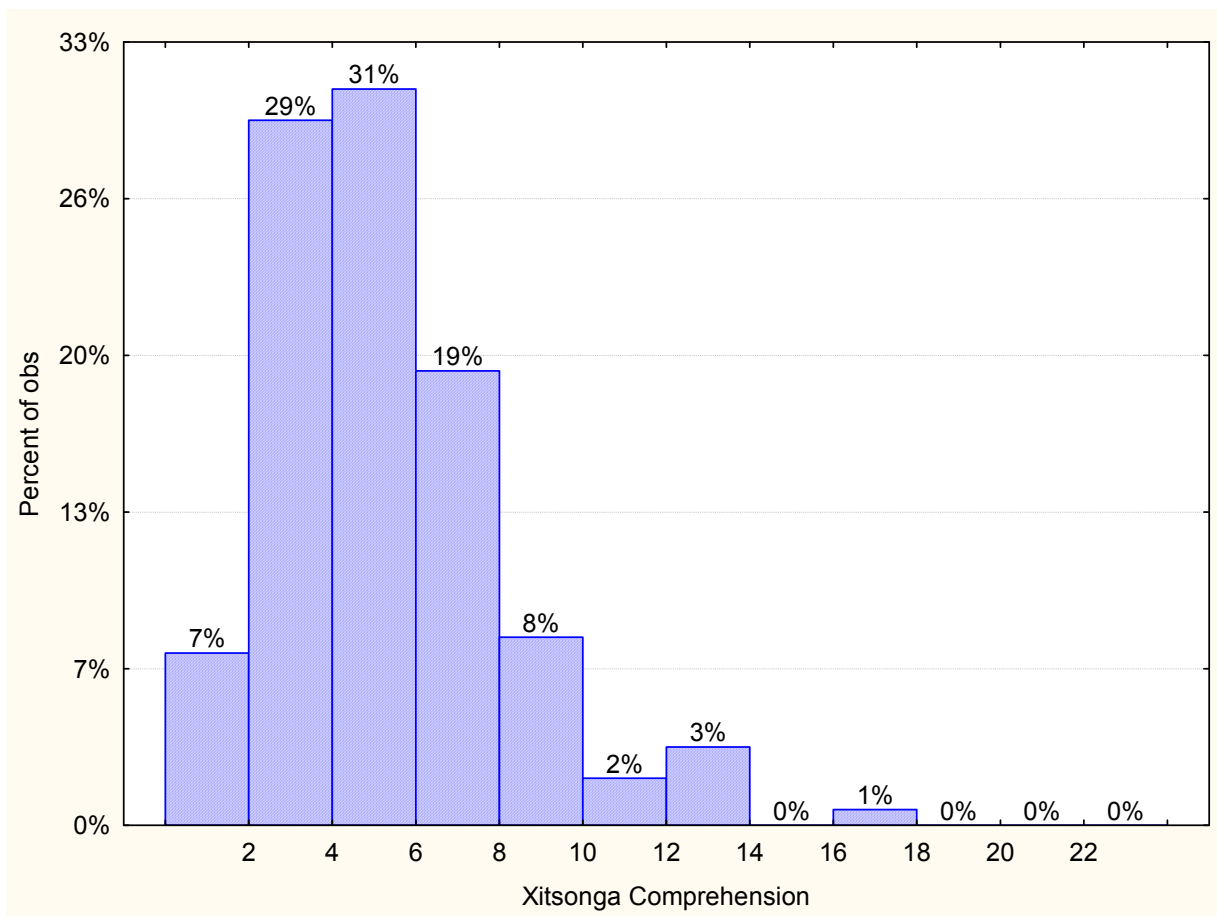


Figure 5.8 shows results of the sub-test comprehension proficiency levels. The overall learner' scores shows poor comprehension proficiency levels, with 94 per cent of the scores below the 50 per cent mean average, and only 1 per cent of the raw scores being above 14 out of a possible maximum score of 22.

### 5.2.3.2 Results of sub-test: grammar

The second sub-test of Xitsonga Proficiency Test consists of the sub-test for grammar. The grammar sub-test has a possible maximum score of 18.

Table 5.10 gives the results of the sub-test for grammar in three selected schools.

Table 5.10: Results of sub-test: Xitsonga grammar

	Count	Cumulative	Percent	Cumulative
<b>0</b>	14	14	7.53	7.53
<b>1</b>	8	22	4.30	11.83
<b>2</b>	5	27	2.69	14.52
<b>3</b>	23	50	12.37	26.88
<b>4</b>	28	78	15.05	41.94
<b>5</b>	12	90	6.45	48.39
<b>6</b>	13	103	6.99	55.38
<b>7</b>	16	119	8.60	63.98
<b>8</b>	11	130	5.91	69.89
<b>9</b>	9	139	4.84	74.73
<b>10</b>	6	145	3.23	77.96
<b>11</b>	4	149	2.15	80.11
<b>12</b>	1	150	0.54	80.65
<b>13</b>	2	152	1.08	81.72
<b>18</b>	1	153	0.54	82.26
Missing	33	186	17.74	100.00

Figure 5.9 gives the tabulated sub-test grammar results (Table 5.10) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.9: Histogram of sub-test: Xitsonga grammar

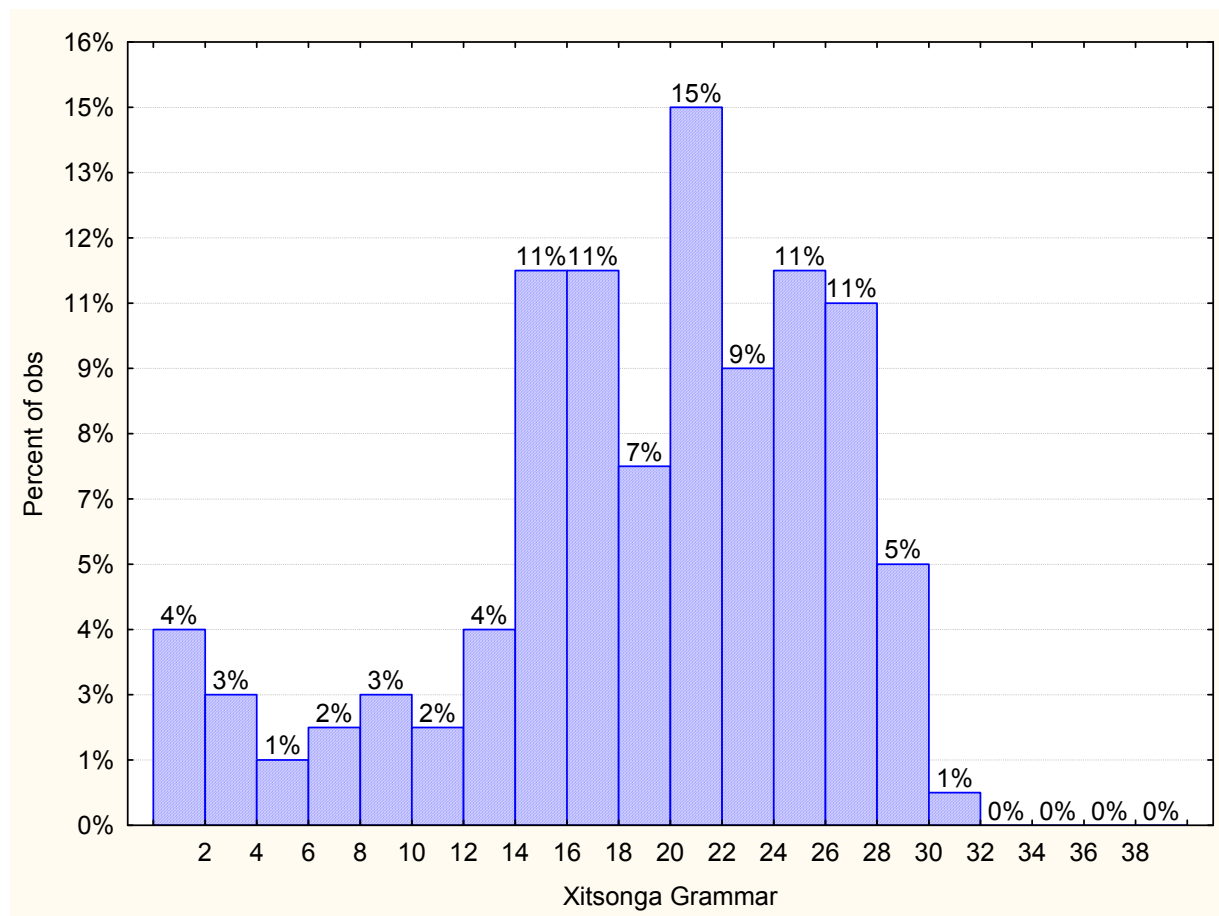


Figure 5.9 shows results of the sub-test for grammar proficiency levels. The overall learner' scores were not evenly distributed through the zero to 37 possible raw score range. Altogether 59 per cent of the scores were above the 50 per cent mean average, with an even 6 per cent of the raw scores being between 29 and 32 of the possible maximum score of 37. In total 10 per cent of the scores were below the 25 per cent mean average, with 9.27 per cent obtaining a zero score, an indication of a complete lack of Xitsonga grammar proficiency skills.

#### 5.2.4 Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test results

A total of 151 learners wrote the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test (see chapter 4). Their scores ranged between 0 and 40 out of the possible maximum score of 50. Their mean score was 25.70, with a standard deviation of 9.17.

Table 5.11 gives the frequency distribution for the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test results.

Table 5.11: Results for Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test

Raw scores	No of obs	Cum obs	% obs	Cum % obs	% Grps of 5
0	1	1	0.66	0.66	
1	1	2	0.66	1.32	
2	2	4	1.32	2.65	
3	1	5	0.66	3.31	
4	1	6	0.66	3.97	
5	2	8	1.32	5.30	5.30
7	2	10	1.32	6.62	
8	3	13	1.99	8.61	
9	1	14	0.66	9.27	3.97
11	1	15	0.66	9.93	
12	1	16	0.66	10.60	
14	4	20	2.65	13.25	
15	1	21	0.66	13.91	4.64
17	1	22	0.66	14.57	
18	2	24	1.32	15.89	
19	4	28	2.65	18.54	
20	4	32	2.65	21.19	7.28
21	9	41	5.96	27.15	
22	5	46	3.31	30.46	
23	2	48	1.32	31.79	
24	9	57	5.96	37.75	
25	5	62	3.31	41.06	19.87
26	5	67	3.31	44.37	
27	13	80	8.61	52.98	
28	9	89	5.96	58.94	
29	5	94	3.31	62.25	
30	4	98	2.65	64.90	23.84
31	9	107	5.96	70.86	
32	9	116	5.96	76.82	
33	4	120	2.65	79.47	
34	5	125	3.31	82.78	
35	8	133	5.30	88.08	23.18
36	5	138	3.31	91.39	
37	3	141	1.99	93.38	
38	7	148	4.64	98.01	
39	2	150	1.32	99.34	
40	1	151	0.66	100.00	11.92
<b>TOTAL</b>	151		100.00		100.00
Missing	<b>14</b>				

Figure 5.10 gives the tabulated results (Table5.11) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.10: Histogram for Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test

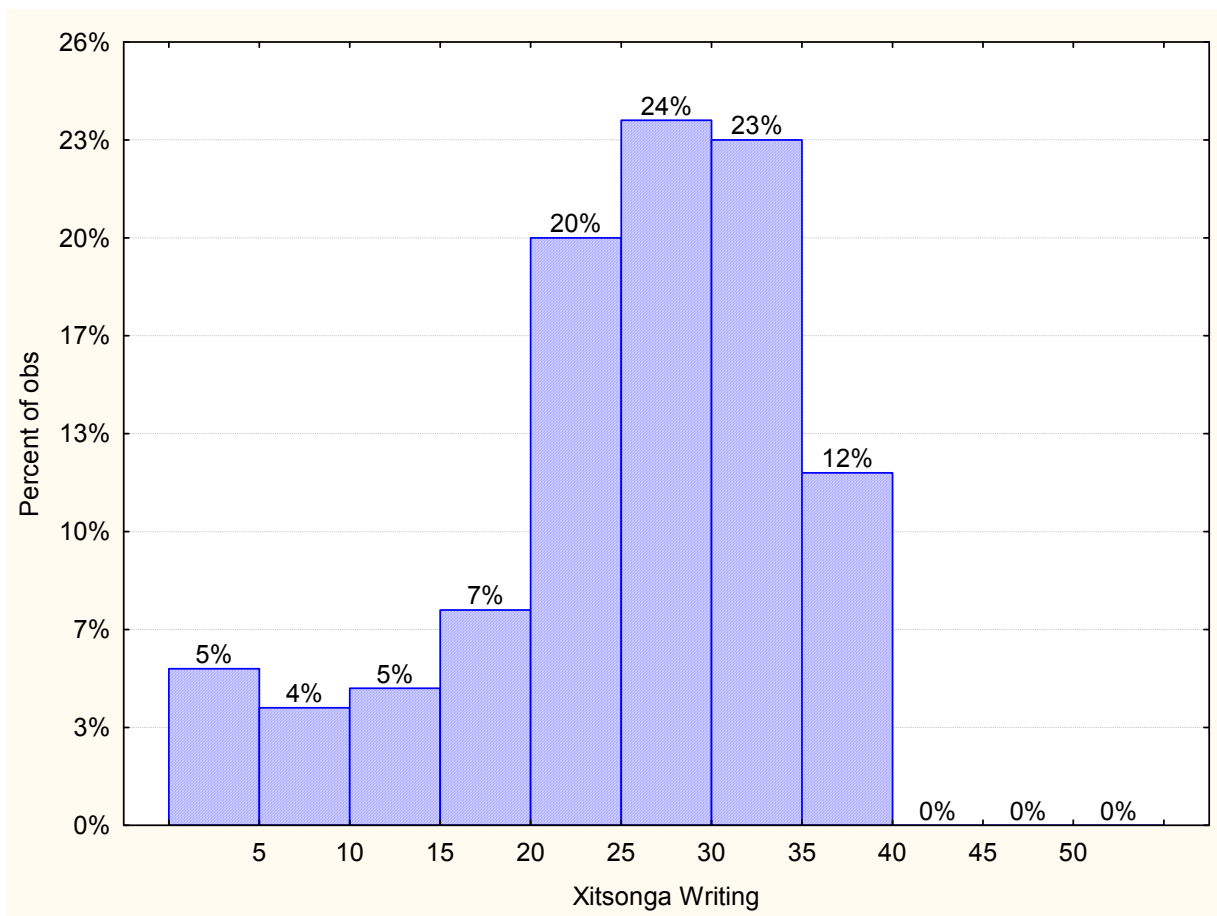


Figure 5.10 shows the overall combined Xitsonga Writing Proficiency results for 151 learners in the three schools tested (see chapter 4). The results show wide variations from low to satisfactory levels of Xitsonga Writing Proficiency.

Altogether 34.97 per cent of the learner' overall scores were above the 53 per cent percentile rank and the top 11.04 per cent of the raw scores fell between the 95 and 100 percentile rank (equivalent to a Stanine of 8 to 9) which indicates good to very good scores. The majority of the scores were 42.94 per cent, ranging from the 20 to 89 percentile rank, equivalent to a Stanine of 3 to 7, which indicates below average, low average, average, high average and above average scores. The very poor Stanine score of 1 was observed in 27.61 per cent of the learners.

#### *5.2.4.1 Results of the sub-test: spelling*

The Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test is further divided into two sub-tests for detailed analysis of the results:

- spelling
- creative writing.

The sub-test for spelling is the second sub-section of the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test. This sub-section of the test had a possible maximum score of 37.

Table 5.12 gives the results of the sub-test for spelling in three selected schools.

Table 5.12: Results of sub-test: Xitsonga spelling

	Count	Cumulative	Percent	Cumulative
<b>0</b>	1	1	0.54	0.54
<b>1</b>	4	5	2.15	2.69
<b>2</b>	1	6	0.54	3.23
<b>3</b>	3	9	1.61	4.84
<b>4</b>	1	10	0.54	5.38
<b>5</b>	1	11	0.54	5.91
<b>6</b>	1	12	0.54	6.45
<b>7</b>	1	13	0.54	6.99
<b>8</b>	2	15	1.08	8.06
<b>9</b>	1	16	0.54	8.60
<b>10</b>	3	19	1.61	10.22
<b>11</b>	2	21	1.08	11.29
<b>12</b>	1	22	0.54	11.83
<b>13</b>	4	26	2.15	13.98
<b>14</b>	2	28	1.08	15.05
<b>15</b>	6	34	3.23	18.28
<b>16</b>	11	45	5.91	24.19
<b>17</b>	8	53	4.30	28.49
<b>18</b>	9	62	4.84	33.33
<b>19</b>	5	67	2.69	36.02
<b>20</b>	6	73	3.23	39.25
<b>21</b>	14	87	7.53	46.77
<b>22</b>	8	95	4.30	51.08
<b>23</b>	10	105	5.38	56.45
<b>24</b>	4	109	2.15	58.60
<b>25</b>	9	118	4.84	63.44
<b>26</b>	8	126	4.30	67.74
<b>27</b>	12	138	6.45	74.19
<b>28</b>	4	142	2.15	76.34
<b>29</b>	3	145	1.61	77.96
<b>30</b>	5	150	2.69	80.65
<b>31</b>	1	151	0.54	81.18
Missing	35	186	18.82	100.00

Figure 5.11 gives the tabulated results of sub-test for spelling (Table 5.12) in the form of a histogram.



Figure 5.11: Histogram of sub-test: Xitsonga spelling

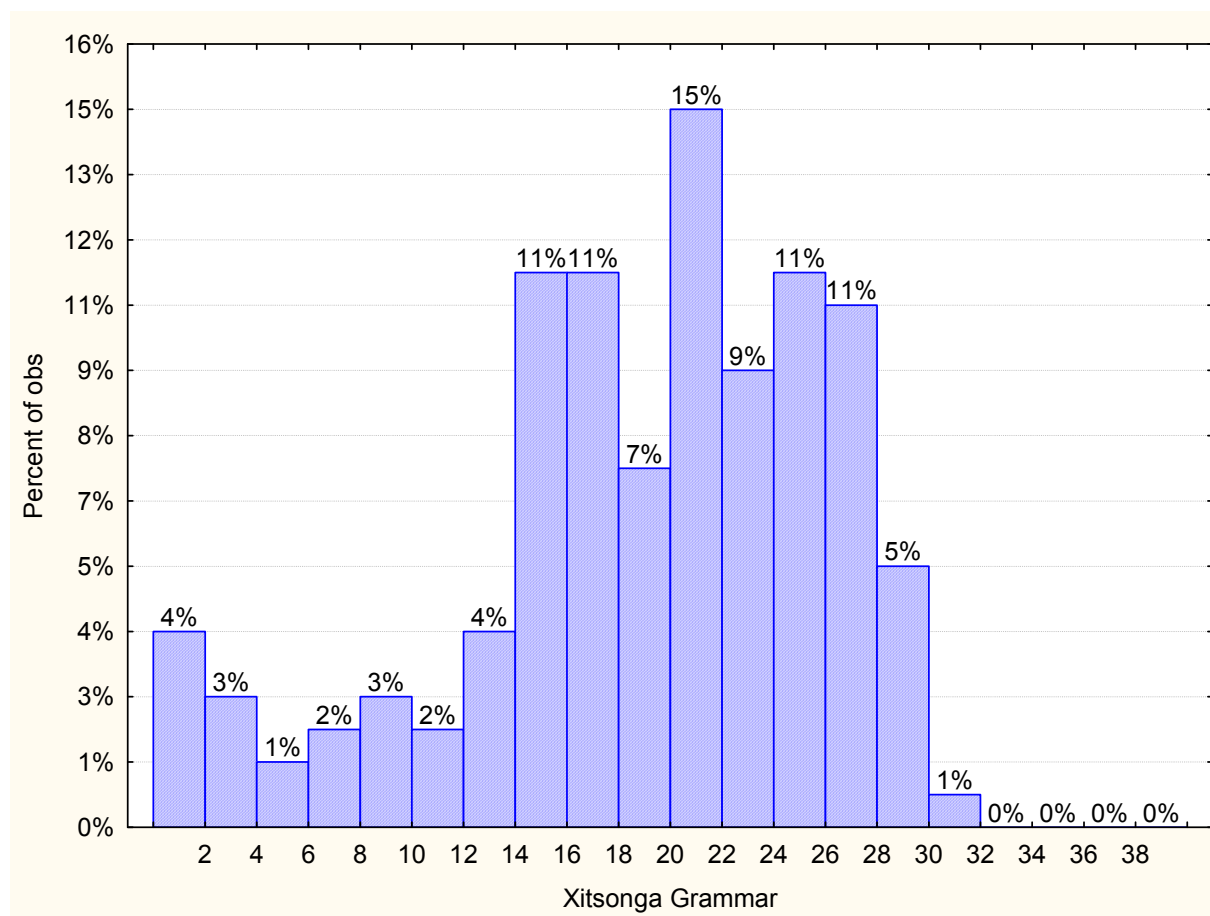


Figure 5.11 shows results of the sub-test for spelling proficiency levels. The overall learners' scores were not evenly distributed through the zero to 32 possible raw score range. Altogether 52 per cent of the scores were above the 50 per cent mean average, with an even 6 per cent of the raw scores being between 28 and 32 of the possible maximum score of 37. A proportion, 19 per cent, of the scores were below the 25 per cent mean average, with 0.66 per cent (0.7%) obtaining zero score, and indication of a lack of Xitsonga spelling proficiency skills.

*5.2.4..2 Results of the sub-test: creative writing*

This is the second sub-test of the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test. The sub-test for creative writing had a possible maximum score of 13.

Table 5.13 gives the results of the sub-test for creative writing administered in three selected schools.

Table 5.13: Results of the sub-test: Xitsonga creative writing

<b>Frequency table: Xitsonga creative writing</b>				
	Count	Cumulative	Percent	Cumulative
<b>0</b>	4	4	2.15	2.15
<b>1</b>	5	9	2.69	4.84
<b>2</b>	5	14	2.69	7.53
<b>3</b>	2	16	1.08	8.60
<b>4</b>	9	25	4.84	13.44
<b>5</b>	12	37	6.45	19.89
<b>6</b>	40	77	21.51	41.40
<b>7</b>	21	98	11.29	52.69
<b>8</b>	28	126	15.05	67.74
<b>9</b>	20	146	10.75	78.49
<b>10</b>	2	148	1.08	79.57
<b>11</b>	2	150	1.08	80.65
<b>12</b>	1	151	0.54	81.18
Missing	35	186	18.82	100.00

Figure 5.11 gives the tabulated results of the sub-test for creative writing (Table 5.13) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.12: Histogram of Sub-test: Xitsonga creative writing

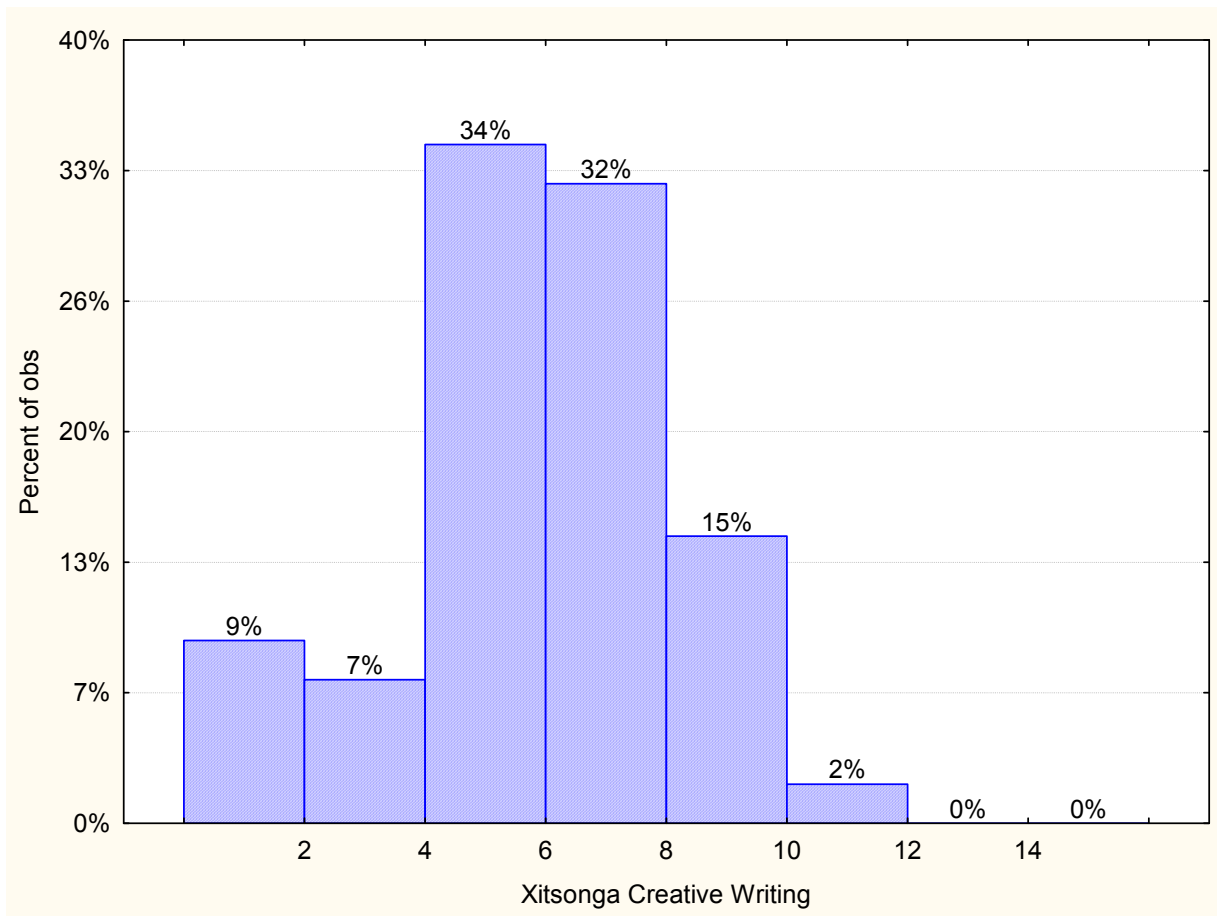


Figure 5.12 shows results of the sub-test for creative writing proficiency levels. The overall learner' scores were almost evenly distributed through the 0 to 14 possible raw score range. In total 49 per cent of the scores were above the 50 per cent mean average, with an even 2 per cent of the raw scores being between 11 and 12 of the possible maximum score of 14. Altogether 16 per cent of the scores were below the 25 per cent mean average, with 2.6 per cent obtaining 0, indicating a slack of Xitsonga creative writing skills.

### 5.2.5 A comparison of learners' English and Xitsonga language proficiency skills

Table 5.14 gives the comparison of English and Xitsonga proficiency skills in both the reading and writing tests.

Table 5.14: A comparison of the English and Xitsonga proficiency skills test results

Correlations Marked correlations are significant at  $p < .05000$  N=150 (Case wise deletion of missing data)

	<b>English Reading</b>	<b>Xitsonga Reading</b>	<b>English Writing</b>	<b>Xitsonga Writing</b>
<b>English Reading</b>	1.00	-0.09	-0.14	-0.13
<b>Xitsonga Reading</b>	-0.09	1.00	0.32	0.32
<b>English Writing</b>	-0.14	0.32*	1.00	0.60
<b>Xitsonga Writing</b>	-0.13	0.32*	0.60*	1.00

\* Correlations marked with \* are significant at the 5 per cent level

Table 5.14 shows that there is a strong correlation between English writing and Xitsonga writing. It further shows a significant correlation between English reading and English writing. A noteworthy correlation also exists between Xitsonga reading and Xitsonga writing. The significant correlation means that performance in Xitsonga reading is the best predictor of performance in Xitsonga writing. This implies that those who performed poorly in Xitsonga reading also performed poorly in Xitsonga writing vice versa.

### 5.2.6 A comparison of learners' English and Xitsonga reading proficiency skills

Figure 5.13: Histogram for comparison of the English and Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Tests

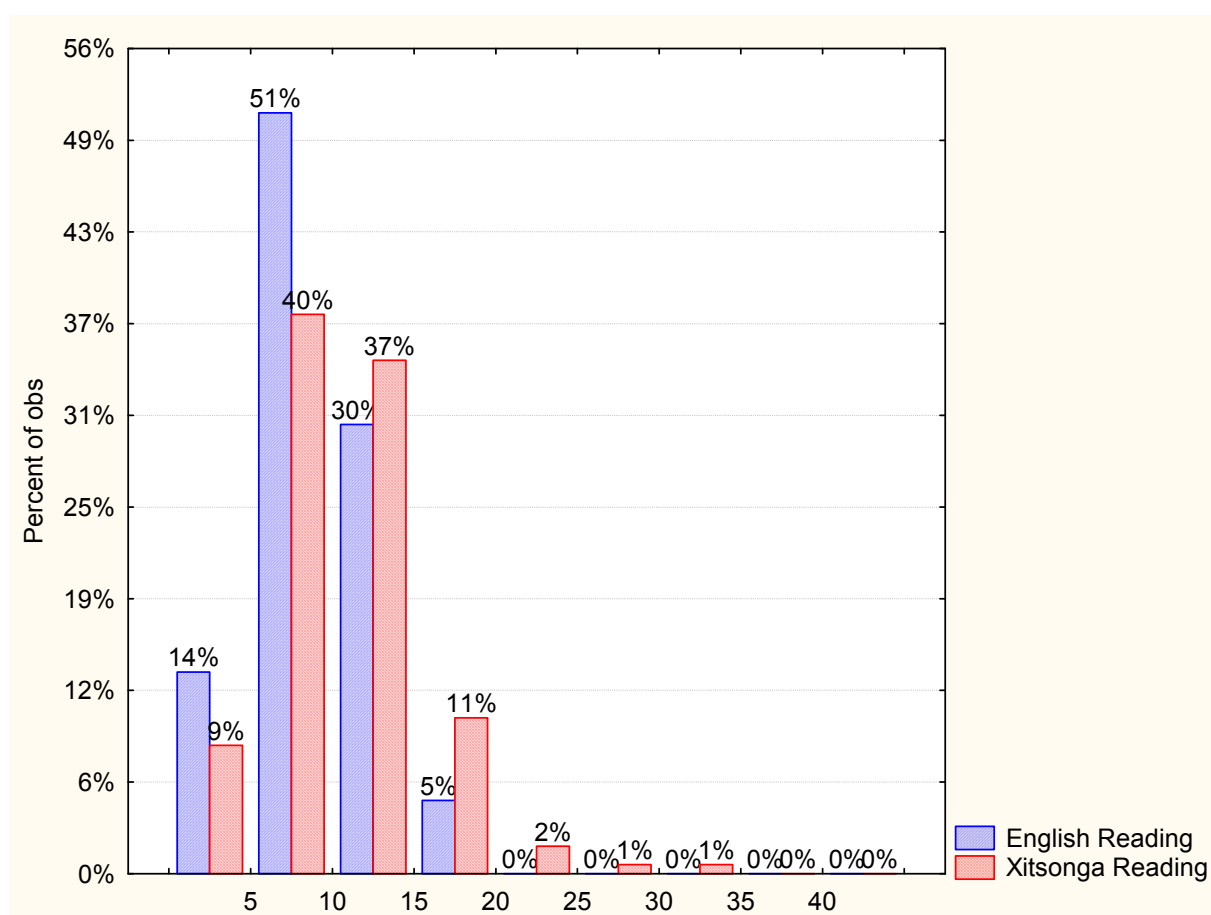


Figure 5.13 shows that the learner's performance of the English and Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test display similar patterns. However, 52 per cent of the learners obtained higher marks in Xitsonga than in English. Altogether 80 per cent of the learners were unable to score 40 per cent in Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test, and 95 per cent of the learners were unable to score 40 per cent in the English Reading Proficiency test.

Figure 5.13 shows a significant difference between the English Reading Proficiency Test results and the Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test results.

### 5.2.7 A comparison of learners' English and Xitsonga writing proficiency skills

Figure 5.14: Histogram of comparison of the English and Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Tests

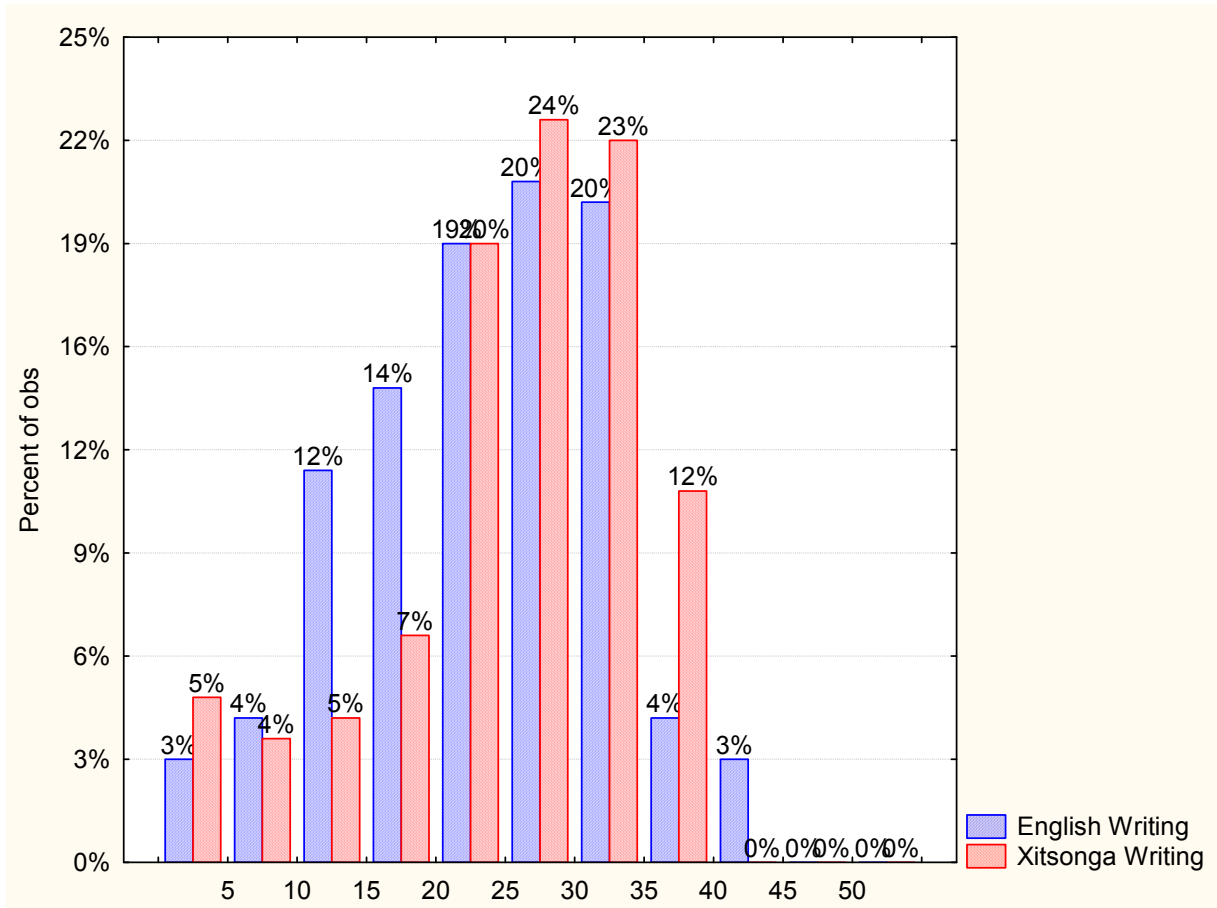


Figure 5.14 indicates that the learner's results in English and Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Tests are better than those for the English and Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Tests. A significant observation is that only 3 per cent of learners obtained marks between 0 and 5 for English, 5 per cent for Xitsonga. More learners passed the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test as opposed to those who passed English Writing Proficiency Test. However, their performance is still not satisfactory as Xitsonga is their first language.

The proportion of learners who passed the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test was 79 per cent as opposed to 66 per cent for the English Writing Proficiency Test. The total number

of learners who failed the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test was 21 per cent as opposed to 34 per cent who failed the English Proficiency Test.

### 5.2.8 Comparisons of Proficiency Test results between the three schools tested

#### 5.2.8.1 English Reading Proficiency Test results

Table 5.15 gives the English Proficiency Test results for the three selected schools.

Table 5.15: English Reading Proficiency Test for the three selected schools

School; Unweighted means current effect: $F(2, 159)=.80646$ , $p=.44825$ Effective hypothesis decomposition					
School	English Reading Mean	English Reading std error	English Reading -95%	English Reading +95%	N
<b>1</b>	9.03	0.35	8.34	9.72	96
<b>2</b>	9.72	0.57	8.59	10.85	36
<b>3</b>	9.73	0.63	8.50	10.97	30

The structure of the table is explained in the ensuing paragraph.

The first column of Table 5.15 shows the number of schools tested. The second column indicates the reading mean score for each school. The third column shows the standard error for each school. The fourth column and the fifth column indicate the confidence interval of the mean score. The last column specifies the number of learners in each of the three schools tested. This structure also applies to Table 5.16.

Table 5.15 indicates that the English reading test results showed no significant differences in the three schools tested; 9.03 ( $\pm 0.35$ ) Vs 9.72 ( $\pm 0.57$ ) Vs 9.73 ( $\pm 0.63$ ), for the three schools, respectively,  $p = 0.38846$ .

Figure 5.15 gives the tabulated results (Table 5.15) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.15: English Reading Proficiency Test results for the three schools

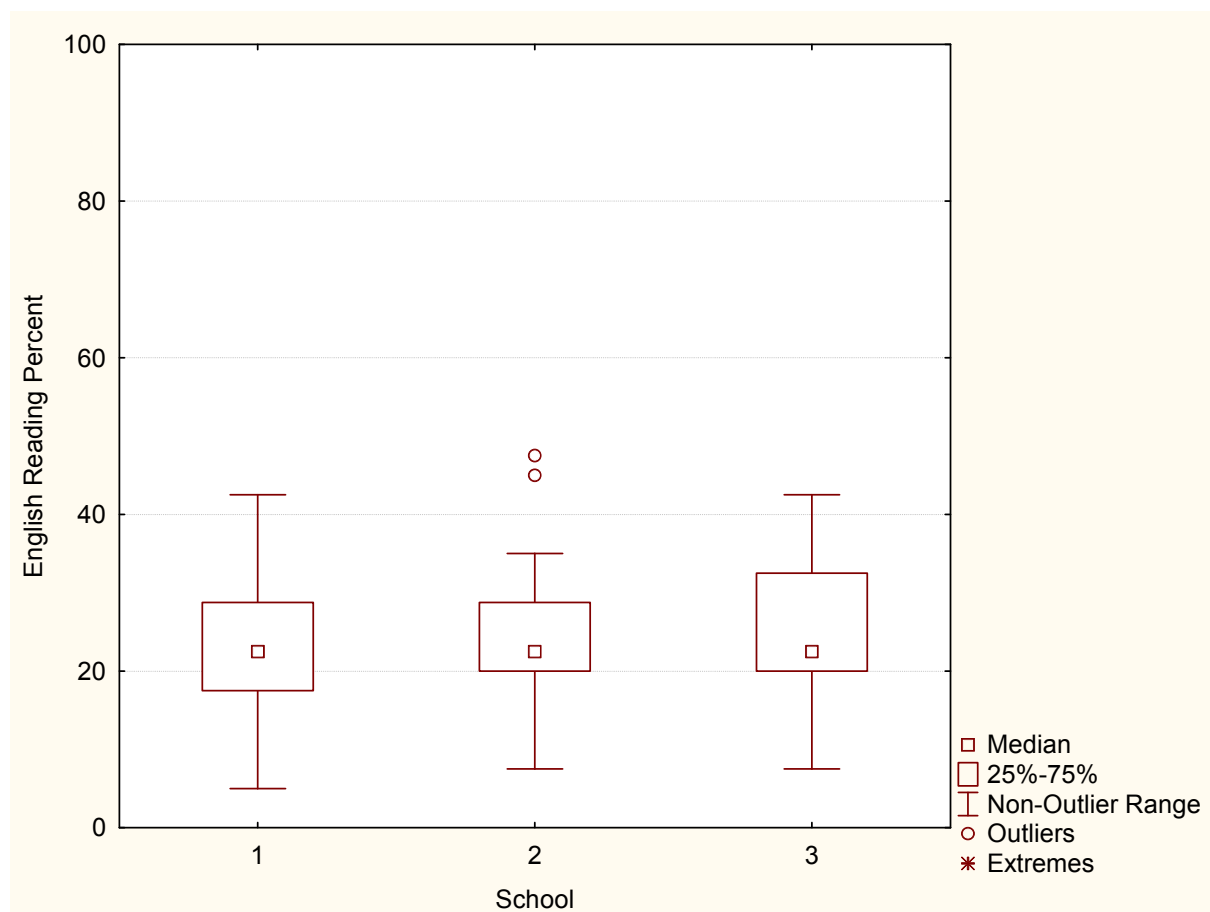


Figure 5.15 shows a graphical representation of the English Reading Proficiency Test results for the three schools. A median is a value in an ordered set of values below and above which there is an equal number of values. The median percentage scores were almost similar in all the three schools tested and were just above the 20 per cent level. The 25 per cent - 75 per cent median range shows overlap throughout the range. However, School 2 revealed two high performer outliers.

### 5.2.8.2 English Writing Proficiency Test results

Table 5.16 gives the English Writing Proficiency Test results for the three selected schools.



Table 5.16: English Writing Proficiency Test for the three schools

School; Unweighted means current effect: $F(2, 158)=6.6797$ , $p=.00164$ Effective hypothesis decomposition					
School	English Writing mean	English Writing std error	English Writing – 95%	English Writing + 95 %	N
<b>1</b>	26.03	0.91	24.23	27.82	95
<b>2</b>	19.83	1.49	16.91	22.75	36
<b>3</b>	22.93	1.63	19.74	26.13	30

The structure of the table is explained in the ensuing paragraph. This structure also applies to Table 5.17.

The first column of Table 5.16 shows the number of schools tested. The second column indicates the reading mean score for each school. The third column indicates the standard error for each school. The fourth column and the fifth column indicate the confidence interval of the mean score. The last column indicates the number of learners in each of the three schools tested. This structure applies to Table 5.17.

Table 5.16 indicates that the test results for English writing showed a significant difference in the three schools tested: 26.03 ( $\pm 0.91$ ) Vs 19.83 ( $\pm 1.49$ ) Vs 22.93 ( $\pm 1.63$ ), for the three schools, respectively,  $P= .00328$

Figure 5.16 gives the tabulated results (Table 5.16) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.16: English Writing Proficiency Test results for the three schools

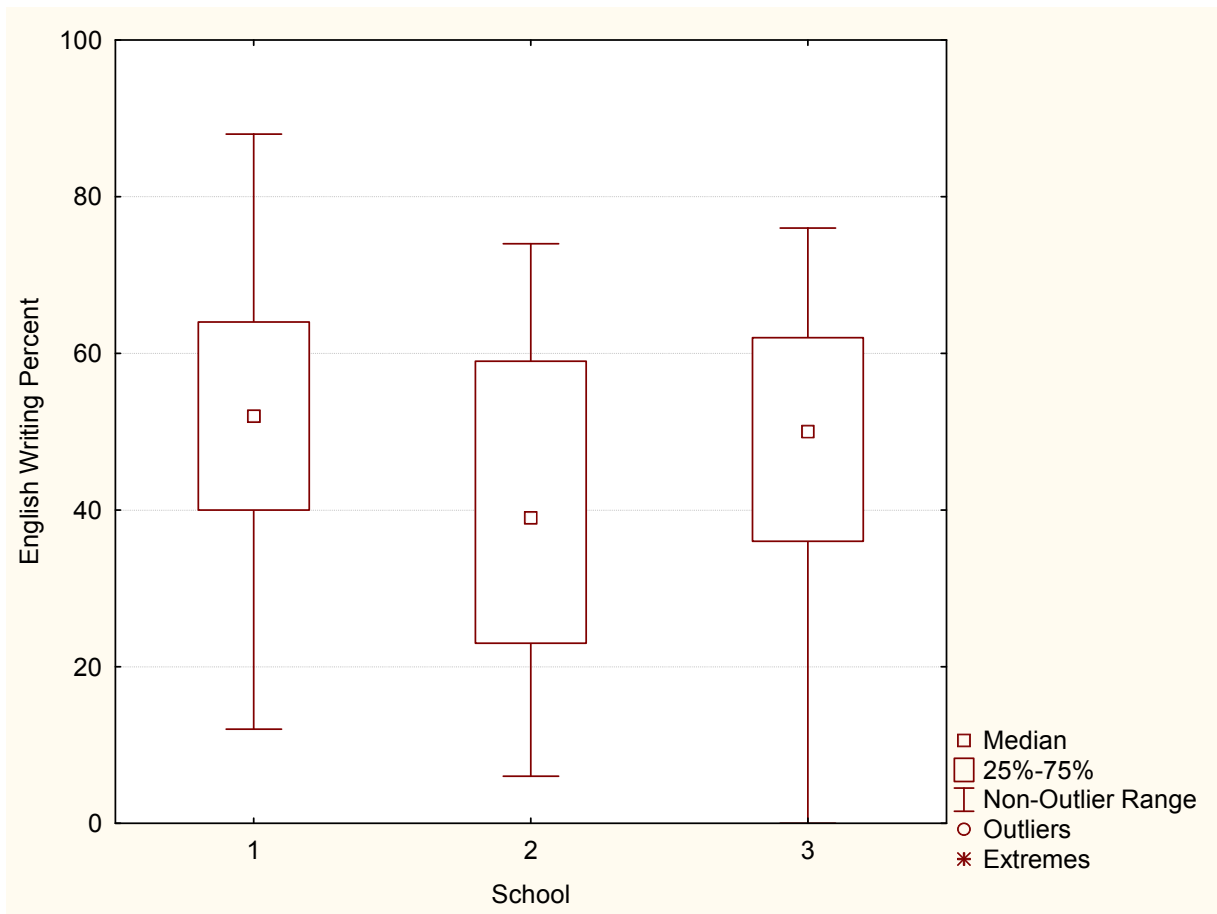


Figure 5.17 shows a graphical representation of the English Writing Proficiency Test results for the three schools. The median percentage scores were almost similar in Schools 1 and 3 at about the 50 per cent level, but lower for school 2 at just the 40 per cent level. The 25 per cent - 75 per cent median range also shows similar patterns of overlap for School 1 and 3, with School 2 showing a wider spread of percentage scores.

5.2.8.3 Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test results

Table 5.17 gives the Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test results for the three schools.

Table 5.17: Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test results for the three schools

School; Unweighted means current effect: $F(2, 150)=14.223$ , $p=.00000$ Effective hypothesis decomposition					
<b>School</b>	<b>Xitsonga Reading Mean</b>	<b>Xitsonga Reading std error</b>	<b>Xitsonga Reading - 95 %</b>	<b>Xitsonga Reading + 95 %</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>1</b>	12.39	0.46	11.47	13.30	90
<b>2</b>	9.30	0.77	7.78	10.81	33
<b>3</b>	7.90	0.81	6.31	9.49	30

The structure of the table is explained in the ensuing paragraph. This structure also applies to Table 5.18.

The first column of Table 5.17 shows the number of schools tested. The second column indicates the reading mean score for each school. The third column shows the standard error for each school. The fourth column and the fifth column indicate the confidence interval of the mean score. The last column points to the number of learners in each of the three schools tested.

Table 5.17 indicates that the Xitsonga reading proficiency test results showed a significant difference in the three schools tested; means were 12.39 ( $\pm 0.46$ ) Vs 9.30 ( $\pm 0.77$ ) Vs 7.90 (0.81), for the three schools, respectively and  $p = .00000$ .

Figure 5.17 gives the tabulated results (Table 5.17) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.17: Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test results for the three schools

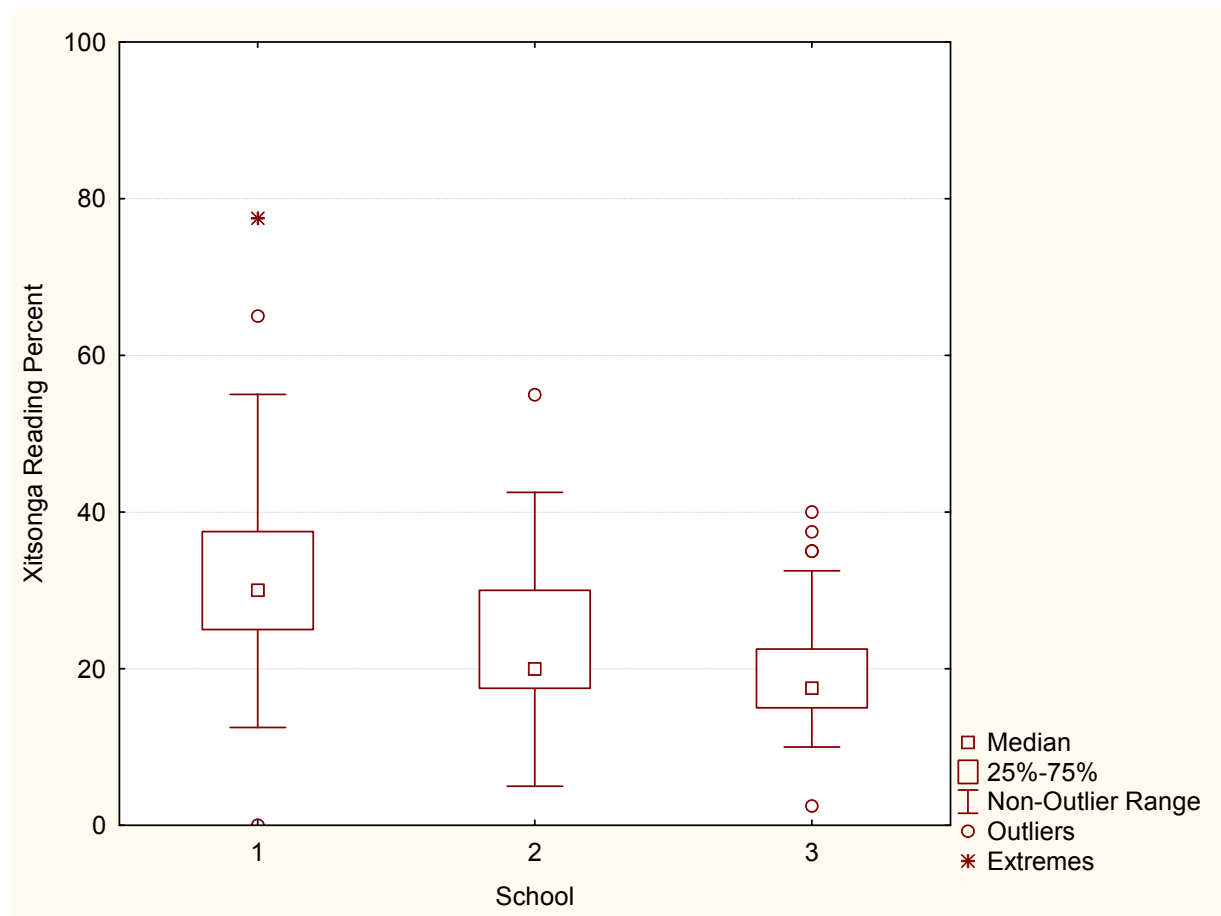


Figure 5.17 shows a graphical representation of the Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test results for the three schools. The median percentage scores showed a clear pattern of decreasing performance from School 1 to School 3, 30 per cent, 20 per cent and 17 per cent for Schools 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Similar patterns of decreasing performance are also shown in the 25 per cent - 75 per cent median range. School 1 showed a single high performer outlier, and also both a low and high extreme performers. School 3 also showed three high performer outliers and a single low performer outlier. However, School 2 showed only a single high performer outlier.

*5.2.8.4 Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test results*

Table 5.18 gives the Xitsonga Proficiency Test results of the three schools.

Table 5.18: Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test for the three schools

School; Unweighted means current effect: $F(2, 148)=1.1454$ , $p=.32089$ Effective hypothesis decomposition					
<b>School</b>	<b>Xitsonga Writing mean</b>	<b>Xitsonga Writing std Error</b>	<b>Xitsonga Writing - 95 %</b>	<b>Xitsonga Writing + 95 %</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>1</b>	26.64	0.98	24.71	28.57	88
<b>2</b>	24.67	1.60	21.51	27.82	33
<b>3</b>	24.07	1.67	20.76	27.37	30

The structure of the table is explained in the ensuing paragraph.

The first column of Table 5.18 shows the number of schools tested. The second column indicates the reading mean score for each school. The third column points out the standard error for each school. The fourth column and the fifth column indicate the confidence interval of the mean score. The last column shows the number of learners in each of the three schools tested. This structure also applies to Table 5.16.

Table 5.18 indicates that the writing test results for Xitsonga at the three schools tested showed no significant difference;  $26.64 (\pm 0.98)$  Vs  $24.66 (\pm 0.60)$  Vs  $24.06 (\pm 1.67)$ , for the three schools, respectively,  $P = .28879$ .

Figure 5.18 gives the tabulated results (Table 5.18) in the form of a histogram.

Figure 5.18: Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test results for the three schools

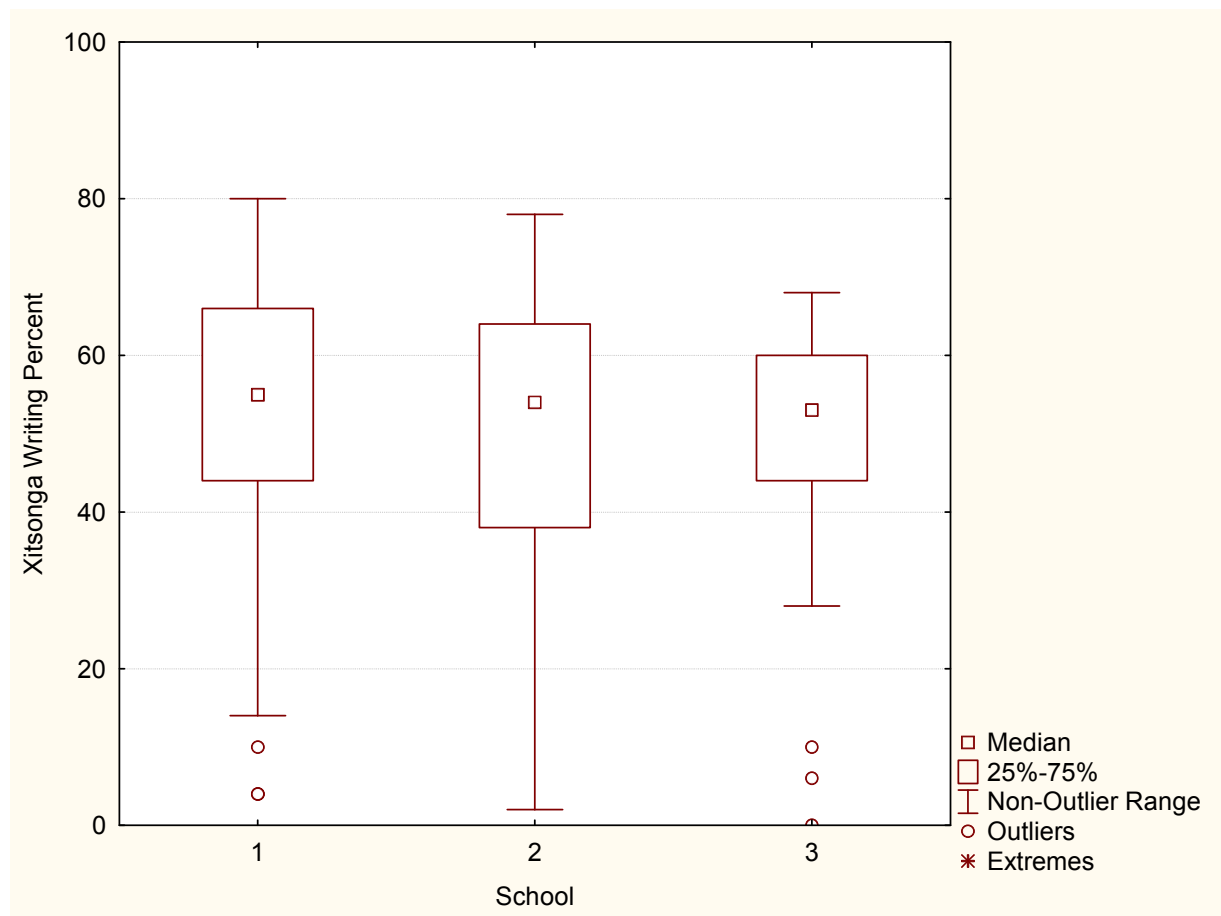


Figure 5.18 shows a graphical representation of the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test results for the three schools. The median percentage scores were almost similar in all the three schools at just above the 50 per cent level. School 3 showed a narrower 25 per cent - 75 per cent median range spread than the other two schools. Both Schools 1 and 3 had two low performer outliers each, with School 3 revealing an extremely low performer.

### 5.3 GENERAL DISCUSSION

The tasks that were assessed in this study were generally simple and learners are expected to cope with these tasks from Grade 6 level. The learners who participated in the test should have obtained scores which are close to 100 per cent in order to demonstrate absolute proficiency in the L1 or L2. However, this was certainly not the case. The learners showed similar patterns of under-performance in all sub-sections of the tests and in both languages.

### **5.3.1 Comments on learners' reading skills in English and Xitsonga**

Both the English and Xitsonga Proficiency Reading Tests were assessed out of the possible maximum score of 40, and were further sub-divided into comprehension and grammar test sub-sections. The discussion interrogates the results based on the two sub-sections of the test for both languages.

The results for English and Xitsonga reading comprehension show that these learners obtained a mean of 5.15 (standard deviation = 2.31) and 5.79 (standard deviation = 2.75) out of the possible maximum score of 22. The observed mean of 5.15 for English comprehension was less than 25 per cent of the scores which is far below the normal mean score of 12. Similar patterns were observed for Xitsonga. Learners performed very poorly in the reading comprehension in both languages. However, even though the answers for both language comprehensions were at times not correct, the Xitsonga version showed greater clarity of expression. Those learners who performed well in Xitsonga did not necessarily perform well in English; however, those who performed well in English also did well in Xitsonga.

There appears to be no statistically significant differences between the learners' achievement in English and Xitsonga reading comprehension. Although some learners obtained better marks in Xitsonga comprehension, some obtained 17 out of 22, others obtained 0 in the same subject. It is the researcher's opinion that since these are Xitsonga first language speakers their average performance in Xitsonga should have shown major improvement with no one obtaining 0!

The grammar results in English and Xitsonga languages showed a mean of 4.13 (standard deviation = 2.31) and 5.14 (standard deviation = 3.24) out of a total of 28. A similar trend was observed for the comprehension test results. The highest mark obtained in English grammar was 11 out of 28, with some learners obtaining 0 out of 28. The Xitsonga grammar results showed a slightly higher mark of 18, but with some learners obtaining 0 out of 28.

### **5.3.2 Comments on learners' writing skills in English and Xitsonga**

The Writing Proficiency test for both languages was sub-divided into two sub-sections, spelling and creative writing. The maximum possible score for spelling was 37, while for creative writing it was 13, with a combined maximum score of 50 for both sub-sections.

The mean score for English spelling was 17.69 (standard deviation = 7.59), and for Xitsonga the mean was 19.32 (standard deviation = 7.29). The highest score obtained for English spelling was 35 with some learners obtaining 0. For Xitsonga, the highest spelling score was 31 and the lowest was 0.

The mean score for English creative writing was 6.37 (standard deviation = 2.27), and for Xitsonga it was 6.39 (standard deviation = 2.35). The observed highest scores for English and Xitsonga creative writing were 11 and 12, respectively, with the lowest score of 0 for both languages.

There was no statistical significant difference between the English Writing Proficiency Test and the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test results. The observed spelling and creative writing results for English were as high as 46 out of 50, while for Xitsonga it was 43 out of 50. The researcher expected these learners to have scored in the region of 45 and above out of 50 for Xitsonga as it is their L1. These results are therefore of great concern as it is education policy that learners cannot be promoted to a higher level without first passing their L1.

In the Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test, learners were able to fairly accurately reflect on what was happening in the picture. Their sentences were more complex and they were able to write marginally more detailed sentences than in English. There was evidence of good vocabulary, with fewer grammatical and spelling errors. Versions were largely in descriptive mode. These learners have not yet mastered the narrative mode and also have not yet mastered the use of cohesive devices.

Although, the Grade 7 learners made an effort to express themselves, their performance in both languages was nowhere near the required proficiency level for using one or the other as a sole medium of instruction. And this is after seven years of formal exposure to



English. Spelling and grammatical errors were plentiful. Sentences were generally very short. The sample shows learners' difficulties in forming sentences. At Grade 7 level the expository task is often in a list form, although there more varied expression should be developing. There was a closer correlation between the English and Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test results. They averaged slightly below 50 percent in both languages. These results are very discouraging in the sense that even in their L1 most of these learners are unable to even achieve 50 per cent.

### **5.3.3 Comments on the learners' socio-economic environments**

The socio-environmental conditions in which the learners live were described in chapter 4 (see 4.4). Learners in township schools are educated in a school environment where they are exposed to similar amounts of English and Xitsonga, resulting in an additive environment as described in chapter 2 (see 2.4.2.7). The three schools selected have made an attempt to use both languages effectively in education. In Grade R Xitsonga is the medium of instruction. Both Xitsonga and English are taught as subjects. From Grade 1 on English is the medium of instruction. Both English and Xitsonga are taught as subjects. Most of the teachers are Xitsonga first language speakers and are able to provide mother tongue support in the classroom if necessary. Although English is the medium of instruction in all the schools tested, the learner's first language is usually given a more significant status. Nevertheless a major problem, according to the results of the empirical study, is the learner's lack of even average proficiency in both languages. According to Cummins (2004:30), a lack of adequate competence in both languages has a detrimental effect on academic performance. This occurs as the learner has no adequate language in which to establish the cognitive process that is the basis for learning. Bialystok (2001:35) claims that it is not the balance between the languages that is important, but rather the need for one language to be developed to a level that is sufficient for schooling.

The learners in the three township schools tested are thus at an academic disadvantage, despite the balanced proficiency in their L1 and L2. The reason for this is maybe that it takes longer to acquire academic proficiency in both languages within an additive bilingual context. Although this explanation may have some credibility, it is more likely that the broader educational context in township schools is not ideal, and that general

conditions within the school contribute to the learner's poor academic performance. These learners performed very poorly in the sections requiring language processing, that is, reading comprehension and the sentence construction and completion tasks (see 5.2.2.2 and 5.2.4.2). This finding would support the slower development of language proficiency.

It is also important to take into account that the learners do not experience the languages equally. According to Bialystok (2001:98), no bilingual is ever equally competent in both languages. This is seen in many studies where learners show a disparity in vocabulary size for the two languages. The differing levels of performance are due to the fact that the bilingual learner does not have the same experience in both languages. In the township English is not used for socialisation, rather it is considered as the language of education and school. These learners use Xitsonga in their everyday environment. According to Cummins (2005), a child who is subjected to intensive L1 exposure in her/his home environment as well as intensive L2 exposure will have a high level of competence in the L2 without a negative effect to L1.

Another explanation of the learner's unsatisfactory performance in their L1, Xitsonga, lies in the fact that these learners found themselves in environments wherein many languages are being spoken. Many of these learners do not have a single primary language or mother tongue. In addition, it emerged during an informal interview with one of the language teachers that most of these learners are from cross-cultural family backgrounds and/or inter-ethnic marriages. They are therefore able to talk a number of languages but without developing academic proficiency. Makoni (2004: 34) argues, that these learners cannot be said to be multilingual in the sense that they speak three or more languages. He claims that this view of multilingualism which is used in policy documents in South Africa is constructed through monolingual perspectives. The reality, according to Alexander (2004:36), is that the languages spoken by these learners are an amalgamation of South African languages with regional and community variations. Thus, the prevailing situation which requires learners to learn through the medium of a single defined African language means that they will not be learning through their primary language.

The learner's acquisition of academic English proficiency is also hampered by societal factors. One of the socio-cultural factors that impacted negatively on use of English is social enclosure. Although the apartheid social barriers have been removed there are few people in townships and squatter camps that learners could practice speaking English to. In a socially enclosed environment it is difficult for these learners to acquire the necessary language skills for academic success. These learners, then, have only the classroom in which to learn and practise as there are no native speakers in the neighbourhood from whom the learners could acquire fluent English. Most of the learners also come from poor socio-economic backgrounds where there is lack of parental support and resources which could help the learners acquire the necessary language(s) for academic success (see 4.4).

The availability of educational resources that promote the development of English L2 proficiency such as libraries, English books, newspapers and magazines are considered by the researcher to be highly influential. Learners who participated in this study did not receive the necessary exposure to educational resources necessary to improve their literacy skills. Of the three schools which participated in the study one was without a library, whereas the other two had libraries that were not fully utilized. The library in one of the schools was used as an additional classroom.

An analysis of the results shows a pattern of learners experiencing greater difficulties with conjunctions, temporal concepts, conditionals and intensifiers. These concepts require a multi-faceted understanding of the language. It is necessary for learners to have the correct semantic knowledge of the word, as well as the grammatical knowledge of the language in order to complete the task. According to Altenberg (1991), grammar is the aspect of language most vulnerable to attrition. These learners tended to confuse the syntactic structure between the languages thus making errors in both languages. It was also noted that in the weaker language, in this case English, the learners often had an impoverished vocabulary and were thus unable to find the correct word with which to express themselves. It would appear that both the semantic and grammar errors accounted for poor performance in both English and Xitsonga. The learners showed better performance in tasks that required less involvement of the cognitive processes. Bialystok (2001) provides a framework showing the different uses of language in relation to their underlying cognitive requirements. Oral, literate and meta-linguistic tasks involve increasingly more cognitive ability with higher levels of cognitive control and

analysis. The task which learners had most difficulty involved higher levels of processing than the other tasks in the test. This is directly related to cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). The reading comprehension, sentence completion and sentence construction task involved higher levels of processing and CALP, in order for the learners to correctly complete the task. This also confirms the importance of the Threshold hypothesis proposed by Cummins (2004), stating that a minimum threshold level of competence is needed in a second language in order to benefit from instruction in that language. The child's level of linguistic competence may therefore have an effect on their cognitive and academic development.

Consequently the learners in this study are at a disadvantage academically, despite their balanced proficiency in their L1 and L2. The reason for this may be that it takes longer to acquire academic language proficiency in both languages within an additive bilingual context.

The researcher observed that the assessment skills of all teachers in the three schools tested were rudimentary. Their questions never moved beyond simple recall and learners were seldom encouraged ask questions, individual reading was almost none existent and written work was rare. It is the researchers opinion that the forms of assessment advocated in the revised curriculum statement is well beyond these teachers. Teachers need guidance and assistance with assessment in order to help learners develop the academic language necessary for academic success.

From the observations and informal interviews with the teachers in the three schools visited it appears that the language changes required by education policy, which came into force in 1997, are both flawed in their conceptualisation and implementation strategy. The role of African languages in South African schools is not adequately addressed, despite policy statements to the contrary. In spite of the country's institutional documents, which proclaim linguistic pluralism to be the national objective, it is regressing to its pre-apartheid situation of monolingual practice. There is failure in almost all schools to maintain mother tongue instruction or additive bilingualism.

The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) report (1999:16) claims that schools policies have evolved from realities on the ground such as

staff language proficiency and parental preference for high status languages. Staff language proficiency also determines the language policy of the schools in township schools. The *de facto* policies of the schools are also influenced by perceptions of the value of English as a language of socio-economic power and mobility. Many schools are increasingly offering English at lower levels (Setati 2000:32).

The developmental Interdependence Hypothesis, as discussed in the introduction, describes the interdependence between the development of L1 and L2. The learners' L2 competence is dependent on the level of L1 development at the time when L2 begins to develop. It could be hypothesised that the L1 of Xitsonga learners tested in the three schools is not adequately developed when the introduction of L2 begins. Their L1 is poorly developed and intensive exposure to L2 interferes with the continuing development of the L1. These learners performed well in many Xitsonga test items which required less linguistic processing. This supports Cummins (1984) Underlying Proficiency Model, which suggests that there may be a common underlying proficiency for both languages, where conceptual knowledge is not language dependent and may be accessed through either language.

A considerable amount of research from various countries like the USA, Britain and South Africa suggests that L2 speakers develop fluent surface or conversational skills in the school language but academic skills continue to lag behind grade norms. The distinction between conversational and academic language skills can lead to prejudicial decisions regarding the testing of minority learners. The research shows that very different time periods are required for minority learners to achieve peer appropriate levels in conversation as compared with academic second language proficiency. Specifically, conversation skills often approach native-like levels within two years of exposure to English whereas the research suggest that for academic aspects of language proficiency to develop learners need five to seven years to achieve native-like proficiency. The research in both the USA and Britain is based in the context in which learners are immersed in both the English language and culture. Both countries have well resourced schools and highly qualified teachers who are English first language speakers. Township school learners' experiences are consequently more deprived and so they continue to lag behind academically.

## **5.4 CONCLUSION**

An analysis of the learner's levels of English and Xitsonga language proficiencies revealed that:

- there is a significant correlation between the learners' performance in the Reading and Writing Performance tests in both languages
- the learners' Reading Proficiency Tests in both languages correlate positively with their oral skills
- irrespective of the level of English and Xitsonga proficiencies, most learners performed poorly in their reading skills such as recognising inferences related to tone, recognising punctuation, recognising different types of discourse and recognising inferences relating to ambiance.

From their Writing Performance Tests for both languages it was observed that the most serious weaknesses of learners, though in varying degrees, were:

- failure to understand instructions which led to poor responses to task demands
- spelling errors
- inappropriate use of tone and register
- incorrect punctuation marks
- incorrect use of tenses.

The joint analysis of the learner's performance in both the English Reading and Writing and Xitsonga Reading and Writing Performance Tests shows these learners are not capable of handling the requirements of the Grade 7 curriculum.

## Chapter 6

### Recommendations and Conclusions

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Research on second language learning has shown that many early secondary school learners have not mastered the required proficiency levels in the English medium of instruction in South Africa. Consequently this investigation was undertaken to evaluate the levels of proficiency of Grade 7 learners in both English and Xitsonga to suggest ways in which they could be helped to improve their language proficiencies for academic success. The importance of English proficiency stems from a number of factors:

- value of additive multilingualism for South Africa
- English is a medium of instruction in most South African schools and higher education institutions
- English is a language used in most human resource development initiatives
- the importance of a good foundation in L1, in this case Xitsonga, so as to effectively acquire L2, in this instance English.

This investigation, therefore, made use of the assumption that the research results could lead to the improved understanding of the Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners' English academic language proficiency levels. In specific terms the research aimed at:

- explaining what language proficiency entails in a linguistically diverse environment and to discuss the various models of language proficiency which are used
- describing the language policies and practices in education in South Africa with reference to the democratic period
- determining the English academic language proficiency of Xitsonga speaking Grade 7 learners in selected schools in the Tshwane metropolitan area

- comparing the English academic language proficiency with Xitsonga academic language proficiency of Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners
- making recommendations on how to improve the acquisition of English academic language proficiency among Grade 7 learners in South African schools.

The major findings of this study are summarised below. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations made according to the findings.

## **6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

In the first section, findings from the literature review are summarised and in the second section, the findings of the empirical investigations are summarised.

### **6.2.1 Findings from the literature review**

The main findings from the literature review are a combination of chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 2, where theories of first and second language acquisition are discussed, it was found that children the world over follow similar patterns when acquiring their first language. These are called stages. These stages are, cooing, babbling, one word, two words and sentences. This occurs irrespective of the language the child is learning (see 2.3.1).

Different opinions exist on how language is learned by children. These are the behaviourist, the nativist and the social interaction and language development approaches. Their dissimilar views lie in what is called the nature-nature continuum. Their diverse approaches show that L1 acquisition is partly influenced by practice, genes and environmental factors (see 2.3.2).

Different theories have been influenced by the varying approaches to first language acquisition. The selected theorists are constructivists as represented by Piaget and Vygotsky. They believe that learning should advance alongside the child's developmental level. Piaget's four stages of development include the sensory motor stage, the pre-operational stage, the concrete operational and the abstract reasoning stage. This shows his belief in learners' active participation in learning. This is relevant to teaching. He



points out the importance of thought in learning. Piaget stressed the importance of individual cognitive development as a relatively solitary act. Biological time-tables and stages for development where basic social interaction takes place were important only to trigger development at the right time (see 2.3.3).

Vygotsky views social interaction as being fundamental to cognitive development and rejects the notion of predetermined stages. He maintains that learning occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD represents the intellectual functions that have not yet matured and are in the process of maturation. Vygotsky stresses society as the determiner of development and not the stages. He emphasises the importance of the teacher in the classroom as a learning mediator (see 2.3.3).

The different approaches to first language acquisition have resulted in a number of issues and problems arising which researchers in the field are addressing. These are competence and performance, comprehension and production, universals, systematicity and variability, imitations, practice, input and discourse (see 2.3.4). Imitative skills, a general language mechanism, cognitive awareness and structured input all play their part in guiding the course of language acquisition. Unravelling the interdependence of these factors constitutes the main goal for future language research.

Theorists of L1 and L2 acquisition show both similarities and differences in the way two languages are acquired. There are many inhibitions when acquiring a second language such as personal traits and environmental factors which play a role in determining how much of second language is acquired (see 2.6). The same cannot be said of infants learning a language be it a L1 or L2.

This led Krashen to distinguish between language acquisition and language learning. His theoretical model which continues to evolve is designed to help L2 teachers in their teaching. His theoretical model consists of five hypotheses: the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Acquisition Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. These hypotheses are able to deal with the five core observations of second language acquisition transfer, staged development, systematicity, variability and incompleteness. He stresses the importance of the creation of natural environments in L2 classrooms so as to overcome personal inhibitions (see 2.4.2).

Cummins' theory helps explain why it is difficult of L2 learners to cope with school work. His distinction between communicative language proficiency and academic language proficiency helps teachers understands why learners who appear to be proficient communicators are unable to cope with school work. His common underlying proficiency model helps illustrate the importance of adequate first language development to facilitate second language development (see 2.4.3).

Although there are several L2 proficiency models not all are conducive for language minority learners. Good programmes are those that continue facilitating the development of academic L1 and L2 proficiencies for the language minority learners (see 2.5).

It was relevant to review literature on the South African education system in order to understand the South African school context and the programmes used to teach English L2 learners. In order to achieve this two historical periods were reviewed the period 1948 – 1994 and the period after 1994.

The change in the language policy after 1994 shows the government wanted to change the South African education system to suit the ideology of democracy. In order to effect these changes the South African Constitution was drawn up which gave equal status to all eleven South African languages (see 3.2.2.1). Parents were expected to choose the language of instruction for their children. The South African School's Act, was promulgated to guide transformation in schools and to regulate the democratisation of schooling. The Act gave everyone an equal opportunity to develop their talent and introduced compulsory education to learners under the age of sixteen years. Learners could attend their school of choice irrespective of colour and gender (see 3.2.2.1).

A new curriculum, Curriculum 2005, was introduced to South African schools. It is aimed at addressing equity in education so that the quality of learning opportunities is the same for all learners. This curriculum has since been revised because difficulties emerged in its initial implementation. The Revised National Curriculum 2005 has since been introduced (see 3.2.2). Most researchers agree on the relevance of the Revised National Curriculum 2005 as an educational reform. But researchers such as Jansen (2005: 34 ) argue that

although it is a better curriculum most teachers are still not in a position to implement it fully due to lack of adequate training, large classes, lack of resources and under utilisation of available resources. Teachers who are ready to implement this new curriculum, for instance, those in former Model C schools, with good resources and reasonable teacher-learner ratio, are so caught up in administrative responsibilities that they end up concentrating on preparing their learners' for examinations only.

Despite all the attempts made to improve the South African education system, the woes of the past continue to affect historically disadvantaged schools. Due to their geographic location not much has changed in these schools. They are still under-resourced, staffed with unqualified or under-qualified teachers. Matric results in these former disadvantaged schools continue to be the lowest in the whole system. There is also lack of discipline and dedication on the part of some of the teachers as is noted by their late arrival at schools and inability to be in class when they are supposed to (see 4.4.1.5; 4.2.5; 4.4.3.4). Ways of improving the education of learners in these previously disadvantaged schools remains elusive for the government (see 3.3).

In order to achieve an integrated system of education and training the White paper on education was introduced. This was aimed at providing a single, coherent and unified approach to education and training. The National Qualification Framework (NQF) is a set of principles and guidelines by which records of learners' achievements are registered. This enables national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages lifelong learning (see 3.2.3.4). The NQF organises learning into three bands consisting of eight levels. These are: the General Education and Training Band, Further Education and Training Certificate and the Higher Education and Training Band (Prinsloo 2002:51). An important development in the introduction of these school phases is the realisation of the need for Early Childhood Development Centres which the government has sadly neglected. These centres, if well resourced and the resources optimally utilised, can provide learners with a necessary foundation for schooling. However the amount allocated to these centres is still hopelessly inadequate. The best day-care centres in South Africa are privately owned and as such are very expensive (see 3.2.3.4). They are only accessible to the middle class families. Township and rural areas are still experiencing the problems of inadequate day-care centres. Those

that do exist are under- resourced with inexperienced teachers. It is for this reason that very little learning takes place in these centres (see 3.2.3.4).

In order to address the need to prepare learners from poor socio-economic conditions Grade R was introduced into the foundation phase. There are however problems being experienced with this move. In township schools learners come across teachers who have a different L1 to them. This disparity between the teachers' L1 and the learners' L1 contributes to linguistic problems because these learners do not receive a good foundation in their L1. The inability of some Grade R teachers to speak the L1 of the majority of the learners means that these learners fail to be proficient in both their L1 and L2 (see 3.2.3.6).

Although all the eleven South African languages have been declared official by the South African Constitution (RSA 1996), the school's language policy is determined by the language proficiency of the teaching staff. For instance in all former Model C schools the medium of instruction remains predominantly English or Afrikaans despite the changing demographics of the learners. Most of the teachers in these schools are unable to communicate effectively with these learners because of language disparity (Chisholm 2004:56). Full details of teachers' language proficiency are provided in section 3.2.3.6.

### **6.2.2 Empirical findings**

In the empirical investigation a quantitative approach was used. The focus of the study was to determine the level of acquisition of English academic language proficiency among Grade 7 Xitsonga speaking learners in selected schools.

Three township schools were selected in the Tshwane metropolitan area. Two schools are situated in Atteridgeville and one school in Mamelodi. Two classes of Grade 7 learners were tested in school one and one Grade 7 class was tested from each of the other two schools as they had only one class each. The total number of learners who participated in the study was 160.

Data was gathered by means of a standardised language test, the Achievement Test for English Second language in Grade7, provided by the Human Sciences Research Council

(HSRC). The use of the standardised test was aimed at establishing the learner's present level of proficiency and competence.

In order to collect data whereby the questions posed as well as the statements of the research problem was answered the following instruments were used:

- Reading Proficiency Test in English (RPT)
- Writing Proficiency Test in English (WPT).

Moreover, a translated version of the above tests was also used:

- Xitsonga Reading Proficiency Test
- Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Test.

For a detailed explanation of the both the English Reading and English Writing Proficiency tests and Xitsonga Reading and Xitsonga Writing Proficiency Tests see 4.5.

The major empirical findings of this investigation have integrated chapters 4 and 5. The findings are presented below.

Learners in the three schools tested have shown limited success with the bilingual learning programme. The learners show similar, although not perfect proficiency in both languages that is English and Xitsonga (see 5.2.5). The medium of instruction is English but learners are given the opportunity to experience education in their home language. The use of home language is encouraged in the classroom. The decreased proficiency seen in these learners may be a result of limitations in the learning environment, such as limited access to textbooks, large number of learners in the classroom and the low socio-economic conditions of both the learners and the school. Increasing the academic level of the schools in general through increased resourcing, may lead to improved learners proficiency levels in both languages (see 4.4.1.4, 4.4.2.4 & 4.4.3.4).

It is also important to note that, in order for a language to be learnt effectively it is not only necessary to have a positive attitude, but strong language planning and policy efforts, as well as real life relevance (see 3.2.3). Changing from home language education to English may lead to a devaluation of the importance of learner's home language. The drive for English appears to hamper the development of mother tongue education. Even

when parents are given the opportunity to choose the medium of instruction they tend to choose English above home-language (Kapp 2000:56). According to Kapp (2000:59), learners feel that it is impossible to communicate in a public environment outside townships without being proficient in English. Misconceptions about the nature of language learning however, have led to the belief that English will benefit all learners educationally and economically. High levels of proficiency in English can be achieved through instruction in a second language. Additionally, the use of other official languages in this country by officials and high profile public figures would contribute to changing perceptions.

It is therefore important for both the teachers and parents to understand the interaction of factors that contribute to bilingual development. According to Setson (1994:26), major benefits occur in learning when involving parents and giving value to the home language. Support of home language is seen as being vital to literacy learning. Interacting factors in bilingual development consists of individual variables, linguistic input variables and situational variables (Spolsky 1989; Ellis 1992).

In South Africa, Curriculum 2005 and OBE have been introduced to promote change in education. These policies have moved away from the problems of the past and developed a curriculum that allows for the development of knowledge, skills and values for innovation, growth, cultural creativity and tolerance. The use of mother tongue education as discussed has not been widely accepted by parents and learners (see 4.4.1; 4.4.2.1 and 4.4.3.1). The implementation of Curriculum 2005 has also been difficult. Although the new school curriculum says all the right things about what learners should learn, teachers are under a heavy administrative workload and are therefore only interested in getting their learners through the exams. In order for learners to cope with the revised curriculum statement it is vital that they are proficient in the medium of instruction. This is necessary in order to cope with the cognitive demands that are placed on the learners.

A major problem identified in this study was the lack of resources in schools. Schools are not well resourced. Infrastructure is poor. In addition the classes are large. A major concern that has been noted by Chisholm et al. 2000 is the lack of resources for the

different languages in South Africa (see 4.4). As discussed earlier, the use of mother tongue education has been proven to be beneficial when properly taught.

This study looked at the learners capabilities in both their L1 and L2. In order to identify differences their abilities in both English and Xitsonga it was necessary to translate the standardised English Reading and Writing Proficiency Tests into Xitsonga (see 4.5.4). The translation of the assessment battery was cited as problematic.

This test was important in order to investigate what these learners know and can do as a result of their six years of schooling. In most cases these learners were unable to compose grammatically correct sentences, there was a lack of logic in their writing and, crucially, they fail to think creatively when faced with routine problems (see 4.5.4).

Findings of this study confirm the complexity of bilingual language acquisition. Such acquisition is dependent on an interaction of many factors including learners characteristics such as aptitude for learning, cognitive style, motivation attitude and personality. Input variables can be the language model, language interaction and topics of conversation and linguistic issues. It would appear that the different levels of proficiency developed in English, in particular by the learners in the same contexts assessed in this study, was at least partly due to the English proficiency of their teachers (see 5.3.1). In township schools teachers are less proficient in English. The influence of learner's characteristics is confirmed by the substantial range of scores seen in both sections of the Xitsonga and English tests (see 5.3.3).

### **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICE**

#### **a) Learners' L1 as a medium of instruction**

It should be recommended that these learners be given the opportunity to learn in their dominant home language if at all possible. This could be implemented through the introduction of various L1s in schools to give learners an opportunity to choose the L1 in which they are most adept. It is important to recognise that there are a number of different languages spoken by various learners in the school and it is economically not feasible to have a language class for each of the eleven official languages. Parents and

teachers should therefore be encouraged to promote the development of L1. According to Cummins (1988:139), educators who see their role as adding a second language and cultural affiliation to learner's repertoire are likely to empower learners more than those who see their role as replacing learners L1.

Studies have shown the value of L1 instruction over L2 instruction for ultimate literacy and academic achievement in the L2. Although there is a drive towards English education and focus on multilingualism, it is also vital to provide learners with the abilities to succeed in education. It is necessary therefore that to provide learners with a strong L1. The maintenance of the L1 has to be taken into consideration as a way of developing the cognitive flexibility of bilingual learners in South African context. The main education should be to foster bilingualism at all levels of language usage.

b) Schools should be well resourced and resources used optimally

To ensure that schools achieve equity in education the Department of Education must ensure that every school has the minimum of resources to function well enough to deliver quality education. The Department of Education should ensure that all teachers in various schools and classes are competent to teach the subjects they teach. It was discovered during the empirical investigation that there were language teachers who did not qualify to teach these languages. If the teachers are not specialised in a particular subject teaching it becomes a disaster. This is unfair to both the teacher and the learners.

Schools should be equipped with libraries and a librarian be appointed to manage the library properly. Teachers in black schools should liaise with former Model C schools to learn the effective use of resources for language gains. The school librarian needs to be made aware of the mission and vision of the school. The Department of Education should make sure that all schools receive prescribed books on time and that they are available in all schools



- c) The need for in-service and pre-service training in language teaching across the curriculum and the teaching of language(s) as subjects

A detailed account of teacher's skills requisite for enabling learners to acquire academic English language proficiency was presented in sections 4.4.1.5; 4.4.2.5 and 4.4.3.5. These skills are indispensable for successful teaching of academic English proficiency. It is recommended that the Department should conduct pre-service education and training and in-service (INSET) programmes aimed at equipping English language teachers with various aspects of second language teaching and the different approaches to teaching. These workshops should be conducted by language experts, for instance, language lecturers who are teaching at universities and who are aware of recent developments in the field.

Teachers ought also to take into account certain learner aspects when planning a lesson. These include age, first language, language aptitude, intelligence, personality and cognitive styles. Schools must be encouraged to compile such learners' profiles (see 2.6).

- d) Creating positive teaching and learning environments

Research has revealed a number of activities that principals, teachers and learners ought to embark upon to support teaching and learning. It is therefore recommended that to establish and maintain a culture of teaching and learning in schools the school management team must:

- create positive relationships between teachers, parents, learners and communities by having communities involved in the education of their children
- maintain a disciplined setting for both teachers and learners where time is respected
- develop a clear vision for the school and sell the vision to the interested parties so that they all eagerly strive to achieve it
- ensure that teachers are dedicated professionals
- make sure that teachers are good role models at all times to the learners
- guarantee that learners are actively involved in learning through the use of group work, discussions, investigating, asking questions and other innovative teaching methods to cultivate creative and reflective thinking skills.

### **6.3 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research should also:

- compare the learners' CALP and BICS in both L1 and L2 in order to determine the level of development that has taken place in each language
- determine the influences of first language development on second language development in the South African context
- compare the learners' English academic language proficiency with their L1 in other grades
- conduct longitudinal studies concerning learners who have been introduced to intensive, cognitively demanding L1 and L2, using both the standardised tests and the content related test materials.

### **6.4 CONCLUSION**

The major findings of this study are that the Xitsonga speaking learners, who participated in the study, are not proficient in either their L1 or L2. The implications are that they are unable to function in an academic context using either of the languages they were tested on. The school environments proved to be inadequately resourced to equip them with the necessary support materials for learning both their L1 and L2. The socio-economic conditions of the schools and the learners' homes appear to be a major contribution to their lack of success in education.

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