

**Reading difficulties as barriers to learning experienced by learners entering the  
intermediate phase**

by

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## DECLARATION

I declare that **Reading difficulties as barriers to learning experienced by learners entering the intermediate phase** 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.

November 2016

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SIGNATURE

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DATE

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My profound and unfeigned gratitude is conveyed to:

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to the glory of my Lord Jesus, my late dad Siva,(you are proud of me, smiling down from heaven) my wonderful and irreplaceable mum Ruth. Thank you for all you have sacrificed and given to me. No amount of words would suffice the gratitude I have for you. Finally to Tony, Jadon and Jared, soar on wings of eagles, overcome all challenges and reach for the stars.

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to investigate reading difficulties as barriers to learning experienced by learners entering the intermediate phase. The researcher conducted an in-depth literature study and by means of a qualitative research approach, empirical data were collected through individual interviews, observations and document studies. The findings revealed a number of common themes on the impact of reading difficulties and the factors that may cause these difficulties. The research findings revealed that in order to prevent reading difficulties as barriers to learning, the essential components for reading development must be acquired effectively, the role of the teacher and the parent are crucial and the early identification and remediation of reading difficulties is paramount. Resulting from the findings in the empirical investigation and in correlation with the findings from literature, the researcher made recommendations regarding strategies to reduce reading difficulties

## **KEY TERMS**

reading; reading difficulties; barriers; transition; phonemic awareness; phonics; word recognition; fluency; reading vocabulary; comprehension

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# CHAPTER I

## ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading is a dynamic, complex act that involves bringing meaning to and getting meaning from the printed page. This definition implies that readers bring their backgrounds, experiences and emotions into play (Erekson, Opitz & Rubin, 2011:6). If our children do not learn to read, they are unlikely to succeed in life. During my years as a teacher I have experienced that learners with reading difficulties lose their interest in subjects that require learning from written material. Therefore without the ability to read, the opportunities for academic and occupational success will be limited (Kline & Lerner, 2006:372).

According to research by Brock-Utne, Desai and Qorro (2010:108, 109) there is a general agreement that, there is a crisis in school education in South Africa and this is notably in the schools that provide service to the less fortunate. These researchers add that literacy levels in South Africa currently pose one of the most severe challenges to the state. They state that as per measurement by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2006, Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners' ability to switch from learning to read to reading to learn during the Intermediate Phase is diminished. It was also stated that South African reading performance in Grade 4 does not compare with Grade 4 learners internationally, despite being a few years older than their international counterparts. There have been a number of literacy programmes that have been implemented with regards to reading difficulties. However research reveals that some learners still experience reading difficulties in the different grades and reasons for these barriers need to be identified in order for suitable support and intervention.

In addition to the above, The National Reading Strategy Campaign, an initiative by the Department of Education (DoE) envisages that every South African child will be a fluent reader who reads to learn and reads for enjoyment (DoE, 2008: 4-6). Gunning (2007:7) states that unlike mild or moderate difficulties, severe reading problems can be very detrimental to a child's academic progress and will require intensive

intervention. Learners who are poor readers in the early grades tend to be the lowest-achieving readers in the upper grades. Severe reading difficulties can be persistent and these reading problems may affect all aspects of a learner's life. Research by Gunning (2007:7) also shows that not only do the poor readers read less on their own, but that they have fewer opportunities to read independently at school.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The study focused on reading difficulties as barriers to learning experienced by learners entering the Intermediate Phase. In order for learners to learn to read effectively, there are two basic processes that are involved. The first process is the ability to learn to decipher the print. This entails learning to transform letter sequences into familiar words. The second process is the ability to comprehend what was read. This is the learners' ability to make meaning of the print. It is therefore vital for primary school teachers to make a contribution to the learners' ultimate reading success. This can be accomplished by the teacher helping the learners to acquire the alphabetical foundation which is necessary for learning to read words and strategies for comprehension (Reid & Wearmouth, 2006:167).

### **1.2.1 The need for a sound reading foundation**

Bailey, Patton, Pollaway and Serna (2013:114) state that the ability to read is essential for living in today's world. Personal independence requires at least functional literacy. Since reading is the basic skill for all academic subjects, failure in some schools or institutions of learning can be traced to inadequate reading skills and this failure to read restricts academic progress.

While Kline and Lerner (2006:373, 374, 383) add that proficiency in all subjects at school depends on the ability to read, the development of reading skills serves as major academic foundation for all school-based learning and is a key skill for acquiring and maintaining employment. They refer to reading as being so critical to success in our society that reading failure not only constitutes an educational problem, but also has lifelong implications.

These researchers add that reading is not a natural process and that it requires careful instruction. They describe reading as a lengthy process. The process of recognizing words is complex. Learners must be taught a number of strategies to accomplish this. It is vital for learners to learn to read in order to read to learn in future grades (Kline & Lerner, 2006:374).

### **1.2.2 Factors that influence reading development**

Research on reading difficulties that was conducted Burns, Griffin and Snow (1998:3) has revealed that effective reading instruction is built on the foundation that recognizes, that reading ability is determined by multiple factors. Adequate initial reading instruction requires that learners use reading to obtain meaning from print. In addition learners must have frequent and intensive opportunities to read. They must be exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships. Learners must learn about the nature of the alphabetical writing system and they must understand the structure of spoken words (Burns, Griffin & Snow, 1998:3).

While research by Kline and Lerner (2006:373) revealed that many learners may be at risk for reading failure due to the lack of phonemic awareness, non-familiarity with the letters of the alphabet and the lack of knowledge of the purpose of print, learners may lack ample oral language and have limited vocabularies. Linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the limited exposure to the English language may also cause learners to be at risk for reading failure.

The above statements are concurred by Burns *et al.*, (1998:3,4) that adequate progress in learning to read in English or in any alphabetic language, depends on the learner having a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically and having sufficient practice in reading in order to achieve fluency with different kinds of text. Coupled with this, learners must have sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary in order to render written texts meaningful and a continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes.

In order for a learner to be able to develop the skills mentioned above, one must understand that reading is a language skill (Anderson, Scanlon & Sweeny, 2010:18). Throughout the learners' early years they gradually and easily develop their linguistic system. They are usually equipped with innovative language which enables them to communicate their thoughts verbally. Learning to read does not begin at the conclusion of oral language but is the foundation from which written language emerges. Reading is an integral part of general language acquisition (Goldsworthy, 2003:22). The limited exposure to oral language can be seen as the first challenge to the learners, reading success and overall academic success (Jones & Wyse, 2008:14). In addition to language, the essential components that influence reading development in emerging literacy include: phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, reading vocabulary, fluency and reading comprehension (Barnsley, McLachlan, Mercer, Nicholson & Ohi, 2013:36; Kline & Lerner, 2006:377).

The development of skill with the alphabetic code requires that learners have insight into words that entails phonological awareness. They have to be aware that words are composed of individual sounds that are connected to letters in written words (Anderson *et al.*, 2010:76). Phonological awareness is the ability to hear sounds in words, such as syllables, rhyme and phonemes - an important skill linked to the acquisition of literacy. Learners who have been taught phonological awareness prior to beginning formal education (Grade R), have been found to be better equipped for learning to read. It is also believed that learners who do not have phonological insight, do not make sense of decoding instruction or of the relation between written and spoken words and thus fail to learn to read (Barnsley *et al.*, 2013:125).

Fellowes and Oakley (2010:26) state that phonological awareness is an important foundation for reading and writing alphabetic languages such as English. It is therefore a necessary pre-requisite for the application of knowledge about letter-sound relationships in the early grades. In addition, learners need to be taught effective phonics skills which would enable them to recognize words in the reading process, develop fluency to make the bridge from word recognition to reading comprehension. Learners need to possess adequate and grade level vocabulary as vocabulary occupies a central position in learning to read and it is strongly related to reading comprehension. Finally, all reading instruction should provide for the



development of reading comprehension as the ultimate purpose of reading is comprehension. This is the ability to gather meaning from the printed page (Kline & Lerner, 2006:378, 382, 386, 387). It is therefore vital for learners to read to become aware of all elements involved in reading and to use the reading system in a balanced way (Charlton & Jones, 1992:22; Jones & Wyse, 2008:14).

### **1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

Research reveals that in 2006 South Africa participated in the PIRLS, with 40 other countries and 45 education systems making up this study. This international study saw 215 000 Grade 4 learners being surveyed across the 40 countries. Majority of the countries were developed with some still developing. During PIRLS, South Africa represented the baseline for reading literacy in primary schools, across all 11 languages. According to research, South Africa had the largest number of learners, that is 16 057 participate. According to the PIRLS results, the learners from South Africa achieved the lowest scores of the 40 countries. It is estimated that 80% of the learners from South Africa, failed to reach the low international benchmark. It was noted that many South African learners had not mastered the basic reading skills, in contrast to the 6% of the learners internationally (Dowse, Howie, Tshele, Van Staden, & Zimmerman, 2012:6).

As an educator at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal, and having read the PIRLS statistics, as well as other research studies, reasons for the learners' reading difficulties when they enter the Intermediate Phase were sought. The researcher is of the opinion that if the reading difficulties are not identified and the necessary recommendations are not given timeously, the learners will continue to struggle throughout the phase. Hence the researcher is interested in finding out why some of the learners in Grade 4 are experiencing reading difficulties, the types of reading difficulties they are facing and the impact of these reading difficulties on the other subjects and academic success in Grade 4.

### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The National Reading Strategy campaign, an initiative by the DoE envisages that every South African child will be a fluent reader that reads to learn and reads for enjoyment (DoE, 2008:4). However many research studies and literacy programmes have highlighted that reading difficulties are still prevalent in many primary schools with the emphasis placed on learners entering the Intermediate Phase as stated in the motivation for this study. Research by Bharuthram (2012:205) revealed that after a number of studies by independent researchers, it was concurred that many learners are not reading at the expected levels in specific grades.

Against this background, the main research question is stated below:

- What is the nature of reading difficulties experienced by learners when they enter the Intermediate Phase?

The main research question is divided into five sub-questions. These will be investigated first in order to contribute to the main research question. The sub-questions are:

- What are the essential components for reading development?
- What types of reading difficulties are the learners facing when entering the intermediate phase?
- What influence do the identified types of reading difficulties have on the learners' learning in other subjects and academic success?
- What are the factors that influence these reading difficulties?
- What are the factors that can improve reading?

## **1.5 AIMS OF THE STUDY**

Under normal circumstances, every learner should have the ability to learn to read. This ability is fundamental to be able to function at school and in society. Reading difficulties as barriers to learning experienced by learners entering the Intermediate Phase can be combated when teachers and stakeholders are given the necessary tools to assist in the reading development of a learner. In this study a rich description

of factors that influence reading development and factors that can cause reading difficulties are presented. The research aims are to:

- Determine the components that are essential for reading development
- Determine the types of reading difficulties in Grade 4
- Determine the influence of reading difficulties on the learners' learning in all subjects and on academic progress
- Determine the factors that can cause reading difficulties
- Determine the factors that can improve reading

The research design and methodology that were executed to accumulate the appropriate data in order to accomplish the research aims and to answer the research questions is discussed below.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:2,3) describe research as being a systematic process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data in order to increase one's understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Research can be understood by the following 8 distinct characteristics which include:

- It requires clear goal setting
- It originates with a question or a problem
- It requires a specific plan of action
- It divides the main problem into manageable and understandable sub-problems
- It has clear guidelines that are the research problem or research question
- It requires critical assumptions
- It requires the collection and analysis of data that relates to the research problem
- It follows logical and developmental steps, therefore making it cyclical or helical in nature.

The researcher in the study outlined the aims and objectives in that the nature of the reading difficulties experienced by some learners entering the Intermediate Phase was investigated. This was guided by the main research question and was then divided into manageable sub-questions. The research encompassed a pre-empirical phase, which is the literature review and the empirical investigation. The literature review allowed for the interpretation of the research conducted by different researchers and authors on reading difficulties as barriers to learning. The second phase, which was the empirical investigation, included the collection and analysis of data which related to the research problem while administering a qualitative data approach.

### **1.6.1 Literature review**

The literature review in this research study described theoretical perspectives and previous research findings on the study at hand. A literature review has a number of benefits and the following benefits were gained using guidelines given by Leedy and Ormrod (2005:64, 65). New perspectives and ideas were gained using the literature review on reading difficulties of learners entering the Intermediate Phase. Information on the handling of methodology and research design was also obtained. New sources of data, measurement tools and problem solving methods that can be employed by the researcher and help to interpret the findings. Many of the sources of the literature study revealed that:

- In order for learners to be successful in life, they need to be able to read and comprehend effectively.
- Reading literacy can be regarded as one of the most important abilities that learners acquire as they progress through their early school years, ie. primary school.
- Many learners in South Africa are not able to read, write and count at the expected levels and are unable to execute tasks that demonstrate key skills associated with literacy.
- There is a decline in literacy levels in primary school especially when learners enter the Intermediate Phase.

## **1.6.2 The empirical investigation**

The researcher chose to use the qualitative research approach in this study in order to answer the central research question. The research question stated in par.1.4, required a research approach which deals with real-life experiences. These had to be studied in their natural setting and be in-depth as discussed by Leedy and Ormrod (2005:35). The real-life experiences of the learners in Grade 4 had to be studied in their natural setting, that is the classroom. The proposed research topic required the analysis drawn from a number of sources of data collection, such as observations, documentation and interviews.

Qualitative research serves one or more of the following purposes: Qualitative research can reveal the settings, the nature of some situations, relationships, as well as the nature of people and allows for new insights to be gained by the researcher. Qualitative research allows for the development of new concepts and for the discovery of problems that may exist within the phenomenon that is being studied. Qualitative research allows for the testing of validity and also provides a means for the evaluation of the effectiveness of theories (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:135; Bailey, Hennik & Hutter, 2011:10). Lichtman (2010:41) states that if a researcher fits the criteria below, then a qualitative research approach should be followed. Does the researcher have an interest in people and is he/she empathetic towards them, their situations and environment and is the researcher interested in people in their natural settings? Does he/she have a passion to study questions about the interaction of people and how some cultures are nurtured? Does he/she have an interest in looking at the behaviours, thoughts and feelings of individuals with certain character traits? The researcher of this study has a deep interest in the well-being and holistic development of learners at primary school level and will strive to use the information gained, to provide suitable suggestions on the way forward.

The researcher selected an on-site, single instrument descriptive case study. This case study design was bounded by time, ie. three months of data collection. The case study design was also bound by a single place, ie. a single primary school. The unit of analysis was the reading difficulties as barriers to learning. The interest was in

process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable and in discovery rather than confirmation. The how, when, where and why things happen are noted and formed part of the study (Henning, 2004:41). The data collected in this case design provided information on the nature of the case, the historical background, the physical setting and all other contexts as discussed by Mertens (2010:243).

Since a case study is the study of the singular, the particular and the unique, this researcher was able to make meaning of the nature of the reading difficulties experienced by the selected Grade 4 learners. The researcher was the key instrument in the data collection and employed three types of data collection. The data consisted of in-depth interviews, observations and document studies. This was possible after the necessary consent was obtained. The main goal was to obtain a rich description of the case and a holistic understanding of the phenomenon within its social context. Using the case study design, the researcher was able to build an understanding by addressing the research questions and triangulating the descriptions with interpretations on an ongoing process as discussed by (Biber, Leavy & Nagy, 2011:265; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:135).

#### **1.6.2.1 Participant selection**

With qualitative research, the researchers make selective use of the data and draw the data from a number of sources (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:145). The qualitative researcher also engages in a series of activities in the process of collecting data (Creswell, 2013:146). The purposive sampling method was employed by the researcher. The participants were able to yield the most information about the topic were chosen. The participants were chosen from a distinct target group as their information was of specific importance to this research study.

The research site was a multi-cultural and multi-racial school in the Zululand region of KwaZulu-Natal. The District is located in the north-eastern region of KwaZulu-Natal. This district is a semi-urban environment with a population of 907,519 (Main, 2015:172). The learners at this primary school come from the suburb as well as from the surrounding residential areas. The participants in this study included: Nine Grade

4 learners between the age of nine and ten, some of the parents or guardians of the selected Grade 4 learners, three parents in total, six teachers who teach or have taught Grade 4 learners and three Foundation Phase teachers.

All the teacher participants have a number of years of teaching experience, and have been involved in teaching Grade 4 learners at some stage. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with all the participants. The teacher participants were able to provide rich data as they acquired many years of teaching experience and each one of them had previously taught Grade 4 learners or were currently teaching a subject in the Grade 4 classes. The criteria for selecting the learners were based on information obtained from the teachers who previously taught the learners and from the review of previous documents. This information was obtained after all the ethical requirements were met. The data collected from the in-depth individual interviews was supplemented by observations and document studies. The observations were conducted during the different subjects in the Grade 4 classes.

#### **1.6.2.2 Data collection**

Data are the concrete reflections of the social world that can be sensed, which means that data are what we can see, hear, taste, touch or smell. Data come from asking people identical questions, and having them choose their answers from a limited set of possibilities (Loseke, 2013:15). In a case study, the researcher collects extensive data on the phenomenon on which the investigation is focused. Data collection methods for a qualitative case study include: interviews, observations, documents, past records and use of audio-visual material (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:135). The data collected from the different sources must lead to triangulation in order for it to be verified (Creswell, 2013:210). The researcher chose the collection of data through observations, interviews and documents (learner workbooks and assessments). These data collection instruments are discussed in detail below.

##### **a) Observations**

Observations, according to Simons (2009:55) create a comprehensive picture of the site and a sense of the setting, which cannot be obtained solely by speaking to

people. Documenting observed incidents and events provides a “rich description” and a basis for further analysis and interpretation.

According to Creswell (2007:134), observation of the study sample requires a series of steps which the researcher plans on following during this study. The researcher has to identify who and what is to be observed. In the study on reading difficulties as barriers to learning, the researcher observed the reading behaviour of the selected learners. The role assumed by the researcher was that of an insider. The researcher also designed an observational protocol as a method of recording notes in the field of study. The researcher made use of a second observer for reliability of findings. Two Grade 4 classes consisting of approximately 40 learners were observed. Checklists were used during the observations.

#### **b) Documents**

Documents are used in a research study to shed light on the phenomenon that is being investigated. Written data may include published and unpublished documents. The authenticity and accuracy of the documents must be evaluated prior to using them (Maree, 2007:4, 5). In this study, the researcher accessed workbooks, report cards, tests, files and correspondence of the selected Grade 4 learners from the principal and class teachers after all ethical requirements were fulfilled. These documents were used to supplement data received from interviews and observations.

#### **c) Interviews**

In this empirical investigation in-depth individual interviews were conducted. The interviews with the teachers were guided by an interview schedule and focused on the questions relating to the need for a good reading foundation, the elements crucial for reading development and academic success. The individual interviews with the learners focused on their feelings with regards to the reading difficulties they were experiencing. The individual interviews with the parents focused on the reading behaviour of the learner outside school.



### **1.6.2.3 Data Analysis**

In order to break down the data collection in this study, the researcher organized the data using index cards and folders. The researcher then identified general categories and themes and classified each piece of data accordingly using the guidelines as stipulated by Leedy and Ormrod (2005:150).

In this study the researcher organized the data obtained during observations and interviews in a logical order and categorized it into meaningful groups. Categorizing involves the grouping of codes with similar attributes into broader categories in order to give a more conceptual understanding of the data (Bailey *et al.*,2011:245, 246).

The researcher employed the following data analysis strategies manually as discussed by Creswell (2007:149).

- all ideas obtained in the data collection process were sketched,
- all notes that were taken were summarized,
- identification of salient themes or patterns obtained in the data collection,
- related categories and built a logical chain of evidence and finally displayed the data in tables.

### **1.6.2.4 Trustworthiness and Transferability**

In order to ensure the trustworthiness and transferability of the data that was collected, analyzed and interpreted, the researcher collected multiple types of data to support the interpretation. The use of multiple sources of data allows for triangulation, thus increasing the trustworthiness of the study. To ensure credibility of the research study, prolonged engagement in the field is necessary, thus the researcher spent three months of data collection at the research site. The researcher has been a level one primary school teacher and a School Based Support Team (SBST) member for a number of years and this provided valuable insights into the research problem. The researcher employed the technique of member checking, use of a second observer

and video recording of the interviews after obtaining the necessary permission. A review of all interviews was conducted at the end of all individual interviews to allow for accuracy of the data. These techniques helped increase the reliability of the research study. These guidelines were employed as discussed by Shenton (2004:64, 72)

### **1.6.2.5 Ethical Considerations**

#### **a) Ethics**

Ethics is how we behave or should behave in relation to the people with whom we interact, this means establishing throughout a relationship with participants that respects human dignity and integrity throughout the research process (Simons, 2009:96). It was necessary for the researcher to obtain an ethics clearance certificate from UNISA after all the requirements for this study were met. This included:

- Written permission was sought and obtained from the Head of Department at the KwaZulu DoE, the Senior Education Minister at the District where the institution is situated as well as from the principal of the school.
- Written permission was sought and obtained from all the participants after a detailed explanation of the study was given to them and on the plans for the use of data that was collected.
- Written permission was obtained from the parents of the underage participants as well as assent from the learners themselves.

The researcher made certain that the privacy and confidentiality of the participants are respected and maintained. If any participant refused to participate in the study their decision was respected.

#### **b) Doing No Harm**

What constitutes harm is interpreted differently by different people and may be perceived differently at different times (Simons, 2009:97). The researcher adopted procedures and methods that were relevant to the research in question and ensured

that no harm came to the participants with regards to any information that was revealed unintentionally.

The researcher in this study followed the ethical procedure as discussed by Simons (2009:102):

- The researcher made the purpose of the study and the anticipated audiences for the information clear at the outset, in this instance the principal, the teachers, the learner participants and the parents of the learner participants of the institution where the study was conducted.
- The researcher sought permission to access documents, workbooks, report cards, tests, files and correspondence of the participants from the principal and participants as these documents formed part of the required data.
- The principle of confidentiality was adhered to throughout the research and no discussion with non-participants was entered into.
- The researcher did not use or divulge any information that the participants' requested to be kept in confidence.
- In keeping with Denzin and Lincoln (2000:138, 139), the researcher ensured that participants agreed voluntarily to participate, ie. without physical or psychological coercion. In addition, the participants' agreement was based on full and open information.

## **1.7 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

The following key terms outlined below are used and understood within the context of this study.

### **1.7.1 Reading**

Reading is a dynamic, complex act that involves bringing meaning to and getting meaning from the printed page. This definition implies that readers bring their backgrounds, experiences and emotions into play (Erekson *et al.*, 2011:6)

### **1.7.2 Reading difficulties**

A learning disorder marked by impairment of the ability to recognize and comprehend written words. Reading difficulties can also be defined as the inability to grasp concepts from print, a problem to recognize and decode words, difficulty in grasping phonetic knowledge and difficulty in comprehending text that has been read (Grosser & Spafford, 2005:53).

### **1.7.3 Barriers to learning**

A barrier to learning is anything that stands in the way of a child being able to learn effectively. A learner may experience one or more barriers to learning throughout his or her education (R2ECWD, 2011).

### **1.7.4 Transition**

Transition is the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another (Hornby, 2000:1274). In this study transition refers to the progression of learners from the Foundation to the Intermediate Phase.

### **1.7.5 Phonemic awareness**

The ability to notice, think about and work with individual sounds in spoken words. In order to read print, children must first become aware of how sounds work in words (DoE, 2008:13).

### **1.7.6 Phonics**

Refers to the relationship between printed letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes) in language. Children must learn to decode printed language and translate print into sounds (DoE, 2008:13).

### **1.7.7 Word recognition**

Word recognition is the ability of a reader to recognize written words correctly and virtually effortlessly. It is sometimes referred to as "isolated word recognition" because it entails a reader's ability to recognize words individually from a list, for example without the benefit of surrounding words for contextual help (Luckner & Urbach, 2012).

### **1.7.8 Fluency**

The ability to read texts accurately and with understanding. Fluency is an important factor in how children comprehend text (DoE, 2008:17). Fluency is also defined as the ability to read accurately at an acceptable fluency rate, based on the learner's grade level which leads to an increased reading comprehension (Courter, 2011:75; Levey & Polirstok, 2011:198; O'Connor & Vadasay, 2011:168).

### **1.7.9 Reading vocabulary**

Vocabulary, as discussed by Kline and Lerner (2006:386), is said to occupy a central position in learning to read. These authors believe that a learner's vocabulary has a significant effect on their achievement and this is strongly related to reading comprehension. A learner is expected not only to read a word or words, but must

also make meaning of that word. The learner must also be able to apply or use and understand the word in the appropriate context. Learners acquire vocabulary through speaking and listening and then by recognizing words from print or a text.

#### **1.7.10 Reading comprehension**

The purpose of reading comprehension is to gather meaning from the printed page. It is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text. It is also a thinking process and can be viewed as a problem-solving ability (Kline & Lerner, 2006:387). Comprehension is described as the ultimate aim of reading and listening as it enables one to acquire information, to experience and be aware of other fictional worlds, to communicate successfully and ultimately to achieve academic success. The goal of reading a text is to get an overall picture of the text instead of retrieving the meanings of individual words or sentences, thus when a learner experiences comprehension difficulties, meaning of the overall text will not be established (Cain & Oakhill, 2007:1).

### **1.8 RESEARCH PROGRAMME**

This study is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 provides an orientation to this study. This chapter includes a detailed discussion on the background of the study, the problem statement, the aims of the study, the research approach and design and the research methodology.

Chapter 2 entails the literature review on reading literacy, the essential elements for acquiring reading skills and factors that influence reading development together with a theoretical framework on how children learn and the impact this has on learning to read.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion on the research approach, design and methodology in order to conduct the empirical investigation. Data collection methods are also discussed. The analysis and interpretation of the data is discussed in detail.

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth analysis and interpretation on the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the literature review and the empirical investigation. The researcher draws conclusions and recommendations are made on how to assist learners in Grade 4 with reading difficulties.

## **1.9 CONCLUSION**

Reading is fundamental for success. If children do not learn to read, they cannot succeed in life. Without the ability to read, the opportunities for academic and occupational success are limited. If these difficulties are not identified timeously, and not resolved early in a child's life, then the problem will persist until it is too late to assist the child overcome the barriers to reading (Kline & Lerner,2006:372).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **READING DIFFICULTIES AS BARRIERS TO LEARNING**

In this chapter, I will discuss the consequences of reading difficulties, the essential components that are vital for acquiring reading skills and finally I will discuss the factors that can cause reading difficulties.

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Reading is said to be a dynamic, complex act that involves bringing meaning to and getting meaning from the printed page. This definition implies that readers bring their backgrounds, experiences and emotions into play (Erekson *et al.*,2011:6). Reading is also a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency and motivation. It requires that we: identify the words in print, a process called word recognition and construct an understanding from them. This process is called comprehension, and to coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate. This achievement is called fluency (Leipzig, 2001).

Bosker and Van Staden (2013:1) state that reading literacy can be regarded as one of the most important abilities that learners acquire as they progress through their early school years. The researcher concurs with this statement as the ability to read is fundamental to negotiate life. However many learners are facing reading difficulties in primary school as revealed in the PIRLS report which was discussed in chapter one. Further discussion on reading by Meier (2011:549) shows that many learners in South Africa are not able to read, write and count at the expected levels and more especially are unable to execute tasks that demonstrate key skills associated with literacy. In addition the results of the Annual National Assessment (ANA) of 2011 for Grades 2 to 7 revealed that Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners scored an average of 35% and 28% respectively for literacy (Desmond & Nassimbeni, 2011:95)

Greyling and Joubert (1989:12) state that reading is the foundation of the ability to learn and study, and is therefore part of an educated person's make-up. Thus, there is a direct relationship between sound reading skills and successful study. These



authors argue that people are able to obtain information and communicate through reading, therefore a learner who experiences reading difficulties will not be able to enjoy these two benefits of reading. Since the reading process is also the social construction of meaning from print and is a very complex process, it requires the active involvement of the reader, who has to interact with the printed page in order to derive meaning. However, a learner with reading difficulties will not be an active participant in this reading process. It is therefore essential for good teaching background, knowledge of schema, motivation, interest, prior experiences with reading, exposure to print and resiliency to be maintained throughout a learner's primary school years. These factors have a direct influence on how efficient and effective the learner will be during the reading process.

Since reading skills are necessary to study at school as well as to find suitable employment, the research of this study aims to find suitable reasons for reading difficulties at primary school, especially when learners enter the Intermediate Phase as in this grade reading now forms the basis for learning in all subjects.

## **2.2 ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS“READING” AND “READING DIFFICULTIES”**

Reading is the process of understanding written language. It begins with a flutter of patterns on the retina and ends, that is, if reading is successful, with a definite idea about the author's intended message. Reading can be seen as a perceptual and cognitive process (Ruddell & Unrau, 2004:149). Seeing that reading is the process of understanding written language, Acevedo and Rose (2006:1) state that anyone who has been to school knows that the central skill that all learners need in order to achieve success, is to be able to read and to learn from reading. As a foundation for learning across all subjects, literacy can be used for recreation and personal growth, while simultaneously providing young learners with the ability to participate more extensively in their communities and societies (Bosker & Van Staden, 2013:1). The ability to read is a necessity to function in a modern society and learners who do not achieve reading success will have limited opportunities.

Reading is a complex process that requires the analysis, co-ordination and interpretation of a variety of sources of information. This complex process has to be considered in order to effectively meet the needs of learners during the acquisition of reading skills (Anderson *et al.*, 2010:9). These researchers further emphasise that literacy instruction for all learners, especially those with reading difficulties, must consider the complexity of the reading process. This include the ability to read the words of a text, retrieve the words' meanings, put the words together to form meaningful ideas and assemble a larger model of what the text is about. If a learner has difficulties with one of the steps in the reading process, this could result in the learner experiencing reading difficulties for all given texts. Research has proven that learners who lag behind their peers in early reading development, are at a high risk of experiencing prolonged reading difficulties (Anderson *et al.*, 2010:12).

In addition to experiencing prolonged reading difficulties, these learners are unlikely to succeed in life, for without the ability to read, the opportunities for academic and occupational success are limited (Kline & Lerner, 2006:372).It is therefore vital that reading difficulties be identified and appropriate learner support be given, in order to avoid long-term reading difficulties. Since reading is the basic skill for all academic subjects, a learner with reading difficulties is likely to achieve little or no academic success.

Coupled with academic success or lack there-of effective reading skills are necessary for obtaining and maintaining employment. If a learner experiences early reading difficulties with little or no support, then their chances of obtaining suitable employment later in life will be severely hampered. There are few job opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled workers, so the learners who experience reading difficulties are likely to be unemployed in future (Kline & Lerner, 2006:374). Anderson *et al.*, (2010:47) reiterate the importance and of reading, in that reading competency is essential for school success and almost all employment. These researchers add that inadequate reading ability puts the youth at a high risk for school dropout, followed by failure to develop satisfying, self-sufficient and productive lives.

Further discussion by O'Connor and Vadasay (2011:1) reveal that reading and proficient literacy skills are critical to negotiate life in the complex world of the 21<sup>st</sup>

century. These authors stress that learners who do not acquire a strong foundation in reading skills may experience continued poor school outcomes in reading and in content area learning. They add that the learners who struggle with reading could likely have a diminished motivation to succeed in school.

Snowling and Stackhouse (2006:45) believe that learning to read is a very difficult task since it is multidimensional in nature. Effective readers need to consistently, efficiently and rapidly apply their knowledge of the phonology of language to words while reading and simultaneously construct meaning of what is being read. This would be a very tedious and frustrating task for learners who experience reading difficulties. These authors explain that a reader accesses their short term memory with previously stored readings as well as schemata from their long-term memory in order to link new information to what is already known and what was just read. For this to be possible, effective reading acquisition skills are necessary for effective reading and application of knowledge.

Acevedo and Rose (2006:1) advocate that in each stage of schooling the demands on reading skills become more and more complex and conceptually challenging. Yet after the early years of school, the explicit skills to learn from reading are not taught and especially not in secondary school, where they are more critical than ever. They argue that the top learners are instead left to pick up these skills intuitively as they study across the curriculum, whereas less successful learners rarely do.

Biancarosa (2012:22) adds that even excellent basic reading instruction in the primary grades does not guarantee that a learner will successfully make the shift to the higher-level literacy demands in later grades. She feels that researchers have long recognized that academic reading changes after Grade 3, and this transition can be seen as a shift from learning to read to reading to learn. This researcher believes that to make this transition, learners must learn how to organize and apply their background knowledge as a context for their reading, get information efficiently from text, and monitor and adjust their reading as required.

Lemmer, Meier and Van Wyk (2012:72) reiterate that in the Foundation Phase of primary school, learners spend a lot of time reading, writing and enjoying stories but

as learners move into the Intermediate Phase that is, Grade 4, 5 and 6 and the Senior Phase that is, Grade 7, 8 and 9, much of their reading is subject related. Since each type of text calls for a particular reading skill, mastery in these skills is necessary for effective achievement in all subjects in Grade 4 and in the rest of the Intermediate Phase. The stages in reading skills that promotes reading in South African schools is vital and is discussed below.

In keeping with the statement with regards to the teaching of reading skills at the different stages of a learners' life, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) gives clear guidelines to all stakeholders in education. This document outlines the aims of the South African Curriculum as well as the programme of teaching and learning and promotion requirements. The second part of this document, known as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS), provides guidelines on the processes and procedures for the assessment of learners in all subjects. The NCS for Grades R to Grade 12 aims to produce learners who are able to:

- Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking
- Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes
- Collect, analyze, organize and critically evaluate information (DoE, 2011:4, 5).

These are three of the six aims as outlined in the NCS document. In order to satisfy these aims, a learner must be equipped with effective reading skills. The stages of reading development from Grades R to Grade 6 will be discussed below as envisaged by the Department of Basic Education.

The DoE (2007:9,10,11,12) discusses the stages of reading in primary school in order for academic success in the Intermediate and Senior Phases of a learner's life. The stages include:

Stage 1: The pre-reader that is the Grade R learner, should be able to hold a book and turn the pages correctly while identifying the beginning and the end of the book.

The pre-reader should be able to listen to, and respond to stories, interpret pictures, pretend to read, have some knowledge of letters and show interest in print.

Stage 2: The emergent reader includes learners in Grades 1 and 2 should be able to use pictures to tell stories, know some sounds or phonemes and letters that make the sounds, know the side the African and European print runs from, should be able to join the teacher or any reader when reading familiar books, should be able to recognize some words and also be able to read print in the environment as well as familiar books with word patterns.

Stage 3: The early reader includes learners in Grades 1, 2 and 3 who should know most of the letter sounds and names, whilst recognizing some common words. The early reader should be able to re-tell an age-appropriate story and will use pictures to make meaning of text. It is also envisaged that they should be able to read 70% of the words correctly in a familiar text. The child should also be able to read aloud when reading to self although he/she will still read word by word and not yet fluently. The learner is expected to read early readers and picture books with patterns and repetition as well as rhyme in both the Home Language and Additional Languages.

Stage 4: The developing reader should be able to use pictures to make meaning of text and use knowledge of sentence structure as well as phonics to decode words. They should then be able to combine words into phrases rather than reading word for word. They should also be able to re-tell the beginning, the middle and end of the story with some details and should have basic sight word vocabulary with at least 50 words. In addition to the above, the learner should also be able to apply punctuation to reading and could read longer texts, although books will have larger print.

Stage 5: The early fluent reader should be able to use different cueing systems such as phonics, language knowledge and general language in order to make meaning of text and should recognize most familiar words on sight, that is at least 200 words. They should be able to read at least 60 words per minute fluently. They should be able to use punctuation to enhance their comprehension of text and could read texts with longer and more complex sentence structures. They should also be able to read

books with smaller print at this level and will be able to use reference material with guidance.

Stage 6: The independent reader should be able to use cueing systems, which include phonics and language as well as general knowledge, to make meaning of text. They should be able to read at least 60 words per minute fluently and understand books with unfamiliar settings, will be able to understand implied meanings and read longer and more advanced books with chapters, including fiction and non-fiction. They should also be able to use reference books independently. The DoE (2007:11) envisaged that all learners should be at stage 6, that is independent readers by the end of Grade 6.

The DoE envisaged the following with regards to reading and viewing according to (Archer, Du Toit, Howie, Long, Scherman, Van Staden & Zimmerman, 2008:6, 7):

- The learner at Grade R to Grade 3 level should be able to use visual clues to make meaning, will be able to role-play reading at Grade 1, will make meaning of written text from Grade R to Grade 3 and start recognizing and making meaning of letters and words.
- At Grade R level learners should begin to develop phonemic awareness and this awareness should be developed further in Grades 1 and 2. This should then be consolidated in Grade 3 and all learners from Grade R to Grade 3 should read for information and enjoyment.
- This document states that by Grade 3 the learners should be able to read texts alone by using a variety of strategies to make meaning of the text.

The DoE envisaged that upon entering the Intermediate Phase, that is in Grade 4 the learner is expected to use the acquired reading skills in the eight subjects that he/she will be engaging in (Archer *et.al.*, 2008:7). The following skills are envisaged for the learners in Grade 4:

- The learner should be able to read a variety of texts for different purposes, including comprehension of text using comprehension strategies.
- View and comment on a number of texts.

- Describe their feelings on the text.
- Discuss the choice of language used in the text.
- Identify and discuss the central idea in a text.
- Infer reasons for the actions in a story.
- Understand and respond appropriately to information texts and select information texts for their own information.

In addition to the vision of the DoE in South Africa, research by Burns, Griffin and Snow(1999: 107, 118, 119) indicate the accomplishments of learners in Grades 1, 2 and 3, which are crucial to understand the level at which a learner should be at when entering the Intermediate Phase.

The first grade accomplishments include: the ability to transition from emergent to real reading, to read age-appropriate text aloud with accuracy and comprehension while accurately decoding one syllable words using print-sound mapping in order to sound out unknown words. The learner should use letter-sound knowledge to sound out unknown words when reading and be able to recognize common, irregularly spelt words by sight (Burns *et al.*, 1999:107).

Burns *et al.* (1999:107) add that the Grade 1 learner should have a reading vocabulary of 300 to 500 sight words and easily sounded-out words, while reading and comprehending both fiction and non-fiction that is of the grade level. The learners will show evidence of expanding language and begin to use more formal language. The learner should be able to create his/her own text for others to read and read and understand simple written instructions. They should be able to predict what will happen in stories and discuss prior knowledge. In addition they will be able to answer simple comprehension questions based on what was read, count the syllables in a word, blend and segment phonemes of one syllabic words and engage in a variety of literacy activities, amongst other accomplishments.

The accomplishments of the Grade 2 learner according to Burns *et al.*, (1999:118) include the ability to read and comprehend fiction and non-fiction texts while accurately decoding regular, multi-syllabic words and sounding out unknown words. Grade 2 learners should be able to accurately read irregularly spelt words, read and

comprehend both fiction and non-fiction, read voluntarily and compare and connect information across texts. The Grade 2 learner should also be able to reread sentences when meaning is not clear and recall facts and details of texts. They should be able to read non-fiction materials for answers to specific questions or for specific purposes.

While the Grade 3 accomplishments include the learner being able to read aloud with fluency and comprehension, use letter-sound knowledge to decode words, read and comprehend both fiction and non-fiction text. The learner should be able to read longer fictional selections and chapter books independently, with the ability to point out words that cause comprehension difficulties. Being able to infer word meanings from taught roots, suffixes and prefixes and being able to incorporate literacy words and language patterns in own writings are important accomplishments for the Grade 3 learner (Burns *et al.*, 1999:119). I will now discuss the theoretical framework for the reading process.

## **2.3 THE READING PROCESS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.3.1 Theories on the learning process and how individuals learn to read**

This study is influenced by a number of theories on how individuals learn. It is vital for any research to be governed or guided by specific theories as theories provide a well-documented explanation for the phenomenon in a research study. These theories become part of the body of content knowledge that constitutes the field. The existence of viable theories greatly facilitate scientific progress by explaining the phenomenon in a study (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:5, 6, 7).

#### **2.3.1.1 Constructivism**

Constructivists believe that individuals develop knowledge through active participation in their learning. New knowledge is said to integrate with existing knowledge and this involves the active engagement in the learning process. Learning takes place through internal mechanisms with no external noticeable indicators. Learning involves hypothesis testing and is a process of inferencing. This implies that



an individual fills in gaps when trying to comprehend written or oral language (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:57, 58).

### **2.3.1.2 Social Constructivism**

The socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky states that children develop from the “outside in”. This theorist believed that development takes place through social interactions. His research shows that children from a very young age are able to construct meanings from their social interactions, they learn from social interactions within a cultural context and what and how they learn is determined by the culture in which they grow up (Berk, 2003:257; Bredekamp, 2014:45; Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2006:50).

The socio-cultural theory also states that children are able to achieve on their own, but they would achieve much more with assistance, as explained by the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This zone shows the difference in the actual development level of a child using his/her own potential, compared to achievement accomplished through adult assistance as well as with the interaction with other children. The role of the teacher is vital in the acquisition of reading skills and the teacher should not be seen as a controller but rather as a collaborator. The teacher is seen as a mediator who helps the learner to form links in a process of understanding. Higher human mental functions must be viewed as products of mediated activity. Emphasis is on the course of interaction between children and adults, the young learner would identify effective means for remembering, as the adult should have highly developed memory skills. Finally, the term “scaffolding” is important. The teachers should be able to adjust the assistance they provide to fit the learner’s level of performance. Direct instruction should be a tool to offer assistance for a new task whilst less help should be provided as the level of competence increases (Berk, 2003:258; Morrow & Tracey, 2012: 127,128; Vygotsky, 1978: 124,126)

### **2.3.1.3 Cognitive Development Theory**

The cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget stressed the importance of an individual as an active organism as he/she progresses in cognitive development. Piaget believed that there are certain factors that influence the thinking of an individual. These factors include: biological maturation whereby the genetics of the individual comes into play in growth development. The second factor is activity which refers to physical experiences that assist in the construction of knowledge. The next factor is social experiences which involve the interaction with other individuals thus enabling the construction of knowledge. The final factor is equilibrium which refers to cognitive balance when cognitive imbalance occurs. This means that a frustration is experienced when a learner has to accommodate new information (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:91).

According to Donald *et al.*, (2006:50), people are constantly confronted with new information from the environment ie. the physical and social world. Their discussion of Piaget's cognitive development theory reveals that children are said to construct complex 'maps' of knowledge in an attempt to organize, understand and adapt to it. This is done in three stages and include: assimilation which is the introduction of relevant information to the information that is already in the child's mind. The child's map of ideas is thus extended. Accomodation is the next stage and occurs when a child reshapes or makes adjustments to his current map of knowledge to accomodate new information. Finally equilibration takes place, which is the balance between assimilation and accommodation.

The child is said to have cognitive conflict when faced with new knowledge. This is however seen as positive development because a challenge means knowledge is used to deal with the challenge. According to Piaget's cognitive developmental theory this occurs in stages.

- In stage one, from the ages of birth to two, which is the sensory motor stage, infants think by acting on the world with their eyes, ears, hands and mouth.
- The pre-operational stage is between two to seven years, where the child develops language and make-believe play takes place.

- Concrete operational is the next stage and this is between the ages of seven and 11 years when logical reasoning begins and children are able to organize information.
- Finally, the formal operational stage, which is between 11 years and over, which is where more abstract thinking takes place and children are able to “think” about things and use reasoning to answer questions. This theory provides a vital framework and gives a clear explanation of how the minds of children develop (Donald *et al.*, 2006:56).

#### **2.3.1.4 Psycholinguistic Theory**

This theory can be described as constructive in nature as it is based on the assumption that reading is primarily a language process. The emphasis is on the reader’s reliance on language cueing systems that aid rapid reading. These cueing systems include:

- Syntactic cues which are related to the grammatical or syntax of language.
- Semantic cues, these are related to the meaning of words and sentences. They allow for the prediction of new words.
- Graphophonic cues, these are derived from visual patterns of letters and words and corresponding sounds. They enable a reader to predict new words in a text (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:68, 69).

This theory also emphasizes the use of a language system to guide reading. Readers are said to use their knowledge about language and the world in general to drive their thinking as they engage in the reading process. Readers are said to make predictions about a text using the knowledge they already possess. They use prediction and hypothesis testing rapidly and unconsciously. This allows for quick progression through the text rather than reading every word separately. The use of authentic reading material is preferable to practice worksheets. This theory also stresses that language is not phonetically constrained. Finally, the developing reader is viewed as a “reader” per se (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:69).

#### **2.3.1.5 Behaviourist Theory**

Behaviourists like B.F. Skinner believed that only what can be observed, that is outward behaviour deserves scientific inquiry. To them learning is affected by changes in behaviour. Behaviourist theorists were of the opinion that all children can learn if influenced correctly. Their theory concentrated on content learning and environmental influence. Children are said to react to the environment based on their prior experiences. They added, that should a test be given to a learner and the correct response be given, then the learner could move on to the next question. However, should the response be incorrect, the learner should try until the answer is correct. The outcome of learning, according to this theory is an observable change in behaviour. This behavioural change is as result of response to stimuli. External stimuli can be manipulated to either strengthen or reduce an individual's behaviour (Morrow & Tracey, 2012: 41; Pacis & Weegar, 2012:2, 5).

With regards to reading, the behaviourist theory viewed the task of reading as a complex act consisting of components. These parts include: visual discrimination, which is the ability to discriminate shapes and letters; auditory discrimination which involves sounds of the alphabet, left and right progression and vocabulary, which is word recognition and comprehension, and entails gaining an understanding of what was read. This called for a sub-skills teaching approach where the task of reading is broken down into different elements. Emphasis is on the mastery of these elements. Each element that is learnt needs an overt response. Correct responses receive reinforcing feedback, but if the response is incorrect, the emphasis is on repeated learning until the correct response is given. Direct instruction is necessary from teachers who help focus the learner's attention on specific concepts, for example, vocabulary and phonics (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:49).

Direct instruction is the most effective and efficient approach to reading instruction. It is based on the teaching of the following six steps:

- Specifying objectives
- Devising instructional strategies
- Developing teaching procedures
- Selecting examples

- Sequencing skills
- Providing practice and review (Morrow & Tracey, 2012: 50).

#### **2.3.1.6 The Top-down Model of Reading**

This model assumes that the reading process is primarily driven by what is in the reader's head. The reader's background knowledge is of utmost importance in the reading process. Background knowledge includes: topic, text-structure and sentence-structure knowledge. It also includes vocabulary, which is word knowledge and the knowledge of sound-letter correspondences. Readers use this knowledge to make predictions and hypotheses about a new text. If the new text is consistent with the reader's hypotheses then there is evidence of rapid progression in the reading process. Should the reader's hypotheses not correlate with the new text, then reading is said to be slowed. The emphasis in this model is on the reader rather than the text (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:162, 163).

The assumption that a reader has an understanding of written language enables the reader to make sense of the printed text. There is an implementation of all reading skills to make sense of the text. The ultimate aim of reading, as discussed in this model, is comprehension of text. Prior knowledge of text is a key factor in this model. The foundation of reading is based on the comprehension of text and reading is said to continue throughout one's life. Silent reading is vital to make meaning of text and teachers who adopt this reading model view learning as a holistic process (Bester, Evans, Joubert, Meyer & Phatudi, 2015:104).

Teachers who adopt this model of reading, believe that the reader's aims and expectations are defining factors on what is read and how it is read. The reading process is seen as meaningful. The reading process is not fragmented into sub-skills. Comprehension of text forms the foundation of reading and learners should be introduced to books immediately and not after a number of pre-reading exercises. Teachers are advised to use a number of reading resources and learners are allowed to work individually, in pairs or in groups. The pairing or grouping of learners involve random selection and is not based on reading skills. Grading of books is influenced

by the ability to comprehend the context and the difficulty of the vocabulary (Bester *et al.*, 2015:105).

In addition to the above, emphasis is placed on phonics and sight vocabulary, the aim is to empower the learner to make meaning of the text. Learners are encouraged to read individually. Assessment of a learner's reading ability is based on the learner's ability to use different strategies to comprehend individual and not on the recognition of isolated words (Bester *et al.*, 2015:105).

### **2.3.1.7 The Bottom-up Model of Reading**

The early cognitive model of reading introduced by Gough became known as the bottom-up information processing model. This model implied that cognitive information proceeded from lower to higher order stages. This model depicted the reading process as a series of discreet stages. The reading process begins when the eye captures the input of each letter from the printed text. Thereafter the image is identified as a letter, and a decoding process begins. The correct phonemes are said to attach to each letter. The sound of each letter is put together and a search for word meaning takes place. After the meanings are formulated, sentences are constructed (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:154, 155, 156).

The bottom-up model has the following implications on the teaching and acquisition of reading skills in primary school:

- Learners learn separate letters first as well as the characteristics of the letters. They then learn other letter units that represent sounds. This is followed by the learning of single words, phrases, sentences and then the meaning of text.
- The process of reading is seen as a combination of detached skills. The emphasis is on the page rather than the reader.
- Mechanical and technical aspects of the written language are mastered prior to the comprehension and understanding of text.

- Learners are encouraged to read aloud and teachers who adopt this model believe that reading is a very complicated skill.
- They believe that the learner must go through a series of isolated perception exercises without context in order to be ready to read.
- Emphasis is on the use of graded readers, which contain words that have already been learnt from flash cards.
- The learner is compelled to master one reader in order to progress to the next reader.
- Knowledge of the sound of words and sight vocabulary are pre-requisites along with reading aloud.
- Finally, the ability to read single words correctly forms the basis for assessment and the ability to sound letter combinations correctly forms part of this assessment (Bester *et al.*, 2015:104, 105, 106, 107).

#### **2.3.1.8 The Interactive Model of Reading**

This model provides a range of factors that are relevant to the way in which learners acquire reading skills. The emphasis is on a variety of processors converging on visual information simultaneously, rather than in a linear process. This model was designed by Rumelhart and depicts the simultaneous processing of (1) syntactic information which, refers to word order within sentences, (2) semantic information which refers to message construction, (3) orthographic information, which entails visual input and finally (4) lexical information which refers to word knowledge. These concepts enable higher and lower level processes to interact simultaneously on the visual input. This in turn leads to the most probable interpretation of the message. The central characteristic in the interactive reading model is that the reader simultaneously uses information from multiple sources during the reading process. If one of the processors is non-functional, the other processor will compensate for it (Morrow & Tracey, 2012:160, 161, 162).

#### **2.3.1.9 The Components Model of Reading**

This model identifies the components involved in reading. This enables the components to be targeted during reading instruction and allows for the identification

of components that are causing reading difficulties. In this model the two major components are reading comprehension and word recognition. Word recognition is made up of two sub-components, which are phonological awareness and fluency. Reading comprehension includes the sub-components of vocabulary and enjoyment of reading (Caldwell, Jennings & Lerner, 2010:10). The researcher believes that the components model of reading is the most relevant to this research study and thus forms the theoretical framework. These essential components in the reading process will be discussed in detail below as they are vital to understand the reading difficulties experienced by learners entering the Intermediate Phase.

## **2.4 THE CRUCIAL COMPONENTS FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF READING SKILLS**

There are five components of reading acquisition skills and good reading instruction that are necessary for effective making meaning of text, as discussed by Lerner and Kline(2006:376). These five components include:

(1) The recognition and use of individual sounds to create words, which is referred to as phonological/ phonemic awareness. Learners need to be taught to hear the sounds in words, and words are made up of the smallest parts of sounds or phonemes.

(2) The second key component is word recognition. This is the ability to understand the relationship between written letters and spoken sounds known as phonics. Learners need to be taught the sounds that individual printed letters and groups of letters make. Once learners are taught the relationship between sounds and letters, they will be able to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically which is word recognition.

(3) The third key component in the reading process is the ability to read text accurately and correctly. This is known as reading fluency. When fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically and when they read aloud, they read effortlessly. However, learners who are weak in fluency, read slowly, focusing on decoding words instead of comprehending meaning.



(4) Lerner and Kline (2006:368) add that learning the meaning and pronunciation of words, is vocabulary development. This is the fourth key component in the reading process where learners need to actively build and expand their knowledge of written and spoken words, their meaning and how they are used.

(5) The fifth key component is the acquisition of strategies to understand, remember and communicate what is read, commonly known as reading comprehension strategies. Here learners need to be taught the different comprehension strategies or steps that good readers use to make sure they understand text. These key components will be discussed in detail in order to demonstrate their importance in the reading process and how the failure to acquire any of these key elements will hamper the reading progress in a learner.

#### **2.4.1 Phonological Awareness**

Phonological awareness refers to the awareness of three aspects of spoken language ie. words, syllables within words and the sounds or phonemes within syllables and words. Phonemic awareness on the other hand, is one aspect of the larger category of phonological awareness and is the awareness that words are made up of individual sounds (Erekson *et al.*, 2011:123).

Anderson *et al.*, (2010:77), Courter (2011:69) and Goldsworthy (2003:76, 77) discuss phonological awareness as the ability to reflect on and manipulate the component sounds of spoken words. They describe it as one's sensitivity to, or explicit awareness of, the phonological structure of the words in one's language. This is done by using phonemes. These are the smallest units of a sound which distinguish between the meanings of words. This involves the ability to notice, think about and manipulate the individual sounds in words and as the explicit understanding of a word's sound structure. It includes the ability to segment words into syllables, identify and produce rhyming words, identify individual sounds in words, blend sounds to make words and to segment words into individual sounds.

Learners are able to identify parts or syllables of words and recognize rhyming words. Learners will be able to develop a sight vocabulary of meaningful words, notice beginning letters in familiar words and start to make letter-sound matches. They will also be able to learn initial and ending consonant sounds, gain knowledge about short and long vowels and finally be able to identify some high frequency words. Mastering these phonological and phonemic awareness skills has a positive correlation with reading success in early childhood education (Gambrell & Morrow, 2011:74, 75).

In keeping with the above statement, phonemic awareness is a prerequisite for and a consequence of learning to read. It is also believed that some degree of phonemic awareness in the phonological structure of words helps to make learning to read a more understandable task (Anderson *et al.*, 2010:78; Goldsworthy, 2003:85; Muse, Tannenbaum & Wagner, 2007:6).

Courter (2011:69, 70) reveals that many teachers are of the understanding that from Grade R to Grade 2, learners learn to read, whilst they read to learn in the grades that follow. They become exposed to longer and more complex texts and there is a marked increase in critical thinking as well as an increase in their other subjects, for example Science and Social Science. This researcher is of the opinion that for learners who experience reading difficulties by Grade 3 and Grade 4, there would be a significant amount of stress and adds that a mastery of phonological awareness skills is a necessary element at pre-school or early primary school in order for reading to occur. It is also believed that deficient phonological awareness, specifically phonemic awareness in the early years of school, can lead to poor reading performance in the years to follow.

Graham, Harris and Swanson (2013:169, 170) state that, to date, there is little disagreement that children with reading difficulties experience a core phonological deficit that interferes with their ability to develop phonological awareness and also the ability to decode words. Phonological awareness is the ability to perceive and manipulate the sounds of spoken words. It is the knowledge that words are composed of individual sounds. These individual sounds ultimately combine to form words, which then enables a learner to recognize the correlation between the

phonemes and graphemes. The learner is then able to develop basic reading skills and should be able to sound out new words in more complex tasks.

The importance of phonological awareness is further explored by Levey and Polirstok (2011:9) when they state that phonological skill is the vehicle for verbally expressing ideas and concepts derived from language. This skill enables a learner to be understood, as it involves the ability to sequence sounds to produce words and longer utterances. Unfortunately learners who experience phonological difficulties also have problems combining sounds or syllables in words and if these difficulties are not identified in the early years of primary school, it could have a negative impact on the learner's future reading abilities.

The ability to associate spoken sounds of the alphabet depends on the ability to perceive the difference in sounds (Graham *et al.*, 2013:171). These researchers believe that learners must be able to internalize and store the difference in sounds so that they can use them later to identify words. This is an important skill linked to literacy. Learners who have been taught phonological awareness prior to their formal instruction, ie. Grade R, have been found to be better equipped for learning to read.

Learners, who do not have phonological insight, do not make sense of decoding instruction or the relationship between sounds and words, thus they fail to learn (Barnsley *et al.*, 2013:125). This statement is reiterated by Fellowes and Oakley (2010:121) who state that phonological awareness is an important foundation of reading and writing alphabetical languages such as English. This is a prerequisite for the application of knowledge about the letter-sound relationship. Therefore, if the foundation for phonological awareness is not set at Grade R, or the entry level of primary school, then reading problems are likely to persist.

Otto (2014: 235, 257) comments that the Grade R year marks a transition from home to school for most learners, even those who did not attend Grade RR or day-care. Grade R is often their first experience in the larger education system. During this grade, the goals for the learner would include an increase in the learner's ability to communicate orally and an awareness of the purpose of reading and writing. Otto adds that at Grade R level, learners should be easily understood by most adults,

having mastered the production of phonemes. The learner's awareness of sound similarities and contrasts should be evident in their verbal play. It should be evident that the learners in Grade R have acquired phonological awareness, ie. in their ability to distinguish similarities in beginning and ending sounds. This awareness contributes to the acquisition of reading skills necessary for academic success in the Foundation Phase of primary school.

Phonological awareness continues to develop during the Foundation Phase in Grades 1, 2 and 3. During this time, learners are expected to achieve mastery over phoneme production. A learner's phonological knowledge is increasingly influenced by his/her experiences with reading and writing. Further discussion by Otto shows that by the sixth and seventh year, learners continue to produce a full range of specific language sounds and by the eighth year most learners should have complete phoneme production. The emphasis is on the importance of the acquisition of sound, phonological and phonemic awareness skills in the early years of a learner's life to ensure future reading success (Otto, 2014: 287).

This fact is further emphasized by Anderson *et al.*, (2010:79). According to them learners who experience significant difficulty in learning to read, tend to have difficulty in developing sensitivity to phonemes in spoken language. Their research has revealed that this slow development of phonemic sensitivity is an important cause of reading difficulties. It is thus vital that the correct phonemic awareness skills are taught in the Foundation Phase. Phonemic awareness helps the learners to learn to read and spell and is an important factor as they move on to Grade 4.

Antonacci and O'Callaghan (2012:2, 3) add that phonemic awareness tasks are the best predictors of a learner's success with reading acquisition and that it is imperative for teachers to assess a learner's phonemic awareness skills in order to differentiate instruction or provide intervention if necessary. Teachers must have adequate knowledge on the stages of phonological awareness. They will then be able to provide and assess activities that will enable them to acquire knowledge on the learners' phonological development (Erekson *et al.*, 2011:123).

These stages of phonological awareness include different levels: the first is the ability to recognize that words represent a sound. The teacher can provide learners with a counter and after reading a story, he/she could select a sentence and say it aloud. They could then repeat the sentence slowly and ask the learners to drop their counter into a container each time they hear a word from the sentence.

The second level is the ability to detect that words are made up of different parts, ie. syllable awareness. In this instance the teacher can read a story. After reading the story, the learners could select certain words that contain single and multiple syllables. They can then invite learners to clap out the parts as words are read.

The next level is the learners' ability to recognize that words are made up of individual sounds; this is phonemic awareness. The teacher can use a given word from a story and ask the learners to state how many sounds they can hear in it (Erekson *et al.*, 2011:123).

Erekson *et al.* add that for most learners phonological awareness is “caught” rather than “taught.” Learners who have been raised in a rich language environment in which they had exposure to read-alouds, nursery rhymes, songs and other forms of language play, would have more phonological awareness. However this would not be the case for learners who lack in phonological awareness. Teachers can assist learners who have not been afforded a rich language environment (Erekson *et al.*, 2011:124).

#### **2.4.2 Word Recognition / Phonics**

According to Gunning (2002:225) as many as one in four learners experience significant difficulty learning to read. Gunning (2002:225) adds that many of the learners have difficulty in decoding the alphabetical nature of printed language. A learner is expected to master the basics of phonics by the end of Grade 2, and that the failure to master phonics or related word-analysis skills is the number one cause of reading problems.

A developmental process is involved in learning to read. In order to read a text, learners must be able to recognize the words on a page. In order to be able to recognize words on a page, learners must have a good phonic knowledge. Phonics, decoding and word recognition are needed to accurately read printed words. Phonics is the system by which the sounds in spoken language are represented by letters and the understanding is that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes, which are the sounds of spoken language and graphemes, which are the letters and spelling that represent sounds in written language (Golden, Grant & Wilson, 2015:55; Goldsworthy, 2003:77).

The process of recognizing words is complex as it involves three related areas: spelling, reading and decoding and vocabulary knowledge. However, good readers are said to identify most words easily and quickly. Learners with reading difficulties are said to have a difficulty with word recognition and that they spend a lot of time and energy struggling to recognize words. Thus, they have less time and energy to concentrate on the comprehension of text. A variety of strategies must be used to accomplish this task of recognizing words. There are stages in the recognition of words in the reading process and one must be aware of these stages (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:17, 191, 192; Capello & Moss, 2010:93).

The stages of word recognition begin from emergent reading to fluent and accurate word recognition and teachers in the Foundation Phase must understand these stages. This will enable them to assist learners with reading difficulties. Stage one is known as the logographic or visual cue reading stage. Here learners only use visual cues to recognize words. This may include actual logos or even a few letter cues (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:17, 191, 192; Capello & Moss, 2010:93).

Stage two of word recognition is known as the partial alphabetic or phonetic recording stage. Learners now begin to match letters and sounds. The beginning and ends of words are focused on. It must be noted that decoding during this stage is slow and learners will depend on context and picture cues. The third stage involves learners moving into full or consolidated alphabetic reading. This is known as “controlled” reading. Attention is paid to vowels. Decoding is slow yet more accurate. The final stage is sight word-reading known as “automatic word recognition.” Many

words are recognized automatically, without sounding out. During this stage, learners develop a large store of sight words. Sight words are words that are recognized immediately (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:17, 191, 192; Cappello & Moss, 2010:93).

Research by Ellis and McCartney (2011:145) reveal that fluent reading is not a letter-by-letter process, but that readers parse words into units that are larger than a single letter but smaller than a word. They believe that if the upper-case and lower-case letter in a word are mixed, this is likely to disrupt word recognition. When this disruption occurs, the words would be very difficult to read indicating that learners use morphemes as units during word recognition. Morphemes being the smallest units of meaning in language.

Further research by Ellis and McCartney(2011:145, 146) reveals that the better learners are at word recognition, the more they rely on morphemes. It was also found that a learner's knowledge of morphemes made a significant contribution to the prediction of their word reading skill. These authors state that in Grade 3, learners are more aware of sounds in words, whilst at Grade 4, morpheme awareness plays a vital role in word reading. In order for a learner to learn a word, two things must be done: firstly the learner must be able to sequence the sounds that form a word, which means they need to use their phonological short-term memory and secondly add meaning to the sequence of the sounds. This means that morphological awareness is vital for a learner to remember the sounds of words.

Antonaci and O'Callaghan (2012:28) add that proficient readers have self-efficacy, or the belief that their effort can help them reach their goals. However, striving readers often skip over words they do not understand because they lack word identification strategies. It is therefore vital that strategies to identify words be taught. Opportunities must be given to implement these strategies to see if there is improvement. Learners must be taught explicit decoding skills for this to be effective. They add that when learners are explicitly taught strategies for word identification and are then given opportunities to implement them, their confidence improves. Instructional support is vital for this to take place.

The strategies that can help learners in word identification include: sequential decoding abilities and the skills to take apart a word in order to identify the individual sounds and letters. In addition learners need more exposure to text, strategies to assist them to identify rhymes and decode by word patterns. This can be done using systematic and explicit phonics instruction (Antonnaci & O'Callaghan, 2012:28, 29).

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is said to make a significant contribution to a learner's reading than unsystematic instruction. It is most effective when systematic teaching begins in Grade R or in Grade 1. Tutoring can be done in small groups or even as whole class instruction. It must be noted that systematic yet poor teaching instruction can do much more harm (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:195).

During systematic and explicit phonics instruction, learners must be taught that print is the primary source of information and not pictures. Phonics instruction builds on phonemic awareness and instruction is clear and direct, which means that teacher explanation and modeling is vital. It is integrated into the total reading programme and the focus is on reading words rather than learning rules. It includes several invented spelling practices and word families with the use of decoding by analogy. The focus is on the internal structure of words in order to develop word recognition. Explicit phonics instruction enables and develops automatic word recognition skills (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:195).

Bester, Joubert and Meyer (2008:100, 101) add that attention is paid to phonics and word study throughout the reading process. These are embedded elements of the reading process and they believe that specific attention can be given to these elements through direct instruction to help learners learn sounds, build words and inculcate these skills. These strategies are dependant on the grade and development of the learners and they include: the use of magnetic letters which remain permanently on the board where the teacher can join them together or swap them around. The words are then read by the learners and the initial consonants and the two or three consonant blends at the beginning are emphasized.

In addition to the above, Antonnaci and O'Callaghan (2012:28, 29) provide the following guidelines for effective phonics instruction: effective phonics instruction



helps young readers to analyze and blend individual sounds while teaching the use of chunking word parts to decode. They add that the application of word identification skills in context of use, leads to automaticity. Explicit phonics instruction teaches readers strategies for word identification that emphasizes meta-cognition and flexibility of thought. It allows for the active engagement by learners in word sorts or making word activities that foster individual accountability and application of phonetic skills. Finally, effective phonics instruction entails ongoing assessment to facilitate targeted instruction. The third key component for reading development which is reading fluency is discussed below.

### **2.4.3 Fluency and Reading**

Fluency as discussed by (Courter, 2011:75; Levey & Polirstok, 2011:198; O'Connor & Vadasay, 2011:168) can be defined as the ability to read accurately at an acceptable fluency rate, based on the learners grade level. The learner who reads too slowly will have difficulty following the context of the information being read. "Fluency" can also be described as the ability to read correctly and rapidly or as the accurate reading of connected text at a conversational rate with appropriate expression. This ability to read a text fluently allows for the comprehension of text and can help motivate a reader's success. Reading fluency links word recognition and comprehension in addition to all of the above, fluent readers will be able to spend time on the comprehension of text rather than decoding words.

O'Connor and Vadasay (2011:169) report that teachers who work with struggling readers often encounter learners who cannot read fluently. These learners read slowly and with great effort as they stop to decode unknown words. These researchers state that learners may even skip the difficult words. Non-fluent readers often focus on decoding at word level which in turn makes comprehension difficult and even impossible. It is further stated that whilst learners in the junior phase that is Grades 1, 2 and 3, may have difficulty with phonemic awareness, learners in the Intermediate Phase, Grade 4, 5 and 6, may have trouble with reading fluently and the comprehension of texts.

According to McGuinness (2005:254, 255) learners often struggle with reading comprehension due to the lack of reading fluency. This author adds that the non-fluent readers have to allocate their cognitive resources to basic word recognition instead of comprehension. Although many learners read fluently yet do not comprehend due to cognitive processing problems.

Levey and Polirstok (2011:198) believe that when a learner first learns to read, he/she reads primarily by using their phonological abilities to sound a word phoneme by phoneme. This is a good method, but will not result in fluent reading. These authors reveal that it is too slow and laborious to sound out each word. They state that as in spelling, fluent reading requires the integration of many linguistic skills which include phonological, orthographic, morphological and semantic skills. Phonological skills are used to sound out words, while orthographic enables a child to memorize whole words for quick recognition in order to decode them. Morphological skills are used to quickly identify prefixes and suffixes. All this knowledge needs to connect with the word meaning or semantic knowledge.

Levey and Polirstok (2011:199) discuss the interaction of these linguistic skills that aid a reader in quick word identification to keep meaning intact. Since reading is so complex, our ability to read fluently develops over time. It is envisaged that by Grade 3 most learners would have moved from word-by-word reading and be on their way to becoming fluent readers. Fluency is greatly influenced by familiarity with or complexity of the reading material and even a skilled reader may have difficulty with unfamiliar technical material. Improvement in fluency continues into adulthood.

Reading fluency is said to have three main components, as discussed by Cockrum and Shanker (2009:269) and these include speed, accuracy and phrasing. Speed of fluent reading is a rate that is appropriate for understanding the material while accuracy refers to the number of words the reader identifies correctly when reading out loud. The goal of fluent reading is to have a high degree of accuracy but not 100% accuracy. Phrasing is defined as the proper intonation, pauses and stress made while reading out loud (Cockrum & Shanker, 2009:269). These three components are essential as they help a reader develop reading fluency and

comprehension. Fluency is not a specific subskill of reading but is a reflection of the ability to use various reading skills. Young readers are believed to develop fluency as they develop the use of those reading skills and practice reading.

According to Allington and Gabriel (2012:10) good readers read with accuracy almost all the time. They add that 98% or higher accuracy is essential for reading acceleration and that anything less, slows the rate of improvement, whilst anything below 90% accuracy does not improve reading ability at all. When learners read accurately or fluently, they solidify their word-recognition, decoding and word analysis skills. More importantly, they are likely to understand/comprehend what they have read. Unfortunately, learners with reading difficulties spend the same amount of time but due to their reading difficulties will not be able to read accurately. They will read less text, encounter problems with word recognition and finally have a lack of comprehension. This would make them very frustrated. Thus acquisition of fluency and word-recognition skills are vital in the early stages of reading development.

According to Antonnaci and O'Callaghan (2012:51) reading fluency is an essential mark of a proficient reader and is a key connector between reading words and comprehension. Further research reveals that when learners are fluent, they read words quickly and accurately thus freeing their mind to concentrate on the comprehension of text (Beattie & Manis, 2014:36; Fellowes & Oakley,2010:73; Goldsworthy, 2003:22). These researchers advocate that not all learners become fluent readers by Grade 3 and that reading fluency plays a major role in the grades that follow as well as in future reading achievement. Cappello and Moss (2010:84) report that while fluency in and of itself is not sufficient to ensure high levels of reading achievement, fluency is an absolute necessity. It depends on and typically reflects comprehension. They add that if a reader has not developed fluency, the process of decoding drains attention, thus insufficient attention will be available for comprehension. It is therefore necessary, according to Ellis and McCartney (2011:123), that teachers at Grade 2 level and beyond take measures at the beginning of a school year to gauge progress in this area.

Caldwell *et al.*, (2010:219) state that in order for fluency to be developed, a large amount of reading is critical. As learners read to enjoy a story or acquire information,

they are unconsciously improving their reading fluency. Reading must be made enjoyable, especially for those with reading difficulties. To help learners improve and build reading fluency, learners need to read easy books filled with words that they can recognize. Teachers must schedule time for reading. This should include a minimum of ten minutes for low-achieving learners as they may find it difficult to concentrate for longer sessions. The time can gradually be increased.

#### **2.4.4 Vocabulary and Reading**

Muse *et al.*, (2007:1) report that acquiring the vocabulary we use for thinking and communicating is a linguistic achievement of nearly incomprehensible importance and complexity. They state that although babies learn to produce language with ease, acquiring a language is an immense task. Children by the age of three must have acquired an almost adult-like understanding of syntactical constructions and by pre-school have acquired their native language, though their mastery of vocabulary acquisition is incomplete. While at school, children begin to learn additional word-learning strategies. They add that 80% of the words children acquire by Grade 6 are learned through direct instruction. This shows that direct instruction takes place at home, at school and with peers.

A large store of sight words allows for fluent processing (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:17, 191, 192; Capello & Moss, 2010:93). A sight word is defined as a word that the reader knows instantly. The learners can go from the printed form of the word to the spoken form of the word automatically without using any other type of word analysis. The learner with reading difficulties will fail to recognize words that are thought to be common or even below the grade level. They may be unable to read some or all of the basic sight words. Many learners battle with sight word vocabulary which is not at their grade level. In advancing from grade to grade, learners should increase their sight word vocabularies at each grade. Only if learners can correctly pronounce 95% of the words in books written at their grade level, is their sight vocabulary up to par. Learners who have not adequately mastered a number of sight words will be greatly disadvantaged as they would spend more time analyzing many more words than normal readers (Cockrum & Shanker, 2009:29).

Sight word instruction is crucial in the word recognition process. Teachers must be aware of the main goal when providing sight word instruction in reading. This is to develop the automatic association between the printed form of a word and the spoken form. When direct instruction is given for sight words, a presentation of the printed form is required. It is good for teachers to have cards with the word on one side and the pictorial representation on the other. In this way the learner sees the word, for example ball, and also sees the picture. Independent reading activities also help promote a learner's sight word knowledge. Teachers can play a recording of a story while learners follow the printed form of the story. This could help with sight word development. Stories that are presented visually on computer reading programmes are also helpful in developing sight vocabulary. Important words can be highlighted as the words are spoken (Cockrum & Shanker, 2009:31).

Barone, Mallette and Hong Xu (2005:85) add that the more sight words there are in a text, the less cognitive energy learners will need to expend in decoding. The development of sight word knowledge is believed to be reciprocal. This means that learners learn sight words through numerous encounters with words. The words that a teacher selects should be from the high-frequency word lists.

O'Connor and Vadasay (2011:138) believe that vocabulary is strongly tied to reading comprehension. They add that in the early grades the vocabulary that gets the attention, comprises words that students know from oral language but need to learn to recognize in print, and this of course is a vital aspect of the learners' literacy education. The learners may meet new words in the early grades and a brief meaning may be given by the teacher. At the intermediate grades vocabulary forms part of the reading lesson, where a set of words are discussed prior to the reading activity. This makes the text more understandable, thus again showing that vocabulary is indeed very important for comprehension of text.

O'Connor and Vadasay (2011:140) discuss the three principles that are vital for vocabulary acquisition: it is a network of connected concepts; it is learned from context, which is an inefficient learning medium and that learning is incremental, ie. the understanding of a word's meaning accumulates as a learner encounters in different contexts. It is necessary for the reader or the learner to make sense of the

subsequent contexts containing the word. It is believed that even if the word provides strong clues in the first context, multiple contexts would still be necessary as this would provide clarity of the word that is being used.

According to O'Connor and Vadasy (2011:140) when a learner acquires information about a word's meaning, connections to other words are formed in the brain. When these connections are made, a link is formed between the old and the new information, thus the learners will be able to piece together all the information to understand the new word. It is also believed that skilled readers make better use of experiences with words and are able to recognize a words meaning quickly.

Reading is a language skill thus it would be essential for learners to develop their vocabulary and other language skills upon which reading comprehension depends (Anderson *et al.*, 2010:18). They believe that proficient readers are able to effortlessly identify virtually every printed word they encounter and most words are learned through effective word solving. Once learners have developed vocabulary or word solving skills, effectively, they are able to "teach" themselves to read a number of words. This is only attainable if proper word/vocabulary identification and acquisition strategies are taught at school.

Learning vocabulary from context according to O'Connor and Vadasay (2011:141) is major resource for attaining new vocabulary. These authors state that young children learn new vocabulary on a daily basis through conversations. The learner is able to acquire vocabulary orally by being able to link a word to an object, and also through conversations, which are made of the most frequently used words in the English vocabulary which are then reinforced. In order for vocabulary acquisition to develop, it has to be sustained by learning new words from written sources. Unfortunately written sources according to these authors, lack the immediacy of oral language. Reading requires the development of ideas from words alone, thus the task of figuring out word meanings of unfamiliar words would be difficult. This in turn could lead to reading difficulties.

Vocabulary, as discussed by Kline and Lerner (2006:386) occupies a central position in learning to read. A learner's vocabulary has a significant effect on his/her

achievement and this is strongly related to reading comprehension. A learner is expected not only to read a word or words, but must also make meaning of that word. The learner must also be able to apply and understand the word in the appropriate context. Learners acquire vocabulary through speaking and listening and then by recognizing words in print or a text.

Kline and Lerner (2006:387) add that learners learn words gradually. These researchers believe that at least twenty exposures of words are necessary in context for the adequate grasp of word meanings. They add that vocabulary can be learned incidentally in the context of reading or by listening to others. Finally the instructional procedure of teaching, prior to reading any text can be helpful.

Muse *et al.*, (2007:3) add that to a great extent, vocabulary growth is motivated by the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension as it is believed that people with bigger vocabularies also tend to be better readers. These researchers discuss the three possible types of casual links between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. This is the instrumentalist hypothesis which means that the more words you know, the better reader you would be. They discuss the knowledge hypothesis, which means that stored concepts are necessary for comprehension. Thirdly, there is the aptitude hypothesis, which states that reading comprehension and vocabulary are connected. If a person is a good comprehender, then that person would be a good word learner.

Muse *et al.*, (2007:3) add that the breadth and depth of word/vocabulary knowledge is a key factor in reading comprehension and it is therefore a student's difficulties in comprehending texts can be attributed in part to their limited word knowledge or vocabulary. Acquiring enough English vocabulary to perform well in reading and writing tasks expected of Intermediate Phase learners is a challenge for many language-minority learners. It is therefore necessary to consider why vocabulary acquisition is a challenge for many second language learners and also the optimal conditions for vocabulary acquisition.

Muse *et al.*, (2007:5) report that vocabulary can be classified as a large problem space because learners are required to learn to recognize 26 letters, to distinguish

44 phonemes in addition to mastering many spelling rules and the acquisition of approximately 75000 separate words with its own meanings. Learners with reading difficulties will have a huge problem since they read little as well as to comprehend little, as these words will be encountered during literacy. Put simply, the acquisition of vocabulary must be taught effectively and strategically in the Foundation Phase and must be developed effectively in the grades that follow.

Courter (2011:91) adds that the ability to understand and accurately retrieve new vocabulary is essential for academic proficiency. In order to store and retrieve vocabulary accurately, learners need to do more than memorize the words necessary for a class test. Instead, they need to understand the word in the context of the subject matter or else it would be a meaningless exercise because learners would not be able to apply the word in other instances. Lemmer *et al.*, (2012:54) comment that teaching literacy across all academic disciplines requires mastery of technical vocabulary as each subject necessitates the use of its own vocabulary. They add that knowing a word requires both recognition and production and that vocabulary is not gained automatically but has to be taught explicitly. The fifth key area for reading development is discussed below.

#### **2.4.5 Comprehension and Reading**

Comprehension, according to Cain and Oakhill (2007:1) and Tennent (2015:22, 23), is the ultimate aim of reading and listening as it enables one to acquire information, to experience and be aware of other fictional worlds, to communicate successfully and ultimately to achieve academic success. The goal, when reading a text, is to get an overall picture of the text instead of retrieving the meanings of individual words or sentences, thus when a child experiences comprehension difficulties due to poor reading skills, meaning of the overall text will not be established.

Cain, Elbro and Oakhill (2015:1) advocate that reading comprehension is important not just for understanding text but for broader learning success in education and employment. It is vital for social lives due to e-mails, text and social networking sites. Reading comprehension is a complex task, which requires the orchestration of many different cognitive skills and abilities.



Unlike foundational skills, which include letter identification and phonics, which are acquired to mastery levels over a short time period, comprehension development occurs across a lifetime. Changes over time in a learner's bio-socio-cultural development and ever increasing bank of experiences, result in changes in reading comprehension. Capable decoding, language processes, vocabulary and prior knowledge are pressure points that contribute to comprehension thresholds (Garcia & Stahl, 2015:2, 7; Erekson *et al.*, 2011:210, 211).

The process of comprehension, as discussed by Anderson *et al.*, (2010:276), is that comprehension occurs as the reader builds a mental representation of the text and that it is an active, constructive process in which the ultimate understanding of the text is determined. During the reading process, there is engagement between the reader and the text, and the reader must be able to integrate prior knowledge to existing knowledge. Proficient readers are seen to do this without even thinking about it. Anderson *et al.*, (2010:276) add that word knowledge is an essential component of reading comprehension because every text takes for granted that the readers have familiarity with a whole range of unspoken and unwritten facts about the cultural and natural world.

Anderson *et al.*, (2010:277), Cain and Oakhill (2007:1), Fellowes and Oakley (2010:266) and McCormack and Pasquarelli (2010:127) agree that when someone listens to or reads a text, a complex interaction takes place between what is known and what is presented. The amount of text relevant knowledge is said to have a substantial influence in order to make required inferences and for the comprehension of the text. How one interprets a text and what one learns from it depends to a great extent on what one already knows. A learner who understands the purpose of reading is more likely to understand more, than the learner who does not know the purpose of reading (Cockrum & Shanker, 2009:65; Cain & Oakhill, 2007:1; Brunsting, *et al.*, 2014:25).

In order to understand the purpose of text, Anderson *et al.*, (2010:278) state that word knowledge, topic specific knowledge, schematic knowledge and general knowledge all play a vital role in the comprehension of text. General knowledge is

simply word knowledge which includes background or prior knowledge and incorporates the facts and concepts of what is already known. This accumulates over time and might or might not be taught explicitly. It is important that teachers be alert to recognize general knowledge gaps that may interfere with the learner's ability to understand interactions. Topic specific knowledge relates directly to the topic at hand and if seen before, the reader will have some knowledge of the text. It is expected that learners will be introduced to a number of sciences, for example Social Sciences and this will enhance topic specific knowledge.

Anderson *et al.*,(2010:282) are of the opinion that schematic knowledge will show that the topic specific knowledge is structured and organized. Due to the amount of encounters with information, it would be quite difficult to store and retrieve this information unless it were organized. Thus, schema affects how information is perceived by the reader and how he/she will interpret it. Having schema related to a topic, plays a big role in facilitating one's understanding of text. Finally, genre knowledge is a specific type of knowledge and involves understanding the characteristics of different categories of text. Learners who are familiar with the different types of text knowledge are likely to read and listen in an active way. Therefore, teachers must make certain that learners be made aware of the different types of knowledge that is necessary for comprehension of text.

One must also be knowledgeable on the levels of comprehension in addition to the purpose of comprehension. Fellowes and Oakley (2010:266) describe the levels of comprehension as follows, firstly the literal level which includes noticing and remembering what the text says. The inferal level, which involves the reader or listener making inference or reading between the lines of a text to make meaning of it. This means that the answer to a question about the text would not be found in the text. Thirdly, the evaluative level, which requires the reader to make his/her own conclusions of the text by relating it to his/her own life experiences.

These three levels of comprehension require the learner to make use of the cognitive process to make sense of the text. Learners who are good readers will use a number of strategies to engage with all these levels of comprehension. However, those with reading difficulties would find it a frustrating task. The learners may become

demotivated and fall behind in their reading abilities relative to children their age. A learner will be able to express and feel different emotions during the reading process if he/she is able to make meaning of the text due to the acquisition of comprehension skills at primary school (Fellowes & Oakley, 2010:266). Comprehension can range from having a powerful impact on a reader to almost no impact at all, especially for learners with reading difficulties (Cockrum & Shanker, 2009:64).

A final requirement for text comprehension is the reader's ability to decode words rapidly. Should a learner stop to puzzle over new words then he/she would have difficulty in comprehending the text. Should a learner be unable to understand many of the words easily, the whole process of reading becomes a difficult one. The learner will pay more attention on decoding the words rather than comprehending the text. It is therefore vital for the correct decoding skills to be taught in the early phases of literacy education (Cockrum & Shanker, 2009:65; Cain & Oakhill, 2007:1; Brunsting *et al.*, 2014:25). Good comprehenders are said to engage in meaningful learning. They are able to assimilate, categorize, see relationships, compare, analyze, synthesize and evaluate information. They are active, purposeful, evaluative, strategic and persistent (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:211).

## **2.5 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE READING DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.5.1 Language**

Language in all its forms(spoken, read and written) is an especially important tool in teaching and learning. It is the principle way by which people interact, transmit knowledge and it helps psychosocial development (Donald *et al.*, 2006:96). This statement is reiterated by Lerner and Kline (2006:333) according to whom language is the most important component of reading and learners acquire language in a natural environment. Human relationships help the learner to become a processor of language. There is a need for an interaction between a child and an adult for language acquisition, and this leads to reading acquisition skills. This statement is in keeping with both the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, which form part of the theoretical framework for this study.

Ereksan *et al.*, (2011:49) state that reading instruction begins with oral instruction and if this oral foundation is weak, progress in reading will be slow and uncertain. Children must have at least a basic vocabulary and a reasonable range of knowledge about the world around them. Children must also have the ability to talk about their knowledge, since this forms the basis for text comprehension. The learners' background directly determines where and when to begin reading instruction. Learners who come to school from homes full of literary rich experiences, bring a wealth of language abilities and understanding with them.

There are many factors that influence the language system. One such factor is the belief that learners who are in the company of adults more than in the company of children, have accelerated language development, as stated in Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978:124). It is believed that physiological factors, which refers to a healthy child, who has more contact with his/her surroundings as well as different surroundings, will have far more opportunities for the development of language. Many learners with reading difficulties have oral language problems, thus it is vital that certain language milestones be achieved at the different levels of development in a child (Courter, 2011:41).

Lemmer *et al.*, (2006:52) reveal that since South Africa is a multicultural and country, this would have an impact on the development of reading skills at school. Besides the 11 official languages in this country, there are also at least 24 other languages spoken in South Africa. Most learners are instructed in the medium of their mother tongue during the Foundation Phase only. Many students are then plunged into schools where the Language of Learning and Teaching is in English as the LoLT. In addition, the onset of the Intermediate Phase often marks a transition to English as the LoLT for all subjects.

Lemmer *et al.*, (2006:52) add that this transition may cause many problems, especially reading problems. One of these is the disparity between English proficiency and the proficiency required in order to master all other subjects through the medium of English. The learners may lack the command of English necessary for success at school. It must also be noted that the necessary reading skills, which include phonological awareness, vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills

are taught in the Foundation Phase. Therefore, for the learners with English as a second language, where their ability to communicate fluently is assumed, they will find themselves at a risk of under achievement as their reading skills will be inadequate for academic success. However it must be noted that many learners do achieve academic success in spite of the LoLT.

Lemmer *et al.*,(2010:226) advocate that although 8.6 % of the population of South Africa are native English speakers, English has the dominant status, particularly as the language of higher education, commerce and government. They add that extensive international and local research has indicated that without sufficient support for the way in which the first language is presented at school and at home, learners are likely to experience reading difficulties.

The National Reading Strategy, an initiative by the DoE, reveals that a learner's language competence affects his/her performance in all subjects at all grades. Poor language competence limits conceptual development. If reading competence is poor, then the learners, writing competence will be poor and ultimately their comprehension levels will be affected. Language mismatches add to the problem since the language of home and school do not match and the language of the resources at school do not match the home language (DoE, 2008:7).

While research by Golden *et al.*, (2015:42) reveal that learning two or more languages can be a complicated cognitive investment for learners. These researchers recommend that teachers keep the following in mind when working with bilingual learners: English language learners who know concepts attached to words in their first language fare better in attaining a second language. Learners who come from a language impoverished home environment will have no cognitive or linguistic foundation for a second language.

The PIRLS report (2011) states that in South Africa, many children start using their additional language, English, as the language of learning in Grade 4, which means they need to have reached a high level of competence in reading and writing English by the end of Grade 3. Emphasis is placed on teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing skills at the additional language level. Grade 4-level also provides

learners with literary, aesthetic, and imaginative competencies that will enable them to recreate, imagine and empower their understanding of the world. Listening and speaking receive less emphasis than reading and writing skills from grade 7 onwards. This is because during the Intermediate and Senior Phases of primary school, learners continue to strengthen their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The majority of learners are learning through the medium of their first additional language, English, and should be gaining more exposure to it. Therefore, greater emphasis is placed on using the first additional language for the purposes of thinking and reasoning. This enables them to develop their cognitive academic skills, which they need in order to study subjects such as Science in English. Students also engage more with literary texts and begin to develop aesthetic and imaginative ability in their additional language (Lemmer *et al.*, 2012:11).

A rich oral language programme is a necessary step to prevent reading failure. The closer the learner's language is to written symbols encountered in reading, the greater their chance of success. Hearing English in the context of something meaningful with which they can identify, helps learners gain facility in listening, attention span, narrative sense, recall of stretches of verbalization and the recognition of new words as they appear in other contexts (Erekson *et al.*, 2011:118, 119). Teachers can employ the steps below to promote oral language.

Reading aloud to learners increases a learner's vocabulary and the learners who speak non-standard English can make significant gains towards English. This would be effective when the teacher emphasizes certain words before reading, for example the back or front cover of the book. They could point to words while reading in order for learners to see that print carries a message and they will be able to what is said with the print on the page. This is known as speech to print match. Upon completion of the reading, the teacher can emphasize language concepts like 'first, last'. By using these terms, the learner will be able to tell what happened first and last in the text. Teachers could involve learners in fun activities like 'Simon says' as learning language should be fun. Teachers can provide a rich oral language classroom which involves singing, reciting poems, oral story-telling and dramatizations. All these oral language activities can be accompanied by print in some form (Erekson *et al.*, 2011:121).

## **2.5.2 Physical Factors**

Good physical health is a vital basic condition for learning. Poor health can affect a learner's ability to read. Poor health can include chronic illness and/or lack of medical facilities. The general health of learners may affect their success in learning to read, especially if these health problems result in frequent absence during the first two years of school. Persistent allergies and frequent colds may cause temporary loss of some of the child's hearing abilities thus hampering reading instruction (Ekwall & Shanker, 2003:123; Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:41, 45).

### **2.5.2.1 Hearing and Auditory Discrimination**

Crawford, Gillet, Temple and Temple (2012:442) believe that hearing and language are as intimately related as language and reading. These researchers add that when children learn to read, they employ their whole experience with oral language. Hearing problems can interfere with, delay or even prevent the development of oral language frequency. Hearing problems are also believed to interfere with normal phonemic awareness. Since one of the essential components of reading is phonological awareness, where phonemic awareness plays a vital role, it is important for learners to be able to hear the difference between sounds. They need to use their auditory facilities to learn decoding and phonics.

Deponio and Macintyre (2003:42, 43) reveal that learners who have difficulties in learning to read and spell can suffer from auditory discrimination problems even though they may have acquired speech at the correct time. They add that many learners cannot distinguish between sounds and this affects their reading abilities. Learners with auditory difficulties may experience poor or confused reception of sound and the inability to follow sequential instructions. They may also experience confusion of similar sounds and reduced vocabulary.

Auditory discrimination, as discussed by Erekson *et al.*, (2011:55, 56, 57) is the ability to distinguish between sounds, and this is vital for language acquisition and for learning to read. The more alike two phonemes are in structure the more likely they

are to be misinterpreted. This ability to discriminate between sounds differs in individuals, it begins at birth and is said to mature when a child turns eight.

There is also a correlation between the slow development of auditory discrimination and inaccurate pronunciation. A positive relationship exists between poor auditory discrimination and poor reading. It is believed that learners who speak languages other than English at home, use the speech sounds for that specific language very early in life. This is usually established before the learner begins school. Thus it is believed that these learners may find it difficult to distinguish among English phonemes. This may be observed at the beginning of English language learning.

Hearing impairments may affect the learner in a number of ways. It can lead to low self-esteem, the quality of interaction and participation in activities. The learner will have a limited range of vocabulary, which in turn will affect his/her reading and assessment taking abilities (Golden *et al.*, 2015:80).

Bester *et al.*, (2008:31) state that teachers can assist learners with auditory problems. The first step is to make sure that the problem does not have a physical cause. Teachers should be aware of the following: a learner who constantly asks for instructions or turns his/her head to listen, do not have a physical hearing problem. A learner who cannot hear will not turn his/her head when someone whispers. A learner with temporary hearing difficulties is one who suffers from sinusitis or a respiratory tract infection. Those learners who genuinely have a hearing problem should have their ears tested. Parents should be contacted and the learner should be referred to a specialist.

Learners with impaired hearing may be included in mainstream classrooms and teachers can assist them by ensuring that they can see the teacher's mouth when she teaches. The learners can be seated in the front of the class. The teacher must make sure that the learner has heard every instruction. This can be done by checking that the learner is not lost or hesitant to start a task. The teacher can also learn simple sign language or the finger alphabet. The learner must know this as well and parental cooperation is vital. The other learners in the class can be motivated to look directly at the hearing impaired learner during conversations. The teacher should



also encourage peers to be empathetic towards the learner with hearing difficulties and to accommodate him/her in communication situations should the learner feel lost or confused (Bester *et al.*, 2008:32).

In keeping with hearing and reading, Bester *et al.*, (2008:32) state that although a learner may be able to hear well, and have no hearing problems, he may be unable to comprehend what is heard. The ability to listen well includes being able to interpret the information heard. They add that this is especially true for learners who are taught in a language other than their home language. The inability to listen may stem from the following: the learner may come from a home where there is no conversation. No time been spent on developing his/her language proficiency and no opportunities given to listen to stories. The learner may have a deficient ability to concentrate and will not sit still long enough. The learner may also be overwhelmed by auditory input. The learner may get lost in this auditory maze. The learner may also “close” his ears as he chooses not to listen. The learner may take a long time to understand what is taught in a second language, thus the teacher needs to be very patient.

The teacher can use perceptual exercises in the form of games, to help learners develop sound awareness. Learners can be asked to close their eyes and identify sounds, for example ringing a bell, striking sticks or wooden blocks against each other. She can play recorded sounds to the learners, such as a dog barking, door creaking or vehicle sounds. They can listen to different music notes and clap in rhythmic patterns. Learners can listen to the sounds that make up a word and put the sounds together to form the word (Bester *et al.*, 2008:33).

### **2.5.2.2 Vision and Visual Perception**

The ability to see clearly is critical to the reading process as reading is a seeing act. Learners need to be able to see the print they are reading. Learners also need to be able to read print from different sources. They need to have crisp, sharp eyesight in order to see print clearly. Learners’ eyes need to be able to focus and adjust as necessary (Golden *et al.*, 2015:77, 78)

Dechant (1991:45) describes reading as a sensory process, which focuses on graphic input, ie. the words on a page. Further discussion shows that without graphic input there can be no reading, as reading begins as a visual skill, with vision as the first step in reading. Dechant (1995:45) adds that it is imperative for learners to attain certain levels of visual efficiency and maturation prior to reading. Should there be defective eyesight, difficulties in reading are likely to follow.

Deponio and Macintyre (2003:47) state that the picture seen by each eye of a learner must be focused and the eye must be able to scan without losing clarity or accommodation. If this does not happen, the learner will see an overlapping or blurred picture. They add that learners with poor visual discrimination may have reversal tendencies in both reading and writing.

Dechant (1991:45) adds that although efficiency in reading depends upon adequate visual functioning, the movement of the eyes during reading is also very vital. As a matter of fact, adequate visual perception is even more important. Visual perception deals with the ability to extract visual information from the printed page as well as the analysis and retention of patterns that are necessary for effective reading and the acquisition of reading skills.

Golden *et al.*, (2015:79) discuss visual perception as the act of giving meaning to what is seen. Visual perception requires the ability to analyze and interpret visual images. In reading, this analysis and interpretation must take place with a high degree of automaticity. According to Golden *et al.*, (2015:79), there are a number of visual perceptual skills such as: visual discrimination, which is the ability to perceive likeness and difference in visual information, this is vital during the reading process. Visual meaning is the next skill and this is the ability to retain visual information and use it later. This enables learners to maintain visual information in tracking and turning the page. A visual spatial relationship is the ability to perceive visual information in relation to space. This allows learners to relate to reading text in various shapes. Form constancy is the ability to perceive the relationship of shape to visual elements. In reading it deals with letter formation and word formation cues. Finally, closure is the ability to perceive a whole entity from its components. With

regards to reading, word recognition is based on selected letters in a word. Efficient readers are said to have strong visual closure skills.

Teachers need to be aware of the symptoms of vision problems and these include: complaints of constant headaches, eyelids are swollen with red rims, frequent sties and watering. The learner squints while reading and asks to sit closer to the board. The learner will be unable to sit still while doing close-up tasks and may skip many words or sentences during reading. The learner may make many reversals and confuse letters and may even refuse to read. Many repetitions may be made and similar words may be confused. The learner may sometimes have difficulties in remembering what was read silently (Erekson *et al.*, 2011:53, 54).

Erekson *et al.*, (2011:53, 54) suggest the following visual perception exercises to assist learners include:

- The teacher gives a row of three or four pictures of the same object and the learners choose the one that does not fit in. They then explain why it does not fit in with the others.
- The teacher can also give pictures of objects that show rhyming words and the learners match the rhyming words using the pictures.
- Another activity is pictures of objects where learners name the similarities and the differences.
- An interesting activity is when the teacher places a few objects in row and the learners study the arrangement. The learners close their eyes and the objects positions are changed. The learners' show which objects have moved and to which positions.

### **2.5.3 Home Environment and Parental Involvement**

Caldwell *et al.*, (2010:25) state that a learner's first environment is the home and this can be the foundation for cognitive growth and development. The early experiences of a learner's life will have a powerful influence on his/her development. Parents

should provide emotional well-being as well as intellectual stimulation. Research reveals that good readers have a favourable home environment. Parents are the key to help stimulate a learner's love for reading and can provide a role model for literacy. Parental involvement must continue after the learner enters school.

Caldwell *et al.*, (2010:25) add that learners with reading difficulties need satisfying family relationships. Poverty, family instability and violent neighborhoods increase the risk for reading failure. Health and emotional problems tend to increase in difficult environments. Parental alcohol addiction may affect a learner as parents will not have the energy to nurture a learner's education. Hungry or unhappy learners will have less energy to focus on school activities. Parents may also be undereducated and lack skills to nurture literacy, there may be little or no encouragement, no assistance with homework activities and no communication with teachers (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:26).

Blair, Schaudt and Turner (1992:143) believe that parents are viewed as partners in the learning process. They are to make sure that they take their unique position to help their children become good readers. This team approach between parents and teachers focuses on positive action and growth both at school and at home. Marais and Meier (2012:152) go along with this by stating that parental involvement is a dynamic process where teachers and parents work together for the ultimate benefit of the learner. Learners who receive attention from parents in the early stages of development are able to deal with school work later. A learner who comes from an unhappy home can experience emotional problems and this could lead to poor academic progress. Very little or no access to reading material at home, parents who are unable to read and also the lack of concern of parents towards a learner's reading development can be factors that influence reading achievement.

Reitsma and Verhoeven (1998:3, 4) state that the acquisition of literacy is not a natural developmental process. Therefore specific home, cultural and schooling conditions are required for the acquisition of literacy skills. These researchers add that literacy can be related to the learner's social and economic background. They state that research that was conducted on the home environment of young learners revealed significant limitations in some of the learners' pre-school exposure to

reading activities. This calls for a match between the linguistic experience in the learner's home and the linguistic demands in the classroom. This linguistic match is essential for academic progress. The degree of experience with literate practices in the home had a positive influence on the understanding of the mechanisms of literacy (Reitsma & Verhoeven, 1998:3, 4).

According to Tyre and Young (1983:85) there is ample evidence that a learner's academic achievement is strongly associated with environmental factors. This includes: the size of the family, social class and material circumstances, the reading habits of the parents and the number of books available in the home. The learner's ability to read is particularly associated with whether or not the mother or father reads to them and with the frequency with which they are read to. It is believed that the parent's interest in their children's education was the most significant factor in the level of a child's academic achievement.

Blair, Heilman and Rupley (1998:134) add that the home plays a significant role in a learner's emerging literacy. The home factors that contribute to this early literacy development include: parents reading to a child, children's observation of parents reading, availability of books and trips to the library. This is further emphasized by Harris and Sipay(1980:312)who add the parental desire for their children to be educated, guidance without strict domination, emotional support and parental intellectuality as well as interest in reading, help with the reading success of a learner.

#### **2.5.4 School Environment and Effective Teachers**

Since most of a learner's time is spent at school, the school environment, coupled with teaching practices, profoundly affects their lives. For learners with reading difficulties, the experiences at school will be unhappy ones and will include many negative feelings. Certain school practices can contribute to reading problems. Teachers may give up entirely on trying to teach a learner to read and may just read everything to them. In addition, learners with reading difficulties do not read as much as those who are good readers. Poor readers read only a third as many words as average learners do. There is not enough practice to improve and unsatisfactory

relationships with adults at school add to reading difficulties (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:27).

Harris and Sipay (1980:309) state that reading problems can also be caused by poor reading instruction in that formal reading instruction may have begun prior to the learner being ready. Classes with a large number of learners may lead to the unintentional provision of poor instruction and the needs of individual learners are not met. During the initial stages of reading instruction, incorrect teaching methods may be employed and this may have a negative impact on the learner's reading acquisition. If the same material is expected to be read by all learners irrespective of their reading ability or level, and if the material is too simple or difficult, interest may be lost. The non-identification and the inability to identify reading problems early in reading development may also severely hamper reading acquisition skills. Some learners who have become disabled readers, might have fared better with different teachers. Communicative barriers between teachers and learners may also be a contributing factor to reading difficulties.

Blair *et al.*,(1992:19) believe that in order for the teachers of reading to meet the individual needs of their learners, they must have a solid foundation in the knowledge of literacy acquisition and the teaching process itself. They add that the effective reading teacher should understand that reading is a language process. The teaching of reading should be integrated with that of other language arts which include: writing, listening and speaking. The teacher must recognize plans for a wide range of individual differences in the classroom.

Blair *et al.*,(1992:20) add that the reading teacher must have high expectations of all learners and must ensure that all learners put forth a strong effort in their school work. These researchers believe that reading instruction builds on oral language. If this foundation is weak, progress in reading will be slow and uncertain. They state that learners must have at least a basic vocabulary and a reasonable knowledge about the world around them. Learners must also have the ability to talk about their knowledge. These abilities form the basis for the comprehension of text. It is therefore imperative for the reading teacher to assist the learners build this necessary foundation.

The reading teacher is an effective teacher when she/he is knowledgeable and adept at combining and adjusting various methods, practices and strategies to meet the needs of a set of learners with different needs. This teacher is likely to lead learners to higher levels of literacy achievement and is committed to improve learner achievement (Gambrell & Morrow, 2011:19).

Gambrell and Morrow (2011:20) feel that the effective teacher should be much like a coach. They guide learners in constructing meaning from text. They do this by using discussion and inquiry and do not tell learners what they need to do to become better readers. They incorporate high level responses to text and emphasize cognitive engagement during literacy activities. They provide access to a wide variety of books and time to engage with print in authentic ways. They do this in an effort to encourage learners to become life-long learners.

In order for the effective reading teacher to assist the learner with reading difficulties, information about a learner's educational history, school attendance and instructional method is vital. This will provide much needed insight into a learner's reading difficulties. Teachers will be able to gauge the options for instructions. This information may offer hints about the seriousness of a learner's reading problems. Teachers must make every effort to obtain information regarding learners with reading difficulties in the early grades of primary school (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010:53, 54).

In addition to obtaining information, reading instruction plays a major role in the reading process. It can affect a learner's reading success significantly. A balanced approach is recommended as it is said to be effective. Teachers need to be highly effective in instructional strategies in word knowledge, comprehension and writing. Effective instruction for learners with reading difficulties must be matched to individual learner needs (Caldwell *et al.*, 2010: 55). Teachers should take note of some teaching practices that can add to reading difficulties.

Teachers who fail to ensure that the learners are prepared to learn a specific skill or strategy. The use of material that is too difficult. The pacing of instruction, this can either be too slow or too fast. In addition, instructional time could also impact

negatively on the reading process. Research reveals that the time a learner spends on academically relevant activities at the correct level of difficulty, will influence the reading process. The more time spent on a task, the higher the academic achievement is believed to be. Teacher enthusiasm is said to keep learners focused. Learners who feel safe are likely to take risks on the way to become proficient readers. Teachers who tend to ignore unsatisfactory reading behaviour until they become habits. When a teacher asks a question and answers without giving learners time to respond. The failure of a teacher to acknowledge learners when they try. To express disapproval or sarcasm when a learner makes a mistake. To allow fellow learners to disparage another learner's efforts. To expect a learner to perform a task that they cannot do in front of others. The expectation that a learner will perform poorly because his/her older siblings did so (Ereksen *et al.*, 2011:48, 49).

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

Although reading is a complicated process, it is necessary for academic success and for the acquisition of employment. Many learners in South Africa are not able to read and understand text at the expected levels. The main reason for reading is to make meaning of the text. This would not be possible without the acquisition and explicit teaching and learning of the key elements that determine proficient reading. These elements include phonological awareness, word recognition, fluency and comprehension of text. These elements work in correlation to each other to ensure success in reading and overall academic success. The characteristics of proficient readers as discussed by Anderson *et al.*, (2010:285) include: The reader will have a clear purpose for reading and will constantly evaluate whether this purpose was achieved. They will read selectively and make decisions about their reading, what to read and how to read (speed). They will use prior knowledge to construct meaning and will think ahead of what is likely to come next. They would also monitor their understanding of the text and fill in gaps to make sense of the text, will figure out unfamiliar words and ask questions on what was read. They will think about the text after reading and will use it in appropriate situations when necessary and will finally construct summaries of what was read whilst drawing inferences. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors impact reading acquisition skills.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter 2 the literature review was concerned with the elements that are crucial for effective reading in primary school. In the Foundation Phase in primary school, learners are taught to read in order to learn. During the transition to the Intermediate Phase, Grade 4, the learners need to read in order to learn. The literature review also focused on the types of reading difficulties that are experienced by learners during this transitional period. Chapter 3 will outline the research design to be employed by the researcher in order to gain insight into the reading difficulties that are experienced by learners entering the Intermediate Phase in a primary school in KZN. The research question in this study requires a research approach which deals with real-life experiences. These real-life experiences have to be studied in their natural setting and have to be in-depth. The proposed research topic requires the analysis drawn from a number of sources such as observations, documentation and interviews. In order to satisfy the requirements of the proposed topic, the qualitative method of research is most suitable. This chapter will focus on the purpose of the empirical investigation, detailing the research methodology, research design, data analysis and interpretation and the ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH AIMS**

The purpose of this research is to explore and understand reading difficulties as barriers to learning experienced by learners entering the intermediate phase.

As stated in paragraph 1.5 the aims of this study are to:

- Determine the components that are essential for reading development
- Determine the types of reading difficulties in Grade 4
- Determine the influence of reading difficulties on the learners' learning in all subjects and on academic progress
- Determine the factors that can cause reading difficulties

- Determine the factors that can improve reading.

The detailed discussion of the research methodology that was used for this empirical investigation is presented below.

### **3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:2,3) discuss research as being a systematic process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data in order to increase one's understanding of the phenomenon one is interested in and concerned about. Research can be understood by its eight distinct characteristics, which include:

- clear goal setting
- a problem or a question
- a specific plan of action
- divides the main problem into manageable and understandable sub-problems
- clear guidelines, which include the research problem or research question.
- requires critical assumptions
- the collection and analysis of data that relates to the research problem
- follows logical and developmental steps making it cyclical or helical in nature.

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative research approach**

Discussion by some researchers (Henning, 2004:3; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:8; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:134; Marshall & Rossman, 2011:3) reveal that the qualitative research approach usually aims for an in-depth understanding rather than the quantity of understanding. The researchers using this approach want to understand and explain an argument by using the evidence from the data that has been collected. No boundaries will be set as this researcher would not want to place limitations on the data collection.

Further discussion by these authors, illustrates the qualitative approach enables the researcher to make meaning of the data. This is done by seeing the bigger picture and by converting the raw empirical information known as the thin description of the phenomenon, into a thick description. This approach can also be seen as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. Data collection in this approach is less structured yet more flexible (MacQueen & Namey, 2012:5, 6). The researcher will have prolonged contact with the participants in a naturalistic setting. This will allow the researcher to gain a holistic overview of the study at hand. The main instrument in the qualitative approach is the researcher (Gbrich, 2013:44).

This researcher used the qualitative research approach for the empirical investigation, reading difficulties as barriers to learning by learners entering the Intermediate Phase, by employing multiple data collection methods. These qualitative data collection methods included interviews, observations, document studies (documents pertaining to learner academic progress) and the literature review, in order to gain a holistic view of the empirical investigation.

The interview method was the main method of data collection. Interviews were used to collect data on the teachers' perspectives on the components necessary for effective reading development, the need for learners to read at the expected levels and some of the factors that they felt were impacting the learners, reading skills. The interviews were also used to collect data on the Grade 4 learners' feelings about reading and reading activities. The observation method was used to collect data on the reading behaviour of the learners. The review of documents was used to verify the impact of the reading difficulties on the selected Grade 4 learners' academic progress in all subjects. The literature review provided an in-depth understanding of the crucial components that are necessary for reading development when learners enter the Intermediate Phase. It also provided an in-depth understanding of the factors that can affect reading development and the impact of reading difficulties on a learner's overall academic progress. These multiple data collection methods enabled the researcher to make meaning of the data by converting the thin description of the phenomenon into a thick description.

**Table 3.1: The qualitative research approach can be characterised as follows:**

Characteristics	Description
1. Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holistic and emergent</li><li>• Specific focus</li><li>• Specific design and instruments</li><li>• Interpretations that can change along the way</li></ul>
2. Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description – nature of settings and relationships</li><li>• Interpretation – researcher gains new insight about phenomenon</li><li>• Verification – allows for the testing of validity within real-life contexts</li><li>• Evaluation – allows for effective judging of practices</li></ul>
3. Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purposive and nonrandom, selection of individuals or subjects that will yield the most information</li></ul>
4. Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research takes place in a natural setting</li><li>• Close interaction with participants</li></ul>
5. Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiple methods can be employed</li><li>• Interviews, observations and document studies</li></ul>
6. Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is primarily on participant's perspectives</li><li>• Participant's subjective views</li></ul>
7. Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identification of themes</li><li>• Categorizing of themes and patterns</li></ul>
8. Human instrument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Researcher is relied upon as key instrument in collection of data</li></ul>

Adapted from (Creswell,2013:46;Leedy&Ormrod,2005:134-145).

The research design for this study embodied the characteristics and theories of the qualitative research approach discussed above. The researcher was the key instrument in the collection of data and multiple data collection methods were employed. The focus was on the participants' perspectives as they were able to provide rich data with regards to the phenomena. In addition to this the research took place in a natural setting, in a primary school and this allowed for the investigation into reading difficulties experienced by some learners entering the Intermediate

Phase. The data analysis allowed for the identification and categorization of salient themes and patterns. The researcher chose to use the case study design for this study as it was most empathic and productive in attaining the relevant and necessary results.

### **3.3.2 Case Study Design**

Research designs are the plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. The design includes several decisions that need to be taken in the order in which they would make sense to the researcher. A research design also helps the researcher to outline the defined purpose between the researched questions and approaches. This outline will generate data that will be verifiable and will also be credible (Creswell, 2013:50; McMillan & Schumacher,2001:74)

This researcher adopted the descriptive case study design it describes the natural phenomenon which occurs within the data in question. The goal of the research was to describe the data as they occurred. The design also allowed the researcher to explore the issue through a variety of lenses, thus multiple facets of the phenomenon were revealed and understood (Baxter, 2008:548). A case study design relies on multiple sources of evidence with the data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin, 2009:18).

This descriptive case study design within the qualitative approach of data collection enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon ie. reading difficulties as barriers to learning by learners entering the Intermediate Phase and meaning for those involved. The interest was in the process rather than outcomes. It was also in context rather than a specific variable and in discovery rather than confirmation. The how, when, where and why things happen were noted and formed part of the study (Henning, 2004:41).The data collected in this case design provided the necessary information on the nature of the case, the historical background, the physical setting and all other contexts as discussed by Mertens (2010:243). The researcher was given the opportunity to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life as discussed by (Yin, 2003:10). Discussion by

Harding (2013:16) revealed that the aim of a case study should not be to generalize but to contribute to theory. These researchers add that a case study is a unique form of design because the context is crucial to the research. In order for a researcher to use a case study design, he/she needs to consider five components: The study's question, the study's propositions, the unit of analysis to be used, the logic that will link the data to the proposition and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2003:27).

In addition to the above, research by Creswell (2007:73-75) reveals that the researcher should determine if the case study design is appropriate to study the problem. This researcher believes that a case study will be good when the enquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries. The case study should also provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena. Yin (2003:69) mentions that a good case study investigator should be able to ask good questions and interpret the answers that are given. They should also be good listeners and should be adaptive and flexible. The case study investigator should view new situations as opportunities and not threats. They should also have a firm grip of the issues being studied and must be unbiased.

In line with the findings by Kothari (2004:113, 114) and Yin (2009:29), the researcher in this study, focused on a single process as the unit of analysis within a single organization. The focus on this case study was the reading difficulties as barriers to learning by learners entering the Intermediate Phase. The researcher conducted an in-depth and intensive investigation of this process as a unit of analysis. The object was to locate the factors that accounted for the behavioural patterns linked to the given unit of analysis. Using the descriptive case study design, the researcher made every effort to also study the behaviour patterns of the individuals who are directly linked to this unit of analysis. This was done in order to acquire a holistic picture of the unit, the interrelation between the different components ie. the teachers, learners and reading behaviours were investigated. A complete study was made and covered all the facets of reading difficulties as barriers to learning. This was done using a number of data collection methods and was bounded by three months of data collection.

### **3.4 SAMPLING COLLECTION**

#### **3.4.1 Sampling**

Sampling is the representation of a population for the collection of data during a research study. Population is a collective term used to describe the total quantity of things or cases. Population can also be described as the subject of the study. The population can consist of objects, people or even events (Walliman, 2006:275, 276). Kothari (2004:58) describes a good sample design as one that must result in a truly representative sample and one where the results of the sample study can be applied, in general, for the universe with a reasonable level of confidence.

A sample is a subset of the population that is taken to be representative of the entire population (Tayie, 2005:32). A sample consists of cases, units or elements that will be examined while participants are the people who will be selected from a population in order to gain insight into the phenomena being studied. The sample in qualitative research is generally small, however, there is an intense study of the phenomena and large amounts of data are generated. The cases are studied and specifically selected in order to gain insight into the phenomenon and issues that are important (Boeije, 2010:36, Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:145). The sample that is selected must be free from bias, which is the unwanted distortion of results. This usually occurs when parts of the sample are more strongly represented than others (Walliman, 2006:79).

Discussion by Flick, Kardorff and Steinke (2004:169) outline the following criteria to be adopted by the qualitative researcher with regards to the quality of the key informants: the informants have available the knowledge and experience that the researcher needs, the informants are capable of reflection that they are articulate, they have time to be interviewed and that they are willing to participate in the investigation.

#### **3.4.2 Sampling Method**

There are two types of sampling in a research study, probability sampling, which entails a random selection process and non-probability sampling, which entails the

non-random selection of participants. Random sampling techniques yield the most reliable representation of the whole population, whilst non-random techniques rely on the judgment of the researcher (Walliman, 2006:276). When using the non-probability sampling method, the researcher purposively and non-randomly selects the sample for the study (Kothari, 2004:59).

The researcher of this study used the purposive and non-random sampling method. Purposive sampling is where the researcher selects what she thinks is a typical sample based on specialist knowledge or selection criteria (Walliman, 2006:79). This method will be of benefit as the participants will yield the most information on the proposed study or about the topic under investigation.

Research by Emmel (2013:34, 35) reveals that purposive sampling is used for in-depth study of information rich cases. It is also selected to fit the purpose of this study. The researcher who uses this sampling method, considers the resources that are available and the constraints to be faced. Theory is also taken into consideration and sound judgment is made prior and after sampling. These judgments are made with what is already known about the phenomena. The researcher is said to select a limited number of cases which produce the most information. The sample that is chosen using purposive sampling should produce the most credible results that will be suitable for the audience. The capacity to analyze the collected data is also considered.

### **3.4.3 Sample participants**

There is no formula for defining the desired number of units or instances when determining a sample size for a research project. However the size of the sample should be indirect relationship to the number of questions asked, the amount of detail required in the analysis of data and the number of controls introduced (Walliman, 2011:188, 189, Yin, 2011:89). The size of the sample required for a qualitative study can also depend on at least one or more of the seven points as discussed by Tayie (2005:42), the project type and the purpose of the project. The complexity of the research project the amount of error that is to be tolerated, time constraints, financial constraints and previous research in the area of study



In addition to the characteristics above, Kothari (2004:56) states that the size of a sample should not be too small, neither should it be too large but optimum. This means that the sample should fulfill the requirements of efficiency, representativeness, reliability and flexibility for a case study.

Considering all of the above this researcher employed the purposive sampling method. These participants were chosen as they were able to yield the most information pertaining to the study. The research study entailed a descriptive case study design, in a single primary school in the Zululand Region of KwaZulu-Natal. The participants were specifically chosen as they were directly involved with the phenomenon to be investigated. They had first hand information on the data that was necessary for this study. This sample consisted of nine teachers, nine learners and three parents. Each of the teachers, learners and parents participated in individual interviews. Some of the teacher participants had previously taught the learners entering the Intermediate Phase whilst the other teacher participants were currently teaching the learners who had entered the Intermediate Phase. The teacher participants were able to yield rich information as they taught different subjects in the Grade 4 classes. They had a number of years of teaching experience. The parent participants that were selected were the parent or guardians of the selected learner participants. In addition to the interviews, observations done in two classes during four different subjects. The classes that were observed were the Grade 4 classes. Each of these consisted of approximately 42 learners. The reading behaviour of the selected learners was observed during the observation sessions in the different subjects. Specific documents pertaining to the learners were reviewed. These documents included: learner portfolios, which contained assessments and tests, learner workbooks and learner reports. This researcher used the steps outlined below to select the learners for the research study after the necessary ethical clearance was obtained.

In order to purposively select the learner participants, the researcher engaged in detailed discussions with the respective teachers with regards to the profile of some of learners who were experiencing reading difficulties. These discussions included aspects of general reading habits, levels of reading and independent reading skills.

The different teachers had ample background information on the reading skills of the learners who had transitioned to Grade 4. They had records of reading difficulties that the learners had previously experienced based on continued observations and assessments. At the beginning of the school year, all English Language teachers in each grade conduct baseline diagnostic testing with regards to the learners reading abilities, the level they are reading at, the number of words that they can identify and their comprehension of text skills. A checklist and a marking rubric are used by these teachers and this information will be used in conjunction with the information that is given by the Grade 3 teachers to gain some insight on the learners' reading skills. Based on the information from the teachers who previously taught the learners and from those who were currently teaching them, the learner participants were selected. The final number of learner participants formed part of the study after the necessary consent was requested and received. These were nine Grade 4 learners.

### **Profile of Participants**

The researcher used the non-random sampling strategy to select the 21 participants. Of the 21 participants 9 participants were teachers who had the first hand information as they taught or had taught Grade 4 learners and were purposively selected. They had between four to 30 years of teaching experience. The teachers are highly motivated and are effective in curriculum delivery and must be acknowledged that they were able to contribute valuable information about the study. They are constantly engaged in workshops that foster better teaching and learning methods. They are very keen recipients of new knowledge that would allow for greater learner participation and learner success. The teacher participants are distinguished as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8 and T9. Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of them.

The other 9 participants were the Grade 4 learners. These learners were also purposively selected, using information from their previous teachers, as well as from their records and after consent was approved and granted. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the grade 4 learners. Learners are distinguished as L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6, L7, L8 and L9. These learner participants were able to yield rich data with regards to their feelings on reading and their

preferences for reading material. They were able to provide some insight on and the impact of these reading on academic results. They were also able to express their need to be able to read and what they thought about the importance of reading. The final three participants were either a parent or guardian of the selected learner participants. A request was made for each parent or guardian to participate in this research. Three parents responded as participation in research studies are voluntary. The parent/guardian was able to provide some insight into some of the selected learners' reading behaviours at home. In total 21 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted.

#### **3.4.4 Research site profile**

The setting is also very important as this is where the observation of the subject will take place and where the topic will manifest itself most strongly (Boeije, 2010:36, Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:145). The research site and target population for this study was a multi-cultural and multi-racial primary school in the Zululand Region. The institution is situated in a district that is a semi-urban environment with a population of 907,519 and is located in the north-eastern region of the KwaZulu-Natal province. This district is home to six local municipalities and has the third-highest population in the province (Main, 2015:171, 172). The researcher used this site as a single case-study (the descriptive case-study design was discussed in par.3.3.2) as it consists of multi-racial and multi-cultural learners and teachers and would provide suitable information for the study at hand. The research site has approximately 770 learners. Most of the learners live in the suburb, whilst the other learners travel approximately 35 kilometers to school. The Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) at this primary school is English, with English as the Home Language, IsiZulu and Afrikaans as additional languages. The teachers at the primary school are employed by the Department of Basic Education with seven teachers employed by the School Governing Body. There are also administration staff members and cleaning staff. The School Management Team (SMT) is made up of: the principal, deputy principal and heads of department. This management team is highly efficient and they manage the school effectively. This is done by continuous audits of all the components of the school and through consistent communication and correspondence with all stakeholders.

The school consists of 22 classrooms, suitable for between 38 to 42 learners per classroom. All of these classrooms are well-lit, painted and have ample chairs and desks as well as resources which include textbooks and other visual resources for efficient teaching and learning. The school also has a computer centre and computer lessons are given to learners in all grades. There are many literacy programmes to promote reading awareness during computer lessons.

This research site boasts a well-stocked library with books for all ages and also a number of non-fiction books and resources to assist learners with assessments. Learners from Grade R to Grade 7 have a library period, during which they can borrow books and conduct necessary research. There are a number of reading activities and programmes at this school to promote the love and importance of reading. "Readathon", which is a reading campaign held annually in all schools to promote reading, is observed and celebrated here. This reading campaign serves as a catalyst to involve whole communities in the school's literacy activities. During the readathon week, the importance of reading is demonstrated by a number of unique and fun-filled activities. Learners are also engaged in many reading initiatives. One such initiative which aims to encourage all teenagers and the youth of South Africa to read for pleasure. They do this by providing story books to schools who are beneficiaries of this programme. The learners at this school participate in story-telling competitions and book review competitions as well as assembly talks. There is a specific period allocated for "reading for pleasure" daily for learners from Grade 1 to Grade 7. Peer reading activities are also encouraged.

The research site strives to provide quality education to all learners and is always open to suggestions and recommendations. The learners at this school are encouraged to participate in a number of activities that help foster holistic development. They participate in the bi-annual Eisteddfod, Kaste, Challenga and Olympiad Examinations as well as the Science Astronomical Quiz. The learners at this school excel in athletics, public speaking competitions, debates, dancing and drama. This research site strives to assist learners to achieve better academic results, especially in literacy.

The research site is governed by the principles outlined in the NCS and has a school code of conduct. There are a number of policies that have been implemented that ensure structure and maintain order. These include: learner code of conduct, teacher code of conduct, safety and security, environmental, health promotion, learner support and discipline. There is excellent communication with parents, guardians and caregivers with regards to learner performance and strategies to improve results. This is done through correspondence in the learner communication books, sms services and telephonically. Learner test and assessment results are sent to parents to view and acknowledge. The school also has an Institutional Level Support Team (ILST) whose purpose is to provide the necessary support to learners with varying difficulties when information is sent to them by teachers. They have meetings with parents or guardians to discuss difficulties experienced by the learners. The team have regular meetings and learner profiles are monitored. The school has also remedial programme in place. However, if the problems are severe then the assistance of the district support team is sought. Parents and guardians are the key decision-makers once recommendations and reports are given to them with regards to reading difficulties.

The ILST team is made up of the principal, the heads of Department and some teachers. The stakeholders including the school governing body members, are in constant contact with neighbouring schools, obtaining new methods for effective teaching and learning and to share ideas. The principal and teachers attend literacy workshops, engage with other institutions, conduct literacy workshops at school and acquire literacy resources to improve the literacy levels at this institution.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION**

Data are the concrete reflections of the social world that can be sensed, which means that data are what we can see, hear, taste, touch or smell. Data comes from asking people identical questions, and having them choose their answers from a limited set of possibilities (Loseke, 2013:15).

The main aim of this research was to answer specific questions on the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher used a number of data collection methods,

namely observations, interviews and document studies to gain the necessary data. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews were videotaped and later transcribed after permission had been granted by the participants. Observations on the reading behaviour of the Grade 4 learners were conducted by the researcher as an observer. The observations were conducted in a natural setting, that is the Grade 4 classrooms. Documents included the learner portfolios, report cards and workbooks.

### **3.6 INTERVIEWS**

In qualitative interviews, the researcher is once again the main instrument as in observations. The information obtained during interviews concerns behaviors, ideas and experiences that describe the phenomenon that is studied. These interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher to learn more about the phenomenon through the perspectives of others (Boeije, 2010:61).

Qualitative interviewing is a useful research method for accessing individuals, attitudes and values. Things that cannot be observed or asked in a formal questionnaire can be asked in an interview. If the questions are open-ended they can yield more considered responses (Silverman, 2013:171).

In addition, interviews are guided by conversations rather than structured questions. The questions are fluid rather than rigid. Interviews are targeted and focus directly on the topic at hand. They are very insightful and provide inferences and explanations. The interviewer must follow an interview protocol, a line of enquiry. The interviewer should ask actual questions in an unbiased manner. Interviews are conducted over a period of time and not during a single setting (Yin, 2009:106).

#### **3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews that are semi-structured and interpersonal encourage openness and richness of data. The questions that are asked in a semi-structured interview are asked with purpose and are open-ended, yet flexible and sequential. Since flexibility is a key component in semi-structured interviews, they encourage an exchange or

dialogue and that is a real conversation. This dialogue takes place between the interviewer and interviewee. This manifests a personal component that is a necessary and unique benefit for qualitative researchers (Lavrakas & Roller, 2015:53; Simons, 2009:44).

In addition, semi-structured interviews also consist of several questions that assist in the exploration of the phenomenon in a research study. These interviews allow the interviewer or the interviewee to diverge so that a response can be pursued in detail (Chadwick, Gill, Stewart & Treasure, 2008:291, 295). Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in research projects to corroborate data emerging from other data sources. The researcher uses interview schedules or guides that define the line of enquiry. These interview guides allow for information from the different interviews to be directly compared. The interview guides usually have standard introductions and conclusions but allow for flexibility. This provides a natural flow of information and the interviews are usually conducted one- on-one (Maree, 2007:87).

Researchers who opt to use a descriptive case study design, use the technique of semi-structured interviews as it is economical. It also provides a basis for generalization and not much skill is required from the interviewer (Kothari, 2004:98). This researcher used interviews with a semi-structured format to collect the necessary data. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with all participants.

### **3.6.2 Individual Interviews**

In-depth individual interviews are known as intensive interviews. This type of interview uses individuals as the point of departure for the research process. The researcher makes the assumption that the selected individuals have unique and important information or knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. This knowledge is then shared during the interviews. These interviews can be described as a construction site of knowledge, where individuals discuss a theme of mutual interest. The in-depth individual interviews ask matter of fact questions as well as the opinions of the participants (Biber *et al.*,2011:95; Marshall & Rossman, 2011:142; Yin, 2009:106).

Another requirement for an individual interview to be successful, is the process of active asking and active listening. The interviews can occur in one session per interviewee or more than one session can be used. The interview is centered on the specific topic in which the researcher is interested. The ultimate goal is to gain rich qualitative data from the selected participants (Simons, 2009:4). The researcher has to bear in mind that interviews have limitations and needs to acquire the trust or build on the trust of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:142,149).

During the individual interviews, the same questions were asked of all those involved. The kind and form of questions go through a process of development to ensure the topic focus. To ensure equivalent coverage, interviews are prompted by supplementary questions if they have not been spontaneously dealt with one of the sub-areas of interest. Approximately equivalent interview time is allocated in each case (Gillham, 2005:70).

### **3.6.3 Interview procedure**

The researcher conducted 21 individual interviews and used four interview schedules with open-ended questions (Appendix H) for the Foundation Phase teacher participants, Appendix I for the Grade 4 teacher participants, Appendix J for the learner participants and Appendix K for the parent participants. The following procedure was followed by the researcher using guidelines by Biber, Leavy and Nagy (2011:105), Gillham (2005:70, 77), Leedy and Ormrod (2005:147).

This researcher was main research instrument when collecting data using interviews and this called for certain requirements which included, the necessary consent for all participants, an interview guide with the relevant questions, an environment free of bias and the principle of voluntary participation for the individual interviews to be successful. Permission was sought and obtained from the Department of Basic Education per the ethical requirements from UNISA. Permission was obtained from the district Senior Education Manager (SEM) and from the principal of the research site. Written permission and consent was obtained from the all parents of the learner participants. Written permission and consent was obtained from all teacher participants. Learner assent was also obtained. A detailed explanation of the study was given to all participants. The date, the time and the venue was given prior to the



interview and was suitable for all participants, precise information was given. The probable length of the interview was also given to all participants. The interview room was well-prepared prior to the interview. The interviews were conducted at suitable times and no teaching or learning disruptions took place. All interviews were conducted professionally yet in a friendly manner. Participants were at ease and under no pressure. The interviewer made every effort to create a friendly atmosphere of trust and confidence. The interviewer was well prepared and asked relevant questions in a proper manner. All responses were recorded accurately and completely. The interviewer was friendly yet unbiased and kept the interviewee on track. Participation was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw from this study at any given time. All participants were treated with dignity and respect. The questions for the learners were simplified. The researcher listened intently and made certain that participants were comfortable. Rapport was built from the beginning of the interview and was maintained throughout by ensuring that the participants were comfortable and under no pressure to answer questions that they did not want to. The researcher was courteous and respectful and non-judgemental throughout the interviews. Participants were given opportunities throughout the interview to review their responses.

### **3.7 OBSERVATIONS**

An observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research. These observations are based on the research purpose and research questions (Creswell, 2013:166). Observations in a qualitative study are intentionally unstructured and free-flowing. The primary advantage of conducting observations is flexibility as the researcher can take advantage of unforeseen data sources (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:145).

Discussion by Simons (2009:55) describes observations as a comprehensive picture of the site and a sense of the setting which cannot be obtained solely by speaking to people. Documenting observed incidents and events in their natural setting provides a rich description and a basis for further analysis and interpretation.

A final characteristic of observations is that it is an essential data gathering technique as it holds the possibility of providing the researcher with an insider perspective of the group dynamics and behaviors of different settings. It allows the researcher to hear, see and begin to experience reality as the participants do. The researcher must ensure that he/she have defined the purpose and focus of the observation (Maree, 2007:84)

There are different types of observation in a qualitative research study as discussed by Creswell (2013:166,167) and Maree (2007:85).

- a) Complete participant observation whereby the researcher is fully engaged with the people he/she are observing. The researcher gets completely immersed in the setting. The participants who are being observed would not know that they are the subjects of observation.
- b) Participant observer, this is when the researcher participates in the activity at the site. This assists the researcher in gaining subjective data. The researcher may intervene in the dynamics of the situation. The researcher may also try to alter the situation.
- c) Observer as a participant, here the researcher gets into the situation but the key role is to observe the situation. The researcher remains uninvolved, does not influence the dynamics of the situation, however identifies patterns of behaviour and tries to understand the assumptions, values and beliefs of the sample. The researcher tries to make sense of the social dynamics but has no direct involvement with the participants.
- d) Complete observer, in this instance the researcher is neither seen nor noticed by the participants. This is the least obtrusive form of observation.

Creswell (2013:167) discusses the steps that a researcher can follow for successful observation. The site to be observed must be selected and necessary permission must be sought and obtained prior to the observations. The researcher should also have a good idea of who or what he/she would like to observe and have an idea of

the duration of the observations. The researcher should determine the role that they would like to assume and have a good observation protocol or schedule. Proper records of the observations must be maintained throughout the study. When recording the observations, the researcher should capture the dimensions of what was observed, that is thick descriptions and researcher reflections. Accurate recording is vital and both verbal and non-verbal behaviour must be recorded. The researcher can do this by relying as much as possible on ticking boxes or circling numbers. Boeije (2010:61) adds that all notes should be concrete and not abstract and Walliman (2006:97) states that if possible the researcher should process the information as the observation progresses as this could help identify critical matters that need to be studied in detail.

In keeping with all of the above, the researcher in this study conducted structured observations of the selected learners in the units of Grade 4 classes at the school. The researcher was an observer as a participant but remained uninvolved and did not influence the dynamics of the lessons. However pattern and behaviours were identified and there was no direct involvement with the participants. Since the researcher has many years of teaching experience at a primary school and prolonged engagement with learners of different grades, this enabled the researcher to conduct structured yet free-flowing observations. This included six sessions of observations of Grade 4 classes during the different subjects. Each Grade 4 class consisted of approximately 42 learners. These observations included descriptive and reflective field notes. Descriptive field notes record a description of events and activities, while reflective field notes record the researcher's personal thoughts and experience of the situation (Maree, 2007:85).

The researcher confirmed the observation sessions with the respective Grade 4 teachers and began the observation once approval had been granted. Prior arrangements were made and specific time allocations were adhered to. The researcher briefly explained the reason for the observations to the learners in the Grade 4 classes but did not directly identify any learners. There was no disruption of teaching and learning time as the researcher did not actively participate in the lessons. All observations were video recorded and notes were taken.

The researcher was able to make the necessary observations on the reading behavior of the selected learner participants. Observations were conducted after all the ethical requirements were met by the researcher. Each of the observation sessions was recorded and a template was used with the headings indicating the subject, time of lesson, date, and the lesson being taught. A checklist was also used during the observation sessions (Appendix G). A separate checklist was used for each learner participants. The researcher conducted the observations with this schedule:

- Observation of the learner's reading behavior during general reading activities
- Observation during prepared and unprepared reading assessments in the English period
- Observation of reading activities that entailed comprehension of text
- Observation of independent reading behaviour
- Observation of the learners' reading behaviour during group-work or peer-work activities.
- Observations when no reading was necessary.

### **3.8 DOCUMENTS**

Documents are used as a method of data collection in a qualitative research study and descriptive case study designs in order to shed light on the phenomenon to be investigated. The researcher must consider the following with regards to documents: the kind of document that would be appropriate and relevant in shedding light on the study, if the document is a primary or secondary source, if it is official or unofficial, the purpose and intent of the document and that its content show that the document relates to the study (Maree, 2007:83). Using documents as a data collection method in a descriptive case study design is advantageous as they are stable, and can be viewed repeatedly. Documents are also unobtrusive and were not created as a result of the case study. They also have a broad coverage and contain events and settings (Biber *et al.*,2011:257).

In this study, the researcher used documents to supplement the data collected through interviews and observations. These documents pertained to the learner participants in the study. The documents were examined after the ethical clearance was approved by all stakeholders. This included permission from the principal, parents and teachers. The documents included the learner workbooks, homework and communication portfolios containing tests and assessments and teacher records. The documents were collected and examined for usefulness in answering the research questions. These documents were used to establish a link between the reading difficulties and the learners academic progress. They contained information over a period of two terms in Grade 4 and form part of the discussion and analysis in Chapter 4.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Data analysis in a qualitative research study consist of preparing and organizing the data for analysis. This is done by transcribing the collected data into text data. Transcription is the process of converting audiotape, recordings and field notes into text data (Creswell, 2012:239). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:150, 151), the researcher in qualitative research begins with a large body of information and using inductive reasoning, sort and categorize it and reduce it to a small set of underlying themes.

Data analysis also lies in the related process of describing phenomena, classifying it and then seeing how the concepts interconnect. Essentially data analysis involves a process of immersion in data through which the researcher can identify and interpret the experiences of the participants (Bailey *et al.*, 2011:245, 246).

Walliman (2011:209) adds that the main reasons for data analysis is to measure, make comparisons, to examine relationships, to forecast, to test hypotheses, to construct concepts and theories, to explore, control and to explain.

#### **3.9.1 Steps in data analysis and interpretation**

The steps for data analysis as suggested by Creswell (2012:237) is discussed below. There are six steps that are commonly used when analyzing qualitative data. These steps represent how the data is presented and organized for analysis.

- Data is collected during different methods of data collection.
- Data is then prepared for the analysis, usually by the transcription of field notes.
- The data is read by the researcher in order to gain general sense of the data that was collected.
- The data is then coded.
- The text is then coded for descriptions that will be used in the report.
- Codes the text for the underlying themes that would be used in the research report.

According to Creswell (2012:263) the steps of research analysis include all or some of the following: preliminary reading, coding, description, thematic development, representation and interpretation. The researcher in this study followed the above steps. The data was collected, organized into files and folders. This system of organization was vital, due to the large amounts of data. It was also vital to develop a matrix or a table of sources. This organization of data was according to types for example, folder one for interviews, folder two for observation data and folder three for documents. Codes were then allocated for the different folders.

The next step was the transcription of data. This is the process of converting the collected data into text data. The researcher read through all the data, marked it by hand and then divided it into parts. Highlighters were used to mark relevant information.

The next step was the exploration of data and the development of codes. After the organization of and transcription of data, the researcher explored the data and formulated relevant codes. Coding is the process of segmenting the text to form descriptions and broad themes. It is also the process of labeling the text. This is done in order to make sense of the data. The researcher divided the text, labels with codes, examined the codes and collapsed the codes into broad themes. Data that

was irrelevant to the themes were discarded. The process of coding was done and a list of code words were made and grouped. This was done to reduce codes to make it simpler for the researcher to manage the process of analysis (Creswell, 2012:243).

After the reduction of codes, themes were formulated. Themes are also referred to as categories. These themes allow the researcher to write the qualitative report while providing detailed information. Themes can be categorized as:

1. ordinary themes, in this instance the researcher expects to find these themes;
2. unexpected, meaning the themes are surprises;
3. hard to classify themes these do not easily fit into the main theme;
4. and major and minor themes, main ideas and secondary ideas.

### **3.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TRANSFERABILITY**

Trustworthiness and authenticity in a qualitative research study refers to the way in which the inquirer is able to persuade the audience that the findings in the study are worth paying attention to and that the research is of high quality (Maree, 2007:297). This process involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability in a research study. The criteria below as discussed by Shenton (2004:69), Creswell (2013:251) and Marshall and Rossman (2011:46, 47) assisted, the qualitative researcher to ensure trustworthiness and transferability in this research study.

#### **3.10.1 Credibility**

This is established by prolonged engagement in the research field and in the triangulation of data sources, methods and investigations. It is also referred to as internal validity and this is done in order to assess whether the information obtained through the data collection is correct. The strategies to establish credibility in a research study include member checks and triangulation of data.

Member checks means the data is shared and interpretations are made with participants. Triangulation includes the use of different methods of data collection. This is done to provide corroborating evidence in order to shed light on a theme or perspective. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (Creswell, 2012:259) and enables the researcher to compensate for the individual limitations or shortcomings in the different data collection methods. The data collected from the interviews can be supported by the data collected during observations and supporting data may be obtained from relevant documents. Triangulation can be obtained by using a wide range of participants and the individual points can be verified against each other. In this way a rich picture can be constructed based on the contributions of the participants (Shenton, 2004:66).

### **3.10.2 Transferability**

This refers to the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. It is gaining knowledge on whether a study's findings can be generalized beyond the immediate case study (Yin, 2009:43). The researcher must ensure that sufficient contextual information about the research site is provided in order for transferability to be done. The researcher needs to highlight the boundaries of the study and provide information regarding the number of organizations participating, restrictions of participants, number of participants, data collection methods, number and length of data collection sessions and period over which data was collected (Shenton,2004:70).

### **3.10.3 Dependability**

Dependability, in terms of reliability, can be achieved through the use of overlapping methods. This allows for the researcher to report the study in detail. Should another or future researcher repeat the study, he/she should be able to gain the same results. In-depth coverage has to be provided by the researcher in order to allow the reader to understand the research practice that has been followed (Shenton, 2004:71). It is



also necessary for the qualitative researcher to document the procedure of his/her case study and to document as many steps of the procedure as possible. A detailed case study protocol and data base should also be set up (Creswell, 2013:203).

#### **3.10.4 Conformability**

This refers to the qualitative researcher's comparable concern to objectivity. Steps are taken to ensure that the results are based on the ideas of the participants and not the characteristics of the researcher. The researcher in this study was completely objective as the research aim was the priority. Detailed methodological descriptions must be given and the role of triangulation in promoting conformability must be emphasized. This is done to reduce the effect of investigator bias (Shenton, 2004:72).

The researcher in this study used the following steps to ensure trustworthiness and transferability of results. Prolonged engagement in the field, the researcher collected data over a prolonged period of three months at a single institution and this allowed for credibility of findings. Triangulation was obtained as the researcher used different methods of data collection and this included: observations, in-depth interviews and documents. This allowed for triangulation, analysis and recommendations, common themes and patterns. Multiple sources of data were used and this included data collected through interviews, observations and examination of documents which was supported by the literature review. The research was conducted methodically and steps were taken to ensure that the data that was collected data was organized, free of bias and distortion. This allowed for proper analysis and interpretation of results. The participants were given ample and detailed information with regards to the study and were neither forced nor coerced to participate. Participation was on a voluntary basis and participants were not under any pressure. Participant observation was conducted in a natural setting, the Grade 4 classrooms and a second observer was also used and all observations were recorded. Member checks and peer debriefing were also conducted which enabled participants to check the accuracy of data during interviews. A review was conducted at the end of the interview sessions.

### **3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethics is how we behave or should behave in relation to the people with whom we interact. Doing research this means establishing a relationship with participants that respects human dignity and integrity (Simons, 2009:96). Ethics also deal with honesty and to treat participants with respect (Walliman, 2006:147).

### **3.11.1 Informed Consent**

Informed consent is the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice. It is free from manipulation or any form of inducement (David & Sutton,2004:43, 48). Further discussion on ethics and informed consent by Flick (2014:44) reveals that this is done to protect the interests of those participating in the study. To sure certain no harm comes to any of them. The privacy of any individual should not be invaded and participants should not be subjected to any danger.

Walliman (2011:251, 263) states that the participants chosen for a research study can base their decision for participation on the information they receive. Prior to receiving consent from the selected participants, the researcher has to obtain consent from the managers of the institution or organization. Clear information must be given at all levels on how the empirical investigation will be conducted and how confidentiality will be maintained. There has to be some form of participant protection if the need arises. Clarity, brevity and frankness are three key attributes in providing information on which the consent is based. Wording on the information document needs to be simplified so that a non-technical person can understand the contents of the study. Particular consideration needs to be adhered to with regards to vulnerable participants such as children, elderly, illiterate or even foreign language speakers. Those responsible for the vulnerable participants must be consulted. Participants have the right to terminate participation at any time. The researcher must accept the participant's termination immediately. There should be no coercion. There must also be justification of rewards if any.

### **3.11.2 Potential harm and gain**

No harm should be caused during research. However, there has to be some gain, and this should be for the participants in the study. The researcher should have some indication of the possibility of harm or gain with regards to the chosen methods and outcomes. There should be a review of all tentative risks and suitable methods should be chosen to minimize risks. The researcher should make provisions for participant support if necessary. Other types of harm could be those arising from the results of the investigation. The researcher should be aware should the results be harmful to reputation, dignity or privacy of the participants. It is vital that anonymity and confidentiality is maintained throughout the research study (Walliman,2011:253, 254).

### **3.11.3 Honesty, deception and covert methods**

Research studies should be based on the principal of honesty. Preclusion of deception and the use of covert methods. The researcher should decide on a suitable time and method for the disposal of analyzed data. Precautions should be taken to protect confidentiality of the participants and the data. The identity or any information which may identify the participant may not be revealed without the participant's adequate prior consent in writing. There should be no compromise on the personal dignity of the participant or any infringement on the participant's right to privacy (Walliman,2011:255,259,263).

Confidentiality and anonymity procedures that a researcher can adopt include: individual confidentiality statements, statements from all research personnel, coding data, ie. use numbers instead of names, destroy all tapes after transcription, store all data in locked files where only two people have access to these files, use of pseudonyms and finally, proper and appropriate disposal of data that could reveal the identity of the participants (Walliman, 2011:263,264).

### **3.11.4 Ethical Considerations Adhered to**

The ethics clearance application that is required by UNISA was submitted and approved then the following procedure was followed: Permission was applied for and obtained from the head of department of KwaZulu-Natal, Department of Basic Education prior to data collection. Permission was then obtained from the senior education manager at the District Department of Education. Permission was requested and obtained from the principal of the school involved. All the participants were given the consent documents which provided a detailed explanation of the study. Permission and consent was requested and obtained from the parents of the learners and assent was obtained from the learners in the study. The researcher ensured that privacy and confidentiality of the participants was respected and maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed that participation was purely voluntary and if at any time a participant wished to withdraw his/her decision would be respected. The principle of confidentiality was adhered to throughout the research study and no discussion with non-participants was entered into. The researcher did not use or divulge any information that the participants requested to be kept in confidence. The researcher adopted procedures and methods that were relevant to the research in question to ensure that no harm came to the participants with regards to any information that was revealed unintentionally. A risk management programme was in place, in the case of unforeseen risks. There was debriefing of the learner participants after the interviews and a counselor was available on site during the interview sessions. The questions in the learner interviews were simplified and interview sessions had a short time span. Interviewing would have stopped immediately had the researcher seen any signs of discomfort however little. Learners were informed that the findings of the results would be discussed with the principal and parents in order to find suitable ways to assist learners who experienced reading difficulties and that they were not forced to answer any question that would make them uncomfortable. No names were used and each participant was given a confidential profile. To maintain the dignity and rights of all participants, consent was obtained from all participants. All consent was given voluntarily and participants were guaranteed confidentiality.

### **3.12 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 3 presented the research methodology and research design for this empirical investigation. The research approach, design, data collection methods, data analysis and ethical considerations were discussed. This chapter set the platform for the analysis of the data and the research findings in Chapter 4. In Chapter 4 there will be a discussion on the research that was conducted using the qualitative research method thereafter there will be a discussion of the empirical results which would include:

- Reduction and organization of data
- Discussion of results and findings
- Summary of findings

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 3, the research approach, design, sampling, data collection instruments and data analysis was discussed. In this chapter the research findings from the empirical investigation will be discussed. These findings are based on the aim of the research and the sub-questions as stipulated in Chapter 1, paragraph 1.4. The data collected from the teachers, learners and parents will be discussed simultaneously.

The following research questions established this empirical investigation as stated in Chapter 1, paragraph 1.4:

- What are the essential components for reading development?
- What types of reading difficulties are the learners facing when entering the intermediate phase?
- What influence do the identified types of reading difficulties have on the learners' learning in other subjects and academic success?
- What are the factors that influence these reading difficulties?
- What are the factors that can improve reading?

## 4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

During decoding, six themes emerged from the analysis of the data that was collected through individual semi-structured interviews. The data analysis strategy that was used was outlined in paragraph 1.6.2.3 and later in paragraph 3.6.1. The researcher used the data analysis strategies as discussed by Creswell (2007:149). All the information, transcripts and documents that were obtained in the data collection process were analyzed, examined for redundancy, sketched, summarized and labelled with codes that were identified as salient themes and patterns. In order to be able to validate findings, triangulation was incorporated by examining each source of information for evidence in support of the different themes. Themes were then related and a logical chain of evidence was obtained and a link was formed. According to Creswell (2012: 263) the steps of research analysis include all or some of the following: preliminary reading, coding, description, thematic development, representation and interpretation.

The six themes that emerged related to the following and are indicated as themes and sub-themes in Table 4.2: purpose of reading coupled with a good reading foundation; the need to read at expected levels, reading difficulties and academic progress in Grade 4; linking of the crucial reading components for reading success; specific factors that may cause reading difficulties in Grade 4; factors that can assist in improving reading skills. These six themes will be discussed below. There was some overlap in data in some of the themes as themes were closely related. The data obtained from the teachers and learners through the individual interviews will be discussed simultaneously. The data obtained from the parent interviews will also be discussed. Analysis of documents and the data collected from the observations appear in chapter 3 (paragraph 3.6, 3.7) and will also be discussed in this chapter.

The table below shows the themes that were formulated.

**Table 4.3 Themes and sub-themes**

Themes	Sub-themes
1. The need for a good reading foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic success</li><li>• Development and future</li></ul>
2. The need to read at the expected levels at primary school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Independent participation</li><li>• Reading to learn</li></ul>
3. Reading difficulties in Grade 4 and academic success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of independent participation</li><li>• Loss in lesson time</li><li>• Demotivation and lower self - esteem</li></ul>
4. Linking the crucial components of reading for reading success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Phonological awareness</li><li>• Word recognition</li><li>• Vocabulary</li><li>• Fluency</li><li>• Comprehension</li></ul>
5. General factors that may impact a learner's reading development in Grade 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Language of learning and teaching</li><li>• Parental involvement</li><li>• The school environment</li></ul>
6. Factors that could help improve reading in Grade 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early identification of reading difficulties</li><li>• School environment coupled with effective teaching of reading skills</li><li>• Parental involvement and supervision</li></ul>

#### **4.2.1 The need for a good reading foundation.**

##### **4.2.1.1 Academic Success**

Reading is the basis of all learning (par 1.1, 1,2,1, 2,2) and all nine teacher participants shared the opinion that in order for a learner to progress academically, he/she needs to have specific reading skills. When asked, "What in your opinion is the purpose of reading?" All the teachers responded by stating that reading is the foundation for all learning. They were in agreement that without the ability to read,

learners would not progress academically. All nine teachers believe that a good reading foundation sets the tone for academic success.

They added that reading literacy is compulsory and that this is a vital ability that all learners should acquire as they progress through their early grades in primary school. Reading is the basis for all learning and a good foundation is very important *'as it paves the way for reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase'* (Teacher T5). Acquiring reading skills effectively in the Foundation Phase is vital as *'all future learning is dependent on these effective reading skills'* (Teachers T6). Teacher T6 added *'a good reading foundation will enable a learner to easily grasp concepts and will enable him/her to understand content in future grades, in this instance Grade 4'*. Seven of the teacher participants felt that since the content that is taught in Grade 4 is much greater than that of earlier grades, a good reading foundation would be vital. The individual interview with teacher T1 revealed, *'The connection of ideas in Grade 4 is much clearer for learners when the foundation is developed effectively in the earlier grades of primary school'*. A good reading foundation is vital for the necessary framework for the future grades. All teacher participants stated that reading is the foundation for the ability to learn and study and the interview with teacher T2 revealed the following, *'Learners who have developed a strong reading foundation from grade R to Grade 3, would be able to progress through Grade 4 onwards with ease. The learner would be dependent on their reading foundation to access new knowledge'*.

It was also interesting to note from the individual interviews with the learners, that they also understood the importance of reading and the need for a good reading foundation. The majority of the learner participants believed that reading is the key to their future as stated by learners L1, L3, L4, L5, L7 and L8 that in order for learners to pass from one grade to another, *'they must be able to read well'*. Learners must understand everything, *'so that they can pass all their tests and exams'* (Learner L4). Learner L9 stated that if learners could not read well, it would be difficult to go from one grade to another next grade, *'I need to read so that I can be clever and pass, I would become smart and later on I would be able to get a job'*. Research reveals that learners who do not acquire a strong foundation, may experience poor school outcomes in content area.



According to all nine teacher participants, a good reading foundation will ensure that when learners enter Grade 4, they would be able to construct meaning using their acquired skills in the reading process. They added that since learners in Grade 4 read for a variety of purposes, for example, engaging with the different types of text in the different subjects, a good reading foundation is vital. The learners in Grade 4 must be able to engage with the text and must be able to relate previous experiences and knowledge in all subjects, *'in order for academic success'* (Teacher T4). There are many learners in Grade 4 who have an excellent reading foundation *'however there a few learners who do not have a good, solid reading foundation and I find them struggling to engage with the text and this does have detrimental academic implications'* (Teacher T6).

#### **4.2.1.2 Development and Future**

All nine of the teachers were of the opinion that learners need to be taught the importance of reading at an early age as it not only has an impact on their academic progress in primary school, but their future as well. They stated that since many learners come from impoverished backgrounds, the learners must be motivated as early as in Grade 4 to read and study well in order to break out of the cycle of poverty. *'A good reading foundation sets the tone for academic success as well as motivating a learner to set goals for their future careers. Their minds will be developed to focus ahead on short and long term goals'* (Teacher T8). Seven of the teachers believed that lack of adequate reading skills due to a poor reading foundation ultimately leads to unemployment and high school drop-outs. These seven teachers added that learners in Grade 4 must be encouraged to succeed in reading in order to secure their future. There are some learners in all grades who *'come from impoverished backgrounds, many parents and caregivers are unemployed and this does add strain to the learners. Therefore I believe that emphasis must be placed on a good reading foundation and learners must be taught the importance of reading in all grades, subjects and lessons'* (Teacher T7).

It was revealed from the teacher interviews that it would be difficult for a learner to develop his/her imagination and creativity if he/she were unable to read effectively.

The majority of the teachers stated that reading enables a learner to develop his/her ability to focus and ultimately the skill to seek employment, as reading is part of any job. Limitations in reading will have limitations on accomplishments. Learner L7 stated that, *'I will feel unhappy if I am not be able to read well, then in the future I won't get a good job. I won't be able to read the information for the job, I will feel shy'*. Learner L3 stated that, *'When I grow up, I want to drive a nice car, I love fast cars. I also like a nice big house but I must read well and pass. I am sad that sometimes it is so hard to read'*. This revealed that learners are very passionate about having a good future and must be given opportunities to improve their reading.

The teachers also shared the opinion that reading is so fundamental to today's modern society, as everything has developed technologically and learners need to be able to read electronic media as well. *'Imagine not being able to read a text message from a parent or a friend, our learners really need to have proper reading skills to function in the society we live in. If a learner has a good reading foundation, then he/she is set for life'* (Teacher T2). Three of the learner participants stated that their families are always talking about them becoming great people later in their lives and the learner expressed some feelings of sadness about not being able to read well. Learner L6 responded, *'My teachers and parents want me to be a great person when I grow up, I must have a good job so I must read well.'*

Teacher T8 revealed that although learners are in Grade 4 and may seem too young to understand certain concepts, the learners who have a sound reading foundation are those who read widely and are focused on academic success. *'There are learners in my class who have clear goals at this young age and it is quite startling to hear some explanations some learners give after reading a text in the subject I teach them. It seems that they are transported to another dimension. They have very vivid imaginations. There is a difference in some of the responses I receive from some learners with reading difficulties as most will give a 'yes/no' response'* (Teacher T8).

### **Sub-conclusion Category 1: The need for a good reading foundation**

#### **Academic Success**

In closer examination of what the teachers reported, reveals that in order for a learner to progress academically he/she needs to have specific reading skills and a solid reading foundation. The teachers came up with ideas on the deeper understanding of what they observed in their learners. They indicated how essential a good reading foundation is, when learners enter Grade 4. In Grade 4, learners should now be able to learn at a higher cognitive level by constructing meaning from their reading. They are expected to carry meaningful knowledge from one subject to the other. This would improve their memory as the level of learning is higher.

During the interviews and analysis of the data with learner, the researcher noticed that there are commonalities in the way they see their future. They had an understanding that good reading skills are essential in their studies and a future career. Learner participants shared feelings of excitement at being able to have good cars and a bright future.

### **Development and Future Careers**

The teachers agreed that good reading skills are required for a successful future and is a vital factor to prevent the cycle of poverty to continue. This will only be possible once learners are educated and are literate. They added that poor reading skills put limitations on the learners' future accomplishments as it has a negative effect on creativity (this is the development of the right part of the brain). A barrier to reading will prevent successful understanding and interpretation of the text.

The analysis of data also revealed that the learner knew the importance of reading in order to have a successful future. They were willing to share their personal experiences of how they envisaged their future and the understood the need to be able read effectively. However as a researcher I view this as a shortcoming of values in the majority of learners who saw a good future as simply one with a job with a good income. They did not view it as a job where they could use their talents to the advantage to their communities or even the country. The researcher feels that learners should be taught at an early age that their talents and future careers could be used to help and uplift communities.

Some of the parents were able to shed light on the need for a good reading foundation. The researcher was able to ascertain that some of them did not have a very solid reading foundation and were hopeful that their children would not be disadvantaged. They added that the cycle of poverty in society had to be eradicated and that adequate reading skills could make a difference.

## **4.2.2 The Need to Read at the Expected Levels for Academic Success**

### **4.2.2.1 Independent Participation**

Two of the teachers revealed that during the Foundation Phase of primary school, learners spend a lot of time learning to read, reading, writing, and participation in stories. This is done in pairs, in groups and individually. While six of the teachers revealed that when learners move into the Intermediate Phase, Grades 4, 5 and 6 and the Senior Phase, Grade 7 of primary school, a lot of the reading is now subject related. This calls for individual reading and comprehension of text. Data analysis from the individual, interviews with all nine teacher participants revealed that the learner's level of reading did in fact have a direct impact on their academic success. Teacher T5 said, *'In order for Grade 4 learners to complete tasks, they must be able to read at the grade level, this will ensure efficient participation in independent and group tasks. If the learner does not read at the expected levels, then he/she would lag behind in tasks and is likely to perform poorly as well'*. The majority of the teachers reported that in Grade 4, learners need to be independent readers and responsible for the text they are given during the different subjects. They added that learners must not only be able to interact with the different texts but also answer related questions using prior knowledge. *'There is a marked difference in my subject between the learners who read at the grade level. Their engagement with text using their prior knowledge is visible in their responses. However, the learners with reading difficulties do not have ample prior knowledge as they did not interact adequately with the previous texts'* (Teacher T5). The top-down model of reading emphasises that background knowledge is of utmost knowledge in the reading process.

This statement was reiterated by Teacher T8 who said, *'Learners who transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 are expected to work independently in most tasks and if they do not read at the expected levels, academic progress would be limited. I do have some learners who, during my subject, read slowly and sometimes even fail to break up words. They struggle to comprehend text independently and have a challenge to cope with assessments and tests'*. After the in-depth interviews with the learners, their responses also revealed that they also saw the need to read at the expected Grade 4 level for academic success, for example Learner L9 stated, *'I like to read like some of the good readers in my class, but sometimes the words are difficult.'* Learner L6 stated, *'Sometimes I do not get good marks as I find it difficult to read everything and work out stuff on my own. I have to ask my teacher and friends for help'*. Some learners also stated they disliked the longer texts at times *'because I find it difficult to read and this stops me from passing some of my assessments'* (Learner L3). Some learners stated that they enjoyed texts that contained illustrations like cartoons. They could identify with these since they watched some of the cartoons on television.

Further individual interview data analysis with all the teachers involved indicated that pre-reading skills were vital for independent participation in activities and for future academic success. The majority of the teacher participants agreed that these pre-reading skills should be instilled during the early stages of reading development. Teacher T6 stated, *'I believe that a learner will be able to read at the expected levels if they acquire the basic reading skills effectively in the previous grades'* (T6). Teacher T3 shared this opinion, *'Early skills of phonic, word recognition and vocabulary acquisition will allow learners to negate the shock of the larger workload in the additional subjects in Grade 4. They need to be able to read at the expected Grade 4 level as this would allow for a smooth transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4'*.

This statement was supported with the information that was received from Teacher T5 who said, *'Learners will be able to cope adequately on their own and with some assistance with the quantity and quality of work in Grade 4 if they are able to read at the expected Grade 4 level'*. Four of the nine teachers stated that learners who were not coping independently due to reading difficulties, needed constant assistance and as a result less attention is sometimes given to the other learners in the class. They

added that is time-consuming at times and concepts have to be re-taught a number of times. This could be of some disadvantage to learners who can work independently *'since most of the time during some of the lessons are spent with the learners who have problems to read at the Grade 4 level. I empathize with learners with reading difficulties and spend a lot of time in assisting them with their tasks, I also feel that other learners in the class could lose out on instruction time to an extent'* (Teacher T1).

#### **4.2.2.2 Reading to learn**

A common finding from all the teachers revealed that should a learner be unable to read effectively upon entering Grade 4, he/she would experience continuous difficulties in decoding content in all subjects in this grade. This is due to the fact that in Grade 4, learners read in order to learn. If there is a backlog in the learner's reading skills without it having been corrected then there would be further reading backlog in the graded subjects like Natural Science, Social Science, Creative Arts etc. This in turn would *'impact negatively on the learner's academic progress, as seen with some learners in Grade 4'* (Teacher T7).

Learners in Grade 4 should use their previously acquired reading skills *'to gain new knowledge in their new subjects, as this is their tool to engage with the content. I have a few learners who still need to learn to read sufficiently in the subject I teach instead of them reading to learn'* (Teacher T3). This was a common response by six of the teachers. They added that it is hoped for that upon entering the Intermediate Phase, all learners have already mastered the basic reading skills in order to engage with their new subjects. Learners in Grade 4 are supposed to interact with new information *'by reading and finding new ways to solve problems using their acquired reading skills'* (Teacher T2).

The majority of the teachers remarked that there are different types of text in Grade 4 and each type of text requires a specific reading skill, therefore the learners in this grade need to have acquired these skills in the earlier grades. This is necessary for effective achievement in all subjects in Grade 4. The teachers felt that some learners with reading difficulties in Grade 4 had not made a smooth transition and thus this

impedes the smooth attainment of knowledge. Some learners were not coping adequately as they had not mastered the basic reading skills and did not have much to apply to the new knowledge in Grade 4. Some of the teachers revealed that a few of the learners with reading difficulties in Grade 4 were not reading to learn but were focusing more on the mechanical elements of reading. These learners spent a lot of time trying to decode the words and in the process lose the meaning of the text.

Some learners who do not gain or profit much from the activities in some subjects *'due to the focus of the learner being dedicated to decoding words. They then find the task very tedious and they become frustrated at times'* (Teacher T1). Learner L9 said, *'I sometimes feel tired and nervous during some subjects as I take too long to try and read the text.'* Some learners also felt that some activities were boring because they found it difficult to read the texts. The statement of boredom during some subjects was revealed by most of the learners during their interviews. Learner L8 said, *'I am bored during some subjects, I just look at many of the words but don't know what they are, I like to do projects and make things than read; I get happy when we do plays and fun stuff because then I do not have to read'*. As much as practical activities are important, stimulating and enable the learners to participate in lessons, this researcher feels that these activities are insufficient for academic success.

## **Sub-conclusion Category 2: The Need to Read at Expected Levels in Primary School**

### **Independent participation**

After examining the interviews from the teachers it was clear that a learners reading level was vital for academic success. They strongly believed that when the reading level is high, they would be able to interpret and comprehend at a higher level. A learner's prior knowledge ensures greater insight in order for the learner to make sense of new knowledge. This then enables a learner to link ideas more effectively, thus assisting in reading development.

The learners were able to shed light on how they felt because they could not read like the other learners in their class. The researcher was able to gauge that a learner

with reading difficulties felt emotions of sadness and this could later develop into a low self-image and even early childhood depression. Learners may feel a sense of hopelessness and anxiety.

It was evident during the observation sessions that some of the learners with reading difficulties were either shy, nervous or unattentive. Some of the learners had little idea of where to continue reading from as they could not recognize words or make sense of what was read. They were very hesitant and needed constant encouragement, motivation and assistance from the teacher. There was little fluency from some of the learner participants during reading activities as they spent a lot of time trying to decode the words while some of the selected learners refused to read and others skipped many of the words and sentences.

### **Reading to learn**

Much insight was gained after reading and analyzing the reports by the teachers with regards to switching from learning to read to reading to learn. It is surmised that when learners enter the Intermediate Phase they are expected to use their acquired reading skills from the previous grades to engage with the graded subjects in Grade 4. This is affirmed by the DoE (Archer *et.al.*, 2008:7) The teacher participants stated that these earlier acquired skills are the tools that would assist learners in reading to learn.

The learners displayed emotions of uneasiness and frustration at not being able to read to learn as they did not possess the necessary tools. The learner participants also stated that they experienced boredom and exhaustion during some lessons. This could cause restlessness and a disturbance in the class. Reports from some of the learner interviews revealed that they were constantly seeking assistance and were dependent on the teachers and sometimes on peers. The researcher believes that this dependency could cause a lack of confidence in the future and could prevent learners from becoming school prefects or leaders.

It was established from the teacher reports that the learners with reading difficulties took up a lot of the time during lessons. This is an indication that the average and



above average learners could be neglected to an extent. This could also mean that less time would be spent on allowing them to reach their full potential. The teacher reports also indicated that it is vital in the earlier grades, that learners be taught how to read effectively as they require these reading skills to learn and make meaning in the different subjects in Grade 4. There was further evidence from the learner's documents, such as tests and assessments which showed that some of the learners were not achieving the required mark to make significant progress in some of the graded subjects in Grade 4.

### **4.2.3 Reading Difficulties in Grade 4 and Academic Success**

#### **4.2.3.1 Lack of independent participation, loss of time, demotivation and lower self-esteem**

Individual semi-structured interviews with the teachers and learners revealed that majority of the learners in Grade 4 had acquired excellent reading skills, however there were a few learners with mild to severe reading difficulties which are hindering these learners' academic progress. The common response was that the reading difficulties were affecting the learners' academic progress in some subjects more than others. It was clear from these interviews that they were very concerned about the reading difficulties. They added that the learners were not only performing poorly in tests and assessments, their self-esteem and behaviour was being affected as well. Some learners with reading difficulties were described as being unattentive, fidgety, restless and even disruptive during lessons. Some learners with reading difficulties find it difficult to work independently in some subjects. They need assistance continuously and find it very difficult to complete written tests. Some learners prefer to have books with pictures and illustrations to help them make sense of the content. *'I use a number of texts with illustrations in order to include the learners with reading difficulties in the lesson, but this only helps to a certain extent'* (Teacher T6). Majority of the teacher participants also felt that learners with reading difficulties spend too much of time trying to decode or break up the words in a text instead of trying to comprehend it. Due to this lack of comprehension, some learners perform poorly in tasks.

Most of the teachers stated that it is difficult for the learners to complete most of the activities in the different subjects on their own. When they are given certain tasks that require only individual reading and understanding, they have difficulty in engaging with the text and sometimes they spend little time concentrating on the given task. Some of the learners are seen to become restless and tend to disturb the class or prefer to draw or colour in illustrations in the text. Four of the learners said that they did not like to do a reading activity on their own. *'I am happy when I have to do some work with my friends, or when my teacher puts us in groups, during this time I don't have to read myself'* (Learner L7).

Teacher T2 stated that some learners with reading difficulties experienced problems with the basic sight vocabulary, let alone being able to comprehend what was read. *'There are some learners who have a challenge recognize words, even the basic words during my subject, this makes it very difficult for them to engage in written assessments and activities, learners must possess the necessary reading skills in order to progress academically at school'*. Learner L1 stated, *'I like to copy what's on the board, sometimes it is difficult to read and answer some questions, the words are confusing'*. When asked which of the words the learners found difficult to read and how they felt, the response was, *'most of the words, but especially the long words'* (L1, L3, L4, L6, L7 and L9). There was an indication that the longer words in different texts made the learners nervous to an extent.

The learners who read very slowly due to having reading difficulties, find it difficult to complete the tasks in some subjects *'in the allocated time, they have to be given extra time, this then leads to a backlog in their work'* (Teacher T2). Some of the learners do not only read slowly *'but have difficulty in comprehending what they have read, its only words with no meaning. When they are give questions on the text, it is sometimes a futile activity'* (Teacher T5). Learner L3 stated, *'I see the words but I don't know how to read all of them, the long words are scary. I like to look at the pictures on the worksheet or in the textbook. Some learner participants revealed that sometimes they understood the text only when 'my teacher reads to me but I cannot answer all the questions on my own during my tests as I find it hard to read the story or the questions, the words look so hard'* (Learner L2). While Learner L5 stated, *'I*

*sometimes feel a little nervous when I get a passage to read and answer questions on, I cannot read most of the words, I enjoy all the stories with pictures’.*

Four of the teachers explained that reading difficulties, could sometimes lead to backlog in the content to be taught, depending on the number of learners per class who experience reading barriers. This is because much time would be spent during the lesson to teach and re-teach and explain the basic concepts instead of moving on to the next concept. They added that the learners with reading difficulties do sometimes lose a lot of lesson time and have to stay in during the breaks at times to catch up on their work. These teachers stated that the other learners in the class were also affected as they need to be given extra activities to keep them occupied, whilst attention is given to the learners with reading difficulties. It is not a pleasant task for learners to remain in the class during the break as learners are young and want to spend their breaks with their friends. Learners can become frustrated and some complain when they have to *‘stay in during the break to update their work, this is not pleasant as they need to be able to enjoy school’* (Teacher T3). Teachers believed that this could cause undue stress on the learner and add to the pressure of academic progress.

Some of the learners expressed feelings of shyness, lack of interest, and some even a dislike of reading. They added that they felt unhappy when they could not understand certain texts. Some of the learner participants stated that they found activities that involved reading to be boring and preferred practical activities and texts with illustrations. They had some knowledge that the difficulties they had with reading was affecting their academic growth. *‘I like to be able to read like the good readers in my class’* (Learner L2). Learner L6 stated, *‘I try to learn for my tests but it is too hard. I like class work where I can make stuff rather than read so I don’t feel shy’*. Some of the learners expressed feelings of happiness about being able to pass some assessments and these were mainly practical or groupwork activities. *‘Sometimes I am happy with my marks, this is when I pass an assessment, this is mostly a drawing assessment or when we make things or do plays in a group’* (Learner L9). This indicates that learners feel a sense of pride when they are able to achieve and I feel that learners should feel motivated at all times. There would be no need for a low self-esteem if learners are able to read effectively.

### **Sub-conclusions Category 3: Reading difficulties in Grade 4 and academic success**

According to the reports from the individual teacher interviews, this researcher established that learners who experienced reading difficulties learners had challenges to work independently and need constant assistance. Some of the learners displayed early signs of behavior disorders. They were described as un-attentive and disruptive. This could be cause for concern as it could develop into further behavioural disorders such as oppositional disorder. There was also a lot of discussion on the loss of lesson time as a result of discipline issues and the learners trying to decode words.

Further examination of reports from the teacher interviews revealed that some learners were very restless or seemed to wander off during lessons. This researcher fears that since the learners are still very young, this could be the beginning of loneliness and hopelessness. The learners may lose complete interest in school.

Upon closer examination of the learner interviews it was established that learners felt abit nervous to work independently and preferred group or peer activities. This could mean that learners would continue to lack self confidence in the future grades. The researcher fears that this could lead to early high school dropouts. The learners may not even be able to say 'no' to peer pressure and drugs due to being dependence on others. They will not be able to make informed decisions. Teachers reported that there could be backlog in the teaching of some concepts at times due to the time spent teaching and re-teaching concepts. Much time may be lost by both teachers and learners as learners with reading difficulties need constant attention and assistance. There is a need for continued learner referrals for learner support.

The following observations were made during one of the observation sessions in Grade 4 with thirty nine learners per class during the English Language periods. This was a reading and viewing for comprehension lesson. Learners had their own desks and chairs with ample seating space and each learner has their own textbook or reading material for the lesson. Clear instructions in the simplest form were given by

the teacher. The teacher repeated the instructions and simplified them further for those who needed assistance. The teacher then read the text and learners were then given an opportunity to read. The teacher encouraged learners to refrain from mockery and informed learners that she would correct or assist learners who needed help. Many learners in the class read with confidence, fluency and accuracy. Some of the learners with reading difficulties were very shy, nervous or unattentive and some were even eager to read. When the learners with reading difficulties were given opportunities to read, some of the learners had little idea of where to continue reading from and had to be assisted by the teacher. While some learners with reading difficulties were able to read, at times they laboured across the texts, were hesitant and received constant encouragement, motivation and assistance from the teacher.

During the prepared reading assessment in another observation session it was observed that most learners with reading difficulties, were hesitant to stand in front of the class and read although the other learners in the class were busily engaged in other work. A few of the learners with reading difficulties were hesitant, reluctant, soft, and nervous and some could only manage a few basic words. Some words that were learnt in previous grades due to rote learning were read out by learners even when the words did not appear in the text that they were reading.

This researcher observed that during the independent engagement with text, some learners with reading difficulties sought continuous assistance from the teacher or from their peers. This caused a fair amount of disruption in the class. Some of the selected learners did not attempt the activity at all and chose to draw, colour or scribble in their books, disturb their peers, were very fidgety and also cut out pictures or pieces of paper. However, if they did attempt the activities, some of the answers did not make much sense and were at times irrelevant to the text.

Further evidence from the analysis of some of the selected learners' classwork activity books and additional workbooks revealed that notes were copied from the board and from textbooks when necessary. Individual tasks that required learner engagement and interaction with text and the answering of structured questions, were either incomplete, unattempted or illogical with irrelevant answers. Most of the activities that required individual attempts were completed as corrective work which

was copied from the board. Activities that entailed illustrations and use of creative stationery were attempted.

#### **4.2.4 Linking the Crucial Reading Components for Reading Success**

##### **4.2.4.1 Phonological awareness**

All the teachers shared the opinion that phonological awareness leads to good word recognition, which in turn leads to the development of a reading vocabulary, thus enabling a learner to read with fluency. This will allow for the effective comprehension of text. Teacher T2, T4 and T7 stated that these crucial components of reading could not be taught in isolation but complimented each other. They agreed that if any of these components were not taught efficiently and thoroughly, then reading would become a futile activity. All of the teachers believed that the different components of reading which include: phonics, phonological awareness, decoding skills, reading vocabulary, fluency together with comprehension strategies need to be taught explicitly and early to a learner. The teacher participants felt that a learner's comprehension ability, developed as the learner gained exposure to more words and experience with text.

All the teachers stated that they understand phonological awareness as the ability to manipulate or find ways of handling and learning the sounds of spoken words, and a learner that has not been taught how to do this will experience reading difficulties as he/she progress from grade to grade. Some of the teachers stated that they did have some learners in their subject who find it difficult to decode words by manipulating or working out the sound and letter relationships during their lessons. *'Some learners find it difficult to break up the words into syllables or to sound out the words in the subject I teach'* (Teacher T2).

Most of the teachers were of the opinion that reading difficulties could stem from the learners not having fully grasped phonological awareness, phonemic awareness coupled with phonics and added that learners must be taught letter and sound relationships effectively. Learners will then understand and that letters are associated with sounds. If some of the learners were able to make the connection between

*'letters and sounds, then I'm certain that most of their reading battle would be won'* (Teacher T5). During the interview Learner L3 stated *'my teacher helps me to sound out the words and to break up the words so I can read better, I can see the letters and I try to sound them but they sometimes they are difficult'* (Learner L3).

#### **4.2.4.2 Word recognition**

All the teachers felt that word recognition is a crucial component in the reading process and for academic success, and that upon entering Grade 4, learners should be able to identify the grade level words accurately. They believe that the inability to recognize basic words in a text during their subject could lead to a failure to read the more complex texts, and without word recognition, no meaning is achieved. Word recognition helps the learner to *'understand what they are reading and they are able to formulate an image of that word, thus helping them to make more sense of the text at hand'* (Teacher T5). They added that since some learners in the Grade 4 classes have difficulties in recognizing words in the content being taught, thus they struggle to be on the same page as all the other learners.

Four of the teacher participants also stated that the learners with poor word recognition skills have great difficulty in comprehending texts in the subjects they taught. The content matter in the different subjects are vast, thus the concepts require *'thorough recognition of words in order to comprehend, however I have some learners in Grade 4 who have difficulty in recognizing simple words let alone complex terms with regards to specific topics of discussion'* (Teacher T1). The challenge to recognize words that form part of the learning process leads to the *'learners having incomplete tasks and sometimes poor marks in assessments'* (Teacher T4).

The majority of the teachers agreed that with the curriculum, learners spend most of the lesson time interacting with the different texts and have to be able to make comparisons, tabulate differences, make predictions and discuss the different scenarios, and these processes would be difficult due to poor word recognition. These teachers commented that if a learner is unable to recognize words then the learner is unlikely to read with fluency, speed and accuracy. The learner would also find it difficult to make meaning of words, phrases and sentences. They also said that

the learners with reading difficulties often skipped words they did not recognize and this makes the interaction with text even worse. Many of the learner participants stated that when they did not know a word they overlooked it. *'I leave out some of the words that I cannot read in a story or in my classwork'* (Learner L1).

#### **4.2.4.3 Vocabulary**

All the teachers believe that vocabulary plays a vital role in the comprehension of text. Five of the teacher participants added that learners in Grade 4 who have a wide reading vocabulary, are able to read widely and understand a range of texts with ease. This then leads to an improvement in content knowledge in the different subjects that are taught in grade 4. Learners' who have a large reading vocabulary, construct sentences with ease and are able to connect ideas in a text. They are also able to connect prior knowledge to new knowledge. *'This is an uphill battle for learners who have reading difficulties as I find that these learners cannot develop a store of words for later use. This is done by repeated reading experiences, and since the learner is already experiencing reading difficulties, they cannot develop this store of words'* (Teacher T2). *'Learners in Grade 4 who possess a large word bank have greater understanding of concepts and are able to explain the concepts better'* (Teacher T3).

Teacher T3 stated, *'Some learners with reading difficulties find it difficult to retrieve the essential vocabulary from the previous work learnt as they are unable to read and store the essential vocabulary, this impacts negatively on their comprehension of content in my subject and their overall academic progress'*. The majority of the teachers added that learners should be taught various word learning strategies so that learners' vocabulary can then be further developed in the different grades as learners are now faced with the new and vast content. Learners in Grade 4 are exposed to a variety of words in a variety of contexts due to the number of subjects. Learners are expected to *'draw relationships between these new words and the known words in specific content. This would be a tedious and difficult activity for learners in who experience reading difficulties'* (Teacher T1).

#### **4.2.4.4 Fluency**



All the teacher participants believe that fluency in reading allowed for learners to read smoothly and without much effort. They stated that when a learner reads fluently, they would not spend time trying to decode the word. This in turn enables the learner to have a better understanding of the text. The teachers also added that learners who read fluently are better equipped to connect ideas in a text and engage with the text on their own. Learners in Grade 4 who have reading difficulties lose much time *'trying to figure out the word and they do not read effortlessly. This then causes a delay in the understanding of the information they have read'* (Teacher T2). Four of the teachers felt that the learners in Grade 4 who are fluent readers also possess a good reading vocabulary and are able to connect the ideas from previous knowledge to that of the new. They added that learners who are given a lot of exposure to reading at home were fluent readers and that learners who read fluently enjoy the reading experience.

#### **4.2.4.5 Comprehension**

When questioned on the final component in the reading process that is comprehension, all the teachers were in agreement that comprehension is the ultimate aim of reading as it allows for the acquisition of information. They stated that the comprehension of reading material enables one to communicate successfully, and to achieve academic success. The teacher shared the opinion that the goal of reading a text is to gain an overall picture or image of it and should learners not comprehend the text, then reading is a futile activity. This, they added would ultimately lead to academic failure. Active readers do not only read, but they engage with the text and they are able to connect ideas and prior knowledge of the content at hand. However, learners with reading difficulties will be inactive as they would not have the necessary reading skills to interact or engage with the text. This would *'impact negatively on the learners' academic progress as they would be looking at the words on the page without making any meaning of the text'* (Teacher T3). There are some learners in some subjects who experience difficulties in connecting prior knowledge as *'they could not read the previous content or make much sense of it. They find it extremely difficult to make connections as they did not engage adequately with the text due to reading difficulties'* (Teacher T5).

All teacher participants shared the opinion that without reading comprehension skills, the learners have difficulties to gather information and answer questions correctly. They added that comprehension is the key to successful answering of questions. Some learners in Grade 4 with reading difficulties are able to answer some questions verbally, as these questions are explained a number of times, however during tests and assessments, the learners struggle to answer the questions *'not only because they struggle to read, but more especially because they have difficulties in comprehending the text and the questions'* (Teacher T4). Teachers T2, T3, T5, T6 and T7 shared that most of the time the learners who have difficulties in comprehending text, write answers that are irrelevant and sometimes out of context. This therefore leads to poor performance in the subject being taught.

Seven of the teacher participants revealed that some of the learners in Grade 4 with reading difficulties found it demanding to interpret what they read. They stated that comprehension skills need to be developed effectively in the earlier grades and further developed in Grade 4 onwards. Learners who accumulate comprehension strategies in the earlier grades, will engage effectively with different texts. If the gaps in the learner's comprehension is *'identified timeously, then the learner would not likely be faced with comprehension problems in the later grades'* (Teacher T1). Most of the learners revealed that they felt happy if they understood some questions in a test but most of the time they required help or a detailed explanation of the question. Learner (L6) said, *'I feel excited when I understand some questions in my class work or in a test. These are the easy questions but most of the time, I need someone to explain the questions'* (Learner L6). Some learners stated that they feel nervous *'when we have to answer questions from a story, especially during a test'* (Learner L4).

All the teachers stressed that without comprehension of the text, very little, if any, academic learning will take place. They believe that learners will acquire only part knowledge or no knowledge in certain subjects. They added that there would be a number of gaps in knowledge acquisition. Teachers believe that simple facts on a practical level may be understood by the learner but as the work load or content becomes more complex in Grade 4, the learners with comprehension difficulties

would struggle to grasp concepts. *'I see this daily in the subject I teach, as the content becomes more complex, the learners who struggle to comprehend text become more frustrated and anxious'* (Teacher T1). Six of the teachers reiterated that learners in Grade 4 who are able to comprehend the text, are better able to connect to their prior experience or knowledge. They added that the learners who are able to do this achieve good results in assessments compared to those with reading difficulties in the same class. During the observation of lessons, it was evident that some learners found it difficult to connect the previous activities and that some had difficulties understanding new topic-related concepts because they lacked sufficient understanding of the previous content.

#### **Sub Conclusions Category 4: The linking of the crucial components**

Reports from the teachers revealed that in order for learners to recognize letter-sound relationships, they need a solid phonemic awareness foundation. This foundation would enable learners to acquire the other crucial reading components. With regards to the teacher views on word recognition, they provided vital input that this component enables learners to read with ease and allows for the smooth engagement of texts. They added that this component is a prerequisite for reading comprehension. Learners would not spend so time trying to decode words to make meaning of text.

The teacher participant reports indicated that learners who had a good reading vocabulary were able to connect prior knowledge to new content knowledge. Data analysis from the teacher interviews showed that the retrieval of stored vocabulary assisted learners in the comprehension of text. Learners with wider reading vocabularies were able to communicate ideas creatively and construct sentences more effectively. Learners with larger reading vocabularies are able to express themselves creatively and effectively during writing activities.

This researcher also found that reading fluency enabled learners in Grade 4 to read with ease and thus more time could be spent on the constructive engagement, comprehension and analysis of reading. This was evident during the observations. The learners who struggled with word recognition, spent a lot time and effort in trying

to decode words and could not read fluently or accurately. During reading-aloud activities some learners lacked the ability to read with expression and had inadequate eye contact. These are important elements for public speaking. Being unable to read fluently added to the strain of learners not being able to connect the old and new ideas in text. The teachers' reports indicated that learners who read fluently enjoyed the reading experience. They had a flare for reading a variety of texts.

With regards to reading comprehension, the teachers' reports created a bleak picture. Much of the reading activities for learners with reading difficulties in the graded subjects were futile. The ultimate aim of all reading is to make meaning of text and many learners experienced difficulties to do this, and so were unable to make significant academic progress. The reports revealed that some learners were unable to make connections, there was insufficient linking of ideas, a lack of prior knowledge and most importantly some of the learners were unable to answer structured questions based on different texts.

This also came across clearly during the document studies, which included comprehension type activities in the learners' classwork books, assessments and examination scripts. Some of the selected learner participants were unable to make meaning of the texts. They had difficulties to read the instructions making their answers irrelevant, illogical and many did not attempt the answers but left blank spaces. This was noticed in tests for most of the subjects in Grade 4 that required the learners own interpretation. Some of the learners had little interpretation skills for structured comprehension type activities. Some of the learners indicated that they preferred activities with illustrations or diagrams as they felt that these assisted them to make some sense of texts.

The tests and assessments from learner portfolios revealed that the learners with reading difficulties had a challenge to obtain the required marks to pass in most written tests and assessments. The sections that posed the most difficulties were those that required the answering of structured, comprehension type questions. Some learners with reading difficulties wrote illogical and irrelevant answers, if they chose to answer the questions at all. Some of the selected learners rewrote the

questions on the test script. It was noted that many of the instructions on the test could not be read and learners did whatever they understood to be correct. There was little indication of significant academic progress in almost all the subjects and some of the selected learners were not performing at the grade level.

#### **4.2.5 General Factors that may have an on impact a Learner's Reading Development in Grade 4**

##### **4.2.5.1 Language of learning and teaching**

The majority of the teachers shared the opinion that when a learner enters primary school with a home language that is different from that of teaching and learning, this could sometimes lead to some reading difficulties. They added that the ability to learn to read printed English would be difficult to an extent. They stated that there would be problems especially if instruction began in English at school. These teachers felt that many learners with reading difficulties may not have acquired sufficient prior exposure to the language of learning and teaching, as their home language could have taken precedence in the learning process. When learners are instructed in their mother tongue prior to primary school or in the earlier grades in primary school and are then admitted at a later grade, to a school where English is the language of teaching and learning, this is likely to be a cause of some reading difficulties.

Three of the teachers shared the opinion that reading instruction begins with oral instructions and if the foundation of oral instruction is not strong, progress and reading development could be hindered. Five of the teachers said that they had some Grade 4 learners who had not acquired a strong reading foundation in the language of teaching and learning, and were now struggling with reading. *'I have some learners in the subject I teach, who have a challenge to make a connection between sounds and letters. They either confuse the basic words when reading or find it difficult to read most of the text, as the phonics between English (LoLT) and the learner's home language is different'* (Teacher T5). A few of the learners revealed that they did not speak much English (LoLT) outside of school.

For a learner to learn and develop his/her reading skills, *'it is vital to hear the language of learning and teaching as frequently as possible'* (Teacher T4). Some of the teachers stated that in homes where the language of learning and teaching was spoken more often, the learners were able to read better and understand concepts better. *'Due to the difference in language rules between the learner's home language and English, which is the language of learning and teaching in my subject, some learners struggle to read effectively. Learners must hear the language they use at school, at home as well'* (Teacher T1). Language rules differ in the different languages, thus learners who are not frequently exposed to the language of learning and teaching at home, are likely to experience reading difficulties. Oral language is vital for the development of reading skills in the language of learning and teaching at a school.

#### **4.2.5.2 Parental involvement and reading**

All the teachers believe that the literacy practices of a learner in his/her home will have an influence on the learner's reading development at school. They felt that a strong relationship between all stakeholders in a learner's life (parent or guardian) and the teacher could help to minimize reading difficulties in Grade 4. They added that primary learning should begin at home as the primary form of communication is with parents or guardians. Teachers also felt strongly that the parent or guardian plays a pivotal role in the learner's reading development. Parental involvement is vital in a learner's reading development, *'in order to enhance and support what the learner has been taught at school. It is vital for parents or guardians to be observant with regards to the learner's reading abilities by spending time with him/her during homework activities. It is vital for parents or guardians to also provide opportunities for leisure reading. This will create awareness of the learner's reading abilities and reading development'* (Teacher T2). Teachers also felt that parents or guardians should address all their concerns regarding the learner's reading development and academic progress promptly. Parents should play an active role in their child's reading development, *'if they identify reading difficulties, or are informed of reading difficulties, parents should react immediately. It would be advisable to work with the teachers to identify suitable and effective solutions'* (Teacher T5).

The majority of the teachers stated that a sound reading foundation begins at home and long before the learner is admitted to school. Learners who came from homes with a good print environment, performed better in reading activities and tasks and had a greater passion for reading. *'There are learners in my subject who love reading, thus they have a wide vocabulary, a great creative imagination and are able to respond better in tasks. This is due to the reading exposure at home and some learners are rewarded with books instead of toys and gadgets'* (Teacher T7). Teacher T5 stated that the reading foundation should not only begin at home but should be maintained throughout the learners schooling career as this would impact positively on the learner's academic progress. Some teacher participants added that when parents/guardians are requested to call at school to discuss the different ways in which the learner could be assisted it is vital for them to respond effectively, *'unfortunately not all parents or guardians respond effectively. The learner in turn cannot be given the necessary assistance timeously as certain decisions have to be made by the parent or guardian'* (Teacher T5). Parents who are actively involved in a learners reading development must be commended.

Six of the teachers said that there is evidence of a lack of adequate parental or adult support in homework and project activities especially with the learners with reading difficulties. *'Some learners have incomplete homework almost all the time in the subject that I teach, they also do not have the requirements for projects and their books are not adequately monitored'* (Teacher T6). Some learners stated that some of the time, they did not receive ample assistance with their homework activities or they chose to play or watch television after school. Some participants added that they had minor chores after school. *'My parents sometimes come home late from their jobs, I have some chores after school and sometimes there is no one to help me with some of my homework'* (Learner L2). Teacher participants believe that a learner is likely to progress better academically if the parent or guardian is able to provide the necessary support after school, as the tasks given for homework are an extension of the classwork.

It was stated that learners who live with extended families or aged care-givers who also experience reading difficulties will likely not be given the necessary reading support. There are some learners who live with their care-givers who are only able to

assist them to a certain extent, they are sometimes not available when requested to call at school and are unable to make decisions to seek further reading support for the learner. The care-givers have to *'receive permission from the parents of the learner, however more time is lost and the learner continues to struggle with reading difficulties'* (Teacher T4).

Most of the teachers stated that if the parent or guardian is informed of the learner's reading difficulties, it is suggested that they discuss any issues the learner may be facing at home. This would be held in confidence. These can include: the lack of resources, illiteracy of adults at home, sibling households or any other difficulty the learner and the family could be facing. The teachers added that they are ever willing to collaborate and assist parents or care-givers, with different alternatives to help the learner. It is vital for the parents or caregivers to call at school when requested to do so. The teacher participants stated that clear explanations would be given to the parents or caregivers. They added that this would be held in confidence as the ultimate aim is to assist the learner. *'I have tried to assist some learners but only to an extent as a number of times, parents or guardians are hesitant to talk about the learners social conditions. I do respect this but we need the cooperation of all stakeholders in order to assist the learner'* (Teacher T5).

Finally all the teachers felt that it is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to make the necessary arrangements for a learner to be exposed to different types of age-appropriate reading materials outside of school. They added that the parent or guardian should keep in constant and consistent contact with the school with regards to the learners reading development. They felt that the parent or guardian must create opportunities for the learner to improve his/her reading skills. *'Help is always available to the parent who is willing to support hi/her child's reading development and parents must be made aware that it is vital for them to provide the necessary support for their child with reading difficulties. This is important as the problem has to be remedied effectively and efficiently. Parents must step forward and not shy away'* (Teacher T7).

#### **4.2.5.3 The school environment**



All the teacher participants shared the opinion that a school is a place where effective teaching and learning should take place daily. They added that the school environment, coupled with effective teacher content knowledge, teaching methodology, reading activities and parent/teacher consultation is vital to develop a learner's reading skills and to sustain reading development. Six of the teacher participants felt that the main point of defence against reading difficulties is to immediately and continuously contact all stakeholders responsible for the learner. Teachers must be commended for doing this. Parents have confidence in the school they choose to enrol their child in. It is vital that they be notified immediately, that is, in all grades when a learner is experiencing reading difficulties. The learners who experience reading difficulties, need to be monitored closely and immediate action should be taken to assist the learner and the parent or guardian. It is vital that the parents or guardians act swiftly when notified and make every effort to work with the teachers, *'as this is would then help elevate the problem being carried forward'* (Teacher T3).

The majority of the teachers also felt that teacher preparation and planning is vital to teach specific reading skills in the early stages of the learner's life. They added that when there are changes in the curriculum, teachers need to make the necessary adjustments that are required to teach sound reading skills in the early grades. *'It is my opinion that teachers, be well equipped with a number of resources to teach reading skills as these reading skills will enable reading development'* (Teacher T3). *'It is advised that teachers continuously seek new methods and resources that would assist in teaching reading skills more effectively. It is suggested that when new content is introduced, teachers make every effort to familiarise themselves with it as ultimately it is the learner who matters the most'* (Teachers T8).

Five of the teacher participants believe that teaching methods play a major role in the acquisition of reading skills and in a learner's reading development. They believe that the correct resources complemented with a wide variety of teaching methods could have a positive impact in a learner's reading development. This would also aid in the learner becoming a confident reader. *'Reading skills must be taught effectively at the formal lessons at all schools and must be complimented with suitable, exciting and relevant reading material, and continued reading activities at home'* (Teacher T4).

It was also stated by the majority of the teachers that teacher motivation is vital in the learner's reading development. They added that an environment that is reader friendly, stimulating and free of ridicule and fear would help learners to read better. They strongly felt that this is imperative in all the grades. *'Learners must be encouraged daily on the importance of reading, and the need to borrow books from the library, to read at home. It is important for learners to be encouraged and praised for their reading efforts. Teachers must try different methods as all learners differ in their needs and there must be constant communication with the parents or guardians of learners in the early grades'* (Teacher T3). Teacher participants added that there must be constant and consistent communication between the Foundation Phase and Grade 4 teachers (as is the current practice) with regards to the learners' reading development in order for reading development to be sustained throughout the grades.

The teachers also saw the need for more time allocation and suitable resources for assisting learners with reading difficulties. They agreed that not all teachers are specialized in assisting learners who have reading difficulties in later grades. They felt that by the time a learner enters the Intermediate Phase, they should possess the basic reading skills that would help them read to learn. Four of the teacher participants stated that it is advisable for a reading specialist to be employed at all primary schools. *'We need a specialist teacher to assist learners with reading difficulties in the later grades. In the Intermediate Phase, learners are taught how to interact and make meaning of text rather than learning to read'* (Teacher T8). The teachers added that the sole purpose of such a reading specialist should be to help identify the learner's reading weaknesses and recommend effective solutions.

#### **Sub Conclusions for Category 5: General factors that may impact a learner's reading development in grade 4**

From the analysis of data received from the teachers it was established that a firm reading foundation begins in the home. Coupled with this is oral language and communication. It was revealed that learners who came from literacy-rich

environment, had good exposure to the different types of reading material and whose parents played an active role in their learning performed well in school.

The same cannot be said for learners who lacked adequate parental involvement. The teachers said that not many parents responded efficiently to their requests to call at school in order to discuss the learner's progress. They added that decisions concerning learner support had to be made by parents or guardians prior to being implemented. It is however a sad reality that some parents do not cooperate. The teacher reports also indicated that some parents were of the opinion that the school was totally responsible for the learner's academic progress.

This researcher was able to establish that some parents did not read or acknowledge correspondence from the school or show much interest in their child's homework activities, project requirements or testing and academic term programmes. It is a requirement for all homework and communication books to be checked and signed by all parents on a daily basis. From the analysis of documents which included the learner message or communication and homework books the researcher was able to gauge that circulars, testing and academic programmes, homework tasks, examination time-tables, revision activities and learner test results were not acknowledged or signed by most of the parents or guardians.

There was some indication that some parents worked late hours and did not have time to check on the learner's homework tasks. While other parents worked away from home and the learners were left in the care of relatives. This is factor of concern as the learners are very young and need a lot of guidance in order to develop emotionally and academically. It was also noted from the teacher interviews that learners who are raised by a single parent may also be affected in their academic progress to an extent. They added that a loving and warm home environment made learners feel safe and thus enabling learners to think creatively and independently. The researcher feels that young learners in particular can suffer much stress and trauma if there are negative home circumstances for example parent separation and divorce. Learners who experience the death of a parent can also suffer similarly. Teachers and parents must be sensitive to the needs of learners and make every endeavour to assist learners with reading difficulties. The learner interview data

showed that some of the learners felt a bit nervous and shy when they could not complete tasks. It is vital that learners be made aware and that it is no fault on their part. It is advised that learners should be motivated and praised for their efforts in all subjects. It is suggested that teachers in all grades should not request learners who lack confidence to read out aloud in class and should only do so once the learner confidence has developed. According to some of the parent interview reports, they felt that the teachers and school management team should do all they can to assist the learners as they felt that these stakeholders had the expertise to assist the learners. They also stated that they would be willing to cooperate as they wanted their children to become better readers.

#### **4.2.6 Factors that Could Help Improve Reading in Grade 4**

##### **4.2.6.1 Early identification of reading difficulties**

The majority of the teachers agreed that the early identification of reading difficulties is vital for the improvement of reading skills, in the early years of a learner's life. They were of the opinion that if learners had severe reading difficulties should not be moved right up to Grade 4 at all schools if the reading difficulties were not remediated. These teachers felt that consistent observations need to be made on the learner's reading development. *'Teachers who teach in the early years have a huge task to teach learners how to acquire reading skills. They must be commended for the excellent readers they produce. They must continue to inform stakeholders should they observe reading difficulties until suitable solutions are found'* (Teacher T7). Teachers agreed that their main concern was the learners and for them to be able to read at the grade level and to progress academically.

##### **4.2.6.2 The school environment coupled with the effective teaching of reading skills**

Finally, all teachers shared the opinion that the early years of the learner's reading journey are the most important. This is when the reading foundation is established and if it is not a strong foundation then the problem would be visible in Grade 4 and future grades. These teachers argued that the teaching methods used to teach

reading in the early stages at all schools should be of a very high standard and that teacher content knowledge is vital. It is advised that there be constant assessment and evaluation on the teaching methods used to teach reading skills *'in order for the effective teaching of reading skills. This should be done by the teachers themselves'* (Teacher T1). A number of teaching methods with exciting and stimulating reading activities in the early years would motivate young learners, and also inculcate a love for reading. These different methods would provide opportunities for the diverse needs of learners to be met and that *'all learners will be given the opportunity to read at all grade levels'* (Teacher T7).

#### **4.2.6.3 Parental involvement and supervision**

All the teachers shared the opinion that another vital factor that could help improve a learner's reading development is the role of the parent or guardian. They firmly believe that the ultimate responsibility for a learner's reading development is the parent. The majority of the teachers added that parents are not to make assumptions regarding the learner's reading capabilities, but should be in constant contact with the school. Teacher participants added that when parents are informed of a learner's reading difficulties, immediate action should be taken by the parent to assist the learner. As a parent, it is vital to monitor the learner's reading progress, to monitor the tasks executed in class, to provide necessary assistance and support with homework activities *'and help with preparation for tests and assessments. 'I am of the opinion that if a parent or guardian is unable to assist the learner, they should get help from someone who will then be able to assist the learner'* (Teacher T4). Five of the teachers added that the parent or guardian must help the learner by providing reading opportunities outside of the school, and must engage with the reading activities with the learner. *'Parents or guardians must not take for granted that what is taught at school will be sufficient for the learner's reading development and it is important to reinforce what has been taught at school. This will be of great help to the learner and the teacher,'* Teacher T6.

#### **Sub-Conclusions for Category 6: Factors that Could Improve Reading in Grade 4**

Early detection and diagnoses of reading difficulties is vital according to the teachers. They were strongly of the opinion that all necessary steps should be taken to ensure that learners received adequate support prior to moving into Grade 4. They added that since the content is very complex and requires independent engagement, the learner with insufficient reading skills would struggle throughout the grades in the Intermediate Phase. The researcher feels that there are a number of reading assessment tools that are available to teachers and parents and that every effort should be made to obtain these tools to reduce reading difficulties. It is also vital that learners with reading difficulties not be overlooked with the hope that their reading skills will improve over time.

Further analysis of documents which including The National Reading Strategy (DoE, 2008:15), revealed that teacher training and development manuals comprising assessment techniques are available to teachers. Continuous reading development conferences and workshops should be held by to empower teachers to become better teachers of reading. Adequate and relevant reading resources should also be designed and made available to all schools.

With regards to factors in the school environment that could help reduce reading difficulties, it was noted that the school should have ample print, a well-stocked mini library in each class, consisting of children's literature and other exciting reading material. This will help learners develop a love for reading. It is vital for teachers to model good reading behaviour. Teachers should make every effort to ensure that learners feel safe and confident and in this way they will be able to take risks and develop into proficient readers.

Another vital factor that the teachers reported was on the use of instruction time. Teachers at all schools and all grades should use instruction time effectively and that concepts especially the components of reading should be taught until reading achievement improved. The more time spent on teaching specific reading skills, the higher the academic achievement is likely to be. Attendance of reading workshops by all teachers is imperative and equally important is monitoring learners with reading difficulties.

Finally, with regards to parental involvement as a factor that could improve reading, it was established from the teacher interview analysis that once the parental support was obtained, there will be a marked improvement in a learner's reading. They added that constant and consistent parental involvement is one of the keys to reading development. Parents are not to make assumptions that all is well with the learner and take for granted that the teacher is solely responsible for a learner's academic progress. It is the responsibility of the parent to provide a safe home environment for the learner and to acquire the necessary assistance for the learner outside school. Should the parent be unable to provide the necessary reading support to the learner, he/she must inform the school. It is vital for the parent to read all correspondence or seek help if he/she is experiencing literacy difficulties. They need to make every effort to supervise homework, acknowledge test results and learner report cards. Immediate contact should be made with the teachers once the learner report cards are received and problems are detected and parents and guardians who do this must be commended.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

The research findings revealed that reading is the basis for all learning and if a solid reading foundation is not established in the early grades of primary school, reading difficulties would persist throughout the grades. To be part of society, everyone has to be able to read. A strong reading foundation forms the basis for future academic success. When learners enter the Intermediate Phase, they are expected to read at a Grade 4 level that provides for an ability to learn according to the required curriculum. Learners in Grade 4 are expected to read at the expected grade level in order to engage with different types of texts in the now eight new subjects in Grade 4.

However, learners who experience reading difficulties upon entering the Intermediate Phase, will not be able to engage and make sense of the content in the different subjects and this will lead to poor academic progress. Emphasis was placed on learners being taught the purpose of reading at an early age. Many learners in Grade 4 have creative and vivid imaginations due to a good reading foundation coupled with reading widely, whereas learners who experience reading difficulties are stagnated in their responses and are not motivated to read.

It was clear from the data that learners who read at the appropriate grade level are able to engage independently with texts and make the necessary connections. Findings also revealed that learners with insufficient reading skills and are not on the expected grade level may later produce poor academic results. Therefore early intervention in the earlier grades is imperative. It is surmised that when learners enter the Intermediate Phase they should be able to apply their acquired reading skills to engage with the texts in the different subjects and to learn more effectively. It was clear that a backlog in the learner's reading skills could lead to further reading backlog in the different grades. This could then lead to poor academic results for some learners in the different subjects and would also disadvantage average and above average learners as more time and attention will be given to learners who struggle to read.

Observations revealed that learners who experienced reading difficulties expressed emotions of frustration and sadness. They preferred to work in groups as this did not involve them reading and engaging with text on their own. These learners were not only performing poorly in tests and assessments, their self-esteem and behaviour was affected. The learners displayed tendencies of being unattentive, fidgety, restless and disruptive during lessons. Continuous assistance is sought therefore this constitutes time loss and curriculum disruptions. The research findings also revealed that a lack in any of the elements or components for reading acquisition skills, and also for reading development, was a cause for concern. The teachers' interview data and observations revealed that the five crucial elements could not be isolated, but complemented each other in the reading process. The following was established with regards to the linking of the crucial components in the reading process:

Teacher participants stated that phonemic awareness enables learners to recognize and use letter-sound relationships and this helps a learner to decode words during the reading process, while word recognition strategies enables learners to read with ease and to engage with different texts in the different subjects in Grade 4. Word recognition also assists a learner in comprehension of text.



A good reading vocabulary is vital to link prior knowledge to new content knowledge in graded subjects and sentence construction is simpler for learners with a wide reading vocabulary. Comprehension of text is the ultimate aim of in the reading process. Learners who do not read for comprehension or make meaning of what they have read, have not acquired an essential skill. This results in learners being unable to complete certain tasks or pass some assessments and tests.

Emphasis was also placed on the language of learning and teaching, the importance of parental involvement, the school environment coupled with teaching methods in a learner's reading. The language of learning and teaching does have positive or negative repercussions and the majority of teachers stated that when a learner enters primary school with a home language that is different from the language of teaching and learning, they are likely to experience some reading difficulties. Language rules differ in the different languages and learners must have exposure to the language of learning and teaching. Oral language is a prerequisite for the development of reading skills in the language of learning and teaching at a school.

The data analysis revealed that a learner with reading difficulties must be given the necessary support and assistance by all stakeholders. Reading literacy practices in the home had a direct impact on reading at school. Parents and caregivers need to collaborate with the relevant teachers at school to help the learner. Parents need to show an eagerness to be good reading examples. Teachers have to confirm to parents that any personal information that is given will be held in confidence and the ultimate aim is to provide assistance to the learner.

The school environment plays a vital role in the acquisition of reading skills and reading development. Learners with reading difficulties must be monitored very closely in the Foundation Phase and teacher knowledge and planning is of utmost importance during this phase of a learner's life. New and creative teaching methods with exciting activities are necessary to help a learner to be motivated and develop a passion for reading. In addition, constant and consistent parental involvement in the reading development of a learner is imperative. Parents are not to presume that all is well and take for granted that only the teacher is responsible for a learner's reading development. The findings revealed that reading difficulties do have a negative

impact on the learners ability to learn in most subjects in Grade 4 as indicated by some teachers. Poor reading skills prevented learners from taking risks and from forming independent understanding. This results in a lack of confidence and lower self-esteem.

Chapter 5 is a summary from the empirical investigation coupled with the findings from the literature study. Thereafter, deductions of conclusions will be made using the findings from the empirical investigation and the literature study. These conclusions will serve as answers to the research questions of the study and recommendations will be made about the timeous prevention of reading difficulties.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this study was to determine how reading difficulties act as barriers to learning by learners entering the Intermediate Phase. Without the ability to read at the expected levels, many learners will be unable to progress academically. The research was conducted to identify the types of reading difficulties that are experienced by learners when they enter the Intermediate Phase. The problem investigated was the factors that may cause reading difficulties, the effect of reading difficulties on learning in other subjects and the factors that can help to improve reading.

The following objectives were sought from the research aims as stated in paragraph (1.5)

- Determine the components that are essential for reading development
- Determine the types of reading difficulties in Grade 4
- Determine the influence of reading difficulties on the learners' learning in all subjects and on academic progress
- Determine the factors that can cause reading difficulties
- Determine the factors that can cause reading

Recommendations for further studies and limitations to the study are also discussed. These guidelines and recommendations are based on the literature study in Chapter 2 and the research findings in Chapter 4.

#### **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

In Chapter 1, the foundation for the study was laid and the work of different authors and researchers was discussed to reveal the need to be literate in a modern society and the consequences of reading difficulties as barriers to learning. This chapter

highlights the low literacy levels specifically in Grade 4 in South Africa and globally. Chapter 1 presented a brief discussion on the research programme of the study.

Chapter 2 presented an in-depth literature study on the concepts of reading and reading difficulties based on theories on how children learn. The literature consulted emphasized the need for the crucial components that are essential for acquiring reading skills. These components included phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, vocabulary, fluency and reading comprehension. In addition the factors that may cause reading difficulties were discussed which included language proficiency, physical factors and environmental factors. The literature consulted concentrated on reading difficulties as barriers to learning in primary schools in South Africa and globally.

Data in Chapter 3 was collected by individual interviews (par. 3.6), observations (par. 3.7) and document studies (par. 3.8). The individual interviews were conducted with three Foundation Phase teachers, six Intermediate Phase teachers, nine Grade 4 learners and parents (par. 3.6.3). A stringent ethical clearance procedure was followed which entailed: informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality (par. 3. 11). All of these ethical issues were considered and implemented to ensure that the rights of all participants were safeguarded. The interviews were recorded and transcribed (par. 3.6.3). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher employed methods of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (par. 3.10).

Chapter 4 comprises the results collected over 3 months and findings which incorporates the reports from the participant interviews, observations on the reading behaviours of the learners with reading difficulties and the learner documents. These documents included: learner classwork books, homework books and communication books, tests and assessments, examination scripts and learner reports.

## **5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **5.3.1 Findings from the Literature Review**

The literature review in Chapter 2 contributed the applicable data from which some of the conclusions were drawn. These included:

### **5.3.1.1 The substance of reading**

The ability to read is a fundamental right and an indispensable tool to succeed in life. This ability is essential to function in a modern society and should be the make-up of every individual. It enables a learner to progress academically, allows for life-long learning and the procurement of employment (par. 1.1, 1.2.1, 2.2). In addition, the ability to read allows for the propensity to negotiate life in a technologically advanced society with social networking media (par.2.2). The DoE envisaged that every South African child to be a fluent reader with the ability to read to learn in order to progress academically and for future success (par. 1.1). However a number of research studies conducted nationally and internationally indicate that there are low literacy levels of learners in primary schools (par. 1.3, 1.4). To emphasize the need for reading in a modern society, studies including, the PIRLS, the National Reading Strategy, the Annual National Assessment, amongst others, have been conducted and instituted (par. 1.1, 1.3).

To emphasize the need to read when learners enter the Intermediate Phase, findings revealed that in order for the proficient understanding of content knowledge in all graded subjects, a learner must possess adequate reading skills. This is a prerequisite to entering Grade 4 as all learning in the Intermediate Phase is dependent on these reading skills (par.1.2.1).

Further findings from the literature study confirm that learning to read is not a simple process that can be achieved over a short time period. It requires considerable and continuous practice, ongoing engagement with text, sufficient oral language proficiency, development and close monitoring (par. 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 2.1). It is therefore crucial to have insight into this complex process to be able to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of all learners during their acquisition of reading skills.

### **5.2.1.2 Factors that influence reading development**

From the literature review it can be surmised that in order for a learner to develop the necessary reading skills, a number of factors need to be considered since learning to read is a multi-dimensional, complex and composite process (par.1.2.2, 2.1, 2.2). The first factor to be considered is the different theories of reading. These must be acknowledged for their contributions to human learning. The constructivist theorist believes that learning is an active construction of knowledge by individuals coupled with active engagement. While the socio-constructivist theorist Lev Vygotsky advocated that children learn from social interaction. The implications of this theory for reading development is the role of the teacher as a mediator who aids the learner to form links in knowledge (par. 2.3.1).

The cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget states that a learner is an active organism in cognitive development. This implies that during the process of learning to read, learners are seen to construct maps of knowledge which they organize, gain understanding and then adapt to (par. 2.3.1). Further analysis of the literature consulted, revealed that reading is predominantly a language process. The emphasis is on the use of a language system which guides reading (par. 2.3.1). The basis for reading is oral language and linguistic and cultural backgrounds influence the reading process. Learners are believed to use their knowledge concerning a language to propel their reasoning as they engage in the reading process. The research findings revealed that the more time young children spend with adults rather than children allows for the advancement in language development. In addition, learners who encounter language difficulties, encounter reading difficulties (par.1.2.2, 2.31, 2.5.1).

Environmental influences are also believed to be vital factors in the acquisition of reading skills. According to the behaviourist theory of B.F. Skinner children's learning is based on correct influences. These influences emulate from environmental factors and prior experience and the task of reading is a multiple undertaking made up of different components. These are inclusive of physical factors, necessary for letter-sound discrimination, vocabulary acquisition, word recognition and comprehension skills (par. 2.3.1). Environmental factors include the home / parental involvement (par. 2.5.3) and the school environment (par. 2.5.4), while physical factors (par. 2.5.2) include hearing and vision (par. 2.5.2.1, 2.5.2.2).

The top-down model of reading (par. 2.3.1) emphasizes the importance of written language for reading. This model highlights comprehension, that is, to make meaning of text, as the ultimate goal of reading with prior knowledge as key factor (par. 2.1, 2.3.1, 2.4.5). While the bottom-up model (par. 2.3.1) places emphasis on the reading process comprising a number of stages. These stages include: eye-letter identification, letter decoding, sounds of letter and search for word meaning. These stages depict the reading process as a combination of disconnected skills. By combining these two models, the Interactive model of reading was discovered by Rummelhart. This model disclosed the simultaneous use of information by a reader from a number of sources.

Finally the multiple sources of literature that were consulted revealed the component model of reading to be effective to form part of theoretical framework for this study. This model emphasizes the need for the crucial component skills to be integrated and taught effectively to ensure reading success (par. 2.3.1).

### **5.2.3 The components necessary for reading acquisition**

In order for effective acquisition of reading skills, the literature highlighted five essential components in the reading process (par. 1.2, 2,4). These include phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Different authors and researchers (par. 2.3.9.1, 2.4) and the National Reading Panel (2000) advocate that these components be taught in proximity to each other.

Phonological awareness enables a learner to reflect on, manipulate the sounds of spoken words and to hear the sounds in spoken words. Mastery in phonological awareness allows for effective word recognition in a variety of texts (par. 2.4.1). A deficiency in phonological awareness in the early grades is said to lead to sub-standard reading performance in the Intermediate Phase. An important point to note, according to research, is that teachers must possess adequate knowledge on the stages of phonological awareness and must be able to assess the learners, skills and provide instruction accordingly.

Word recognition, which comprises phonics, is the second key component and learners must have the ability to recognize words on a page, however to do this they must have acquired excellent phonic knowledge. Phonics is defined as the system by which sounds in a spoken language are represented by letters. Once learners are able to decode words, they are able to recognize and words and read them accurately and fluently. This allows for constructive use of time to comprehend text. Strategies and activities on how to teach phonics and word recognition are in the literature study (par. 2.4.2).

As discussed in Chapter 2 (par. 2. 4.3) the third vital component in the reading process is fluency. Learners who read accurately and at an acquired grade level of fluency have increased reading comprehension. The rapid and correct reading of text is an indication that the learner has acquired sufficient phonological awareness and word recognition skills. Large amounts of practice and reading is a pre-requisite for fluency in reading. Teachers have a variety of methods and activities to choose from in order to enhance reading fluency.

The literature findings (par. 2.4.4) discussed vocabulary acquisition as a linguistic skill. Learners learn 50% of the words through direct instruction at school. Vocabulary is strongly linked to reading comprehension and is dependent on context. Researchers add that learners must have at least twenty exposures to words taught in context to grasp word meanings. Vocabulary can be learned incidentally or in a planned and deliberate way.

Reading comprehension (par. 2. 5.5) is the fundamental aim of reading. To be able to comprehend is to be able to make meaning of text, to communicate successfully and succeed academically. There is consistent and continuous engagement between the reader and the text and the integration of prior knowledge. Learners must be taught the purpose of reading and have a variety of strategies to comprehend text.

### **5.3.2 Findings from the Empirical Investigation**

#### **5.3 2.1 The need for a good reading foundation**



From the teacher interviews it was ascertained that a good reading foundation in the early grades sanctions academic progress in the Intermediate Phase and enables all future learning (par.4.3.1). Teacher, learner and parent participants acknowledged the importance of acquiring the essential reading skills to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since many learners come from low income homes, both parents and learners saw the need to be able to read in order to break out of the cycle of poverty (par.4.3.2). In addition the researcher noted during observation sessions that due to a poor reading foundation the majority of the learner participants struggled to be part of most lessons. The researcher felt that a good reading foundation does not merely ensure academic progress but provides the means for electronic communication. Since learners live in an ever changing society with technological advancements bombarding society constantly, learners will at some point be compelled to communicate through electronic and social networking media and this is only possible with a good reading foundation.

### **5.3.2.2 The need to read at expected levels**

The data from the teacher interviews, observation and document study confirmed that learner reading development is achieved in stages. As an educator, this researcher fully understands the implications of a learner's inability to read at appropriate grade levels. In order to learn in all eight subjects in the Intermediate Phase, learners must read at that expected level (par. 4.4.1). Since the type of content and context varies in all subjects in Grade 4, this calls for specific engagement with text. The Intermediate Phase also sees the learners' active and independent participation in most tasks. This is inclusive of co-curricular activities for the specific skills of listening, speaking, reading and viewing according to the CAPS requirements.

In order to participate in group and peer reading activities, which include role-plays, dialogue and drama, a learner must be able to read at the expected levels. The learner's input and participation is crucial and is a curriculum requirement as per the NCS. A learner who does not function at the expected level will feel excluded and this could lead to lower self-esteem and behavioural disorders. These behavioural problems manifested during observations when some learner participants appeared hesitant, shy and nervous during certain reading activities. While some were loud,

disruptive, unattentive and spent the period cutting up paper, scribbling in their books, or looked at pictures and spoke to peers.

The findings also reveal that the learners who read at the appropriate grade level are able to cope with the quantity of work in the Intermediate Phase as they now read to learn (par. 4.4.1). The content in the different subject varies considerably with expanded vocabulary and new terminology. Learners who read at the expected levels contribute to their own knowledge. This allows for mental stimulation and the ability to challenge their creative and critical thinking.

### **5.3.2.3 Reading Difficulties and Academic Success**

The findings indicate that some learners in Grade 4 were not making the desired progress due to the complexity of reading difficulties. The teacher reports revealed that many learners could not complete tasks independently in the different subjects (par.4.5.1). Some learners expressed emotions of fear or confusion during their interviews and said they preferred to do group or pair work rather than attempt or complete activities on their own.

The study of some, which included learner tests and assessments confirmed, that these reading difficulties have hampered academic progress to an extent. The learner's marks in the different subjects were in some instances below the promotion requirements with some learners meeting the minimum requirements in some subjects. The writing and presenting skills, which included essay and transactional texts were extremely poor. Some learners were unable to construct simple or coherent sentences.

Similar findings emerged from the learners' classwork and the homework books. Most activities that entailed structured comprehension questions were omitted or irrelevant and illogical answers were given. Some activities had corrective work that was copied from the board. Most pictures in the different texts were coloured in and "fill in the blanks" activities and crossword puzzle type of questions were attempted but without much success.

#### **5.3.2.4 The Linking of the Essential Components**

The interviews from the teachers revealed that they all had insight and sufficient knowledge on the essential components for reading acquisition and that each component complemented the other and could not be taught in isolation (par. 4.6). They believed that phonological awareness was the key component that leads to word recognition, vocabulary, fluency and ultimately reading comprehension. The teachers stressed the importance of letter-sound relationships and the need for this to be taught explicitly and effectively (par. 4.6.1). The teachers indicated that there were some learners in Grade 4 who found it difficult to decode words using letter-sound relationships. Some of the learners expressed emotions of confusion with regards to sounding out words to pronounce them.

The researcher gained insight from some of the parents that when they tried to assist the learners with homework it was sometimes tedious as the learners spent too much time trying to work out the words in the text, so the parents completed the activity for the learner. Some of the learners' home language is different from that learning and teaching and the researcher feels that there were gaps in the acquisition of phonological awareness.

The findings from the teacher interviews implied that word recognition, which is made up of phonics and sight words, is a pre-requisite for comprehension of text and the teachers indicated that poor word recognition meant incomplete tasks, low marks in tests and examinations (par. 4.6.2). They added that all learners who enter the Intermediate Phase should have knowledge of the basic word lists. The learners stated that when they did not know a word or words they skipped it and they expressed emotions of uneasiness when they encountered longer words. This was evident during the observations, the unprepared and prepared reading activities when some of the learners would skip words and even sentences. The teacher would call out the unknown word but the learner continued without re-reading it. This was an indication that the learners did not possess ample, if any word recognition strategies to identify the words.

In addition to these components, the data showed that learners in Grade 4 who read widely had a wide reading vocabulary (par. 4.6.3). Some of the teachers stated that many learners are able to use their stored vocabulary to make connections between a variety of texts (par. 4.6.3). This researcher noted during observations that some of the learners had a very basic English vocabulary and answered in yes or no phrases. They seemed withdrawn, hesitant and sometimes reserved. This could imply limited vocabulary, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence during some activities.

One parent reported that the learner is usually assisted by siblings for prepared reading assessments. The learner is taught through rote learning but when he/she attempts the reading assessment and if one word is forgotten, the learner is lost. The researcher feels that rote learning is only applicable to certain tasks and even if the learner is able to acquire all the words through rote learning, he/she would be unable to apply the words to the different contexts. Document studies also reveal that learners who come from homes where reading is done will have large vocabularies. With regards to reading fluency, the findings from observations showed some of the learners labouring across texts, while some were able to read simple sentences with some ease. These were sentences that contained very few words or common words. Most of the participants found it considerably difficult to read texts fluently or accurately during an unprepared reading activity.

Finally, with regards to the essential components, all participant reports revealed that comprehension is the ultimate aim of reading. If a learner does not make meaning of text, it is a futile activity (par. 4.6.5). Linking of ideas is essential for comprehension and entails the active engagement with different texts (par. 4.6.5). It was clear from the low marks in tests and assessments that some of the selected learners lacked comprehension skills. The teachers added that the more complex the task, the greater the battle to comprehend. This researcher feels that a lack of comprehension depletes creative and critical thinking. One of the underlying principles of the NCS is active and critical learning: encouraging an active and critical approach to learning rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths (CAPS, 2011:4).

### **5.3.2.5 General Factors that have an impact a Learners Reading Development**

Document studies revealed that in Indigenous African Languages and Afrikaans, there is a nearly direct correspondence between the alphabetical letters and the sounds they represent. The names and sounds of letters are generally the same. Phonics is said to be easier to teach and learn in the above languages than English (DoE, 2008:13). Therefore, explicit phonics instruction is necessary in the Foundation Phase since many learners enter school with a language that differs from the LoLT (par. 4.7.1) Teachers reported that the home language of the learner has a bearing on the LoLT. In addition some of learners and parents revealed that the learners were not exposed to much of the LoLT outside school. Reading theories stipulate that learning to read is dependent on oral language (par. 2.5.1, 4.7.1). Teachers stressed the need for the learners to hear the LoLT as frequently as possible.

Parental involvement was a factor that the majority of the teachers battle with. The resounding point was the influence the parent and the home environment had on the learners holistic learning (par. 4.7.2, 2.5.3). Some learners revealed that they do not live with their parents as they work away from home. Some live with a single parent, siblings or relatives while some receive some adult supervision for homework the others were left to complete homework tasks on their own. Most learners revealed that they watch television, play with friends after school rather than complete homework or engage in reading for pleasure. This came across in the study of documents with regards to homework and communication books. There was very little acknowledgement of correspondence and incomplete or unattempted homework tasks. The school environment, coupled with effective teaching, was an intense discussion. The findings indicated that the school should be a place of effective teaching and learning (par. 4.7.3). The majority of the teachers and parents were adamant that there needs to be consistent and constant contact between the parent and the teacher (par. 4.7.1). Effective teaching methods with a strong support system are tools for reading development. The teachers expressed the need for all schools to have reading specialists to assist struggling learners during the later grades.

### **5.3.3.6 Factors that Could Help Improve Reading Difficulties**

The majority of the teachers stated that the need for the early and timeous identification of reading difficulties was paramount at primary schools. They felt strongly that reading difficulties should be nipped in the bud and not carried over from grade to grade. This researcher feels strongly about this, as the impact of reading difficulties can be seen across all grades and nationally.

The second vital factor to improve a learner's reading development is the role of the teacher (4.8.2). Some of the parents felt that the teacher was responsible for the learner to acquire the necessary reading skills and that they would give try their best to assist. The majority of the teachers felt that adequate and innovative methods of teaching should be employed at schools to ensure reading development. The findings also revealed the need for effective reading assessment tools to diagnose reading difficulties in and the need for immediate and ongoing communication with the parent or guardian.

The third driving factor was the responsibility of the parent in the learner's education. The findings stressed the significance of the role of the parent on the learner's reading development. It was suggested that the parent needs to make every attempt to seek assistance for the learner in and outside of school. The teachers shared the opinion that all the available help and support would be given to parents who seek help. Document studies also reveal that assistance that is available for the learner, teacher and parent.

## **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the above findings, the following recommendations were made.

### **5.4.1 Recommendations for practice**

Innovative and creative methods for teaching reading in primary schools to meet the demands in all levels of learning and continuous teacher training and resources prior and after the implementation of new structures to the existing curriculum. The provision of relevant teacher resources after training and adequate learner resources

to complement any new content in the curriculum. The intense study of the curriculum and other education documents and the necessary assessment tools and methods to teach and evaluate reading in each grade. Continuous communication between management and teachers to share ideas and provide support. The effective use of IQMS at all schools, this will aid teacher development. Seeking assistance when necessary in order to foster effective teaching and learning.

All teachers must continue to be life-long learners and model good reading habits to inculcate a reading culture amongst learners. They are to be coaches and mediators who assess the individual needs of learners continuously. They need to be motivators and guide learning in the reading classroom. The classroom should be a place of safety and should provide all necessary resources for effective learning. The teacher should possess ample information on every learner and should notify all stakeholders immediately if reading difficulties are detected. All teachers must work in partnership with the parent to help eradicate reading difficulties. Teachers in all grades should obtain and read latest research findings on reading and teaching reading. Attendance of reading conferences and workshops is vital.

The role of the parent is vital and parents must acknowledge that they are ultimately responsible for the learners' education. Parents are responsible to provide all the necessary support outside school. They need to obtain the necessary help if they cannot provide this to the learner. Parents need to call at schools constantly to discuss learner progress and request assistance from the school. The School Governing Body together with the School Management Teams at all schools need to set up special meetings with parents and caregivers and provide guidelines to the parents on their role in the learner's reading development. The latest research on reading difficulties to be made available at all schools. The most recent methods need to be applied to identify reading difficulties in order to provide suitable learner support. DVD presentations to parents on the long-term effects of reading difficulties and the role of the parent in a learner's reading development. The most recent guidelines for teachers and parents on the steps to be taken once a reading difficulty is detected.

#### **5.4.2 Recommendations for future research**

Further studies can be conducted on the impact of reading difficulties as barriers to learning in the Senior Phase. The impact of reading difficulties on tertiary education and employment. Further case-studies on the same phenomena could be researched in rural and urban primary schools with the views of a larger population of participants.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The use of a single primary school for this research. The participants were limited to one school and only the views of these participants were used in the study. The school is also in semi-urban area. The researcher did not obtain the views from schools in rural and urban areas and the findings can therefore not be generalized to all schools. The study was also based on reading difficulties in primary schools, however these difficulties also have an impact on secondary schools. The study was limited to one grade only. The final limitation was the limited data from some participant groups. The researcher also consulted older literature which included the period in between 1980 and 2000 as this research was rich in information and the theories are still applicable to the current education system.

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

This study presented a body of evidence that depicted reading difficulties as barriers to learning by learners entering the Intermediate Phase. It showed that a number of factors that influence reading acquisition skills and support reading development. Furthermore, it indicated that without the ability to read adequately, learners are unlikely to progress academically and succeed in a modern society. In addition, it highlighted the theories of how children learn, which formed the theoretical framework for the study. It was established that learners first need to learn to read in order to read to learn. The role of language, the teacher, school and the parent are the key factors that influence reading development. If all the stakeholders form a partnership then there could be a reduction in reading difficulties when learners enter the Intermediate Phase.



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**APPENDIX A**  
**LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM THE KZN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

The Directorate of Research  
KZN Provincial Department of Basic Education  
Head Office  
247 Burger Street  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

Dear Sir

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

RESEARCH TITLE: READING DIFFICULTIES AS BARRIERS TO LEARNING  
EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS ENTERING THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE

I am currently pursuing a Master's degree at the University of South Africa. My details are as follows:

1.1	Full name	Dorcas Joan Naiken
1.2	Title	Mrs
1.3	Student Number	5962399
1.4	Proposed field of study	Education Psychology (M.Ed)
1.5	Cell Number	0843073567
1.6	E-mail	<u><a href="mailto:joan.naiken@telkomsa.net">joan.naiken@telkomsa.net</a></u>
1.7	Supervisor	Prof HM Vogel
1.8	Telephone number	0828546503
1.9	E-Mail	<u><a href="mailto:dalnavogel@icloud.com">dalnavogel@icloud.com</a></u>

The study aims to establish the nature of reading difficulties faced by learners entering the Intermediate Phase. The study will also focus on the different types of reading difficulties that are faced by the learners in Grade 4 and will focus on the factors that influence these reading difficulties.

The research will require the participation of the Grade 3 and 4 teachers, nine Grade 4 learners and the parents or guardians of the selected learners.

I endeavour to answer the following research questions by using the data collection methods of observations, individual interviews and document studies.

- What types of reading difficulties are learners facing in Grade 4?
- What influence do the identified types of reading difficulties have on the learners learning in other subjects for example, Natural Science, Social Science and Personal and Social Well-Being?
- What are the factors that influence the reading difficulties?

I hereby seek permission to conduct interviews with the selected participants, conduct six sessions of classroom observations during the different subjects in Grade 4. I also seek permission to review confidential documents, i.e. the selected learners' school books, tests, portfolios and reports.

Data will be collected as follows:

- Data will be collected by me through the examination of documents which will include the classwork books, portfolios containing tests and assessments and teacher mark records with regards to oral unprepared and prepared reading activities, listening comprehension activities, listening and speaking activities and reading and viewing activities of the nine selected Grade 4 learners.
- I will collect the above documents from the Grade 4 teachers who form part of the study. Photocopies of these documents will be made and kept in a file by me in a locked cupboard which only I will have access to.
- I will also be conducting classroom observations and this will include six sessions of observations. I will make a brief explanation to the learners in the classroom and will make sure that my presence does not cause any distractions or disturbances. I will use observation checklists to observe the reading behaviour of the selected Grade 4 learners and this will be done confidentially.
- I will also conduct individual face to face interviews with the nine selected Grade 4 learners during their reading for pleasure periods in order to establish reading behaviour of the selected nine Grade 4 learners. The data collected verbally will be recorded in a diary by me. A video recorder will also be used during the interviews.
- The data collection method of individual interviews will be employed for the Grade 3 and 4 teachers who have been selected as participants in this research study.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and no pressure, however subtle, will be placed on any participant. I will seek permission from the principal, parents of the learners in the study, the teachers in the study as well as assent from the learners who will be identified to participate in the study.

I will ensure that:

- Confidentiality of every participant, by allocating a reference number to each in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality throughout.
- No discussion with non-participants will be entered into.
- I will also not divulge or use any information that the participants request to be kept in confidence.
- Please note that all information collected through observations, interviews, recordings and document collections will be held in safekeeping at my home on a password protected PC.
- No direct benefits will accrue and no compensation will be given to the participants.
- The participants are free to stop at any given time.
- The results of this study will be reported to the principal and will be submitted for publications in journals of education.

I sincerely appreciate your approval of this research study at the above institution.

Should you have any queries regarding this study please contact Mrs Dorcas Joan Naiken at 0843073567 or email [joan.naiken@telkomsa.net](mailto:joan.naiken@telkomsa.net) or Prof HM Vogel at 0828546503 or [dalenvogel@icloud.com](mailto:dalenvogel@icloud.com)

I trust that my request will meet your favourable response.

Yours faithfully

.....

RESEARCHER: MRS D J NAIKEN  
M.ED STUDENT (UNISA)  
35962399

.....

DATE

**APPENDIX B**  
**LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

The Principal

Dear Sir

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

RESEARCH TITLE: READING DIFFICULTIES AS BARRIERS TO LEARNING  
EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS ENTERING THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE

I am currently pursuing a degree at the University of South Africa. My details are as follows:

1.1	Full name	Dorcas Joan Naiken
1.2	Title	Mrs
1.3	Student Number	5962399
1.4	Proposed field of study	Education Psychology (M.Ed)
1.5	Cell Number	0843073567
1.6	E-mail	<u><a href="mailto:joan.naiken@telkomsa.net">joan.naiken@telkomsa.net</a></u>
1.7	Supervisor	Prof HM Vogel
1.8	Telephone number	0828546503
1.9	E-Mail	<u><a href="mailto:dalenvogel@icloud.com">dalenvogel@icloud.com</a></u>

The study aims to establish the nature of reading difficulties faced by learners entering the Intermediate Phase. The study will also focus on the different types of reading difficulties that are faced by the learners in Grade 4 and will focus on the factors that influence these reading difficulties.

The research will require the participation of the Grade 3 and 4 teachers, nine Grade 4 learners, and the parents or guardians of the selected learners.

I endeavour to answer the following research questions by using the data collection methods of observations, individual interviews and document studies.

- What types of reading difficulties are learners facing in Grade 4?
- What influence do the identified types of reading difficulties have on the learners learning in other subjects for example, Natural Science, Social Science and Personal and Social Well-Being?



- What are the factors that influence the reading difficulties?

I hereby seek permission to conduct interviews with the selected participants, conduct six sessions of classroom observations during the English Home Language, Natural Science, Social Science and Personal and Well-Being lessons. I also seek permission to review confidential documents, i.e. the selected learners' school books, tests, portfolios and reports.

Data will be collected as follows:

- Data will be collected by me through the examination of documents which will include the class work books, portfolios containing tests and assessments and teacher mark records with regards to oral unprepared and prepared reading activities, listening comprehension activities, listening and speaking activities and reading and viewing activities of the nine selected Grade 4 learners.
- I will collect the above documents from the Grade 4 teachers for the different subjects who form part of the study. Photocopies of these documents will be made and kept in a file by me in a locked cupboard which only I will have access to.
- I will also be conducting classroom observations and this will include six sessions of observations. I will make a brief explanation to the learners in the classroom and will make sure that my presence does not cause any distractions or disturbances. I will use observation checklists to observe the reading behaviour of the selected Grade 4 learners and this will be done confidentially.
- I will also conduct individual face to face interviews with the nine selected Grade 4 learners during their reading for pleasure periods, in order to establish reading behaviour of the selected nine Grade 4 learners. The data collected verbally will be recorded in a diary by me. A video recorder will also be used during the interviews.
- The data collection method of individual interviews will be employed for the Grade 4 teachers and the Grade 3 Literacy teachers who have been selected as participants in this research study.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and no pressure, however subtle, will be placed on any participant. I will seek permission from the principal, parents of the learners in the study, the teachers in the study as well as assent from the learners who will be identified to participate in the study.

I will ensure that:

- Confidentiality of every participant, by allocating a reference number to each in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality throughout.
- No discussion with non-participants will be entered into.
- I will also not divulge or use any information that the participants request to be kept in confidence.
- Please note that all information collected through observations, interviews, recordings and document collections will be held in safekeeping at my home on a password protected PC.
- No direct benefits will accrue and no compensation will be given to the participants.
- The participants are free to stop at any given time.
- The results of this study will be reported to the principal and will be submitted for publications in journals of education.

I sincerely appreciate your approval of this research study at the above institution.

Should you have any queries regarding this study please contact Mrs Dorcas Joan Naiken at 0843073567 or email [joan.naiken@telkomsa.net](mailto:joan.naiken@telkomsa.net) or Prof HM Vogel at 0828546503 or [dalenvogel@icloud.com](mailto:dalenvogel@icloud.com)

I trust that my request will meet your favourable response.

Yours faithfully

.....

RESEARCHER: MRS D J NAIKEN  
M.ED STUDENT (UNISA)  
35962399

DATE

**APPENDIX C**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FROM THE TEACHER PARTICIPANTS FOR INDIVIDUAL**  
**INTERVIEWS**

Dear Sir/Madam

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

I am currently pursuing a Master's degree at the University of South Africa.

I, Mrs D J Naiken, am a post-graduate student in the College of Education at UNISA. I am currently completing my Master's degree in Educational Psychology. This research is being supervised by Professor HM Vogel.

The title of the project is: **READING DIFFICULTIES AS BARRIERS TO LEARNING EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS ENTERING THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE**

Through this study I hope to establish the nature of reading difficulties faced by learners in the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4. The study will also focus on the different types of reading difficulties that are faced by the learners in grade 4 and on the factors that influence reading difficulties.

The research will require the participation of the Grade 3 and 4 teachers, nine Grade 4 learners and the parents or guardians of the selected learners. I would sincerely appreciate your participation in this research as you will be able to provide vital information that will help us provide suitable learner support to learners with reading difficulties.

I sincerely hope to answer the following research questions by using the data collection methods of observation, individual interviews and document studies.

- What types of reading difficulties are learners facing in Grade 4?
- What influence do the identified types of reading difficulties have on the learners learning in other subjects for example, Natural Science, Social Science and Personal Social Well-Being?
- What are the factors that influence the reading difficulties?

This is voluntary participation and should you decide to participate, you will be required to be interviewed me. There will be no divulgence of any confidential information. There is no

compensation or costs involved in this research project. You are free to withdraw from this project at any time with no consequence. Your participation in this research study is appreciated. I would like to assure you that your anonymity will be assured at all times. The information provided by you will only be used to assist learners with reading difficulties. There are no known risks and you may withdraw from the study at any stage, without fear or prejudice. Anonymity will be assured through omission of names.

Interviews will be conducted during your non-teaching time. I will also be conducting classroom observations and this will include six sessions of observations. I sincerely request your permission to do so. I will give a brief explanation to the learners in the classroom and will make sure that my presence does not cause any distractions or disturbances. I will use observation checklists to observe the reading behaviour of the selected Grade 4 learners and this will be done confidentially.

Should you have any queries regarding this study please contact Mrs Dorcas Joan Naiken at 0843073567 or email [joan.naiken@telkomsa.net](mailto:joan.naiken@telkomsa.net) or Prof HM Vogel at 0828546503 or [dalenvogel@icloud.com](mailto:dalenvogel@icloud.com)

Please acknowledge participation by signing below:

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name and surname) have read the preceding premises in connection with this research project. I have also been given ample information and was given an opportunity to ask relevant questions. I am fully aware that this is a voluntary participation and that no compensation or costs will incur during my participation. I was also made aware that the interviews will be conducted during my non-teaching time and will not interrupt my instruction time. I agree that this project will be of benefit to the learners with reading difficulties and that the educators will be able to provide suitable learner support.

I will be/ will not be participating in this research project (underline your choice).

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2015.

Signature of Educator \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FROM PARENTS OR GUARDIANS OF LEARNERS**  
**PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH**

Dear Sir/Madam

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

I, Mrs D J Naiken, am a post-graduate student of the University of South Africa hereby request your permission to include your child/ward in Grade 4 as a participant in my research. I am currently completing my Master's degree in the College of Education, Department of Psychology of Education at UNISA. This research is being supervised by Professor HM Vogel.

The title of the project is: **READING DIFFICULTIES AS BARRIERS TO LEARNING EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS ENTERING THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE**

Through this study I hope to establish the nature of reading difficulties faced by learners in the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4. The study will also focus on the different types of reading difficulties that are faced by the learners in grade 4 and on the factors that influence reading difficulties.

I would sincerely appreciate your participation in this research as you will be able to provide vital information that will help us provide suitable learner support to learners with reading difficulties.

I sincerely hope to answer the following research questions by using the data collection methods of observation, individual interviews and document studies.

- What types of reading difficulties are learners facing in Grade 4?
- What influence do the identified types of reading difficulties have on the learners learning in other subjects for example, Natural Science, Social Science and Personal Social Well-Being?
- What are the factors that influence the reading difficulties?

- The child/ward will be observed by me during the different lessons using checklists on reading behaviour. The learner will not be disturbed during the lessons and the observer will not ask questions directly during these observations.
- The learner will also be interviewed on different occasions on his/her likes and dislikes of reading activities(reading habits) the types of reading materials and their interest in becoming better readers as well as the need to have reading skills. These interviews will be structured and will be explained in detail to the participant and will be conducted individually at the remedial centre. The interview questions will be easy to understand and will be read to the learner.
- There will be no risks and this is a voluntary process, the child/learner can withdraw this research at any given time with no consequences.
- Your child/ward will also be asked if he/she wishes to participate.
- There are no costs involved and no compensation will be given.
- Any personal and private information that may be regarded as sensitive will be treated with confidence.
- You will also be given access to the results of data concerning your child/ward upon request and you are encouraged to ask me questions that you may have regarding this research project.

I sincerely appreciate your assistance and consent in this research project. This project will be of benefit to your child/ward and other learners with reading difficulties, as the results gained will give an indication of the type of learner support that would need to be given to your child/ward with regards to their difficulties in reading.

Should you have any queries regarding this study please contact Mrs D. J. Naiken at 0843073567 or email [joan.naiken@telkomsa.net](mailto:joan.naiken@telkomsa.net) or Prof HM Vogel at 0828546503 or [dalenvogel@icloud.com](mailto:dalenvogel@icloud.com)

It would be appreciated if you kindly sign this letter as a declaration of your consent.

INFORMED CONSENT FROM PARENT/GUARDIAN

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name and surname parent/guardian) the parent/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_(name and surname of child/ward) in Grade\_\_\_\_\_, hereby grant consent for my child/ward to be a participant in this research project. I acknowledge that I have read the preceding premises in connection with research project. I agree that there will be no compensation and no costs for participation in this research project. These conditions have been explained to me in detail and I have been given the opportunity to ask relevant questions. I also understand that this is a voluntary participation and my child/ward can withdraw at any time with no consequences. I hereby declare that by providing this consent and by signing this document, I irrevocably confirm that I am the parent/guardian of the above-mentioned child and I am giving consent for my child/ward to participate in this research project.

I hereby grant/do not grant consent for the above study (underline choice).

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on this the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2015.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian



**APPENDIX E**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH PARENT PARTICIPANTS**

Dear Sir/Madam

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

I am a post-graduate student in the College of Education at UNISA. I am currently completing my Master degree in Education Psychology. This research project is being supervised by Professor HM Vogel.

The title of the research project is: **READING DIFFICULTIES AS BARRIERS TO LEARNING EXPERIENCED BY LEARNERS ENTERING THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE**

Through this study I hope to establish the nature of reading difficulties faced by learners in the transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4. The study will also focus on the different types of reading difficulties that are faced by the learners in Grade 4 and will focus on the factors that influence reading difficulties.

I would sincerely appreciate your participation in this research project as you would be able to provide vital information that would help us provide suitable learner support to learners with reading difficulties.

I sincerely hope to answer the following research questions by using the data collection methods of observations, individual interviews and journal records.

- What types of reading difficulties are learners facing in Grade 4?
- What influence do the identified types of reading difficulties have on the learners learning in other subjects for example, Natural Science, Social Science and Personal Social Well-Being?
- What are the factors that influence the reading difficulties?

This is voluntary participation and should you decide to participate, you will be required to be interviewed by me. There will be no divulgence of any confidential information. There is no compensation or costs involved in this research project. You are free to withdraw from this project at any time with no consequence. Your participation in this research is appreciated. I would like to assure you that your anonymity will be assured at all times. The information

provided by you will only be used to assist learners with reading difficulties. There are no known risks and you may withdraw from the study at any stage, without fear or prejudice. Anonymity will be assured through omission of names.

Interviews will be conducted when you are available, dates and times will be sent to you. You are free to choose the most suitable date and time.

Should you have any queries regarding this study please contact Mrs D. J. Naiken at 0843073567 or email [joan.naiken@telkomsa.net](mailto:joan.naiken@telkomsa.net) or Prof HM Vogel at 0828546503 or [dalnavogel@icloud.com](mailto:dalnavogel@icloud.com)

D. J NAIKEN

M.ED STUDENT (UNISA)

Please acknowledge participation by signing below:

I \_\_\_\_\_ (name and surname) have read the preceding premises in connection with this research project. I have also been given ample information and was given an opportunity to ask relevant questions. I am fully aware that this is a voluntary participation and that no compensation or costs will incur during my participation. I agree that this project will be of benefit to the learners with reading difficulties and that the educators will be able to provide suitable learner support.

I will be/ will not be participating in this research project (underline your choice).

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2015.

Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX F**  
**LETTER OF ASSENT TO THE LEARNER PARTICIPANTS**

Dear Participant

**ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

I, Mrs D J Naiken, am currently studying at UNISA and am completing a Master Degree in Education Psychology in the College of Education. My research project is on the reading difficulties that are experienced by learners in Grade 4 and also how these reading problems are affecting their other subjects like Natural Science, Social Science and Personal Social Well-being. A research study allows people to learn more about problems that other people may be experiencing. You will help me, to help other learners who may have reading problems so that schools, may be able to find ways to help learners with reading difficulties.

If you decide to be part of this research study, you will be interviewed by me for a few minutes on different occasions to talk about your feelings on reading and reading activities in your class. All the information I gather will not be discussed with anyone except for the principal and your parents. When I am finished with this research project, I will write a report but it will not include your name. You will not receive any gifts or money during your participation. However, you and other learners will be helped with your reading difficulties. After you agree to participate in this study and you sign the assent form in the presence of your parents, your parents will get a copy of the assent form.

Your parents will also be asked for permission before you participate so please discuss this with your parents before you decide to take part. You are not forced to participate but I would really appreciate your participation.

If you are willing to take part in this research project kindly write your name in the space provided or colour in the face to show whether you want to take part in this study or not.



Want to take part



Do not want to take part

---

Name and grade of learner

Yours faithfully

Mrs D J Naiken

---

Signature of Researcher (Mrs D J Naiken)

**APPENDIX G**  
**OBSERVATION CHECKLIST**

<b>A</b>	<b>General reading behaviour</b>	<b>+ OR -</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
A1	Learner is relaxed during a reading activity		
A2	Learner is tense and fearful during a reading activity		
A3	Learner fidgets or moves around in chair when asked to read		
A4	Learner moves the reading material towards or away from himself/herself		
A5	Learner works independently to complete a reading activity		
A6	Learner seeks continuous assistance from peers or educators		
A7	Learner does not attempt the reading task or activity		
A8	Learner reads with appropriate expression		
A9	Learner reads accurately		
A10	Is able to identify if text is fiction or non- fiction		
A11	Knows the different types of text		
A12	Is able to describe the plot in a text		
A13	Is able to recognize the different parts of speech in text		
A14	Is able to recognize sentence types in text		
A15	Is able to read a range of common words on sight		

<b>B</b>	<b>Prepared or Unprepared Reading Activities</b>	<b>+ OR-</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
B1	The learner does not read at all		
B2	The learner reads but very softly and slowly		
B3	The learner omits words that are long		
B4	Learner has good pronunciation		
B5	Learner has poor pronunciation		
B6	Learner omits whole sentences		
B7	Learner points to the words while reading		
B8	Learner tries to read		

B9	Learner just gives up and does not attempt to read further		
B10	Learner guesses some words		
B11	Does the learner use punctuation when reading?		

<b>C</b>	<b>Reading Comprehension Activities</b>	<b>+OR-</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
C1	Can the learner read the text independently?		
C2	Can he/she identify the type of text?		
C3	Is the learner able to read words that are pointed out to him or her?		
C4	Is the learner able to scan the text for specific answers?		
C5	Can the learner read and understand the questions based on the text?		
C6	Must the text and questions be read out and explained to the learner?		
C7	Can the learner identify and explain the main idea of the text?		
C8	Can the learner answer questions when the text and questions are read to him/her?		
C9	Is the learner able to answer structured comprehension questions in classwork tasks, assessments and formal examinations?		
C10	Is the learner able to answer questions orally on the text?		

**APPENDIX H**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**  
**INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH GRADE 3 TEACHERS**

1. Why is a solid reading foundation with adequate teacher knowledge a necessity for learners entering the Intermediate Phase?
2. Please explain the components of reading that are taught prior to learners entering the Intermediate Phase.
3. Please explain why it is vital to teach good reading skills in the Foundation Phase?
4. What are some of the reading difficulties that learners experience in the Foundation Phase especially in Grade 3?
5. Please explain why you think it is vital for learners to be able to comprehend text when entering Grade 4.
6. What steps are taken in the Foundation Phase if and when learners experience reading difficulties? Explain briefly.
7. Please explain if there is any or ample parental support with regards to learners with reading difficulties.
8. Please explain the importance of the school environment and the Foundation Phase teacher in the acquisition of reading skills.
9. Do you have adequate resources and support with regards to teaching reading in the Foundation Phase? Please elaborate.
10. What are the consequences of the language of learning and teaching with regards to reading, in the Foundation Phase in your opinion? Please elaborate.

**APPENDIX I**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**  
**INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH GRADE 4 TEACHERS**

1. Why is it vital for learners to have a sound reading foundation upon entering the Intermediate Phase?
2. Please explain the importance of the ability to read at the expected levels when learners enter the Intermediate Phase.
3. Do you have learners in the subject that you teach that have reading difficulties? What is the impact of these reading difficulties?
4. Please describe the effects of reading difficulties with regards to the overall academic progress of learners in Grade 4.
5. What are some of the types of reading difficulties that learners experience in the subject you teach in Grade 4? Explain briefly.
6. What is your knowledge on the essential components of reading (phonics, word recognition, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension)? Elaborate.
7. How do these essential components or the lack there-of impact learning in your subject? Explain.
8. Please explain the impact of the language of learning and teaching versus the home language of the learner in your subject.
9. What are your views on parental involvement in the learner's reading development prior to Grade 4 and in the Intermediate Phase. Please explain with regards to your interaction with learners with reading difficulties in your subject.
10. How does the school environment ie. resources, teaching methods, teacher knowledge, activities, motivation and communication with parents impact reading development? Elaborate.



11. What are some of the factors that you have noticed that have an impact on reading success in the subject you teach in Grade 4? Explain.
12. Please explain what you consider to be vital factors that could help improve the reading skills of learners?

**APPENDIX J**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**  
**INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH LEARNERS**

1. What does the word “reading” mean to you?
2. Why do people need to read? Please explain in your own words.
3. Do you like reading? Why or why not?
4. What is easy about reading to you? Why
5. What is difficult about reading to you and why?
6. How do you feel when you have to read a text yourself during the different subjects?
7. How do you feel when you do reading activities with your class, friends or in groups?
8. What type of material do you like to read in class and why?
9. How do you feel about yourself as a reader?
10. Do you read at home and with whom?
11. Who helps you with your homework?

**APPENDIX K**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**  
**INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

1. Why do you think it is vital for learners to be able to read and develop in reading?
2. Are you aware that your child/ward is experiencing reading difficulties? Please explain.
3. Were the reading difficulties of the child discussed with you previously? Elaborate.
4. Did the learner receive the necessary reading support? Please explain.
5. What suggestions or types of reading/learner support was given? Please provide details.
6. Is the learner encouraged to read at home and what reading material is available? Explain.
7. Does the learner receive assistance to read, complete home work activities and prepare for tests and assessments at home? Please explain.
8. How much time does the learner spend reading books and completing homework tasks compared to watching television, playing with friends or engaging in after school sporting activities? Elaborate.
9. Does the learner receive praise for trying?
10. Briefly describe the home environment the learner comes from.
11. Would you like for your child/ward to receive suitable reading support and explain the role you will play in this process.

**APPENDIX L**  
**AGREEMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY – TEACHERS AND LEARNERS AND PARENTS**  
**PARTICIPATING INTERVIEWS**

Research Title

**READING DIFFICULTIES AS BARRIERS TO LEARNING BY LEARNERS ENTERING THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE**

Institution

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

This study respects the anonymity of **ALL** participants and keeping what transpired in the interview as strictly confidential. No name or any other identifying details are recorded. No information on discussions from the individual interviews may be shared outside this room as that may infringe on the confidentiality of the study and the confidentiality of what participants were willing to share. Your cooperation in this regard is highly appreciated.

**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

I -----, hereby consent to keep all discussions that transpire in this interview as highly confidential. I therefore consent not to share anything discussed in this interview with anyone outside this room.

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX M

### ETHICS CLEARANCE



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE  
2015 -05- 2 2

13 May 2015

Ref #: 2015/05/13/25962399/01/MC  
Student #: Mrs DJ Naiken  
Student Number #: 35962399

Dear Mrs Naiken,

**Decision: Approved**

**Researcher**  
Mrs DJ Naiken  
Tel: +27 35 786 1909  
[joan.naiken@telkomsa.net](mailto:joan.naiken@telkomsa.net)

**Supervisor**  
Prof HM Vogel  
Department of Psychology of Education  
College of Education  
Tel: +27 82 854 6503  
[dalnavogel@icloud.com](mailto:dalnavogel@icloud.com)

**Proposal:** Reading difficulties as barriers to learning when learners transition from grade 3 to grade 4

**Qualification:** M Ed in Psychology of Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for 2 years.

**For full approval:** The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the CEDU ERC on 13 May 2015.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the College of Education Ethics Review Committee.  
An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the



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Preller Street, Muckleneuk, Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150  
[www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

*existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.*

- 3) *The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.*

*Note:*

*The reference number 2015/05/13/35962399/21/MC should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants, as well as with the College of Education RERC.*

Kind regards,



**Dr M Claassens**  
**CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC**  
[mcdtc@netactive.co.za](mailto:mcdtc@netactive.co.za)



**Prof VI McKay**  
**ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN**



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**APPENDIX N**  
**EDITOR CERTIFICATE/CONFIRMATION**

*Ilze Brüggemann*

P O Box 256 Kloof 3640  
Tel. 031 764 6146  
e-mail [ib\\_subed@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ib_subed@yahoo.co.uk)  
Tax number: 1228/005/21/9



26 September 2016

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

This is to certify that I, Ilze Dina Brüggemann, copy edited the final dissertation entitled: *Reading Difficulties as Barriers to Learning Experienced by Learners Entering the Intermediate Phase* by D. J. Naiken (student number 35962399).

I am an Accredited Member of the South African Translators' Institute (No. 1000018).

Please do not hesitate to contact me if further information is required.

Sincerely

*Brüggemann*  
.....  
I BRÜGGEMANN

**APPENDIX 0**  
**LETTER OF PERMISSION:KZN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**



**education**

Department:  
Education  
**PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref.:2/4/8/499

Mrs DJ Naiken  
PO Box 80567  
RICHARDS BAY  
3900

Dear Mrs Naiken

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS**

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"READING DIFFICULTIES AS BARRIES TO LEARNING WHEN LEARNERS TRANSITION FROM GRADE 3 TO GRADE 4"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 03 August 2015 to 31 August 2016.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UThungulu District

**Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD**  
**Head of Department: Education**  
**Date: 03 August 2015**

**KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa dedicated to service and performance

PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004 beyond the call of duty

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