Early Reading Development in Xitsonga: A Study of Learners and Teachers in Grade 1 Classrooms in Limpopo Province

by

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ABSTRACT

Reading literacy for many black South African learners is a problem. In order to understand what happens in the South African foundation phase classrooms that affect learners' reading performance, this study uses the adapted early grade reading assessment (EGRA) tool to assess Grade 1 learners' reading abilities in the home language (four schools) and in the first additional language (one school). The EGRA is important for measuring foundational literacy skills. Its outcomes help teachers plan instruction that accommodates diverse learning capabilities. Data were collected through observing literacy practices and activities in the Grade 1 classrooms, evaluate classroom settings and interview Grade 1 teachers and curriculum advisors of the general education and training band to understand their perception of Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The main findings revealed that the Grade 1 learners are acquiring foundational reading skills in Xitsonga very slowly during the first year of schooling and on all measures, performance was either low or very low. The teachers' lack of deep understanding of how early reading develops and how each of the reading activities contributes to different aspects of this development may have contributed to the learners' reading outcomes. Findings further revealed that the ability to read fluently and with comprehension is determined by hierarchical relationships between various reading skills. Thus, knowledge of letter-sounds facilitates word reading which impacts reading fluency and then reading comprehension – all these skills are important for reading development during early learning only if they are taught well in the classroom.

Key words: EGRA; home language, reading literacy; phonological and phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge; word reading; oral reading fluency; reading comprehension; Xitsonga.

NKOMISO

Ku hlaya ni ku tsala swi tikela vadyondzi vo tala laha Afrika Dzonga. Eka ndzavisiso lowu, ku va hi ta kota ku twisisa leswi swi humelelaka mayelana na matirhelo yo hlaya ya vadyondzi va ntangha R-3, hi kambela vuswikoti lebyi vadyondzi va ntlawa wo sungula (Giredi 1) va nga na byona byo hlaya hi ririmi ra manana (mune wa swikolo) na hi ririmi leri ri nga le eka xiyimo xa masungulo (xikolo xin'we) hi ku tirhisa xikambelwana lexi xi vuriwaka *early grade reading assessment* (EGRA). Xikambelwana lexi (EGRA) xi ni nkoka lowu kulu mayelana ni ku kambela vuswikoti bya n'wana byo hlaya. Mbuyelo wa xikambelo lexi wu pfuna ngopfu mayelana na leswaku vadyondzisi va kota ku kunguhata madyindziselo lama ya angarhelaka vadyondzi hinkwavo. Ndzavisiso lowu wu humelerisiwile hi ku kambela madyondziselo yo hlaya ni ku tsala eka ntlawa wo sungula (Giredi 1), ku kambela xivumbeko xa kamara ro dyondzela eka rona, ni ku kambela vutivi bya kharikhulamu bya vadyondzisi va ntlawa wo sungula na vaseketeri va vona (curriculum advisors). Mbuyelonkulu wu humesele erivaleni leswaku vadyondzi va kuma ntokoto wo hlaya hi Xitsonga hi ku nonoka va ha ri eka lembe ra vona ro sungula xikolo. Leswi swi thlela swi nyanyisa na hi leswaku mbuyelo wa vona wo hlaya eka swiyenge hinkwaswo swa xikambelo lexi xi nga tirhisiwa ku va kambela a wu ri ehansi ngopfu. Eka ndzavisiso lowu, ku pfumala ka vadyondzisi vutivi hi vuenti bya ku dyondzisa vana eku hlaya swi nga va swi vile na xiave eka mbuyelo wa vadyondzi wo hlaya. Vulavisisi lebyi byi thlela byi humesela erivaleni leswaku vuswikoti byo hlaya hi ku twisisa swi koteka ntsena loko mudyonzi a ri ni ntokoto eka swiyenge hinkwaswo swa ku hlaya hikuva swi na vuxaka. Hikokwalaho, vuswikoti byo hlaya mimpfumawulo ya maletere swi pfuneta ku hlaya marito lawa ya thlelaka ya pfuneta ku hlaya hi nkhuluko ni ku twisisa leswi swi hlayiwaka. Vuswikoti lebyi hinkwabyo byi ni nkoka mayelana ni ku dyondza ku hlaya ntsena loko madyondziselo yo hlaya ya landzelerisa leswi kunguhatiweke eka kharikhulamu.

Marito nkulu (Key words):

EGRA, *ririmi ra manana* (home language), *ku hlaya ni ku tsala* (reading literacy), *ku lemuka tifonimi* (Phonological and phonemic awreness), *vuswikoti byo hlaya mimpfumawulo ya maletere* (letter-sound knowledge), *ku hlaya marito* (word reading), *ku hlaya hi nkhuluko* (oral reading fluency), *ku twisisa leswi hlayiwaka* (reading comprehension), Xitsonga

OPSOMMING

Leesgeletterdheid vir baie swart Suid-Afrikaanse leerders is ‘n probleem. Om te verstaan wat in die Suid-Afrikaanse grondslagfase-klaskamers gebeur wat die leesprestasie van leerders beïnvloed, word in die studie die aangepaste instrument vir vroeë graad leesassessering (EGRA) gebruik om die leesvermoëns van Graad 1-leerders in die huistaal (vier skole) en in die eerste addisionele taal (een skool). Die EGRA is belangrik vir die meting van fundamentele geletterdheidsvaardighede. Die uitkomste daarvan help onderwysers om onderrig te beplan wat voldoen aan verskillende leervermoëns. Data is versamel deur die waarneming van geletterdheidspraktyke en aktiwiteite in die Graad 1-klaskamers, die klaskamerinstellings te evalueer en onderhoude met Graad 1-onderwysers en kurrikulumadviseurs van die algemene onderwys- en opleidingsband te onderneem om hul persepsie van Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) te verstaan. Die belangrikste bevindings het getoon dat die graad 1-leerders in die eerste jaar van skool baie stadig basiese leesvaardighede in Xitsonga verwerf, en dat prestasies op alle maatstawwe laag of baie laag was. Die onderwysers se gebrek aan diep begrip van hoe vroeë lees ontwikkel en hoe elkeen van die leesaktiwiteite bydra tot verskillende aspekte van hierdie ontwikkeling, het moontlik tot die leerders se leesuitkomste bygedra. Bevindinge het verder aan die lig gebring dat die vermoë om vlot en met begrip te lees, bepaal word deur hiërargiese verwantskappe tussen verskillende leesvaardighede. Kennis van letterklanke vergemaklik dus die lees van woorde wat die vloeiendheid van lees en dan leesbegrip beïnvloed - al hierdie vaardighede is slegs belangrik vir leesontwikkeling tydens vroeë leer as dit goed in die klaskamer geleer word.

Sleutelwoorde: huistaal, leesgeletterdheid; fonologiese en fonemiese bewustheid, letterklank-kennis; woordlees; mondelinge leesvlotheid; lees begrip, Xitsonga

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Mr Eugene Marais for offering his time to assist me with sending my thesis to Turnitin.

Above all, I thank God almighty, who has endowed me with the wisdom, ability, competence, motivation and persistence, despite all the challenges to complete this study successfully.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research is my own unaided work and that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any university. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged through referencing.

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(Mrs) M. Khosa Date

Student number: 55760600

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations and terms were used in this thesis:

FP	Foundation Phase
HL	home language
CA	curriculum advisor
NECT	National Education Collaboration Trust
DBE	Department of Basic Education
ORF	oral reading fluency
PA	phonological and phonemic awareness
ORC	oral reading comprehension
GGR	group guided reading
SR	shared reading
LER	learner-educator ratio
GET	General Education and Training band
NRP	National Reading Panel
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement
WR	word reading
SMTs	School Management Teams
FAL	First Additional Language
KZN	KwaZulu Natal
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
LSK	letter-sound knowledge
MRA	multiple regression analyses
SES	socio-economic status

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. 0. INTRODUCTION

This study examines early reading development in Xitsonga during the first year of formal schooling, namely Grade 1. This chapter aims to discuss the background as to what prompted this study, to present the research problem and theoretical framework underpinning the current study, to state the aims and research questions and outline the methodology, and finally, to present an overview of the thesis, which comprises seven chapters.

1. 1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Many South African learners, especially African home language learners, face several obstacles in learning to read for meaning in their language(s). This is evidenced by Grade 4 learners' failure to obtain even the lowest international benchmark (viz., being able to understand literal information in a text) in the large-scale assessments of the Progress in International Literacy Reading Study (PIRLS) 2006, 2011 and 2016 (Howie et al. 2006, 2012, 2017), despite the use of home language (HL) as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in the first three years of school. There are many factors that contribute to this literacy challenge. Some of the reasons for this situation include the fact that many Foundation Phase (FP) teachers have not been trained to teach reading in line with the reading methodologies stipulated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Charter 2016; Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray & Spaull 2016), as well as the challenges posed in multilingual home and schooling contexts where print resources in all the languages are relatively scarce, and children's exposure to standard written forms are limited (Howie & Tshele 2017). In this case, many learners may find themselves trapped in a situation where 'they may not be familiar with the standardised written version' (Spaull & Pretorius 2019, p. 4) of the languages spoken at home.

The present study sets out to examine early literacy development in Xitsonga language,[1] specifically early reading development, in selected primary schools of Mopani District in

[1] Xitsonga is one of the officially recognised languages in South Africa.

Limpopo Province of South Africa. Unlike in the past, the term 'literacy' today is not only perceived as the ability to read and write, but it has also assumed a very broad meaning, which encompasses the ability to use a specific technology to gather and communicate information in a particular field, or in general (Pilgrim & Martinez 2013), for example, chess literacy, computer literacy or oral literacy. Although the notion of literacy has broadened considerably, this study will focus on a particular type of literacy, namely reading literacy, which is the ability of an individual to understand and use a language in its written form that is accepted and valued by the society at large (Mullis, Kennedy, Martin & Sainsbury 2006; Mullis & Martin 2015).

Although Xitsonga is recognised as one of the official languages in the Republic of South Africa (RSA), very little reading research, if any, has been done in this language. Early reading studies conducted to date have focused mostly on other African languages (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009; De Vos, Van der Merwe & Van der Mescht 2014; Spaull, Pretorius & Mohohlwane 2020). These have included Setswana (Lekgoko & Winskel 2008; Malda, Nel & Vijver 2014; Taylor et al. 2017 EGRS I[2]), Northern Sotho (Wilsenach 2013, 2015, 2019; Makaure 2016), Changana (Machel, Green & Niad 2018), isiZulu (Schaefer & Kotzé 2018 EGRS II, Pretorius 2018 Zenlit,[3] Menendez & Ardington 2018 SPS; Pretorius 2015), isiXhosa (Zenlit, SPS;[4] Diemer 2015; Rees 2016; Pretorius 2018 Zenlit), isiSwati (Schaefer & Kotzé 2018 EGRS II;[5] Schaefer & Kotzè 2019), isiZulu and isiXhosa (Pretorius 2019), Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu (Spaull et al. 2020 ESRC[6]). The reason behind the limited research in Xitsonga language could be the result of its smaller number of speakers and its low status, which reflects the way it is often held in poor esteem (Masinge 1997).

Another reason for my interest in Xitsonga reading stems from the fact that it is my HL. I learned Xitsonga in Standards I and II (equivalent to Grades 1 and 2) as the LoLT during the Bantu Education system which was introduced in 1953 by the apartheid regime. I also studied Xitsonga for my junior degree as one of my major courses at tertiary level. Most importantly, in my previous research, I studied Xitsonga and its role as the LoLT in Grade 3. However, because of limited opportunities for teaching in African HLs then, I could not pursue my career

[2] EGRS I – Early Grade Reading Study in North West by the Department of Basic Education.
[3] Zenlit 2016 – literacy coaching in FP classooms by Zenex Foundation in KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape.
[4] SPS – Nalibali Story Powered Schools in KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape.
[5] EGRS II – Early Grade Reading Study in Mpumalanga by the Department of Basic Education.
[6] ESRC – Early Study of Reading Comprehension undertaken by ReSep and funded by DFID.

in teaching Xitsonga at the school level; hence, I taught English as a second or first additional language (FAL).

In view of the aforementioned, this study aims to fill the existing research gap by examining how early reading develops in classrooms where Xitsonga is used as the LoLT (four schools) or as a FAL (one school). This is a relatively small-scale study involving 75 Grade 1 learners, five Grade 1 teachers from five different schools and two curriculum advisors. Even so, the development of reading literacy in this study will be examined via a multi-pronged approach: by assessing Grade 1 learners on different aspects of early literacy measures in Xitsonga, by observing literacy practices and activities in the Grade 1 classroom, and by interviewing Grade 1 teachers and curriculum advisors, thus drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.

The multi-pronged approach adopted in this study further enables one to build a bigger picture of what is actually happening in the FP classroom, what the FP classrooms look like, what kind of back-up is provided by way of provincial support, and to link this with one-on-one assessments of Grade 1 learner performance in reading literacy at two different points in Grade 1. It is anticipated that the findings from this study can throw more light on the early reading trajectory in an agglutinating Southern Bantu African language such as Xitsonga and on teacher classroom practices and broader educational support within the context of CAPS. Based on the findings, implications for pedagogy are highlighted, and future research avenues are also identified.

1. 2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Achievement in reading literacy brings many educational, social, economic and health benefits for the individual and society as a whole (Government of Alberta 2009; Fountas & Pinnell 2012). It is well-known that despite the South African government spending more on education than many other middle-and low-income countries (Taylor, Van der Berg & Mabogoane 2013), improvements are slow and the level of reading literacy has remained in a serious crisis for two decades. For example, the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA), which measured numeracy, literacy and Life Skills competencies of Grade 4 learners in several African countries, including South Africa, showed that South African learners in 1999 achieved 48.1% in literacy, with the largest proportion of learners (47%) obtaining scores between 25% and

50%, and only 13% achieving a score of 72% or higher (Department of Education 2009). This was the lowest performance compared to other participating countries such as Botswana and Mauritius.

Furthermore, another large scale assessment conducted by the Department of Education (DoE) (2007) with technical support from an independent agency, JET Educational Services, showed overall improvement by 6% (from 30% to 36%) for the Grade 3 learners' literacy outcomes between 2001 and 2007. Performance across provinces ranged from 24% in Limpopo Province to 49% in the Western Cape (DoE 2009). Although there was an improvement in scores, this was from a low base, showing that learners had difficulty coping with the demands of learning to read and write in the FP classroom, even in their HL (Fleisch 2008).

South Africa also participated for the first time in PIRLS from 2006. PIRLS is an international assessment of reading comprehension at Grade 4 level that has been conducted every five years since 2001. PIRLS tests reading comprehension for literacy experience (narrative texts) and for information (information texts) (Howie et al. 2017). It also tests comprehension at four different levels of difficulty, such as the learners' ability to focus and 'retrieve explicitly stated information, make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, and evaluate and critique content and textual elements' (Mullis & Martin 2015, p. 16). PIRLS results also showed that South African Grade 4 learners achieved well below the international benchmark in the three rounds of 2006, 2011 and 2016, regardless of the fact that the majority of these learners were tested in the African language(s) which had been their LoLT during their first three years of schooling.

In terms of assessing learners' reading literacy, PIRLS 2006 results show that Grade 4 learners (253 mean score) and Grade 5 learners (302 mean score) performed poorly in all 11 official languages (Venter & Howie 2006) because they could not reach the international mean score of 500. Therefore, this led to the introduction of prePIRLS in 2011 where Grade 4s were tested in all 11 HLs, and due to high costs of testing, Grade 5s did PIRLS in English and Afrikaans only. PrePIRLS uses shorter, easier texts (around 400-500 words compared to 800-900 in PIRLS). Questions in prePIRLS are also asked at the end of each page, unlike in PIRLS where they occur at the end of the passage. In the 2011 prePIRLS, Grade 4 learners obtained an average score of 461 (SE=3.7) in all languages, even though the assessment was shorter and easier, while Grade 5s in English and Afrikaans obtained an overall achievement score of 421 (SE=7.3), the lowest for benchmarking participants.

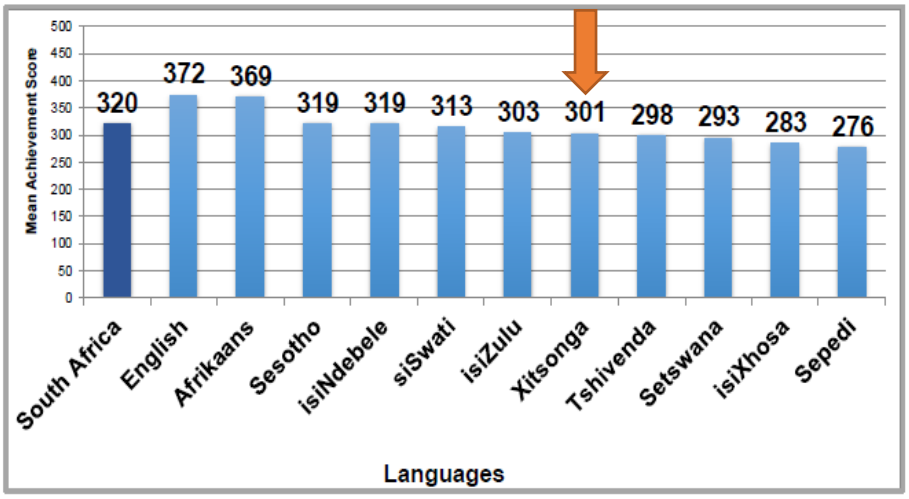
In 2016, the name prePIRLS changed to PIRLS Literacy, and once again, Grade 4 learners were tested in all 11 languages, but they achieved a mean score of 320 which was significantly below the PIRLS centre point of 500, and Grade 5s were tested in English, Afrikaans and isiZulu. They obtained a score of 406, which is also below the PIRLS centre point.

All three rounds of PIRLS results in South Africa show very poor performance, with most Grade 4 and 5 learners being unable to reach the lowest international benchmark (i.e., being able to locate explicit information in a text and make straightforward inferences). For example, in 2016, 78% of Grade 4s could not read for meaning in any language, i.e., they did not attain even the lowest international benchmark (Howie et al. 2017). Performance was particularly poor in the African languages. Although the National Education Policy Act (No. 27 of 1996) and the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996), as well as the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) 'aim to maintain African HL(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s),' poor educational achievement seems to compromise the effectiveness of African languages in developing reading literacy in the FP classroom (Prinsloo & Heugh 2013).

Xitsonga results from the three cycles of PIRLS 2006, 2011 and 2016 showed that Grade 4 learners tested in Xitsonga performed poorly, although they were not the weakest among the language groups. For example, PIRLS 2006 results showed that Grade 4s tested in Xitsonga failed to attain points higher than 300. In 2011 prePIRLS, they achieved 406 score points, and in PIRLS Literacy 2016, they obtained 301 scores. Figure 1.1 below shows the performance of Xitsonga Grade 4 learners in relation to other languages in the 2016 PIRLS Literacy cycle.

Figure 1. 1. Grade 4 PIRLS Literacy outcomes by language of tests

(Howie et al.2017, p. 2)



There is little detailed research on early reading in Xitsonga. Results in Grade 3 from Spaull et al. (2020) show that Xitsonga learners performed at an average of 39.8 words correct per minute (wcpm) in oral reading fluency (ORF) and a mean score of 3.4 in reading comprehension – no local data is available yet in Xitsonga Grade 1. However, in Mozambique, research has been conducted on Grade 1 learners' early reading skills in Changana[7] which showed an average ORF score of 0.04 wcpm at baseline and 13.3 wcpm at endline (Machel et al. 2018). These results suggest that learners fare poorly in reading despite being assessed in their HL.

In sum, both national and international learner assessment studies show poor literacy achievement for South African learners. In response to the poor state of literacy that South Africa is facing, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has implemented several initiatives to improve early grade reading, including a new, more explicit curriculum in 2012, with clearer guidelines for teaching literacy in FP. Other initiatives include large-scale DBE projects such as the EGRS I (with a focus on Setswana in North West Province) and EGRS II (with a focus on English FAL in Mpumalanga, but isiZulu and isiSwati reading are also monitored), which assess what works bests to improve the learning and teaching of early grade reading in the South African FP classrooms.

In addition to improving the state of literacy in South Africa, research has identified several contributing variables to the development of learners' reading literacy at the macro level, which include inter alia, establishing foundational literacy skills, pedagogic issues and socio-economic factors. Research evidence from other countries has been used to establish how the above factors affect learner performance in reading literacy in alphabetic languages during early learning. Although each of these factors will be examined more fully in the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3), they are briefly discussed below in relation to the research problem.

1. 2. 1. Foundational literacy skills

Foundational literacy refers to learners' first encounters with written language and their growing ability to identify, recognise and sound letters and to blend letters to decode words and to read words in sentences and understand them. Although some children develop emergent literacy skills (i.e., the first steps in learning informally about language and print, and realising that print carries meaning) in the preschool years, the foundational literacy skills which are the

[7] Changana (also sometimes Shangaan) and Xitsonga are the same – they are collective nouns for related ethnic groups in South Africa and Mozambique

focus in this study underpins reading in alphabetic writing systems and usually develop formally during the early years of schooling (referred to as FP in South Africa). Thus, by the end of Grade 3, 'learners are expected to be able to read fast, fluently, with appropriate intonation and understand what they read' (Pretorius et al. 2016, p. 5) at their grade level. By the Intermediate Phase, learners should move beyond foundational reading skills. The early skills play important roles in the acquisition of reading, and research worldwide shows that poor foundational skills negatively impact learners' ability to read.

Because alphabetic writing systems represent speech at the level of individual sounds, phonological awareness plays an important role in languages with an alphabetic writing system. Consistent evidence over the years of the importance of phonological and phonemic awareness in foundational literacy has been demonstrated in longitudinal studies in terms of establishing predictive and causal relationships in alphabetic languages (Adams 1990; Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley 1993; National Reading Panel 2000; Melby-Lervåg, Lyster & Hulme 2012; Yeung & Siegel 2013; Makaure 2016; Cárnio, Vosgrau & Soares 2017; Clayton, West, Sears, Hulme & Lervåg 2019). For example, in Israel, Kozminsky and Kozminsky (1995) found that phonological awareness tasks were highly predictive of success in first and third-grade reading acquisition. Evidence from the National Early Literacy Panel's (NELP) meta-analysis (2008) of about 300 studies, which were conducted to synthesise research to contribute to decisions in educational policy and practice in the United States of America (USA), found that foundational literacy skills such as alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters and reading fluency predicted reading and school success. The report also added that children who do not acquire mastery of foundational skills fall behind their peers in terms of reading and understanding texts.

Phonics skill (knowing letter-sound relations and how to blend them) is also important for developing reading skills in alphabetic languages. For example, in a case study of Grade 3 learners' reading ability after explicit phonics instruction in Thailand, Thaen-nga and Leenam (2016) found significant differences between mean pre-test and post-test scores, suggesting that learners increased their letter-sound knowledge and oral reading ability after being taught phonics.

The ability to read accurately and fluently is also an important component of foundational reading skills. Coming back to the South African context, in their quasi-experimental study,

Pretorius and Lephalala (2011) examined whether explicit reading comprehension interventions of English First Additional Language (EFAL) and Northern Sotho Grade 6 learners in Pretoria could assist in improving learners' comprehension abilities. The results indicated a close correlation between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension skills, suggesting that learners needed to have achieved decoding skills in order to make sense of what they had read.

Local research on reading in African languages has also found evidence of a decoding threshold below which learners find it difficult to read with meaning. In a study of the subcomponents of reading across three languages (Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu) of 785 Grade 3 learners in South Africa, Spaull et al. (2020) found that reading comprehension was strongly related to decoding ability, specifically letter-sound knowledge and oral reading fluency. Learners with poor decoding skills were readers who knew few letter-sounds and who read slowly and inaccurately. This decoding threshold differed across the three languages (18.2 wcpm in Xitsonga, 19.3 wcpm in Northern Sotho and 17.2 wcpm in isiZulu) due to differences in the orthographies of these languages.

The above findings are confirmation that deficits in the development of foundational reading skills are applicable to the three South African Bantu languages irrespective of specific orthographic systems. This affects children's ability to read with meaning and the depth of learning in the classroom (Howie et al. 2017).

1. 2. 2. Pedagogic issues

Pedagogic issues have been identified as contributing factors to learner performance in academic achievement. Pedagogy refers to how teaching is conducted in the classroom. It is a specialist knowledge acquired during training for student teachers to become professional teachers. A detailed discussion of these factors will be given in Chapter 3 (§3.3.1).

The teacher's ability to instruct a particular subject plays an important role in promoting teaching and learning. This is supported in the OECD (2005) report, which concluded that teacher quality impacts learner achievement. Research from the USA points out that teachers' lack of pedagogic knowledge is a prevalent deficiency that negatively impacts teaching and learning (Morrow 2007). Similarly, Barber and Mourshed (2007) also found that the quality of the teacher influences effective learning in the classroom. For example, a more recent qualitative study of 1,986 students in Portugal in terms of examining student-teacher interaction

revealed that perceived teachers' competencies influence student-student interactions and learning performance positively and significantly; student-student interactions positively, and also significantly influence learning performance, which in turn, affects students' academic achievement (Costa, Cardoso, Lima, Ferreira & Abrantes 2015, p. 874). A recent mixed-method study of assessing factors contributing to improvement in the academic performance of students in Ghana revealed that the average academic performance (47.0%) of students was weak. The study further established that teacher factors such as completing the syllabus, using teaching-learning materials, frequent feedback to students and students' special attention contribute to student academic achievement. The study also recommended that there should be stricter monitoring of teachers to vary their teaching methods to cater for individual student needs and provide the latter with constant feedback on their academic performance (Abaidoo 2018). Kathirveloo, Puteh and Matemalik (2014) caution that without a full grasp of pedagogic knowledge, teachers may face difficulty in teaching their subjects effectively.

Coming back home, the report from the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) (2013) on the state of the schooling system in South Africa found that teachers in the FP do not know how to teach early reading according to what is recommended by CAPS. For example, teachers observed during reading lessons spent far more time (approximately 40 minutes) than the recommended 15 minutes teaching sounds and pronunciation of words in the Grade 2 classroom and in most instances, during group guided reading, learners not in the group were not given work to do and they made a noise.

Other studies have also shown that teachers' lack of pedagogic knowledge can impact on learner performance. A comparative study of classroom and teaching factors on learner achievement in maths across the North West Province and Botswana found that teacher pedagogic knowledge was strongly linked to ratings of teacher quality and opportunities to learn in schools in the North West Province (Carnoy & Arends 2012). Another study that assessed the impact of teacher subject knowledge on academic achievement using a nationally representative dataset of Grade 6 learners in South Africa found that teacher pedagogic knowledge or lack thereof has a significant impact on learner performance (Shepherd 2015).

Pedagogic issues prevalent in South African classrooms reflect two contributory factors: low entry-level into teacher training degrees and inadequate content of Bachelors in Education (BEd Degree) programmes. For example, some higher institutions in South Africa have low entry requirements for education degrees, such as BEd programmes. A study done over 28

years ago found that most student teachers who qualified in 1988 enrolled with an aggregate symbol 'F' (i.e., 33-39%) (Hartshorne 1992). These are South African teachers who are currently in their late forties/early fifties. Low-entry requirements into teacher training deny learners access to quality education and compromise the quality of teacher training in colleges/universities (Hoadley 2009; Verbeek (2010). However, the situation has changed somewhat in the past decade(s) because most universities' admission requirements for BEd programmes now approve a minimum of 40-49% or 50-59%, depending on the subject-specific requirements, but even these entry levels indicate a low base on which to build a strong academic teacher corp.

Low entry level is not the only factor contributing to pedagogic issues in the classroom, but also what is offered in the BEd programme for the student teachers. After reviewing the country's teacher education programmes in 2007, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) concluded that a student's undergraduate academic majors in relevant subjects are no guarantee of sufficient disciplinary knowledge as a basis for building pedagogical knowledge (Council of Higher Education 2010). This is supported by Taylor (2014), who established in his research that universities in South Africa fail to teach teachers how to teach reading. Taylor (2014) also added that the majority of higher institutions' focus seems to be based on securing more teachers (quantity) than producing better teachers (quality). This, according to Styger, van Vuuren and Heymans (2015), appears to be influenced by the fact that government subsidies for South African universities are weighed inter alia, on student intake. Taylor's findings prompted the Primary Teacher Education (Prim TEd) project, which was established to run for five years (2016 to 2020) in collaboration with various stakeholders (e.g., the Education Dean's Forum, the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Basic Education) to strengthen initial teacher education and provide a more explicit focus on reading instruction.

1. 2. 3. Literacy and socio-economic factors

Socio-economic status (SES) describes one's combined economic and social status, which is commonly associated with education, income and occupation (Baker 2014). Research worldwide has consistently shown that low SES is associated with low literacy and academic achievement. This is not because there is anything 'wrong' with children from low socio-economic backgrounds but because of the barriers to learning that poverty engenders. For example, a study that examined the effects of SES and academic achievement on environmental

consciousness in a sample of 100 undergraduate students at the Dayalbagh Educational Institute in Agra revealed a significant interaction effect between SES and academic achievement as reflected in environmental scores (Shruti & Kumari 2016). In another study that traced 322 (7 to 9-year-old) Roma children in Roumania facing severe poverty and compared them with 178 non-Roma children, SES explained growth in reading skills after controlling for other well-known cognitive and linguistic predictors of reading (Dolean et al. 2019).

International large-scale studies such as PIRLS and SACMEQ further confirm associations between socio-economic measures and academic outcomes. Thus, after assessing the comprehensive literacy skills of Grade 4 learners in 35 countries, PIRLS 2016 results (Figure 1.2) show that all the countries that fell below the benchmark were low to middle-income countries. High performing countries were all high-income earners. Socio-economic factors are also reflected in the urban-rural divide, where rural schools typically serve poorer communities than urban schools, especially in developing countries.

Figure 1. 2. Reading performance of PIRLS 2016 and the impact of SES
(Source: Howie et al. 2017, p. 49)

Coming back home, the SACMEQ data of 2007 highlighted large geographic inequalities where 41% of rural Grade 6 learners were found to be functionally illiterate compared to 13%

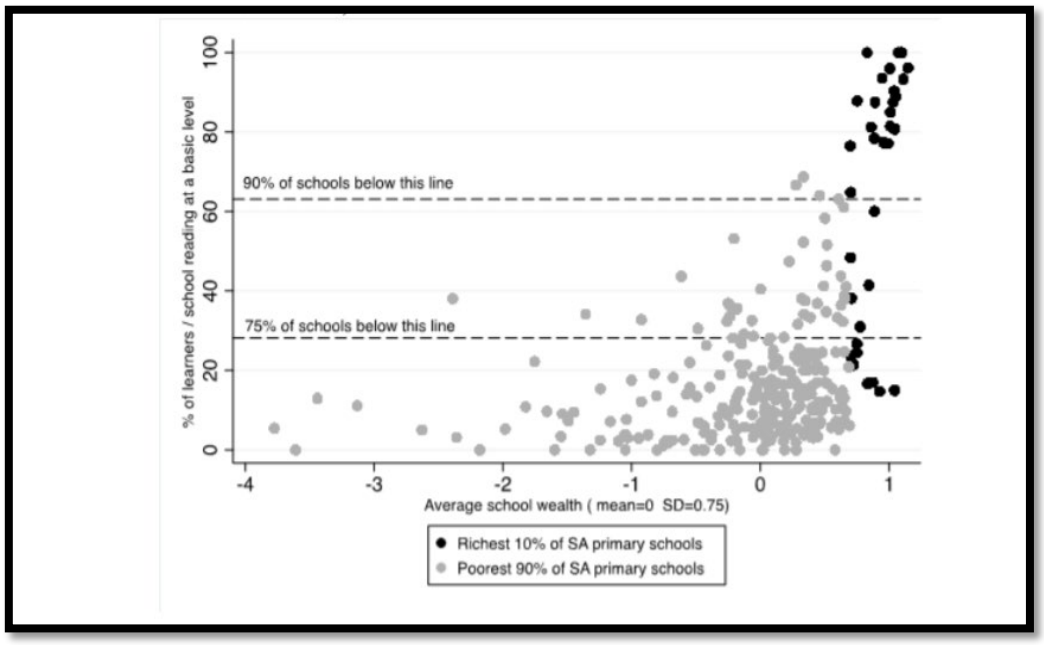
of urban learners in the same grade (Spaull 2015). Performance variations in terms of SES are further confirmed in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1. 1. Reading performance in SACMEQ III and IV and the impact of SES *(Source: DBE 2017a, p. 37)*

Socio-economic level	Reading SACMEQ III (2007)	Reading SACMEQ IV (2013)
Low SES (Bottom 25%)	423.2	511.7
High SES (Top 25%)	605.6	569.3
South Africa	**494.9**	**538.3**

Although the results (Table 1.1) show improvement of scores in the low SES category (low SES Grade 6 learners) from SACMEQ III to SACMEQ IV and a decrease of scores by 36.3 point for the same years for high SES learners, the achievement of this category (high SES Grade 6 learners) was substantially higher than the low SES in reading, confirming Spaull's (2013) findings that poverty and low literacy performance in South Africa do not include all the classrooms. Due to South Africa's political history, low school outcomes and low SES are particularly strongly related. Figure 1.3 shows the percentage of Grade 4 learners per school, reaching the PIRLS low international benchmark by average school wealth.

Figure 1. 3. Percentage of Grade 4 learners per school by average school wealth *(PIRLS Literacy 2016, in Spaull & Pretorius 2019, p. 10).*



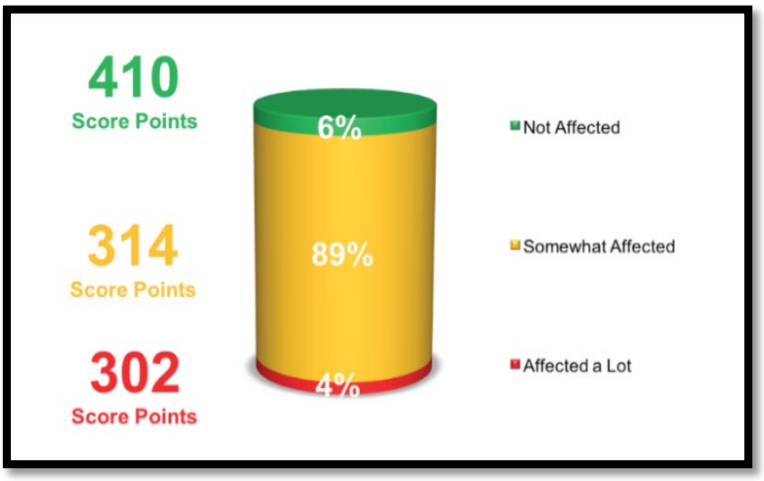
PIRLS low international benchmark by average school wealth was used to measure the level of SES for the South African Grade 4 learners who participated in PIRLS Literacy 2016 (Figure 1.3). The results show the percentage of Grade 4 learners who can read with enough fluency to answer simple questions in each of the PIRLS schools. Only Grade 4 learners from affluent schools (10%) achieved good quality scores ranging from 65% and above, while the highest percentage of learners from low SES schools (90%) performed below 65%, with the majority of learners performing below 30%. Evidence from several sources shows a bimodal system of education, i.e., poor and underperforming schools on the one hand, and rich and high performing schools on the other hand (Fleisch 2008; Spaull 2013), which is a clear indication of educational inequalities in the South African context. However, these scholars differ in their estimation of the proportion of high versus low SES schools (20% or 25% affluent to 75% or 80% low SES).

Public schools in SA are categorised according to five quintiles. The quintile system is determined by the SES of the surrounding communities that the schools serve. Quintiles 1, 2 and 3 have been declared 'no-fee' schools because of their low SES, while quintiles 4 and 5 are 'fee-paying' schools that are supported by middle-class families who can afford to pay school fees. However, in many quintile 4 and 5 schools, many children do not come from surrounding communities – they commute from townships daily to attend these schools. When financial resources are allocated, quintiles 1, 2 and 3 receive the highest amount of funding than the 'fee-paying' schools in quintiles 4 and 5. Nevertheless, in terms of average academic achievement, 'no-fee' paying schools perform lower than the 'fee-paying' schools. This raises concerns, given that most of the service monies go to quintile 1 to 3 schools.

The prePIRLS study of 2011 also confirmed large inequalities in the South African communities. Of all the children who wrote the prePIRLS 2011, only Afrikaans (mean score of 523) and English (mean score of 530) language learners were able to achieve higher mean scores relative to children whose LoLT was one of the African languages (e.g., isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Northern Sotho, Sesotho, Setswana, isiSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga (Howie et al. 2012). This division also reflects SA's past racial history and associated inequalities.

Low SES also means fewer resources. Figure 1.4 below shows the percentage of schools that are affected by resource shortage in Grade 4 classes.

Figure 1. 4. PIRLS 2016 results: Resource shortage and learner achievement
(Source: Howie et al. 2017, p. 98)



PIRLS 2016 results (Figures 1.4) show that 6% of the South African schools, which achieved the highest average in reading, reported that their instruction was not affected by a shortage of resources. The majority of the learners (89%) indicated that it affected them moderately, while 4% reported having been mostly hampered by shortage of resources, obtained the lowest reading score (Howie et al. 2017). Several studies have also shown that a shortage of resources, which is prevalent in low SES schools, deprives learners of receiving a quality education. In a small study investigating the role of LTSM in determining school performance and quality of education at a secondary school from teachers (*n*=6), learners (*n*=4), and various educationists, Manqele (2012) argued that without relevant LTSM, schools could not manage to implement the curriculum successfully, given the socio-economic settings. In another study that explored the perceptions and experiences of secondary school teachers (*n*=8) and principals (*n*=4) in rural schools in Mpumalanga Province, Du Plessis and Mestry (2019, p. S1) found that 'most rural schools do not have water, sanitation or electricity.' This indicates serious implications for effective teaching and learning in schools surrounded by low SES communities. However, these basic resource challenges are being addressed by the DBE, whose reports show approximately 29,198 sanitation installations at 24,793 schools (Louton et al. 2015), suggesting that there are supposedly not many schools without basic resources nowadays.

Clearly, literacy performance among South African learners is affected by SES. This has negative consequences throughout the entire schooling system. Taylor et al. (2017) add that inequality in SA does not seem to be a challenge that will subside anytime soon. For this reason,

on the assumption that prevention is better than cure, Spaull, Van der Berg, Wills & Kotzé (2016) recommend improvement of early reading instruction across schools so that learners are launched on strong reading trajectories from the start.

Although national and international research has established strong links between SES and educational outcomes, poverty per se does not have to be destiny in academic achievement. Currin and Pretorius (2010, p. 44) emphasise that barriers associated with poverty and quality of teaching 'can be overcome if schools create conditions conducive to learning.' There is convincing evidence from research which shows that providing children in their early years of schooling with quality education has great possibilities of overcoming socio-economic disadvantage (Von Fintel 2015; Shepherd 2016). Besides, while SES is something that teachers cannot change, what they can change is their pattern of delivering the curriculum in the classroom.

In view of the above discussion, the central focus in this study is on developing basic reading skills in HL, which is still a problem for many black South African HL language learners who do their early schooling in their HL. Research in early grade reading has demonstrated that developing early reading skills in children makes it easier for them to 'learn to read' and, thereafter, to 'read to learn.' However, the issues highlighted above are some of the problems that negatively impact the development of reading literacy in children's language(s). Thus, it is within this context that the current study of early reading in Tsonga was undertaken.

1. 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research on reading development is theoretically diverse. Because reading is so complex, there is as yet no single, comprehensive, unified theory of reading. Rather, our understanding of reading is informed by different approaches. It can be approached from different disciplines such as psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, etc. This study is framed within a cognitive-linguistic approach to reading which identifies different components of reading, their interactions and the different roles they play overtime in the development of making meaning of language in print form. It uses the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tool to assess and track early reading development. Although the EGRA tool focuses on componential elements in early reading, all these components contribute in different ways to the overall reading trajectory. In addition, the cognitive-linguistic approach

to reading literacy recognises the influence of contextual factors on reading, such as socio-cultural and socio-economic factors, and acknowledges that reading is embedded in a social context, can serve different purposes and be valued differently in different communities.

For this study, a detailed description of the EGRA tool will be given in Chapter 4. EGRA, prepared by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International, is used in developing countries to gather data on primary school performance and completion. It is also used to strengthen early literacy teaching. EGRA is reliable and well known (Dubeck & Gove 2015). In collaboration with the DBE (2013), it has been translated into African languages in South Africa. The basic EGRA comprises four foundational literacy skills, viz. (1) letter-sound knowledge, (2) word reading, (3) oral reading fluency, and (4) oral reading comprehension. For this study, the EGRA tool has been adapted for Tsonga Grade 1 learners.

The current study further draws on the works of Chall (1983) and Stern, Dubeck and Dick (2018) in their models of early reading development. Chall's framework is very useful to show how the nature of reading changes with maturity, skill and increasing text complexity, but it is quite general with regard to early reading. As a result, Stern et al.'s work is also considered in this study because drawing on EGRA data; it shows how reading profiles can be used to identify children according to their reading levels as a useful way to inform pedagogy, which is where the focus of this study lies.

This study also draws on the research panel from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development that espouses a general psychological or cognitive-linguistic theoretical framework. The National Reading Panel (NRP) was established in 1997 in consultation with the United States Secretary of Education. It was meant to assess the effectiveness of different approaches to the teaching of reading during early learning. The panel included 14 prominent experts in the field of reading education. In April 2000, the panel issued a complete report, indicating that confident and independent readers are produced through reading instruction conducted with five different components of reading in mind. These include phonology and phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, oral reading fluency and oral reading comprehension.

In all these cognitive-linguistic approaches, a central concern is identifying different components of language and reading, and examining how they interact with and influence one another, and how the nature of this relationship changes over time as readers become more skilled and read longer and more complex texts. Hence, the simple view of reading (Gough &

Tunmer 1986) and variations on it (Kim, Park & Wagner 2013a), the decoding threshold hypothesis (Wang, Sabatini, O'Reilly & Weeks 2019), and the Direct and Indirect Effects model of reading (DIER) (Kim 2020), all of which focus on the relationship between different components (language, decoding, cognitive and comprehension skills), are used to guide this study. These models are further explained in Chapter 2 (§2.4).

Notwithstanding the fact that a large body of reading literature draws on reading research from English, which is different in several respects from indigenous African languages, the cognitive-linguistic framework is applicable to alphabetic, syllabic and logographic writing systems. English is one of the most researched of the alphabetic languages. Most importantly, research in English provides opportunities for understanding reading in languages that use an alphabetic writing system. Although English is different from African languages, distinct linguistic and orthographic features among these languages provide further opportunities for identifying what is universal and what is language-specific in early reading development across alphabetic languages. Further details are provided in Chapter 2 (§2.6).

Besides drawing on reading research from English, this study also discusses the agglutinative nature of Southern Bantu African languages, including Xitsonga, and links this to reading research that comes from other agglutinating languages such as Finnish, Turkish, and Eastern Bantu languages from Kenya, as well as Southern Bantu languages from South Africa and Mozambique, to establish what can be learned from early reading research in these languages that might inform this study.

It is worth noting that reading in the early grades is facilitated by the interaction of various components, which include decoding, reading comprehension, and reader response. Each one of the three components is briefly described below, while more details regarding these topics will be explained later in Chapter 2 (§2.2).

1. 3. 1. Decoding

Decoding refers to the mechanical aspects of deciphering written symbols into language. Abraham and Gram (2012) describe it as the process of breaking down a word into its separate sounds. For example, decoding the word *buti* (brother) in Xitsonga can be broken down into four sounds /b/+/u/+/t/+/i/. Beginner readers must be able to hear and identify these sounds and associate them with their letters in order to decode words fluently and accurately. Although decoding is often associated with word reading, decoding skills rely on PA, letter-sound knowledge (i.e., knowledge of letter-sound relations), word recognition, and oral reading

fluency (Pretorius et al. 2016). Children's decoding skills can be measured by the accuracy or the rate of reading words in or out of context or by reading pseudowords[8] correctly (Aarnoutse et al. 2001). Assessment of PA and letter-sound knowledge also give an indication of decoding skill, since children who struggle with the latter find it difficult to read words.

Measuring children's decoding skills early in the year is important in helping teachers plan instruction effectively. The reading assessment instrument that is currently available for FP learners is the EGRA tool. As mentioned in §1.3, EGRA is a reliable assessment tool designed to measure the foundational skills needed for beginner readers (Dubeck & Gove 2015).

Decoding is a constrained skill, meaning that it can be taught and mastered efficiently to the level of automaticity, within a short window of time – leaving room to accommodate more complex skills needed for comprehension (Paris 2005). Hence, it is necessary but not sufficient for the development of reading abilities. Although decoding is not sufficient for reading, without it, children cannot understand what they are reading (DBE 2019). Decoding enables children to figure out known and unknown words in writing.

1. 3. 2. Comprehension

Comprehension refers to the ability to understand the meaning of a text. It is 'the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language' (RAND Reading Study Group 2002, p. 11). Comprehension is commonly measured by asking learners to read a text at their grade level and then asking questions to check their level of understanding. Unlike decoding, comprehension is an unconstrained ability. It does not have boundaries; hence, it develops over a lifetime (Paris 2005; Frey 2017). Comprehension enables readers to acquire information, become aware of what is happening in the world, communicate successfully, and achieve academic success (Snowling et al. 2010). Elements involved in facilitating reading comprehension include language proficiency, code-related skills, cognitive skills and text-based factors. The details of each factor are discussed in Chapter 2 (§2.2), but for now, they are summarised below.

Language proficiency in children refers to their ability to use the language they know to communicate with people around them. This first develops orally, and then it also develops in written form together with formal schooling. The underlying process is facilitated through

[8] Pseudowords are words that could exist in a language because they conform to phonological principles specific to that language, but they don't exist, e.g., *brillig* or *slithy* in English, and *pata* or *mbitu* in Tsonga. They are used for testing beginning readers' phonological decoding abilities. If a learner cannot read them, this can be a clear indication of reading problems.

children interacting with parents, caregivers or siblings. Richard (2017) adds that children's listening and speaking skills develop best in an environment rich in sounds, signs and exposure to speech. This provides them with opportunities to develop different language skills, such as phonological awareness, grammar, morphology, vocabulary, discourse and pragmatics, which are critical for everyday social interaction. Oral language proficiency is also critical for learning to read in any alphabetic writing system. All aspects of language proficiency can be measured (e.g., phonological, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, etc.), but the most common forms of language proficiency in the early years are through listening comprehension and vocabulary assessments. Much research has shown that language proficiency and reading are interrelated (Bishop & Snowling 2004; Van Staden, Bosker, & Bergbauer 2016; Mophosho, Khoza-Shangase & Sebole 2019).

Code-related skills are essential for the development of decoding skills. They include elements such as letter-sound knowledge, e.g., knowing that the letter *m* represents the sound /m/ and that it is the first letter in words such as *mina* (myself) and *mali* (money), and word reading, e.g., recognising a range of high-frequency words such as *u* (you) and *ya* (it's). As already indicated in (§1.3.1), these skills are necessary but not exclusive for becoming a skilled and proficient reader.

Cognitive skills facilitate reading comprehension. Various cognitive domains that are necessary for reading comprehension include working memory and attention-allocation, as well as higher-order skills such as metacognition, integration of background knowledge with text information, inference making, prediction, visualisation, sequencing, comprehension monitoring, etc. It is also worth noting that these cognitive skills influence each other, but can be discussed independently from one another.

Text-based skills involve knowledge of text type and genres, their functions and their conventions. They are also important for facilitating comprehension and can promote listening, speaking, reading and writing. Texts can be produced in different forms, viz. written mode (e.g., a poem), oral mode (e.g., a teacher telling a story), or visual mode (e.g., a diagrams/pictures) (Pretorius & Murray 2019). The written texts most commonly encountered in the early grades are narratives and simple information texts. Because this study focuses on early reading development, the emphasis was mainly on code-related skills in relation to oral reading comprehension.

1. 3. 3. Reader response

Reader response refers to affective factors related to reading and the mutual relationship between a reader and text. It is associated with the following affective factors: feelings, attitudes, interests and motivation to read. These factors can either encourage or discourage reading from taking place. Reading for enjoyment and being motivated to read intrinsically (i.e., 'doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable'), or extrinsically (i.e., 'doing something because it leads to a separable outcome'), influence reader response positively (Ryan & Deci 2000, in Pretorius & Murray 2019, p. 247). Adults play important roles in influencing children's reader-response; for example, reading to children before schooling works well in terms of instilling a positive attitude to books and motivating them to read. Research has also shown that reading aloud to children before schooling is associated with later reading achievements (Duursma, Augustyn & Zuckerman 2008; Van Staden & Bosker 2014). However, 51% of South African households are without leisure or children's books (Department of Arts and Culture 2009), suggesting that most children, especially those from disadvantaged families, are deprived of access to books. Thus, the level of motivation to read for these children may be low, as evidenced in their literacy reading outcomes highlighted earlier in this chapter and this study.

In consideration of the above discussion, this study aims to examine aspects of early literacy development in Xitsonga, investigate how the general education and training (GET) band curriculum advisors perceive their role in supporting schools and teachers in developing learners' reading in Xitsonga in the FP, and establish what and how the Grade 1 teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xisonga in their Grade 1 classrooms. To achieve these aims, mixed-method design was used to assess aspects of decoding and comprehension skills from the Grade 1 learners (quantitative), and observe literacy activities and practices involving early reading skills in the Grade 1 classrooms, as well as interviewing the curriculum advisors of the GET band and the Grade 1 teachers (qualitative). It is further anticipated that this study will help throw light on how early reading in Xitsonga develops, and what factors might support or pose barriers. Such insights, in turn, can inform teaching practices that provide learners with opportunities to learn and master their basic reading skills to enable them to read fluently and with comprehension, and perhaps also to improve their academic outcomes.

1. 4. AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main focus of this study was two-fold. The first aim was to examine aspects of early literacy development in Xitsonga over a year in a sample of 75 Grade 1 learners, who were assessed in Phase I (March 2018, referred to as baseline) and again in Phase III (September 2018, referred to as endline), by using the EGRA tool specially adapted to Xitsonga. This aspect of the study was largely quantitative. The second aim which forms the qualitative Phase II (March 2018) of this study was to examine how the curriculum advisors of the GET band view their support of schools and teachers in developing learners' reading in Xitsonga in the FP and the challenges they face, and to establish what and how the Grade 1 teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in their Grade 1 classrooms, why they do things the way they do in the classroom and to reflect on whether their classroom practices are effective, in light of their teaching context and the learners' reading development during the year. This aim was addressed by interviewing two curriculum advisors and five Grade 1 teachers one-on-one, evaluating classroom settings, and observing literacy practices and activities in the Grade 1 classrooms.

Because the study was exploratory, no specific hypotheses were tested. To address the quantitative element of the current study, the following three research questions (RQ) were posed:

RQ1: How do Grade 1 learners perform on early literacy measures in Xitsonga in terms of:

- Phonological and phonemic awareness
- Letter-sound knowledge
- Word reading
- Oral reading fluency
- Oral reading comprehension?

RQ2: How do gender, age and school variables affect early reading development in Xitsonga?

RQ3: Which early reading skills at baseline are predictive of later reading accomplishment at the end of Grade 1 in Xitsonga?

To address the qualitative aspect of the current study, the following two research questions were posed:

RQ4: How do the GET curriculum advisors view their support of schools and teachers in developing learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the FP?

RQ5: How do the Grade 1 teachers develop and support the learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in their Grade 1 classrooms?

1. 5. METHODOLOGY

This section briefly outlines the research design and methods, scientific research criteria used, and ethical considerations. A detailed discussion of methodological issues in the study is given in Chapter 4.

1. 5. 1. Research design and methods

Mouton (1996) defines research design as a plan or blueprint for conducting the research. Research design thus provides a framework for how the study is planned to be conducted. An exploratory mixed-methods research design formed the framework for the present study, where quantitative (baseline and endline) and qualitative methods were used for data collection and analysis. According to Mary, Malina-Hanne and Nørreklit (2011), it is advantageous to use both approaches because they create more robust research outcomes than either method individually.

The quantitative data collected in this study comprised the assessment of Grade 1 learners' reading skills through the employment of an early literacy measure, the EGRA tool. The data were collected and recorded systematically and entered into a computer database of the SPSS programme. Descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25) were used to analyse learner performance on various reading measures, as indicated in §1.4.

For the qualitative data, classroom observations were undertaken and the curriculum advisors' and teachers' experiences and perceptions were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase framework. Semi-structured interviews helped provide opportunities to probe for details from the responses of the participants and classroom observations. The study was conducted in five different schools (one Grade 1 classroom per school) in Mopani district of Limpopo Province. Mopani district was chosen because it is a predominantly Xitsonga speaking area.

1. 5. 2. Scientific research criteria

Scientific research is characterised by rigour, precision, transparency and accountability in data collection and analysis and adheres to ethical guidelines. To ensure rigour and trust in the current study, I used a mixed methods approach by adopting quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study. Findings in this study came from both sources which complement each other.

To further enhance the quality of this study, issues of validity and reliability were taken into account in the quantitative data. Validity and reliability are important concepts in quantitative research in terms of increasing transparency and enhancing the accuracy of the assessment and evaluation of research work (Tavakol & Dennick 2011; Singh 2014). Validity refers to how a concept is accurately measured in quantitative research, and reliability 'relates to the consistency of a measure' (Heale & Twycross 2015, p. 66).

For the qualitative data, trustworthiness was taken into account, which comprises the following criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. To ensure trustworthiness in qualitative data, Yilmaz (2013) emphasises that a researcher must provide an accurate picture of those under investigation rather than imagining things. Trustworthiness was ensured in this study by providing inter alia, a clear and transparent audit trail, with accurate and detailed descriptions of the setting, procedures and participants.

1. 5. 3. Ethical considerations

It is important for research to abide by ethical considerations so that no one is harmed, hurt, unfairly treated or misrepresented and data not distorted or fabricated. This involves ensuring that participants understand all the processes and procedures involved in the study. Participants must also understand that they have a right to withdraw their participation anytime. In this study, I ensured that consent was obtained from the relevant stakeholders (the provincial education department, principals of schools, teachers, curriculum advisors, learners and parents of the learners). All participants had the opportunity to sign consent forms before participating in the study. Parents also signed assent forms on behalf of their children to indicate that they allowed them to take part in the study. Learners were also given a choice to withdraw from participating in the study even though their parents signed on their behalf. Administrative procedures of EGRA were consistent and child-centred to increase the validity of the results.

1.6. THESIS OUTLINE

The thesis comprises seven chapters. The literature review in this study straddles two chapters.

Chapter 2 outlines what reading entails, discusses the purpose of reading and reading in relation to alphabetic writing systems. This is followed by discussing reading comprehension, identifying the foundational components of early reading in alphabetic texts, and then describing how they enable comprehension. Next, I discuss factors that influence reading and then outline theories of reading development. This is followed by discussing Xitsonga language, its role in education, media, literature, and its orthography and grammar as well as the similarities and differences in early reading across languages. Lastly, the discussion is based on developmental trajectories in early reading.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature related to pedagogic issues and their relation to early reading. First, the chapter focuses on the national level by explaining what is happening in South Africa in terms of reading performance, what the curriculum looks like and what is available in terms of allocation of resources in the FP. This will be followed by consideration of the provincial level in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the district curriculum advisors who are the relevant officials at the level of institutional management to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the curriculum. Finally, I will review the literature on foundational classroom practices in the South African context to identify what happens in the classroom that makes the greatest difference to children's literacy outcomes.

Chapter 4 deals with methodological issues. The chapter first sketches the biographic information of the curriculum advisors and the Grade 1 teachers, together with a brief profile of the schools. It briefly outlines the philosophical worldview within which the current study is situated and explains the design used. Thereafter, the chapter describes issues relating to accountability and rigour in research, such as validity and reliability in quantitative research, as well as trustworthiness in qualitative research, and ethical considerations that characterise the current study. This is followed by a description of the instruments and the implementation of the pilot study and how it informed the main study. Thereafter, it provides an account of the instruments and procedures followed in the main study. Lastly, the chapter presents details of the data analysis.

Chapter 5 presents descriptive and inferential statistical analyses of the Grade 1 learners' early reading skills. Data presented and discussed in this chapter address the first three research questions of the current study.

Chapter 6 presents and discusses data that were collected through interviews with CAs and Grade 1 classroom observations and interviews with their teachers as a step towards addressing the fourth and the fifth research questions.

Chapter 7 sums up the entire study. It begins with an overview of what the study set out to do and then summarises the key findings of the study. The implications of the study are then discussed, followed by recommendations and a discussion of the contributions made by the study. Finally, the limitations of the study are acknowledged and recommendations made for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW OF EARLY READING

2. 0. INTRODUCTION

Because reading is a complex construct, it is challenging to know how to best present it. There are many aspects to reading, it comprises many different components, and they are all interrelated, yet we can only talk about it in a linear sequence. As a complex construct, reading can be studied from different perspectives and through different lenses, such as sociological, socio-cultural, cognitive, linguistic, neurological, educational and remedial/learning difficulties. Because reading is a developmental process, it is also important to describe the theoretical perspective of reading development adopted in this study and to review the research literature on early reading development.

This chapter outlines what reading entails, discusses the purpose of reading and reading in alphabetic writing systems. This is followed by a discussion of reading comprehension, identifying the foundational components of early reading in alphabetic texts, and then describing how they enable comprehension. Next, I discuss factors that influence reading and then outline theories of reading development. This is followed by a discussion of the Xitsonga language, its role in education, media, literature, and its orthography and grammar as well as the similarities and differences in early reading across languages. Lastly, the discussion focuses on developmental trajectories in early reading.

2. 1. WHAT IS READING?

Reading as a complex phenomenon is defined in various ways. Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko and Hurwitz (1999, p. 38) describe it in two different ways:

> [Firstly], as a simple process where readers can decode (figure out how to pronounce) each word in a text and then automatically comprehend the meaning of the words, as they do with their everyday spoken language.
>
> [Secondly], as a complex process of problem-solving in which the reader works to make sense of a text from the words and sentences on the page, but also from the ideas, memories and knowledge evoked by those words and sentences.

Hughes (2007, p. 7) also describes reading as 'an interactive, problem-solving process of making meaning from texts.' Keenan, Betjemann and Olson (2008, p. 282) state that 'reading involves decoding, comprehension, and interaction between the two processes.'

The definitions outlined above differ in the extent of what is typically meant by the concept reading. In their first definition of reading, Schoenbach et al. describe it at the word level which is determined by the reader's knowledge of the alphabet, while in the second definition, they describe reading at the text level of processing information, engaging with various cognitive abilities which assist readers in constructing meaning from what is read. Schoenbach et al. understand that reading may be complex, but it is underpinned by decoding skills which pave the way for developing deep understanding of text. Hughes focuses more on comprehension rather than the decoding skills underpinning problem-solving comprehension processes, while Keenan et al. state the relationship between decoding and comprehension explicitly.

In essence, these definitions emphasise two things that happen while reading: the interaction between a reader and the text, and the problem-solving process where the reader engages both code-based skills and higher-order thinking skills such as making inferences, predicting, visualising, sequencing, monitoring comprehension, etc. to make sense of the text. If the skill of learning to read is not successfully developed during the first three years of schooling, then using reading as a learning tool (i.e., reading to learn) is likely to be difficult for the rest of schooling period (Kame'enui 1996; Blimpo, Evans & Ngatia 2019).

Because this study examines aspects of early reading development in Tsonga and the implications for pedagogy on learner performance, it is important to draw attention to issues in reading across languages in terms of the main features of alphabetic writing systems. This will help to clarify the impact that these features may have on the development of early reading. However, it is expedient at this point to first discuss the purpose that reading as a complex construct serves.

2. 1. 1. The purpose of reading

A purpose is a reason for an action. It is one's 'intention or a resolution' (Leider 2015, p. 3). In this section, the purpose of reading and its effect in facilitating reading comprehension is discussed. The acquisition of reading skills facilitates the ability of an individual to understand what is read (Kaya 2015). It is significant for predicting success in schooling and also in life (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009; Leahy & Fitzpatrick 2017; Bigozzi et al. 2017)). Through reading, we can learn about different aspects of life. For example, we learn about other people

and the world. We embed ourselves in reading for various reasons: reading for learning, information, enjoyment, self-help, spiritual, etc.

Reading provides children with opportunities to experience success in school because they are able to access the curriculum at ease through 'reading to learn' and thereby increase their content knowledge of their different subjects, and also improve their communication and language skills. Additionally, reading helps children access all kinds of information worldwide. Reading to learn depends a lot on reading for information (e.g., school textbooks, newspapers, work-related texts, reading for research, etc.). Reading of this kind in the context is more controlled, given that it occurs to fulfil specific learning objectives in different content subjects. It does not typically provide readers with opportunities to choose their texts - these are prescribed in line with programmes of particular subjects. Readers are expected to read a specific amount of information from a prescribed text on a specific phenomenon or topic so that they can respond to literal or inferential questions, write essays, tests, etc., which may be used for grading purposes.

Reading for information continues after school, at work and in life generally (for spiritual, health, financial, lifestyle needs, etc.). Levels of qualification (which reflect reading level) are also strongly associated with wage earnings, distribution of income, levels of employment and economic growth. People without a school qualification earn the least in South Africa and are most likely to be unemployed (e.g., 25% unemployment rate in 2015), whereas those with university qualification earn almost triple what a school leaver earns and they are less likely to be unemployed (e.g., 5% unemployment rate in 2015) (Moses, Van der Berg & Rich 2017). Reading does not guarantee economic growth, but in the long run, a country with low reading levels is unlikely to experience economic growth in the 21st century.

Children who always read for pleasure have a greater advantage in building their own vocabulary and spelling as well as improving their understanding of what they are reading. When reading is done for enjoyment (e.g., reading fiction or non-fiction), it is voluntary reading – there are no formal restrictions or obligations. Unlike reading for information, reading for enjoyment provides readers with opportunities to choose the text that they want to read. Reading for enjoyment also works well for school children. A longitudinal study that examined the effect of reading for pleasure on cognitive development over time, was conducted in Britain by Sullivan and Brown (2013). After analysing the reading behaviour of approximately 6,000 members of the 1970 British Cohort Study regarding how often cohort members read for

pleasure during childhood, the researchers found that reading for pleasure was a stronger determinant for children's cognitive development between ages 10 and 16 than their parents' level of education.

Although international research has shown that extensive reading is associated with academic achievement, reading for various purposes is determined inter alia, by decoding skills, which is why it is important to ensure that basic reading skills are established earlier, within the first three years of school, as Mlachila and Moeletsi (2018) put it so nicely that the battle for literacy is won at primary school. However, decoding, which facilitates reading across alphabetic orthographies, differs with respect to how consistently letters map onto sounds (Ziegler et al. 2010). Hence, the next sub-section discusses linguistic features of different languages to show the effect of orthographic depth on learning to read.

2. 1. 2. The main features of alphabetic writing systems

Reading happens in different orthographies, which may be syllabic, logographic or alphabetic. A syllabic orthography uses symbols or letters which represent sounds as syllables, not as individual vowel or consonant sounds, as in Japanese Kana and Cherokee (Baroni 2011).

A logrographic writing system uses single symbols or signs to represent words. The writing systems of logographic languages use a combination of elements called radicals. For example, 休 for *rest* is composed of the characters for *man* (人) and *tree* (木), meaning that someone is resting by leaning against a tree. Egyptian hieroglyphics and most Asian languages, such as Chinese, Korean and Japanese Kanji use a logographic script.

An alphabetic writing refers to the system of written letters (graphemes) used to represent phonemes (sounds) in the language. It includes African, Western European and Slavic languages. Alphabetic orthographies are largely phonetic, making it easier to establish a link between spoken and written languages (Bruce 2002). For example, the sound /ʃ/ is represented by the letter *x* in Xitsonga as in *xilo* (a thing), *sj* in Afrikaans as in *sjambok* (a heavy whip), *sh*, *ss* and *t* in English as in *ship*, *mission* and *ambition*.

However, alphabetic orthographies vary in the consistency of the relationship between letters and sounds (Caravolas et al. 2013); hence, two different types of orthography are distinguished, transparent or opaque. A transparent orthography means that letters and sounds in a language, stand in a one-to-one relationship where a letter consistently represents a particular sound. For example, a single letter *b* makes the /buh/ sound as in *bu-ti* (bother) or *bu-ku* (book) in Xitsonga.

Transparent languages include Spanish, Turkish, Italian, Welsh, African agglutinating languages, etc. In opaque languages, the same letters can represent different vowel sounds; for example, the vowel digraph/grapheme *ea* in English represents three different sounds as in *beach*, *dead*, and *break*. Different letters can also represent the same sound, e.g., /f/ is represented by the letters *f, ph* or *–gh* as in *frog, phone, and cough*. Languages such as English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic are non-transparent, and beginner readers usually learn to decode in opaque orthographies more slowly than in transparent orthographies (Seymour, Aro & Erskine 2003; Borleffs et al. 2018).

Alphabetic languages are considerably diverse in the size of code. The letters used in the alphabetic code range from 20 to 38, depending on the language. For example, African languages have few vowels, comprising a five-vowel system *a, e, i, o, u* or the seven-vowel system [a] e [ɛ] [i] o [ɔ] [u], represented by the five vowel letters mentioned above, but they have many complex consonant sounds which are represented by complex consonant blends digraphs and trigraphs, e.g., *dyana* (eat) and *tshava* (mountain) in Xitsonga. This is what makes some aspects of decoding in African languages, challenging. Unlike African languages, English has many vowels (over 20) and uses six letters (a, e, i, o, u, y) and combinations of these letters to represent the numerous vowel sounds, but it has fewer consonants which are mostly fairly straightforward.

Letter-sound knowledge refers to knowledge of the letter, sounds (the sounds represented by letters), and the ability to blend them accurately and quickly. Research suggests that letter-sound knowledge is an important skill in all alphabetic languages (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998; Grainger & Ziegler 2011; Kim & Piper 2019a; Spaull et al. 2020), irrespective of whether they are transparent or opaque, but transparent languages confer an advantage in terms of enabling children learn to read letter-sound relations more quickly than in opaque languages. Several studies have shown that letter-sound knowledge strongly predicts children's ability to recognise syllables (Kim & Piper 2019a) and words (Näslund & Schneider 1996; National Early Literacy Panel 2008; Snel et al. 2016; Soltz 2016). Research in African languages has also demonstrated significant and robust associations between letter-sound knowledge and early reading achievement (Lekgoko & Winskel 2008; Wilsenach 2015; Wilsenach 2019; Kim & Piper 2019a; Spaull et al. 2020).

The relationship between phonological awareness (PA) and letter-sound knowledge is bi-directional whereby PA facilitates the development of letter-sound knowledge, and letter-

sound knowledge also further helps with the development of PA (Stahl & Murray 1994; Foy & Mann 2006). Letter-sound knowledge also prevents reading difficulties in young children (Ehri & McCormick 1998; Snow et al. 1998; Durrell et al. 2008). Bradley and Stahl (2001) caution that children who lack knowledge of the alphabetic principle (i.e., awareness that letters stand for sounds in written language) are likely to experience difficulties with other literacy aspects as they 'learn to read.' In essence, in all alphabetic orthographies, successful letter-sound knowledge enables Grade 1 children to map the letter-sounds together to read words.

Having discussed some of the factors involved in reading, I now focus on comprehension.

2. 2. READING COMPREHENSION

Comprehension (i.e., reading for meaning) is what reading is all about (Pretorius & Murray 2019). As mentioned earlier (§2.1), comprehension involves the author (and his/her text) and the reader. The reader uses his/her decoding skills to read the author's words accurately and fluently and employs various comprehension strategies (e.g., background knowledge, making inferences, predicting, visualising, sequencing, monitoring comprehension, etc.) to construct meaning from what is read. As stated in Chapter 1 (§1.3.2), reading comprehension ability is unconstrained – it develops throughout life. Through the process of acquiring reading skills, children need to develop decoding skills and read words with increasing fluency so that they can start honing their comprehension skills. There are different levels of meaning in a text where some are easier than others. These include literal, inferential and critical understanding. Literal comprehension involves the understanding of information that is explicitly stated in the text. Inferential understanding of a text describes readers who make connections between elements in the text and integrate information in the text and in their head. Critical understanding of a text is the level at which a reader is able to interpret or evaluate information of a text at a more abstract level of understanding, based on own knowledge as well as information in the text. A theory of text comprehension attempts to explain how children build a memory representation, which happens in a form of mentally converting individual words and sentences into propositions, and connecting them together through background knowledge or through the process of recalling previous experiences.

I now consider all the different factors (e.g., language, code-related, cognitive and text-based factors) that are involved in the reading process and that enable reading comprehension.

However, since the focus of this study is on early reading, I focus more on the code-related factors, which form the core of the quantitative aspect of the current study.

2. 2. 1. Language proficiency

Oral language proficiency refers to measurement of how well children have mastered their HL. It develops in the pre-school years where children have opportunities to interact verbally with others, play language games, listen to story-telling, talk among themselves, sing songs and rhymes, etc. Language proficiency affects how children learn to read and understand written texts in their HL. Children's language skills (e.g., phonology, vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and discourse), as outlined below, all facilitate reading comprehension.

2. 2. 1. 1. Phonology

Phonology deals with sounds in a language. Yet, Sloat, Taylor and Hoard describe it as 'the science of speech sounds and sound patterns' (1978, in Alduais 2015, p. 159). These sounds are reflected in a stream of speech which can be broken down into sentences, phrases, words, syllables and phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest meaningful units in language – if one phoneme is replaced with another in a word, it changes the meaning of the word, e.g., *vana* (children), *tana* (come), *fana* (similar). Different languages have different inventories of phonemes and children acquire these from an early age when they acquire language, as well as knowledge about the permissible sequence s of phonemes within words, e.g., *nkombe* (wooden spoon) is permissible in Xitsonga, but not **nkomte* or **bnkombe*).

PA is important for learning to read any alphabetic orthography (Troia 1999; Ehri 2004; Melby-Lervåg et al. 2012). Its critical role is evidenced by permitting phonological recoding, commonly known as 'decoding' (i.e., the process of learning and applying sound-symbol mappings to access words in a spoken language) (Goldenberg et al. 2014). For example, a study conducted 17 years ago with Grade 2 learners at an English medium school in South Africa found a strong relationship between phonological abilities and performance on reading and spelling measures (Pijper 2003). In a longitudinal study that investigated the development of PA skills and the relationship with reading of 73 Grade 1 children in Indonesia, Widjaja and Winskel (2004) found that PA and letter knowledge significantly predict reading in familiar word and non-word reading.

2. 2. 1. 2. Vocabulary

Vocabulary can be described as the total number of words in a language (Hornby 1995) or the collection of words that an individual knows (Linse 2005). Knowledge of words includes their form (what they sound or look like, their spelling, how they are pronounced), their function (whether they are nouns, verbs, etc.), their meanings and their use (are they used for formal/informal situations, do they have positive or negative connotations, etc.) (DBE 2019). Vocabulary can be measured in terms of size (the number of words that are known) and depth (how well the words and their meanings are known). Although little research has been done on word development in African languages (De Vos et al. 2014; Spaull et al. 2020), it is known from research in other languages (e.g., English) that children learn about 2,000 to 3,500 words a year incidentally (Anderson & Nagy 1993; Anglin, Miller & Wakefiels 1993), and in Grades 1 and 2 they need to learn approximately 800 words a year (Biemiller 2012) through explicit instruction.

Vocabulary is important in developing language proficiency and is often used as an index of language proficiency. In other words, children who perform well on vocabulary tests are regarded as being more proficient in the language than children who perform poorly. Several studies have also shown that vocabulary facilitates reading comprehension (Hemphill & Tivnan 2008; Jalongo & Sobolak 2011; Nouri & Zerhouni 2016). For example, a study that examined the relationship between vocabulary knowledge (size and depth) and reading comprehension of 32 EFL freshmen specialising in telecommunication engineering in Morocco found significantly strong correlation between depth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension performance, but only a low correlation between vocabulary size and reading comprehension (Nouri & Zerhouni 2016).

The home environment plays an important role in developing the size and depth of children's vocabulary (Biemiller 2003; Wasik, Bond & Hindman 2006). As a result, children differ in their vocabulary knowledge when they start school because their exposure to new words before schooling may not necessarily be the same. Research has shown that children from low socio-economic backgrounds are particularly at risk of failing to develop proficient vocabulary than their affluent peers (Jalongo & Sobolak 2011). However, previous studies have shown that vocabulary is important for reading comprehension, but not necessarily for decoding (e.g., Perfetti & Hogaboam 1975; Hood & Dubert 1983; Spaull & Pretorius 2019).

2. 2. 1. 3. Morphology

Morphology refers to the study of the internal structure of words and the rules governing the formation of words in a language (Öz 2014a). It deals with the internal structure of words in two different senses. Words without internal structure (simple words) can stand alone with a specific meaning (e.g., *house, built, run*, etc.). They are free morphemes and they can't be split into smaller units that carry meaning. Simple words occur far more often in languages like English that do not have as rich a morphology as agglutinating languages; therefore, they are not really an important part of African HL language morphology. Words with internal structure (complex words), must be attached to another unit to make it meaningful. These are known as bound morphemes, e.g., in *unkindness*, *un-* and *-ness* are bound morphemes that are attached to the root *kind* to form a meaningful word. Similarly, the word *exikolweni* (at the school) in Xitsonga, where the prefix *e-* and the suffix *ni-* are added to the root *xikolo* (school) form a locative construction. Complex words are typical of agglutinating languages.

Morphology is also prominent in terms of determining the rules of word formation. For example, African Bantu languages such as Xitsonga commonly use modified prefixes to express the plural of a noun, e.g., *mu-nhu* (person) as *va-nhu* (persons). Morphological knowledge in the HL is important for helping readers discover meanings through identifying and manipulating different parts of words. Xitsonga children will rely on prefixes to help them understand nuances in the meaning of words. For example, the prefix *va-* within *VaVhenda* (Venda people) and *ma-* within *MaZulu* (Zulu people) provide cues for meaning in respect of showing how far these people are from *VaTsonga* (Tsonga people). The prefix *va-* is used for people who stay closer to *VaTsonga,* whereas *ma-* refers to those who stay further away (Hlungwani 2012).

Previous studies have shown that morphology significantly predicts reading comprehension (Kirby et al. 2011; Tighe & Binder 2012). For instance, Kirby et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study in Canada to investigate the relationship between morphological awareness and reading development of Grades 1 to 3 children (n=103) in English. The results showed that morphological awareness was a significant predictor of reading comprehension, even after controlling the effects of verbal and non-verbal ability and phonological awareness.

Although not much research has been done on the role of morphology in reading in African languages, initial research has also shown that knowledge of morphology in these languages may predict early reading in the FP (Reese 2016). However, research from Finnish suggests

that PA skill is more predictive of early reading success (decoding) than morphology because of orthographic transparency. Like vocabulary, morphological awareness may be important later for reading comprehension, but it may not impact decoding. In English, knowledge of morphology is important for decoding because of the opaque orthography. Thus, children need to develop a range of grain sizes because they cannot just rely on phonological recoding. Clearly, more research on the role of morphology in reading is still needed across languages.

2. 2. 1. 4. Syntax

Syntax refers to the arrangements and interrelationships of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences (Emmit & Pollock 1991). Syntactic knowledge plays an important role in enabling reading comprehension in any alphabetic language. This is also supported by different reading models (Gough & Tunmer 1986; Hoover & Gough 1990; Bishop & Snowling 2004; Perfetti 1999). For example, in the simple view of reading, syntactic awareness as part of linguistic comprehension is associated with reading comprehension (Gough & Tunmer 1986; Hoover & Gough 1990).

The role of syntactic knowledge in HL reading comprehension is further evidenced by second language reading comprehension. For example, Siu and Ho's (2020) longitudinal study of word order, morphosyntactic, and reading comprehension skills in HL Chinese and English second language from Hong Kong examined syntactic awareness in HL Chinese on reading comprehension in English. The findings revealed that HL syntactic awareness cross-linguistically predicted second language (English) reading comprehension over time. Thus, for learners to read and understand what they read in another language, they first need to develop the ability to process complex syntactic structures in their HL.

2. 2. 1. 5. Discourse

Discourse refers to 'the use of language beyond the sentence level in social contexts (Seidlhofer 2003, p. 133). It relates to socio-cultural conventions regarding language use in terms of politeness, respect, gender, customs, etc., as well as an understanding of non-verbal aspects such as gestures, facial expressions, pitch, and intonation (DBE 2019). Tsonga people display verbal and non-verbal characters of discourse by being respectful by nature. For example, it is customary for the Tsongas to use a plural form for a pronoun *n'wina* (them) instead of the singular pronoun *wena* (you) to address an adult. Their non-verbal way of showing respect is demonstrated by the pattern of looking down during conversations with adults because direct eye contact is perceived to be rude.

Studies have shown that knowledge of discourse predicts learners' high-level comprehension (Khabiri & Hajimaghsoodi 2012; Gallagher 2015; Murphy et al. 2018). In a year-long study designed to enhance basic and high-level comprehension of Grade 4 learners in the United States, Murphy et al. (2018) found statistically and significant increases in written measures of the learners' basic and high-level comprehension from facilitated small-group discourse.

Obviously, if children have good language skills, they have higher chances of 'learning to read' successfully. However, children differ in their development of HL skills, where some may have poorer language skills than their peers when they start school. Teachers should be cognisant of the differences in children's language development and various assessment tools can alert them to such differences. For example, non-word repetition tasks assess phonological short-term memory and is helpful in testing this one aspect of children's language skills (Archibald & Gathercole 2006; Chiat & Roy 2007, 2008). Vocabulary or listening comprehension tests can also be used to measure children's language skills and teachers can use the assessment profile to design literacy instructions that meet individual learning needs. Children whose language problems are not detected and remedied early are at risk of less successful developmental, reading and educational outcomes (Conti-Ramsden & Durkin 2012).

2. 2. 2. Code-related factors

Decoding refers to the ability to convert letters into speech sounds/oral language. It is a necessary skill but not sufficient for developing comprehension. The ability to decode words accurately and fluently frees up attention so that the focus can then shift to understanding what is read. Decoding skills or lower-level processes facilitating reading comprehension include letter-sound knowledge, word reading, and oral reading fluency.

2. 2. 2. 1. Letter-sound knowledge/phonics

Phonics knowledge refers to the mapping of sounds to a written code such as letters, and blending them. It is 'the conscious, concentrated study of the relationship between sounds and symbols to learn to read and spell words (Savage 2007, p. 7). Research shows that children can develop knowledge of letters early, even before school, if they have frequent exposure to a print-rich environment. Letter-sound knowledge enables children to decode known and unknown words. Children's knowledge of letter-sounds is measured by counting the number of letter-sounds read correctly from a chart within a given time span, such as a minute.

As already mentioned in §2.1.2, several studies have shown that letter-sound knowledge helps with the development of phonological awareness (Foy & Mann 2006; Kim, Petscher, Foorman & Zhou 2010; Málková 2015). For example, Hulme et al. (2012a) found that a reading intervention that included phonological awareness/phonics produced significant improvements in letter-sound knowledge and phoneme awareness and in word reading and spelling skills. As stated in §2.1.3, letter-sound knowledge is critical for word decoding. Several studies have shown the importance of letter-sound knowledge for decoding words, which in turn is important for reading comprehension (National Reading Panel 2000; Cardenas 2009; Clayton et al. 2019; Sigmundsson, Haga, Ofteland & Solstand 2020). In a longitudinal study of early reading development, Clayton et al. (2019) investigated the predictive relationship between phonological language skills and early reading development of Grade 1 learners in London. The findings revealed that letter-sound knowledge and alphanumeric Rapid Automised Naming (RAN) were all strong independent predictors of reading development. Another study of 5 to 6-year-old children learning to read in Norway revealed that letter-sound knowledge was associated with the ability to read (Sigmundsson et al. 2020).

Apart from directly contributing to the development of phonological awareness and speed and accuracy in word reading, letter-sound knowledge also maps to successful oral reading fluency. This was demonstrated in a longitudinal study of 16,400 learners in three Nguni languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa and isiSwati) in South Africa, where strong letter-sound knowledge was found to be critical for oral reading fluency. On the basis of this finding, 40 letter correct per minute (lcpm) was recommended as a benchmark for Nguni readers by the end of Grade 1 (Ardington et al. 2020).

2. 2. 2. 2. Word reading

Word reading refers to the ability to read isolated words quickly and accurately, and to recognise shorter high-frequency words quickly without having to sound them out (Spaull et al. 2020), e.g., shorter high-frequency words in Xitsonga include *hi* (we), *le* (there), *wa* (of), and *na* (and). For beginning readers to read these words accurately, they require many skills, such as the ability to break down known or unknown word parts into letters, phonemes, syllables, and morphemes that make up words. Word reading is assessed in terms of the number of words read correctly per minute. When children struggle with word reading, early grade reading assessment may reveal poor language skills, lack of vocabulary knowledge, or poor decoding and spelling ability (International Literacy Association 2018).

Word reading is important because it provides beginner readers with regular practice in reading words in and out of context. It increases accuracy and speed in reading. This helps the readers free up attention to focus on the meaning of the text rather than laboriously sounding out words, letter by letter and sound by sound (Hayes & Flanigan 2014; Pretorius et al. 2016).

Although the ability to read words alone is not sufficient for successful reading (Nation & Snowling 1998), research reiterates that it is not possible for fluent reading to take place without accurate and fast word reading (Macalister 2010; Roembke, Hazeltine, Reed & McMurray 2019; Ardington et al. 2020). For example, a study that assessed the automaticity of middle-school learners in America with an accuracy-based measure found that automaticity significantly predicted reading fluency over and above knowledge of the relevant grapheme-phoneme mappings (Roembke et al. 2019). A local study investigating decoding skills underpinning reading comprehension across three agglutinating languages (Northern Sotho, Xitsonga, and isiZulu) from 785 Grade 3 learners showed that word reading was robustly related to oral reading fluency across the three African languages (Spaull et al. 2020).

Much research has also demonstrated the effect of word reading on reading comprehension (Guldenoğlu, Kargin & Miller 2012; Cadime et al. 2016). This also applies to reading in an agglutinating language such as Turkish. For example, in a study on word processing and reading comprehension from skilled (n=26) and less skilled (n=23) Grade 2 learners in Turkey, involving the processing of isolated real word and pseudoword pairs as well as their reading comprehension skills, Guldenoğlu et al. (2012) found that word processing and reading comprehension skills correlate positively for both skilled and less skilled readers. Kim and Piper (2019a), in their study of the relations between component skills of reading comprehension in three sub-Saharan African languages (Kiswahili, Kikamba and Lubukusu), also found that word reading was directly and positively related to reading comprehension.

2. 2. 2. 3. Oral reading fluency

Oral reading fluency refers to the ability to read accurately and fluently, with appropriate intonation and feeling, paying attention to punctuation (Spaull et al. 2020). Fluency develops through practice and can be assessed in terms of accuracy, speed (rate) and prosody.

Accuracy*:* refers to the ability to identify individual words correctly. Not being accurate can change the meaning of what is read. Accurate word reading is important because it enables readers to distinguish words from each other, e.g., *limp* from *limb*.

***Speed**:* refers to the ability to recognise and decode words effortlessly. Reading becomes automatic once readers master accuracy and increase their rate of reading according to their grade level. The speed at which reading occurs at grade level and the accuracy shown in recognising and decoding words reduces the reader's cognitive load so that focus can be on comprehension. Reading below a certain rate (referred to as a minimum threshold) severely compromises reading comprehension. In their study, Ardington et al. (2020) found that by Grade 2, learners who read slower than 20 word correct per minute (wcpm) in the Nguni languages fell into a non-comprehension zone. By Grade 3, most Nguni readers should read at 35 wcpm (benchmark) or higher.

***Prosody**:* refers to reading with feeling and intonation, chunking up words or phrases together, and pausing in appropriate places (e.g., after a comma or full stop) (DBE 2019). Reading with prosody reflects language features such as punctuation, text features (such as dialogue), sentence features, etc. Grade-level readers can use these features to help them understand what they are reading. Prosody extends across words – it reflects the natural rhythm of speech and is important in African languages due to their tonal characteristic. For example, Xitsonga words *tiya* (to be strong) and *tíya* (tea) are spelled the same but are pronounced with different tones according to their meanings (*i* with a low tone on the first vowel and *í* with high tone on the second vowel). Because assessment of prosody is more subjective, fluency is usually measured in terms of accuracy and rate.

Studies have also shown that oral reading fluency is significantly related to comprehension in both HL (Àlvarez-Cañizo, Suárez-Coalla & Cuetos 2015; Kim & Piper 2019a; Spaull et al. 2020) and EFAL (Pretorius & Spaull 2016). In a large scale study of 4,697 Grade 5 EFAL learners in South Africa, the relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension was found to be large and robust; reading an additional word correct per minute was associated with a 14% point increase in comprehension score, after controlling for all school-level variables and certain student-level variables such as age and gender (Pretorius & Spaull 2016).

The close relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension is further demonstrated in studies that have shown a bidirectional relationship between the two factors (Klauda & Guthrie 2008; Kim 2015; Veenendaal, Groen & Verhoeven 2016). For example, a study that examined the relationship of three levels of reading fluency (the word level, the syntactic unit and the whole passage) to reading comprehension of Grade 5 learners (n=278)

in the United States found that reading fluency predicted growth in comprehension while comprehension predicted growth in fluency, suggesting bidirectional relations between the two reading skills (Klauda & Guthrie 2008).

In sum, a broad range of research has consistently shown that code-based skills contribute significantly to children's ability to recognise words, read fluently and understand what they read (Share & Stanovich 1995; Castles, Kathleen Rastle & Nation 2018). However, the cognitive abilities discussed below can further make the process of reading comprehension much easier.

2. 2. 3. Cognitive abilities

Cognitive ability is a mental capability, involving 'the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn from experience' (Gottfredson 1997, p. 13). The cognitive factors involved in facilitating reading comprehension process include inter alia, working memory, attention allocation, cognitive processes (such as inferencing, categorising) and metacognitions as reflected in our ability to strategically make predictions, visualise, sequence, and monitor our comprehension.

2. 2. 3. 1. Working memory

Working memory is a cognitive ability that we are born with; we don't have much control over it. It refers to one's ability to work with information (Alloy 2010) transferred to our long-term memory. For example, we use our working memory when we recall the steps of a recipe while preparing our favourite dish. Children's working memory can be measured by using tasks that involve both remembering and processing information (Alloway & Copello 2013). Working memory is important because it helps people hold on to information long enough to use it. Good readers tend to have a good working memory, but those who struggle with reading very often have weak working memories. Hence, research has demonstrated that working memory can predict reading comprehension (Seigneuric, Ehrlich, Oakhill &Yuill 2000; Alloway & Copello 2013; Napier 2014; Sadler 2014). For example, a study that examined the relationship between working memory and reading comprehension abilities of Grade 4 learners in KwaZulu Natal found a positive linear relationship between reading comprehension and working memory in Grade 4 learners (Sadler 2014).

2. 2. 3. 2. Attention allocation

Attention allocation refers to the ability to adapt attentional and processing resources to the demands of the task at hand (Liu, Reichle & Gao 2013). Depending on the level of reading ability, attention allocation enables readers to focus, sustain, select or divide aspects of their reading text. However, children with inadequate attention allocation skills are unlikely to accomplish their assigned tasks (Unsworth, Redick, Lakey, & Young 2010) and they may struggle to understand what they are reading (Kendeou, Van den Broek, Helder & Karlsson 2014) because they can be easily distracted from paying attention. Attention allocation plays an important role in terms of facilitating reading comprehension. This is evidenced in a Grade 4 study that examined the relationship between reading fluency, reading comprehension and attention. The findings revealed that good readers' attention had significant effects on reading speed, prosody, word recognition and comprehension, respectively (Yildiz & Çetinkaya 2017).

2. 2. 3. 3. Cognitive processes

Cognitive processes in reading involve the mental process of acquiring knowledge and understanding what is read. Reading comprehension requires application of various cognitive processes which include inter alia, background knowledge and inferencing.

Background knowledge refers to what is known about a subject (Stevens 1980). It emanates from our life experience or from what we read. Activating background knowledge while reading increases concentration and interest in what is read (Pretorius & Murray 2019).

Previous studies have shown that background knowledge affects reading comprehension (Taft & Leslie 1985; Pei-shi 2012; Awabdy 2012). For example, a study that examined the relationship between background knowledge and reading comprehension on standardized reading tests (the California STAR Test) of Grade 6 to 8 children in the United States found that background knowledge has a significant positive association with reading comprehension. (Awabdy 2012).

Inferencing is making a logical guess about something implied but not stated in a text, also referred to as 'reading between the lines' (Jumiaty 2014, p. 223). Making inferences in reading is important for facilitating comprehension because writers do not often explain everything in the text.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that inferencing is an important predictor of academic achievement and reading comprehension (Pretorius 2000; Hara & Tappe 2016; Sadeghi, Gilani

& Niyazi 2018). For example, a study that examined the relationship between inference skills and reading skills in English second language of 120 Persian female high school students in Iran, found that there was a significant relationship between lexical inference and reading comprehension as well as global inference and reading comprehension. Additionally, the results showed that teaching inference skills had a significant effect on reading comprehension performance among the English language students (Sadeghi et al. (2018).

2. 2. 3. 4. Metacognition

Metacognition in reading can be described as 'thinking about reading' (Shikano 2014, p. 14). Engagement of metacognition skills enables readers to reflect on what they are reading. These are skills that teachers can explicitly teach children to improve their reading. To facilitate comprehension of what is read, metacognition deploys comprehension strategies outlined below:

Making predictions refers to a strategy in which readers use information from a text (e.g., titles, headings, pictures and diagrams) to anticipate what will happen in the text (Oczkus 2003) before and during reading. Forecasting or guessing what will happen in a reading text, enables readers to understand information in the text much better (Pretorius & Murray 2019). Several studies have shown that predictions significantly impact learners' reading comprehension (Wulandari, Sukirlan & Sudirman 2017; Sumirat, Pedilah & Haryudin 2019). For example, a study of Grade 7 learners in Indonesia showed that the prediction strategy significantly impacted learners' reading comprehension (Wulandari et al. 2017).

Visualising refers to the ability to see pictures/images in the mind while reading (Tomlinson 1997; Pretorius & Murray 2019). This process is facilitated by turning the events, scenes, characters, or ideas described in the text into mental images pictured in our heads. Visualising is regarded as an efficient strategy in reading comprehension (Erfani, Iranmehr & Davari 2011). It provides learners with opportunities to use their imagination to draw conclusions, create interpretations of the text, and recall details and elements of the text (Keene & Zimmerman 1997).

Visualisation is significant for both HL and FAL reading comprehension and recall (Tomlinson 1998). Research has shown that learners who create visual images in their minds before, during, and after reading have high chances of improving their comprehension (Sadosky & Paivio 2001; Erfani et al. 2011). The role of visualising in reading comprehension was demonstrated in a study that involved two homogeneous groups of Chemistry students, one of which was

taught through visualisation and the other by the conventional method in Iran. The results revealed a significant advantage of using visualisation in promoting English for Specific Purposes reading comprehension ability of students (Erfani et al. 2011).

Sequencing refers to 'the process of putting events, ideas, and objects in a logical' manner (Becky & Spivey 2008, p. 1). It happens naturally in children's daily routines, such as steps in tying their shoelaces or getting ready for school. Children, who have developed sequencing skills, learn to understand that stories follow a logical order, with a beginning, middle, and end. They can also retell the events of a particular text in the order in which they occurred.

Sequencing plays an important role in facilitating comprehension of a story read. Studies have also demonstrated the effect of sequencing on reading comprehension. For example, in a study of Grades 3 to 5 learners (n=64) in Australia, Gouldhorp, Katsipis and Mueller (2018) found that learners with high reading comprehension (M = 28, SD = 4.10) were significantly better at sequencing than those with low reading comprehension (M = 16.72, SD = 3.56). The results revealed that sequencing is an important skill for children's reading comprehension of narrative texts. Another study involving second-year students in Makassar found that the implementation of sorting and sequencing in reading comprehension was effective for the students (Misbahuddin 2017).

Comprehension monitoring refers to the checking of one's understanding of the text and using a 'fix-up' strategy to clear up factors that may be hindrances for attaining the meaning of the text (Pretorius & Murray 2019). This skill is important for enabling readers to monitor how well they understand what they are reading. Readers engage in self-monitoring strategies which help them know whether what they are reading makes sense. Thus, they may self-correct by rereading portions of the text, or reading slowly to figure out what is it that they do not seem to understand. Khonamri and Kojidi (2011) argue that it is important for readers to assess their reading progress and self-correct problems that they may have encountered while reading.

In a mixed-methods study on the effects of comprehension monitoring on the academic performance of two groups of learners (a control and intervention group) from 12 public primary schools in Kenya, the findings revealed that comprehension monitoring positively impacted on the academic performance of the learners who had comprehension monitoring interventions. The study recommended that teachers introduce regular comprehension monitoring tasks to monitor the learners' reading abilities (Agutu, Gichochi & Wamalwa 2019).

2. 2. 4. Text-based factors

Text-based factors involve consideration of text genres (different text types such as fiction and non-fiction text), text structure (organisational structure comprising for example, setting, characters, problem, resolution and the main idea or theme in narrative texts) and text conventions (e.g., table of content, headings, visuals, etc.), which make the text easier to understand. Thus, besides various language, code and cognitive abilities mentioned above, reading comprehension can also be influenced by characteristics that are related to the written text. Furthermore, familiarity with the topic, or the complexity and abstractness of the topic or language, and the frequency level of words used in a text can also influence reading.

Even though text-oriented approaches to reading comprehension are suitable for older learners (from Grades 3 and above), young children from Grade 1 onwards first become familiar with fiction (through narratives) and may also be exposed to non-fiction text (information texts) in the classroom through shared book reading. Experiences of being read to and also reading by themselves enable children to become aware of how narrative or information texts are typically organised.

In light of the above discussion, it is clear that reading, unlike oral language, is not a naturally acquired process. It needs to be taught and practiced; it is developed over time and involves the interaction of several skills, both simple and more complex ones. However, the relationship between different skills changes over time. Learners need to gain mastery of decoding aspects, and once decoding becomes fluent, then other factors become more prominent in predicting reading comprehensions such as vocabulary, background knowledge and higher-order thinking skills.

After looking at all the language, code, cognitive and text factors that influence comprehension, I now turn to macro factors that influence reading in general, which include socio-economic, schooling and home factors.

2. 3. MACRO FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE READING

Macro-level factors such as SES, schooling and home factors, influence reading in general. As indicated in Chapter 1 (§1.2.3), both local and international research has consistently shown that SE background affects education with children from more affluent backgrounds generally

performing better than children from less affluent backgrounds (Moses et al. 2017). As stated in Chapter 3 (§3.3.2.4), research has shown that academic achievement is not only affected by SE backgrounds but also poor management and leadership practices in schools. This section focuses mainly on the effects of home factors on reading development.

2. 3. 1. Home factors

The home has a strong influence on a child's reading development and attitude to reading. According to the home literacy model proposed by Sénéchal (2002), two aspects of reading are developed at home, namely (i) activities that stimulate rich language development (through conversations and interactions) in children and (ii) activities that foster print-based literacy skills and values (via books in the home, storybook reading, and children seeing parents doing literate things).

Children first learn to use language through interacting with parents, siblings and caregivers. For example, by listening, watching, observing adults as they take turns to speak, talking to a child and responding to what a child says, provide them with opportunities to develop their oral language (Undiyaundeye & Basake 2018). Rich language and learning experiences such as these can prepare children well for their school readiness. However, research has shown that children enter school with varying language experiences developed at home. It is worth noting that home literacy environments (particularly in the way different parents talk and exchange words with their children) may lead to both quantitative and qualitative differences in early literacy achievement and later school success (Sénéchal & LeFevre 2002). For example, in a study of South African children (n=79) between 12 and 15 years, Maswikiti (n.d.) found that children from low SES families with access to high-quality education scored significantly better on the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI) that measures IQ than those from low SES families with access to low-quality education. A longitudinal study of 42 families (1 and 2 years old) in USA found that by the age of 3 years, children from high-income families acquired 86 to 96% of words by interacting with their parents as opposed to their peers (Hart & Risley 2003). The findings further revealed that parental support in terms of their effective communication with children paid off during schooling. In another study of 18 months English language infants (n=48) from high and low-income families, Fernald, Marchman and Weisleder (2013) found that infants from high-income families had larger expressive vocabulary compared to their peers.

Exposing young children to a print-rich environment is important for their language and literacy development. For example, taking them to a museum, a trip to the local library and shopping, increase children's awareness to print and provide them with opportunities to make new discoveries and experience many different environments. Because of the benefits accompanying home background factors, the American Academy of Paediatrics (2015) recommends that parents should read to their infants every day. This can happen by reading bedtime stories to children or conduct shared reading with them. However, bedtime readings or shared readings at home are determined by the availability of children's books, the time given for reading, and the amount and breadth of reading (Krashen 2004) and also by parents' level of education and socio-economic factors. A study that examined the home environment literacy practices of young English learners and their families (n=217) in the United States found that availability of books and child-initiated literacy factors were directly related to the phonological processing efforts of learners (Trainin, Wessels, Nelson & Vadasy 2016). Limited access to books generally affects children who live in deprived homes, and this is a barrier to reaching their potential and achieving success at school (MacFarlane 2005). The findings of PIRLS 2011 and 2016 have also shown relationships between achievement and the extent of the resources at home. For example, of all the South African learners assessed in PIRLS 2016, only 1% of learners whose homes had many resources achieved higher scores (500 points) relative to those whose homes had some resources (354 point) and those who had few resources (295 points) (Howie et al. 2017).

Homes and pre-school settings which regularly expose children to storybook reading provide them with opportunities to master basic grammatical structures and oral discourse skills, which further assist in acquiring more complex oral language skills. This is beneficial when children start school. Studies have also shown positive effects of providing children with opportunities to attend early childhood learning programmes before schooling (Ntuli & Pretorius 2005; Melhuish 2014; Guta, Tarekegne and Tegegne 2017; Grolig, Cohrdes, Tiffin-Richards & Schroeder 2018; Máximo 2019). For example, Guta et al. (2017) found that pre-school education programme in Ethiopia contributed in terms of preparing children for school readiness. Their classroom participation, school attendance and social behaviour was better than children who had no pre-school experiences.

The above discussion clearly indicates that home backgrounds and pre-school contexts can affect children's language and reading in the early stages of learning to read. Therefore, it is

important that parents spend time reading books with children and having rich conversations with them.

Having explained some of the factors that influence children's reading ability during early learning, it is important to examine the complexities associated with reading development. The following section briefly discusses several reading models which emphasise the relationship between decoding and reading comprehension.

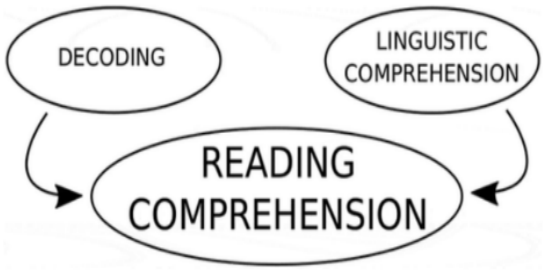
2. 4. THEORIES OF READING DEVELOPMENT

Theorists have proposed different models of how reading develops from the early stage of learning to read and how the different processes interact differentially in the developmental journey of becoming a fluent and comprehending reader. These models include the simple view of reading and variations on it (Text (Oral) reading fluency), the decoding threshold hypothesis and the direct and indirect effects model of reading. Each of these models is explained briefly below.

2. 4. 1. The simple view of reading

The simple view of reading (SVR) is a model of reading first proposed by Gough & Tunmer in 1986 but elaborated in later publications (Nation 2019) to clarify the role of decoding and language in reading comprehension. It states that reading comprehension (RC) is facilitated by two elements, decoding (D) and linguistic comprehension (LC): RC = D x LC, as illustrated in Figure 2.1 below. LC is also referred to as language proficiency.

Figure 2. 1. The Simple View of Reading *(Nation 2019, p. 48)*



The SVR assumes a linear relationship between decoding and linguistic comprehension/ language proficiency (this is what makes this model different from that of Wang et al. (2019

and Kim 2020). The linear relationship means that skilful reading comprehension can be achieved if *both* D and LC components are in place. If either or both skills are not adequately developed from the early stages of learning, reading comprehension problems are inevitable. As already mentioned in Chapter 1 (§1.3.1), to test the SVR, decoding can be measured through the child's ability to read words and non-words out of context, whereas linguistic comprehension may include testing of listening comprehension, vocabulary, or phonological, morphological, syntactic, or pragmatic skills as measures of language proficiency. Several studies have provided empirical support for the SVR (e.g., Chen & Vellutino 1997; Snowling & Melby-Lervåg 2016; Lonigan, Burgess & Schatschneider 2018; Nation 2019). For example, a study that examined the SVR with 757 Grade 3 through 5 learners in the United States of America found that the largest amount of variance accounted for in RC was variance shared by decoding and linguistic comprehension, accounting for between 41% and 69% of the variance (Lonigan et al. 2018).

Text (Oral) reading fluency

Many studies that have tested the SVR have used word reading as a measure of decoding. As a refinement of the SVR, Kim and her team posit that text reading fluency mediates decoding and linguistic comprehension to reading comprehension. In their study of the role of text reading fluency – how it relates to other constructs, e.g., word reading fluency (WRF) and reading comprehension (RC) and how it is different from WRF and RC, Kim et al. (2013a) found that ORF and RC had a bidirectional relationship, over and above WRF and listening comprehension (LC). In a longitudinal study of Grade 1 to 4 learners which investigated the changing role of ORF in mediating the relations of WRF and LC to RC, Kim and Wagner (2015) found that the role of ORF changes over time as children's reading proficiency develops (e.g., in all the grades, RC was largely explained by WRF, LC correlated strongly with RC, and ORF independently related to RC), suggesting that ORF is a dissociable construct that plays a developmentally changing role in reading acquisition.

2. 4. 2. Decoding threshold hypothesis

The decoding threshold is described as a numerical measure of proficiency in reading out of context words (Ardington et al. 2020). The decoding threshold hypothesis proposed by Wang et al. (2019) holds that if readers' decoding skills fall below a certain level (a threshold), then reading comprehension becomes extremely difficult. This model is different from the SVR which assumes a direct relationship between decoding and reading comprehension. Instead,

according to Wang and colleagues, the relation between decoding and reading comprehension can only be reliably observed above a certain decoding threshold (ibid.). This is supported in their longitudinal study of the relationship between decoding and comprehension of over 30, 000 Grade 5 to 10 learners' reading comprehension growth as a function of their initial decoding status in the United States of America. The results showed that scoring below the decoding threshold was associated with stagnant growth in reading comprehension. Based on their findings, Wang et al. (2019) argue that the decoding threshold hypothesis is important in identifying learners whose reading comprehension is likely to remain poor unless there are intervention plans that can remedy the situation, such as teaching them decoding and fluency skills. The decoding threshold is not a constant – it will differ across language orthographies. Ardington et al. (2020) found that in the Nguni languages, learners who read below 20 wcpm were trapped in a non-comprehension zone.

2. 4. 3. The direct and indirect effects model of reading

The direct and indirect effects model of reading (DIER) is an integrative reading model asserting that multiple factors[9] hierarchically and directly and indirectly contribute to reading development (Kim 2020). The DIER, like the SVR, and the decoding threshold, proposes that RC basically depends on decoding and LC, but unlike these models, the DIER brings other factors into the equation and explicitly specifies all their relationships. For example, the DIER shows that RC is facilitated hierarchically by lower-level (e.g., decoding and LC) and upper-level skills which include ORF, background knowledge (content knowledge and discourse knowledge), reading affect or socio-emotions, higher-order cognitions and regulation (e.g., inference, perspective taking, reasoning, and comprehension monitoring), vocabulary, grammatical knowledge (morphosyntactic and syntactic), phonology, morphology, orthography, and domain-general cognitions (e.g., working memory and attentional control) (Kim 2020). In a study that investigated two hypotheses (hierarchical indirect relations and non-hierarchical direct relations) of the DIER to RC, the results showed that when the direct relations model was fitted, the lower-level skills (e.g., decoding and LC) were statistically significant. Furthermore, when both direct and indirect relations models were fitted, upper-level skills (e.g., working memory and vocabulary) and higher-order cognitive skills (e.g.,

[9] Word reading, listening comprehension, text reading fluency, background knowledge, socio-emotions or reading affect, higher order cognitions and regulations, vocabulary, syntactic/grammatical knowledge, phonology, morphology, orthography, and domain general cognitions or executive function.

perspective talking) were indirectly related to RC, whereas decoding and LC remained directly related to RC. These findings support the proposed model of DIER (Kim 2020).

Although most researchers basically show distinct ways of how reading develops to the point of comprehension, they emphasise the relationship between decoding and comprehension, as outlined below.

Relationship between decoding and reading comprehension

Learning to read was a passport to securing freedom from slavery, as per the American social reformer, abolitionist, orator and writer, Frederick Douglass, who once said: 'Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.' Frederick uses this quote to emphasise the importance of relations between learning to read and freeing up one's mind. This is comparable to the link between decoding and reading comprehension. As explained in Chapter 1 (§1.3.1), decoding refers to the ability to translate printed letters into language (Pretorius et al. 2016). It provides children with opportunities to develop foundational skills, including phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge and phonics (i.e., knowledge of letter-sound relations), word reading and oral reading fluency. Numerous research and various reading models assert that decoding is a gateway to reading comprehension. On the other hand, reading comprehension involves the process of extracting meaning from text; however, although decoding is not sufficient for comprehension, one needs it to get there. In addition to decoding, one also needs language proficiency, cognitive abilities and text knowledge to make sense of what is read. This further aligns with the DIER model which emphasises hierarchical and multiple integrations of skills for reading comprehension to be accomplished.

In view of the different reading models highlighted above, the authors all agree on the significant role of decoding in reading comprehension. However, they differ in how they operationalise the construct of decoding and in explaining the relationship between decoding and comprehension. In addition to decoding, reading comprehension is also enabled by language proficiency, cognitive abilities, and text knowledge.

From the perspectives of the reading models emphasising that various skills are involved in facilitating reading comprehension, it is important that during Grade 1, learners develop strong letter-sound knowledge and blending skills, and can read high frequency words in and out of context. Grade 1 learners in this study were assessed by using the adapted Tsonga EGRA instrument comprising five basic aspects of reading, viz., phonological and phonemic

awareness (untimed tasks), letter-sound knowledge, word reading, oral reading fluency (timed tasks) and comprehension (untimed task). Learner performance and various factors that seem to influence academic achievement in the Grade 1 classroom are examined in Chapters 5 and 6 from a quantitative and qualitative perspectives, respectively.

Having discussed the main components of reading and how they enable reading comprehension, I now move to a discussion of the Xitsonga language and, thereafter, to the similarities and differences in early reading across languages.

2. 5. XITSONGA LANGUAGE

This section discusses Xitsonga according to the following subtopics: Xitsonga in education, media, literature, and its orthography and grammar.

Xitsonga is recognised as an official language in South Africa together with the following eight indigenous languages, Northern Sotho, Setswana, Sesotho, isiSwati, Tshivenda, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and isiZulu. More than 3 million people in South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe speak Xitsonga. HL speakers of Xitsonga comprise 4.5% of South Africa's population (Statistics South Africa 2011). Xitsonga is a Southern Bantu language belonging to S50 Tswa-Rhonga family in Guthrie's (1971) classification which encompasses 14 sub-families: S51 Tswa, S51A Dzibi, S51b Dzonga, S511 Hlengwe, S53 Changana, S53A Xiluleke, S53B N'walungu, S53C Hlave, S53D Nkuna, S53E Gwamba, S53F Nhlanganu, S53G Djonga, S53H Bila, and S54 Rhonga (Maho 2009). Several east coast dialects such as Gwamba, Nkuna, Hlengwe, Tembe, Valoyi, Nyembani, Tswa-Ronga, and Chopi emerged around 1200s and were combined and formed one language called 'Thonga,' which was later renamed Xitsonga. This language was registered as 'Xitsonga' within the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). The prefixed forms 'Xitsonga' is used in this study in reference to the language, whilst the name 'Tsonga' is used to refer to the speakers of the language.

Speakers of Xitsonga are often referred to as Changaans, but the Tsonga people in South Africa indicate that it is incorrect and that that term should be used for the Tsonga people who live in Mozambique. Xitsonga in South Africa is mainly spoken in Limpopo (17% of speakers), Gauteng (6.6%), and Mpumalanga (10.4%) (Statistics South Africa 2011) (See map below).

Map A shows South Africa according to its nine provinces, and Map B shows linguistic areas with Xitsonga spreading over a wide area of Limpopo in the southeastern part of South Africa.

Figure 2. 2. Areas where Xitsonga is predominantly used *(Source: Statistics South Africa 2011)*

Map A – provinces

Map B – Linguistic areas

2. 5. 1. Xitsonga in education

Besides being recognised as an official language, Xitsonga is currently used as the LoLT in the FP and is taught as a school subject from Grades 4-12. Xitsonga is offered as a FAL in a few quintile 4 and 5 schools located in Limpopo, Gauteng, and Mpumalanga. It is also offered at the University of Limpopo, the University of Venda, and the University of South Africa as a degree subject. Other South African universities in Gauteng do not offer Xitsonga because the 2005 report released by the University of Johannesburg showed that Xitsonga was not counted amongst the languages (English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, Setswana, Northern Sotho and isiXhosa) that were chosen for specific language development in Gauteng (University of Johannesburg 2005). This could mean that Tsonga students might not have been interested in pursuing it at the university level – a possible effect of language marginalisation countrywide.

2. 5. 2. Xitsonga in literature

Xitsonga was recognised and codified in writing, in 1875 at the Valdezia Mission Station by two Swiss Missionaries, Reverend Paul Berthoud and Reverend Ernest Creux. It has been a written language for well over a hundred years. The first two Xitsonga Bible books were the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, which were translated into Xitsonga and published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1892. The first New Testament translation appeared in 1894, and the first complete Xitsonga Bible was printed in two volumes in 1907. The

translation of Xitsonga Bible was revised in 1929, and again in 2012, where it was published in its new orthography.

The interest of the missionaries to understand the culture of the Tsonga people led to the publication of *Vutlhari bya vatsonga/machangana* (Wisdom of the Tsonga people) (Junod 1936); *Sasavona* (name of the main character) (Marivate 1938); *Murhandziwani* (The adored) (Baloyi 1949); and *Matimu ya vatsonga/machangana* (History of the Tsonga people) (Junod 1977). Various genres, such as poetry, short stories, folklore, drama and novels, were written and published in Xitsonga in the first half of the 20th century.

The first poetry book written in Xitsonga was called *Mambuxu* (A young lad with a bulging tummy) (Ndhambi 1950). Later on, *Masungi M'fana ka Maxele* (Masungi, Maxele's son) (Ntsan'wisi 1954) and *Mahlasela-hundza* (The passing invader) (Ntsan'wisi 1957) were published. Missionaries influenced early Xitsonga writing, but the content of the writings did not reflect the reality of the African Tsonga people, as the writers were encouraged to portray Christian values and to praise missionary efforts. There has been an increase in the number of genres published in Xitsonga. Nonetheless, most published genres (mainly children's books) are direct translations from other languages, such as English or Afrikaans. *Ndzi nga va kwihi na kwihi* (I can be everywhere) (Groenewald 2010a), *Nosipho u te ku ta tshama na kokwana* (Nosipho came to live with granny) (Oosthuizen & Groenewald 2010), and *Mukapu* (Soft porridge) (Groenewald 2010b) are examples of translations from English or Afrikaans. Sanneh (1989, p. 31) argues that '...translation is a highly problematic enterprise' because it denies speakers of particular languages opportunities to experience the originality of their culture. Nonetheless, it helps readers to access information in their own language and increases the number of books in a language that would otherwise not be available. Only a few writers are interested in writing and publishing books in Xitsonga; for example, *Matimu ya mihloti* (The History of tears) (Ngobeni 2012) is an original Xitsonga novel that was recently published. The dearth of authentic writers in the African indigenous languages further promotes the translation of books into these languages. For instance, the DBE's workbooks in all the official languages in the FP came about through translations.

2. 5. 3. Xitsonga in the media

Despite it being spoken by a relatively small number of people, Xitsonga has enjoyed quite a robust newspaper tradition since the early twentieth century. In January 1921, the first Xitsonga newspaper called *Nyeleti Ya Mixo* (Morning Star) was published. The first editors of this

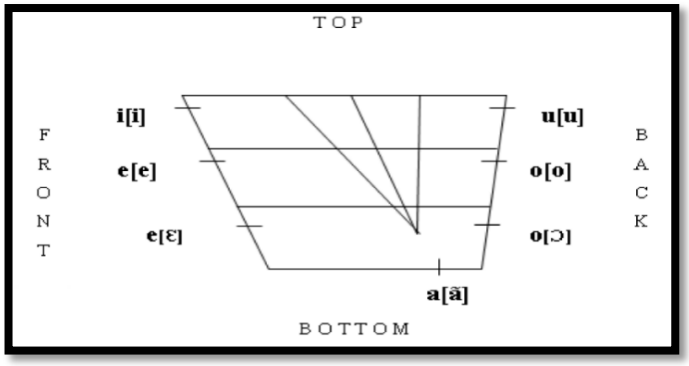
newspaper were A. A. Jacques in the former Transvaal (today Limpopo Province) and H. Guye in Mozambique. The second newspaper called *The Valdezia Bulletin*, which later changed its name to *The Light - Ku vonakala ka Vatsonga* was published in 1931. From 1969-1993 (during apartheid), several Xitsonga newspapers were in circulation: *Mhalamhala* (Trumpet), *Vulavula* (Speakout), and the *Gazankulu Times*. In 1987 a magazine called *ViV* - an abbreviation for *Vutsonga i Vutomi* (Tsonga is Livelihood) was published in Xitsonga and English. The central government published a journal called *Nhluvuko* (Development) before the homeland system was established. From there, the Gazankulu government (the so-called 'homeland' for the Tsonga people under apartheid) published its first official journal called, *Nchangana* (a Shangaan). Publications of the newspapers mentioned above stopped when the homeland system in South Africa was abolished in 1993, leading to the end of apartheid in 1994. In December 2008, a local newspaper called *Nthavela* was published in both English and Xitsonga. This newspaper was awarded the Best Front Cover Award for upcoming publications in May 2013. The former language board also published a journal called *Nyeleti* (Star), which remained in circulation from 1987 to 1997.

Xitsonga is used on radio, the preferred Xitsonga channel being *Munghana Lonene FM* (A good friend). The channel was first broadcast in February 1965 with David Mampele as its first presenter. *Munghana Lonene FM* is still airing, and its transmission covers Limpopo, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and North West Provinces. Xitsonga, together with languages such as Tshivenda, isiSwati, and isiNdebele, are granted limited representation on SABC television (Kruger, Kruger & Verhoef 2007; Olivier 2011). This is viewed as a bias towards specific languages and ethnic groups (Kapatamoyo 2007). The very first Xitsonga TV drama (Giyani: Land of Blood) was aired in April 2019 on SABC 2 channel for 30 minutes (9:30 pm to 10:00 pm). Although Xitsonga dominates the entire drama, other languages such as *Khelobedu* (a Northern Sotho dialect) and Tshivenda are thrown into the mix. This is an ideal opportunity to develop languages that continue to be marginalised despite being official languages.

2. 5. 4. Phonology and orthography of Xitsonga

As shown in Figure 2.1 and Tables 2.1 and 2.2, Xitsonga phonology comprises vowels and consonants. It has five vowels: a [a] e [ɛ] i [i] o [ɔ] u [u]. The mid-high front vowel is realised as /e/, for example, *xelexo* [ʃɛleʃɔ] (that one). The mid-high back vowel /o/ and the mid-low back vowel [ɔ] are written as /o/, for example, *nhloko [nłokɔ]* (head). The high front vowel /i/ is written as *i* and the high back vowel /u/ as *u*, for example, *mbuti [mbuti]* (goat).

Figure 2. 1. Vowel system in Xitsonga (*Source: Baloyi 2012)*



Tsonga has a fairly large and complex system of consonants. However, there is much debate around the classification of consonants as phonemes, for example, whether *-nd-* is counted as a single albeit complex consonant and hence represented by a digraph (i.e., two letters representing a single sound) or as a consonant sequence of *n* and *d*. Janson (2001) claims that there are over 125 consonants in Xitsonga, both simple and complex, and each consonant is regarded as a phoneme. However, there are not minimal pairs to support all Janson's classification of phonemes, but he indicates that the richness and complexity of the consonant system in Xitsonga warrants treating each consonant and consonant variation as individual segments. Table 2.1 below shows Janson's classification of simple phonemes in Xitsonga.

Table 2. 1. Xitsonga consonants (*Source: Janson 2001, in Vratsanos & Kadenge 2017, p.5)*

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		T d				k g	
Nasal	m		n			ɲ	ŋ	
Trill			r					
Fricative	ß	f v	S z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ			h
Lateral Fricative			ɬ ɮ					
Approx			ɹ			j		
Lateral Approx			l					

Xitsonga also has 'whistled' sibilants similar to Shona, [sw/sv, tsw/tsv, dzw/dzv], referred to as labialised consonant clusters which are coarticulated with consonants /gw/, /lw/, /nw/. Xitsonga orthography contains singles, digraphs, trigraphs, 4-consonant sequences, and a few 5-consonant sequences as illustrated in Table 2.2 below. Moreover, it also uses loan sounds from languages such as Zulu, English, and Afrikaans.

Xitsonga makes use of the Latin alphabet. For example, the letter *x* from Portuguese orthography, which is pronounced [ʃ], occurs in words such as *xuxa* (while away time), *xikolo* (school), and *xilo* (thing) in Xitsonga. The spelling-sound correspondence in Xitsonga is transparent, which makes learning to read generally easier, as there is a one-to-one relationship between letters and sounds (graphemes and phonemes) (Ellis & Hooper 2001). However, other factors can make learning the code a bit more challenging, such as the larger consonant code. Tsonga also shares several cognates with Nguni languages such as isiZulu. Examples are given below.

Tsonga	**Zulu**	**Gloss**
1. *-dyá*	*-dlá*	to eat
2. *ncílá*	*úmsîla*	tail
3. *-bóha*	*-bópha*	to bind, tie
4. *nhlárhú*	*ínhlwathi*	python
5. *-rhándza*	*-thánda*	to love
6. *hahú*	*ĭphaphu*	lung
7. *havú*	*ínkâwu*	monkey
8. *ntsumbula*	*úmdúmbulá*	cassava

Although Xitsonga and isiZulu share several cognates, Xitsonga has a mainly disjunctive orthography while isiZulu has a conjunctive orthography. A disjunctive orthography means that some verbal elements are written separately from one another; for example, the sentence*, ndza famba* (I am leaving) in Xitsonga is written as two separate orthographic words, whereas in isiZulu the same sentence is conjunctively written as a single orthographic word *ngiyahamba*. In the conjunctive orthography of isiZulu, prefixes, and suffixes are joined to word roots to form long orthographic words with complex morphological structures (De Schryver 2010). Although there are some long words in Xitsonga, orthographically, Xitsonga written texts contain fewer long orthographic words compared to written Nguni texts.

2. 5. 5. Xitsonga grammar

Xitsonga, like many African languages, has a concatenative morphology, which makes it agglutinate by nature (Jones, Bosch, Pretorius & Prinsloo 2005). According to Haspelmath and Sims (2010, pp. 34-40), ‘concatenative morphology is when two or more morphemes are ordered one after the other, i.e., affixation and compounding (segmentation).’ Most words in agglutinating languages are made up of complex morphology whereby prefixes, infixes, and suffixes are added to noun and verb roots (Spaull et al. 2020).

Table 2. 2. The consonant system in Xitsonga

single consonants	Digraphs	2-consonant sequence	3-consonant sequence	trigraphs	4-consonant sequence	5-consonant sequence	Loan sounds
B	by bv						br brachi (English) bl blomu (Afrikaans)
C	ch cw						
D	dy dz dl			dzw			
F							fr friji (English)
G	gw						gc gcina (isiZulu) gq gqoka (isiZulu) gqw gqweta (isiZulu)
H	hl			hlw			
K	kh kw			khw			khr khrayoni (English) kl klasi (English) kr mukreste (English)
L	lw						
M		mb mh mp mv mf mp mt	mby mbh mpf mbv mph		mpfh mbvh		
N	nw ng nh nj nk ny nc nk nt ny ns nx			ndl ndh ndy ndz ngh nhl nkw nch ntl nts nkw ntw ndy nkh	nghw ntsh ntlh ntsw ndlw ndzh ndlw	ndzhw ntshw	ngh nghilazi (English) ngq ngqondo (isiZulu)
P	pf ph py			phy pfh			
Q	qh qu			ogw			
R	rh			rhw			rh rhediyo (English)
S	sw						sk faskoti (Afrikaans)
T	ts tw ty			thy tlh tsh tlw	tshw		th thelevhixini (English) tl tliloko (English)
V	vh						
W	wh						
X	xw						

The basic form of the verb in Xitsonga consists of an infinitive prefix + a root + a verb-final suffix; for example, *ku vona* (to see) consists of the infinitive prefix *ku,* the root *von-* and the verb-final suffix *-a.* While verbs in Xitsonga may also include various prefixes and suffixes, the root always forms the lexical core of a word. Krüger (2006, p. 36) describes the root as a 'lexical morpheme, which does not include a grammatical morpheme; it cannot occur independently as in the case with words; it constitutes the lexical meaning of a word, and it belongs quantitatively to open class.'

Noun classes in Xitsonga

Like other Southern African Bantu languages, Xitsonga has noun classes identified according to various categories of prefixes. The noun class prefixes are shown in Table 2.3.

Xitsonga has noun classes 1 to 21, except for classes 12 and 13, with their associated prefixes (e.g., mu-, va-, mi, etc.) as in other African languages. Unlike the Nguni languages, none of the class markers in Xitsonga are vowel initial. Noun classes 1 and 2 are explicitly used in reference to humans in the singular *mu-* and plural *va-* forms. The singular noun class 1a does not have a prefix, but its plural counterpart 2a has *va-*. Class 2a is different from class 2 of *va-* because the latter has a high tone. The prefixes of classes 3 to 10 are commonly used to refer to tangible things in Xitsonga.

Table 2. 3. The noun class prefixes of Xitsonga

Class	**Prefix (Singular)**	**Class**	**Prefix (Plural)**	**Example**	**Example**
				Singular	**Plural**
1	mu-	2	va-	*mufana* (boy)	*vafana* (boys)
1a	-	2a	va-	*hahani* (aunt)	*vahahani* (aunts)
3	mu-	4	mi-	*muroho* (vegetable)	*miroho* (vegetables)
5	ri-	6	ma-	*ribye* (stone)	*maribye* (stones)
7	xi-	8	swi-	*xilo* (thing)	*swilo* (things)
9	yi(n)	10	ti(n)	*yindlu* (house)	*tiyindlu* (houses)
11	ri-			*rihlaya* (jaw)	
14	vu-	-	-	*vutomi* (life)	-
15	ku-	-	-	*ku dya* (to eat)	-
21	dyi-	6	ma-	*dyinhloko* (big head)	madyinhloko

In classes 9 and 10, *yi-* is present when the noun stem has one syllable. The prefix of class 11 is the same as class 5; however, the pluralisation of class 11 occurs in class 10, whereas that of class 5 occurs in class 6. The noun class of prefix 14 refers to a wide range of things, but they are usually uncountable in Xitsonga, so they are not used in the plural form. The prefix of class 15 *ku-* only appears in derivation from a particular verb. Classes 16/17/18/19/20 are locative nouns. Their prefixes include *ha-, ku-, and mu-*, but they no longer function in Xitsonga – where they appear, they are used as follows:

Class	Prefix	Example
16	*ha-*	*hansi* (below)
17	*ku-*	*kusuhi* (near)

As shown in Table 2.3, the prefix of class 21 *dyi-* does not have nouns of its own; it appears only in a singular form. Prefix *dyi-* is useful when attached to noun stems belonging to other groups. It has an augmentative function; for example, one can say *dyinhloko* (big head) to mock a person. It should also be noted that the prefix *dyi-* uses the prefix *ma-* of class 6 to pluralise nouns; for example, the plural of *dyinhloko* is *madyinhloko* (big heads).

Personal pronouns in Xitsonga

Personal pronouns in Xitsonga are similar to those of many other Bantu languages, with few variations. They are classified as the first person (the speaker), second person (the one spoken to), and the third person (the one spoken about). Grammatical number (singular and plural) also classifies these personal pronouns, but there is no distinction between subject and object. Each subject noun has a corresponding concord or agreement morpheme that precedes the verbal element. The spelling of the pronoun and the verb in the third person plural is the same, but the tone is different. Table 2.4 shows examples of personal pronouns in Xitsonga.

Table 2. 4. Personal Pronouns

	1st sg.	**2nd sg.**	**3rd sg.**	**1st pl.**	**2nd pl.**	**3rd pl.**
Pronoun	*mina* (I)	*wena* (you)	*yena* (he, she, it)	*hina* (we)	*n'wina* (you)	*vona* (they)
Agreement morpheme	*ndzi, ndza*	*u, wa*	*u, wa*	*hi, ha*	*mi, ma*	*va*
Example sentences	*Mina ndzi vona huku* (I see a chicken). *Mina ndza yi vona* (I see it).	*Wena u vona huku* (You see a chicken). *Wena wa yi vona* (You see it).	*Yena u vona huku* (He/she/it sees a chicken). *Yena wa yi vona* (He/she/it sees it).	*Hina hi vona huku* (We see a chicken). *Hina ha yi vona* (We see it).	*N'wina mi vona huku* (You see a chicken). *N'wina ma yi* (You see it).	*Vona va vona huku* (They see a chicken). *Vona va yi vona* (They see it).

In sum, Xitsonga is an agglutinating language, but with a disjunctive orthography, fairly large consonant code, but transparent orthography. It has quite a long written history compared to many African languages, but there are not many reading books for children in Tsonga.

2. 6. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN EARLY READING ACROSS LANGUAGES

In the previous section, information about Xitsonga language was provided. This section discusses the similarities and differences in early reading across various languages to better situate Xitsonga within this landscape.

Research suggests that when studying a complex phenomenon like reading, it is important to understand how it works across languages and identify which aspects of reading are generic and work similarly across languages, and which aspects are affected by the particular characteristics of a language and are therefore language-specific. Cognitive factors (working memory, inferencing, prediction and executive control) and comprehension processes appear to be similar across languages (literal questions tend to be easier than inferential or integrative ones; story schemas may be similar across languages, etc.), but decoding is more language-specific. Although there are similarities in early reading across alphabetic languages, different orthographic and linguistic features also make early reading development in decoding differ across languages in many ways.

2. 6. 1. Similarities in early reading across languages

Although all languages are unique, phonological awareness across alphabetic languages is counted as one of the pre-literate skills in the acquisition of reading and spelling (Durgonoğlu & Öney 1999; Aro 2004; Ziegler et al. 2010; Sadeghi & Everatt 2018). It has been widely demonstrated that phonological awareness is important in early reading development in both transparent and opaque languages. For example, in a cross-linguistic study of Grade 2 learners' (*N*=1,265) word reading, phonological decoding, phonological awareness, RAN, phonological short-term memory (PSTM), non-verbal IQ, and vocabulary across five European languages, namely Finnish, Hungarian, Dutch (transparent), Portuguese and French (opaque), findings revealed that phonological awareness was associated with reading performance in each language (Ziegler et al. 2010). Phonological awareness also seems to develop in a predictable

pattern, and progresses from larger units of sound in all alphabetic languages, i.e., from words to syllables and to phonemes (Treiman & Zukowski 1991; Chaney 1992; Johnson, Anderson & Holligan 1996).

Another similarity is that letter-sound knowledge is critical for word decoding in all alphabetic languages. This can be evidenced from several studies (e.g., Georgiou et al. 2010; Coskun et al. 2011; Kim & Piper 2019a; Spaull et al. 2020). For example, in a longitudinal study of reading and spelling across languages, Georgiou et al. (2010) tested English (*n*=82) (an analytic language with opaque orthography), Greek (*n*=70) (an inflectional language with largely transparent orthography) and Finnish (*n*=88) (an agglutinating language with transparent orthography) speaking children from pre-primary until Grade 2. Pre-primary learner assessment included phonological awareness, letter-sound knowledge, and rapid naming speed, while Grade 2 assessment included non-word decoding, text reading fluency, and spelling. Findings revealed that the model of non-word decoding in Greek was similar to that of Finnish (both consistent languages), while the model of spelling in Greek was similar to that of English. The results further revealed that letter-sound knowledge dominated the prediction in each language.

In alphabetic languages, decoding skills are commonly assessed using word reading measures in and out of context. Research in agglutinating languages such as Turkish (Miller, Kargin & Guldenoglu 2014; Miller, Guldenoglu & Kargin 2019) and African languages (e.g., Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu) (Spaull et al. 2020) has shown that real words are processed faster that non-words in all the alphabetic languages. This is to be expected because non-words have no meaning and are therefore not visually familiar. For example, in their large scale study of Grade 3 learners across three African languages in South Africa, Spaull et al. (2020) found that Grade 3 learners performed better in single word reading relative to non-word reading, e.g., in Northern Sotho (19.3 vs. 12.5), in Xitsonga (18.2 vs. 14.8) and in isiZulu (17.8 vs. 13.5). Reading speed (as measured by ORF) is important in decoding in alphabetic languages, but ORF norms will differ across languages and orthographies.

Reading comprehension across the alphabetic languages relies on inter alia, the learners' ability to decode words accurately and fluently (Padeliadu & Antoniou 2013; Pretorius et al. 2016; Kim & Piper 2019a; McClung & Pearson 2019; Spaul et al. 2020).

2. 6. 2. Differences in early reading across languages

The rate of learning to read in the early years differs across languages. Although phonological decoding (also referred to as phonological recoding) is a critical component across languages, the degree of transparency affects the rate of learning. Data suggest that in opaque languages such as English, decoding occurs at more than one linguistic level than transparent languages because many words in English are not readily decodable and tend to be learned as a whole or are partially decodable (e.g., *once*, *she*, *tough*). To become an efficient English reader, children need to acquire orthography-phonology. Basically, there is a phonological route for decodable words and a lexical route for opaque words (Marcolini, Burani & Colombo 2009; Maionchi-Pino, Magnan & Ecalle 2010). In transparent orthographies, most children go the phonological route until the orthography is well mapped in memory. In Finnish, for example, many word roots have over 2,000 different word forms (similar to all the word forms for *vona* (them) in Xitsonga, depending on the context in which they occur (Huemer, Aro, Landerl & Lyytinen 2010). This would put a high demand on orthographic mapping in memory; having highly efficient phonological decoding processing in agglutinating languages reduces the orthographic memory load, except for highly frequent (and shorter) word forms. This makes learning to read in transparent orthographies easier than opaque languages such as English, French, Portuguese, etc. (Davies, Cuetos & Glez-Seijas 2007; Ijalba & Obler 2015; Hengeveld & Leufkens 2018). Children learning to read in transparent languages can reach high levels of accuracy by the end of Grade 1, whereas English children may only reach this later in Grade 2.

However, besides code opaqueness, there are also other factors that can make learning to read more challenging. Even though all the alphabetic languages use consonants and vowels, they may vary in terms of both number and type of phonemes, where there may be some with larger or smaller phonemic inventories. For example, Xitsonga has five vowels and 125 consonants (Janson 2001), British English has over 20 vowel sounds comprising 10 single vowels, several vowel diphthongs and some triphthongs, and 21 to 24 consonants, whereas isiXhosa has five vowels and up to 69 consonants (Cappa, Fernando & Giulivi 2012).

Unlike English, which is an analytic language and does not have a rich morphological system, the nine African languages spoken in South Africa are all rich in agglutinating, whereby

prefixes, infixes, and suffixes are added to noun and verb stems (Spaull et al. 2020). As a result of their rich agglutinating structures, morphological processing may pose particular challenges for children in learning to read (Bosch, Jones, Pretorius & Anderson 2007).

Another language-specific feature which may play an important role in reading in alphabetic languages is syllable complexity. Like many other transparent languages, Tsonga has a simple syllabic structure, consisting of V or CV syllables, which allows readers to attend the smallest grain size – 'the amount of orthographic information readers must process to read' (Trudell & Schroeder 2007, p. 3).

Unlike transparent languages, English readers, like other inconsistent orthographies, rely on both decodable words and sight words to read high-frequency common words such as *eat, it, sea, see, sit, seat*, etc. (Seymour 2004).

Studies in African agglutinative languages have found that the conjunctively written Nguni languages are visually more complex to read than disjunctive languages such as Xitsonga and Northern Sotho because they have longer word units. For example, Spaull et al. (2020) found that the Grade 2 and 3 learners' oral reading fluency rate in isiZulu (21 wcpm) was slower compared to Xitsonga (41 wcpm) and Northern Sotho (39 wcpm) learners. According to Spaull et al. (2020), slow reading rates for words in context among isiZulu learners may suggest that they experience difficulties in reading longer words used in their Nguni languages, as opposed to Xitsonga and Northern Sotho languages, which besides having some long words, also have many short grammatical morphemes, resulting in shorter mean length of words and hence faster reading rates.

Although research has shown that the orthographic consistency is a significant factor in determining how children learn to read, the structures and features of alphabetic languages may have implications for reading development regardless of whether they are shallow or opaque. In the next section, developmental trajectories in early reading according to Chall and Stern et al.'s model of reading are presented.

2. 7. THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORIES IN EARLY READING

In this section, I consider the developmental pathway of early reading by first providing an overview of reading according to Chall's model (1983) and then consider Stern et al's (2018) perspectives on early reading, based on stages revealed by EGRA data.

Early reading and later reading are two phases involved in the developmental stages of 'learning to read' and 'reading to learn.' However, it is clear from earlier discussions in this chapter that the acquisition of different skills in reading do not develop at once – some skills develop earlier than others and form the base on which later skills are built. The process begins in several places, such as with stories read to children and reading environmental print. Phonological and phonemic awareness skills are gateways to developing letter-sound knowledge. Phonics skills (e.g., letter knowledge, letter-sound correspondences, blending letter-sounds and encoding) enable the beginning readers to decode known and unknown words. As children slowly gain mastery of decoding aspects, the role of early reading skills changes as later reading accomplishments come into place. For example, letter-sound knowledge is critical for early reading, but by Grade 4 letter-sound knowledge is usually so highly automated that it would not feature as a predictor of reading comprehension, while differences in inferencing skills and vocabulary between children would be better predictors of differences in their reading comprehension. In order to understand the process of learning to read as the main focus in this study, and to show that children vary in their learning capabilities, one needs to situate reading within a developmental perspective to see how different reading skills transition from one level to another.

2. 7. 1. Chall's reading model

The reading model of Chall (1983, in Steinman, LeJeune & Kinbrough 2006) includes six stages of reading development (beginning from stage 0 to stage 5), which change with maturity and skill. Although her reading model is quite general with regard to early reading, it was chosen in this study because it reflects different developmental stages that move from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn' (i.e., transition is determined by age and grade demands).

Stages 0 to 2 are the phases where children are still 'learning to read' (i.e., they are still acquiring and practicing the foundational skills necessary to comprehend their reading text).

Stage 0: Pre-reading (from birth through 6 years), where children mostly develop their language skills and show interest in reading by often pretending to read. Interactive storybook reading helps children in stage 0 recognise letters and develop a schema for understanding stories read to them.

Stage 1: Initial reading or decoding (from 6 to 7-years) occurs in Grade 1, where children develop knowledge of the alphabet and recognise high-frequency words that contain one-or two-syllable words in English.[10] Children may know about 6,000 words, but they can only read about 600 in print in Grade 1.

Stage 2: Confirmation of decoding and fluency (between 7 and 8 years) during Grades 2 to 3 where children's decoding skills are further developed, and the reading of simple words becomes accurate and automised. At the end of stage 2, children should read and understand about 3,000 words (through explicit instruction) and understand about 9,000 words (through incidental learning) in English, mainly in narrative texts. Listening comprehension is better developed than reading comprehension by the end of this stage.

In stages 3 to 5, the focus is on 'reading to learn' which takes learners on their journey of becoming increasingly independent readers. They still read narrative texts, but information texts become important.

Stage 3: Reading for learning new information (Grades 4 through 8) exposes learners to a range of longer and increasingly more complex linguistic structures in texts, they move beyond familiar topics to more infamiliar and abstract topics and they are exposed to other text structures in information texts (description, categorization, compare and contrast, cause-effect) beyond the simple problem-resolution structure of early narratives texts in order to 'read to learn.' Learners expand and deepen their vocabulary and background knowledge at this stage.

[10] Chall's model is based on English data. The general trend may be the same across languages, but the language-specific details may differ.

Stage 4: Different viewpoints expressed within and across different texts (Grade 9 through 12) require high school readers to interact with more complex texts that share multiple views and concepts.

Stage 5: Construction and reconstruction of texts (post-secondary school) where students at college/university are expected to use their well-developed skills to construct and deconstruct knowledge at a high level of abstraction and generality.

High levels of decoding fluency enable readers to read large volumes of text, and vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge and knowledge of text genre and structure become increasingly important in reading comprehension.

2. 7. 2. Stern, Dubeck and Dick's perspectives on early reading

Based on EGRA data for oral reading fluency and reading comprehension from Grade 2 readers in Bahasa Indonesia, the reading model proposed by Stern and colleagues includes five learning profiles of readers in different stages of decoding/comprehension ability on a reading development continuum. These profiles are: non-readers, emergent/beginning readers, basic/instructional readers, fluent readers, and grade level readers. Much like the EGRA tool, Stern et al.'s framework of early reading profile was developed for adaptation to other languages to make it accessible to various stakeholders that support struggling readers. Although it originally described reading profiles using features specific to Bahasa learners, these profiles can be described more generally, with language-specific details inserted where necessary.

***Non-readers*:** According to Stern et al. (2018), this category represents children who cannot yet read. Carnine, Silbert and Kame'enui (1997) describe non-readers as individuals who have not acquired decoding skills to help them read words accurately and with automaticity. The learning profile of this nature requires effective instruction in the foundational skills, which may include phonological and phonemic awareness, letter-sound identification and learning to write letters and words. Children also need to read accurately before they can read fluently. If they can't read words yet, fluency is not going to happen yet.

***Emergent readers*:** These are beginning readers who are still learning letter-sound relationships. At this level, children may decode letter by letter into its corresponding sound and combine all the letter-sounds to form a single word. Reading at this level is dominated by

inaccuracy, somewhat jerky reading and limited comprehension. Intervention strategies should focus on children reading simple little texts everyday to help them practice their decoding skills. By the end of Grade 1, children are expected to have developed an understanding of the alphabet, phonological awareness, and early phonics. They can also read some high-frequency words and short, simple texts.

***Instructional readers*:** This learning profile describes learners who have not yet reached accuracy levels to support automaticity in reading. Their reading rate increases, but they still read slowly and are unlikely to properly understand what they have read. Reading instruction in this category is beneficial if it focuses on improving decoding and fluency skills.

***Fluent* readers:** Fluent readers are automatic and accurate in their word recognition skills, but they are better at understanding and making simple inferences, but not yet good at integrating information globally and reading critically. These children will need support with vocabulary and strengthening of comprehension skills to help them make sense of what they are reading.

***Grade-level readers*:** Children in this category are fluent and read with understanding. In order to help these children progress further and become more independent readers, they should have interaction with varied texts of increasing levels of complexity. Table 2.5 below summarises Stern et al.'s reading development of foundational literacy skills.

Table 2. 5. Learning and reading trajectories of Grade 3s *(Source: Stern et al. 2018)*

Category	Learner profile	Reading interventions
Non-reader	This category refers to a reader who has no letter-sound knowledge. They can't read a single word from a passage.	These children would benefit from instruction in foundational skills, including letter identification and learning to write letters and words.
Emergent reader	At this category, there is a higher level of inaccuracy in word identification, a child can read less than half of the overall passage, and comprehension of what is read is also limited. A child at this level can read a range of words correct per minute (1-29 in Bahasa). Ardington et al. (2020) suggest that all Nguni language learners (Zulu, Xhosa and Swati) should be able to read at least 35 words correct per minute by the end of Grade 3.	Children would benefit from instruction in word identification and reading simple little texts every day to help children practice their decoding skill.
Instructional reader	Here, there is improvement in reading, but it is still done slowly. The child only understands	Children can benefit from instruction that includes practice with Grade 2 level text

	some of what is read (in Bahasa, a child read at least 47 words correct per minute).	to recognise words more quickly and improve comprehension.
Fluent reader but not yet grade level	A child can identify words automatically and accurately but still has a lower understanding of the text. Reading is more fluent but still below grade level (a child in Bahasa can read at least 57 words correct per minute).	Needs instruction to improve understanding of the text, mainly through improved vocabulary to support comprehension.
Grade-level reader	Reading in terms of fluency and comprehension is at the grade level (a child in Bahas can read at least 71 words correct per minute). Performance at the comprehension level is 80% or more.	Children would benefit from instruction that engages them with text and comprehension activities that are more complex than the EGRA passage they encountered.

The research shows a steady increase in decoding fluency (as measured by ORF) and reading comprehension and their interactions, and teachers should be aware of this. It also alerts teachers to look out for children who are lagging behind and give them the necessary support. As shown in Table 2.5, learning profiles are identified according to various reading abilities which are similar across languages but differ across orthographies in terms of the specific fluency norms (e.g., words correct per minute). There is also inclusion of the type of instructional support that can be used to remedy the learning barrier. The assumption is that as progress occurs in the assigned learning profile, the learner should advance to the next level. Research findings have also confirmed that grouping learners according to their learning strengths has positive academic effects, but keeping them permanently in those groups may have negative implications (Ward 1987).

Stern et al. (2018) use the EGRA toolkit to help identify the different reading profiles. These profiles are also considered in the current study to look at what kind of reading profiles might be especially common at Grade 1 level. Even before coming to the EGRA data in the current study, if we apply Stern et al.'s profiles to Grade 1s in South Africa, it is expected at the beginning of the year that most learners will be in the first two (non-reader or emergent reader) profiles, but by the end of the year, most of them should be in profile 3, 4 or 5 (most of the children should be able to read something) in terms of foundational literacy skills. However, this developmental trajectory will only happen if there is quality teaching. But, as has already been referenced in these first two chapters, much research has shown that many South African learners perform poorly in reading literacy and many grade-level classes end up being what

Scholler (2018) refers to multi-grade classes (i.e., there is little homogeneity within a grade, performance is so dispersed that a single grade level class (Grade 3) can have learners who know nothing (e.g., like Grade Rs), know a little bit (like Grade 1s) to learners who are quite skilled (can read fluently and independently at Grade 3 level).

Although the researchers referred to in this section differ slightly in their details of reading development, their views certainly complement one another. Chall explicitly showed how reading development is aligned with a specific developmental age and grade and type of text read. Thus, if children have not acquired enough language or vocabulary skills when they enter their first grade or reading skills at the end of a particular age (6 to 8) and grade (Grade 1 to 3), such children are at risk for reading difficulty (Snow et al. 1998). According to Stern et al. (2018), they may require intervention which needs to focus specifically on remedying the reading skill identified as a problem.

Chapter 5 in this study provides longitudinal data on the Grade 1 learners' reading trajectory in xITsonga from baseline to endline and sketches what their reading profiles look like. Even though there are various contributory factors to learners' poor performance in reading, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (§1.2.1), §2.3, poor foundational literacy skills may also be the result of reading difficulties, which are explained in the following subsection.

2. 7. 3. Reading difficulties in the FP

Reading difficulties include having problems decoding words, reading slowly and inaccurately, reading without expression and not understanding what is read. Although many learners may be struggling to read in the classroom, the reasons for their reading difficulties may not be the same. For some, it could be inadequate language proficiency, vocabulary skills, or alphabetic knowledge, while others may be having difficulties with reading words accurately or fluently or having difficulties with comprehension. Some might have learning or cognitive challenges (e.g., children with dyslexia have phonological processing problems, often inherited from a family member). As mentioned in §2.3, some learners may find 'learning to read' easier because of being exposed to reading materials and print-rich environments before school. Yaseen (2013) argues that most reading difficulties are caused by elements of the child's environment at home, at play, and in school. School-based factors that contribute to reading difficulties include language issues (HL and LoLT), the focus of instructional attention, and

teacher knowledge and orientation to reading (Pretorius & Klapwijk 2016). Although reading is recognised as the most important learning skill, research shows that many South African learners struggle with reading. Despite learner diversity, teachers in South Africa may find it difficult to provide effective instruction that meets individual learner needs. For example, Mahlo (2017) found that FP teachers are unable to cater for learner diversity due to large classes, lack of parental support, inadequate training for teachers, and social problems of the learners.

Problems identified above as hindrances in providing instructional support to struggling readers are prevalent in classes where teachers still adopt whole-class instruction (the traditional way of teaching). These challenges can be resolved by training teachers how to differentiate instruction (i.e., teaching according to individual learning needs and using different reading strategies) in the classroom, by increasing their content knowledge and pedagogic knowledge, by familiarising them with the different stages that readers go through, by training them how to identify reading challenges at each stage, and how to remediate them. Stern et al. (2018) also emphasise the significance of involving parents in the education of their children by advising them how to support their children's educational activities at home, arguing that even if parents have limited or no reading ability, their involvement in terms of encouraging or motivating children may have higher chances of influencing children's academic success.

Furthermore, despite managing large classes, Stern and colleagues also state that teachers can still support learners who require more attention by first assessing them to identify their reading levels and, thereafter, using the assessment record to categorise these learners into different learning profiles. Teachers can then focus their attention on the specific needs of a particular group of learners while keeping others engaged in other reading activities. This is also in line with CAPS recommendations whereby FP teachers are expected to conduct baseline assessment and use group guided reading activities to attend to individual learner needs. The new *National Framework for the Teaching of reading in African Languages* by the DBE (2019) also strongly recommends identifying the cracks before they become gaps and provides clear guidelines on how to identify literacy cracks in all the early foundational skills (detailed discussion of the curriculum happens in the next chapter). The saying 'prevention is better than cure' relates well with Stern et al.'s learner profiles in reading acquisition. Thus, despite having

learners with reading difficulties in FP classes, if teachers identify children with problems early and intervene promptly by providing learners with effective reading instruction appropriate to their reading level, academic failure could be minimised.

The above discussion clearly states that reading needs to be consciously taught and learned. However, it is important to note that even though research has identified various stages or categories that place children at a particular reading level, the rate at which children acquire different reading skills may not be the same and may also vary slightly from language to language. As stated throughout this chapter, the varied learning levels may be due to SES, the level of foundational skills, the orthographic features of the written language or what is happening in the classroom during teaching and learning time.

2. 8. CONCLUSION

In order to situate this study within a broader theoretical reading landscape, this chapter first outlined what reading entails, discussed the purpose of reading, and reading in relation to alphabetic writing systems. This was followed by a discussion of reading comprehension, the foundational components of early reading in alphabetic texts, and how they enable comprehension. Next, macro factors that influence reading, such as the home, were discussed, followed by an outline of theories of reading development. This was followed by a discussion of the Xitsonga language, its role in education, media, literature, and its orthography and grammar as well as the similarities and differences in early reading across languages. The concluding discussion focused on developmental trajectories in early reading and problems that can arise.

This chapter focused mainly on early reading development in the HL. The next chapter discusses the pedagogic issues related to early reading in South Africa.

CHAPTER 3

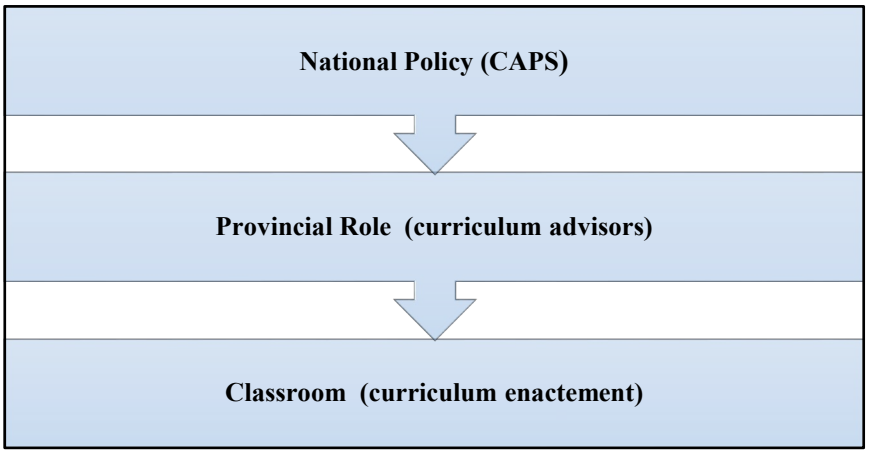
LITERATURE REVIEW OF

PEDAGOGIC ISSUES RELATED TO EARLY READING

3. 0. INTRODUCTION

To properly understand reading development in Xitsonga, one needs to understand the broader context in which it is embedded since early reading trajectories are largely determined by what happens in learners' homes and schools. Even though the home environment plays an important role in reading development, this study focuses on early reading in the school context. This chapter reviews pedagogic issues at three levels which are related to early grade reading, as illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3. 1. Hierarchical levels: Early grade curricula, national, provincial, classroom



Firstly, I will focus on the national level by explaining what is happening in South Africa in terms of reading performance, what the curriculum looks like and what is available in terms of allocation of resources in FP. This will be followed by consideration of the provincial level in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the district curriculum advisors who are the relevant officials at the level of institutional management to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the curriculum. Finally, I will review the literature on foundational classroom practices in the South African context to identify what happens in the classroom that makes the greatest difference to children's literacy outcomes.

3. 1. NATIONAL POLICY: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CAPS IN THE FP

This section explains reading performance in SA, followed by an explanation of what the curriculum entails, a brief outline on its history, a presentation of CAPS as a balanced and differentiated curriculum, and finally, a brief outline of the allocation of resources in the FP.

3. 1. 1. Reading achievement and trends in SACMEQ II, III and IV

SACMEQ is a project for monitoring the quality of education in southern and eastern African countries. It assesses the quality of education at the primary school level by testing literacy and numeracy levels of Grade 6 learners. The SACMEQ results (Table 3.1) from 2000, 2007 and 2013 (Shabalala, Nxumalo & Shongwe n.d.) provide a clear picture of which African countries are doing better in reading and which ones are not.

Table 3. 1. Trends in achievement levels of Grade 6 learners in the SACMEQ countries

	Learner reading score per country				
Country	**2000 (II)**	**2007 (III)**	**2013 (IV)**	**Diff (2000-2007)**	**Diff (2007-2013)**
Seychelles	582	575	608.9	-7	33.9
Kenya	547	543	587.8	-4	-44.8
Tanzania	546	578	?	32	?
Mauritius	536	574	577.6	38	-3.6
Swaziland	530	549	570.1	19	-21.1
Botswana	521	535	567.1	14	-32.1
South Africa	492	495	538.3	3	43.3
Namibia	449	497	537.8	48	40.8
Zanzibar	478	540	525.7	62	-14.3
Uganda	482	479	512.0	-3	33
Lesotho	452	468	510.7	-16	42.7
Zimbabwe	505	508	508.4	3	0.4
Malawi	429	434	457.7	5	23.7
Zambia	440	434	456.1	-6	22.1
Mozambique	517	476	?	-41	
SACMEQ mean	500	507	513.3		

Source: Shabalala, Nxumalo & Shongwe n.d. International results: SACMEQ IV draft report.

Even though it is not early grade reading that is assessed in SACMEQ, the results suggest that many Grade 6 learners are struggling to read, meaning that lower down in the FP, early grade reading probably was not laid very well. The SACMEQ results of 2000 and 2007 (Table 3.1) revealed that of 15 African countries that participated in the reading assessments, South Africa

vacillated between 9th and 10th place, below the SACMEQ mean score of 500. Although there was a gain of scores in the 2013 round, the top-performing countries (Seychelles, Mauritius, Kenya, Swaziland and Botswana), some of which are economically weaker than South Africa, showed higher achievement levels than ours. It is interesting to note that South Africa spends a lot on education, but reading and mathematics performance is not showing strong benefits yet. Thus, there is a lot that still needs to be done to match the top-performing countries. As stated in Chapter 1 (§1.2), several large-scale assessment outcomes (MLA 1999; PIRLS 2006, 2001, and 2016) indicate that most South African learners perform below international and national benchmarks in reading literacy compared to other countries. A high proportion of Grade 6 learners assessed in SACMEQ III (2007) had clearly not even mastered the most basic reading skills (Van der Berg et al. 2011), which raises questions about the role of education policy (by way of curriculum, for example) and how it affects the course of reading development in African HL languages.

3. 1. 2. What is the curriculum?

'Teaching in schools is too complicated to have teachers decide at the last minute what to teach' (English 2010, p. 11); hence, there is a need for a functional curriculum. The word curriculum comes from a Latin verb 'currere,' which means 'racing chariot' or 'race track' (Barrow & Milburn 1990, p. 84; Pratt 1994, p. 5). The curriculum thus refers to a course designed to be implemented according to what is prescribed within a specified time frame. Epstein (2007, p. 5) describes it as the knowledge and skills that teachers are expected 'to teach and what children are expected to learn, and the plans for experiences through which learning will take place.'

The early grade curriculum is important for guiding teachers in knowing how to teach and what to teach to help children acquire basic numeracy and literacy skills. The curriculum provides an overall structure for teaching and learning throughout the school year. This includes the content and methodologies for teaching and learning, the amount of time spent on each subject, how school assessments should be managed, the funds that schools have for resources (referred to as the Learner and Teacher Support Materials (LTSM) budget in South Africa, how much reading children should do, and so on.

3. 1. 3. The history of CAPS

After 1994, South Africa went through several curriculum changes which led to the introduction of outcome-based education (OBE) in the beginning of 1997 by the then Minister of Education, Sibusiso Bhengu. This was an attempt to transform South African society and change the education system from its past inequalities. The OBE curriculum policies were perhaps too ambitious and idealistic for the South African context. Taking a curriculum designed for high-income countries with high levels of literacy, well-resourced education systems and highly qualified teaching corps and importing it into a totally different context, created serious challenges and raised criticism against its implementation. The experience of trying to implement OBE led to the first Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) Grades R to 9 and the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10 to 12 in 2002. Ongoing implementation challenges resulted in another recommendation of the review of the RNCS Grades R to 9 and Grades 10 to 12 in 2009, replacing it with a single comprehensive CAPS Grades R to 12 in 2011. The current curriculum policy was developed to replace subject statements, learning programme guidelines, and subject assessment guidelines in Grades R to 12. The introduction of Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was an attempt to bring more explicit content into the curriculum to counter the implicit approach of OBE and also to change traditional whole-class classroom practices in South African schools to more differentiated ways of teaching. In other words, it was meant to rectify the inadequacies of OBE by providing clear curriculum guidelines. To achieve these goals, CAPS adopted an integrated/balanced approach (as explained below), which gives FP children opportunities to develop reading literacy skills in their HL(s) for a period of three years, from Grades 1 to 3.

3. 1. 4. A balanced approach to teaching reading

There is a robust debate in early reading instruction about what a balanced approach to teaching reading means. This stems from two prominent instructional approaches, namely the phonics and the whole language approaches, especially in the English speaking world, which led to the so-called ‘reading wars’ in the 1980s and 1990s. The phonics approach emphasises the importance of teaching the code explicitly and systematically. However, teaching the code explicitly does not mean that it is the only important part of reading. On the other hand, the whole language approach is developed by encouraging children to use their language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) to read fluently and make sense of what they are

reading. Explicit phonics instruction is frowned upon and regarded as too mechanistic and not meaningful. To try and bring an end to the animosity of the reading wars in the USA, the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) was constituted to review the research literature and come up with recommendations. It recommended effective reading instruction called the balanced approach. As already mentioned in Chapter 1 (§1.3), the NRP comprised 14 individuals, scientists in reading research, and representatives of college of education, reading teachers, educational administrators and parents. As stated in Chapter 1 (§1.3), the NRP was established at the request of Congress in 1997 with the aim of assessing the effectiveness of different approaches used in teaching reading during early learning. After examining research findings from 52 studies on the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency, reading comprehension, etc., the panel found that explicit and systematic teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics improves children's reading and spelling. This approach combines explicit and systematic phonics teaching with holistic approaches to reading, focusing on meaning construction, engagement with texts, and immersing children in reading and writing activities. Five core components are regarded as critical to reading development, viz., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Because different skills are developed and integrated, this gives children opportunities to discover that they can use the knowledge gained from previous skills to enhance the learning of other skills.

CAPS follows this balanced approach to reading instruction during early learning. This means that teaching reading in the FP relies on the development of the five basic components mentioned above, as recommended by the NRP (2000). To these, five different reading methods/activities are added, namely Shared Reading, Group Guided Reading, Paired Reading/Independent Reading as well as Teacher Read-Alouds. Explicit phonics activity is also given its own daily 15 minutes teaching slot. Each of the basic components and reading methods are discussed below.

3. 1. 4. 1. Five basic components of teaching reading in the FP

According to CAPS, the basic components of reading should be taught explicitly and practiced daily with the help of a reading teacher. Archer and Hughes (2011, p. 1) describe explicit instruction as

> instruction which is characterised by a series of supports or scaffolds, whereby learners are guided through the learning process with clear statements about the purpose and rationale for learning the new skill, clear explanations, and demonstrations of the instructional target, and supported practice with feedback until independent mastery has been achieved.

The systematic and explicit instruction in the five basic components of reading is beneficial for all children, particularly those who are at risk of difficulties in learning to read, children from low SE backgrounds, indigenous children, and boys (William, Blair & William 2009). Guidelines in terms of how each of the basic components of reading should be taught in accordance with CAPS recommendations are provided below.

Phonological and phonemic awareness: CAPS recommends that phonological and phonemic awareness should be developed in Grade R and early in the first grade before the focus on phonics instruction begins. Developing phonological awareness in HL, according to CAPS, can be conducted through poems, songs, rhymes, clapping, etc., where the teacher can teach word, syllable and phoneme awareness through the identification, manipulation and blending of different sound units.

Phonics: As per CAPS recommendations, phonics instruction in the Grade 1 classroom should be conducted for not more than 15 minutes everyday in the week. Given that there are various methods of teaching phonics, CAPS recommends that schools may use programmes that support explicit and systematic teaching of phonics. Systematic phonics refers to teaching letter-sound correspondences in a clearly defined sequence (i.e., starting from the easiest to more complex skills) (Ehri 2003). The teaching of letter-sounds in Grade 1 is recommended to begin with frequently used sounds, and digraphs and more complex sequences taught later, in Grades 2 and 3. However, given that many of the digraphs, trigraphs and more complex consonant sequences occur frequently in African languages and because it is difficult to read even a simple text without encountering these sounds, this recommendation has since been revised in the *National Framework for Teaching Reading in African Languages in the Foundation Phase*, and teachers are now encouraged to teach high-frequency digraphs and trigraphs in the second half of Grade 1 (DBE 2019).

Teachers are also encouraged to keep in mind letter formation when teaching phonics; for example, letter *c* cannot be introduced before the letter *a*, and letter *l* must come before *h* and

b so that children can learn the letters beginning from the easiest to the more difficult ones. Phonics instruction and handwriting (15 minutes daily in Grade 1), according to CAPS, should happen together (one after another) to reinforce the reading and writing of letter-sounds and give learners time to practice their handwriting skills.

Comprehension: In terms of teaching comprehension, CAPS recommends that teachers ask a range of comprehension questions, not just literal ones. The teacher can facilitate this by modelling comprehension strategies during Shared Reading and also show the learners how to apply the strategies themselves during Group Guided Reading activities. CAPS recommends the following comprehension strategies in facilitating reading for meaning:

- *literal comprehension*: requires readers to identify, point out, read, describe, find, show, locate and state information and facts directly stated in the text;
- *reorganisation:* requires readers to group separate pieces of information by comparing, listing, contrasting, dividing, classifying, summarising, and responding to 'how' questions;
- *inferential comprehension:* provides readers with opportunities to use information in the text to respond to questions requiring them to make connections between what is stated and what is inferred or implied;
- *evaluation:* requires the reader to explore beyond the text by responding to questions that tap into opinions or evaluations;
- *appreciation:* provides readers with opportunities to express their feelings based on the text read by responding to questions such as *What did you think*? *Is this word/phrase effective*? *Do you know anyone like*? and *Why did you like/dislike*? (DBE 2011, pp. 16-17).

CAPS also recommends that teachers should encourage learners to monitor themselves during reading, recommending that learners should be taught to ask themselves questions such as *Does it sound right*? *Does it look right*? and *Does it make sense*?

***Vocabulary*:** CAPS recommends that teachers explain or demonstrate the meaning of the words, use examples to clarify meanings, display the new words and their meanings on a word wall or chart, etc.). Teachers can also use Shared Reading and Group Guided Reading times to teach children word attack skills, using their letter-sound knowledge to sound out the word.

For English as a First Additional Language (EFAL), CAPS recommends that EFAL learners should know at least 2,500 to 3,000 high-frequency words by the end of Grade 3. Because vocabulary development in African HLs is under-researched, CAPS does not provide specific guidelines for vocabulary development in African HLs in the FP.

***Fluency*:** CAPS suggests several activities that can be conducted during class readings to improve fluency for the young readers, such as teaching specific reading skills for decoding and word recognition, selecting texts appropriate to learners, providing interesting texts, rereading activities to help learners become familiar with the text, and increasing the volume of text read. It is also important for the teachers to have a range of reading resources so that learners can pick up any book that suits their interests and read freely during Paired/Independent reading time. However, CAPS does not suggest how children's reading fluency can be assessed in different languages nor does it provide benchmarks for fluency in the different languages.

The DBE has since introduced the EGRA tool to teachers and encouraged them to conduct baseline assessments at the beginning of each year to determine the literacy levels of their learners and assign them to different reading ability groups for Group Guided Reading.

3. 1. 4. 2. Different methods for teaching reading in the FP

Besides stating what should be taught during early reading, as part of following a balanced approach, CAPS specifies different methods that FP teachers are expected to use to teach early reading. This is an attempt to get teachers to move away from their fronted whole class teaching and chorusing techniques. As shown in Figure 3.2 below, CAPS prescribes six different strategies for teaching reading in the FP. 'Phonics instruction is in a different colour (shaded blue) as it forms the basis for reading at the alphabetic and word level' (DBE 2019, p. 81). The other reading strategies are shaded green because they are used for modelling and practicing reading in extended texts. Each one of the reading strategies is allocated a specific amount of time (typically no longer than 15 minutes per activity), as shown in Table 3.2. These varied strategies apply to whole-class teaching/learning and more individualised teaching in smaller groups or pairs (DBE 2011).

Figure 3. 2. Different methodologies for teaching reading in a balanced approach

Shared Reading (SR) is a process during which the teacher shares an enlarged text such as a big book with all the learners sitting on mats around the teacher's chair. The text should be displayed in such a way that it is visible to everyone. The goal of SR is for the teacher to model read the text, which is at the learners' level or slightly above, and to ask questions and discuss the text with the learners so that they can make sense of the text and read with expression. The whole purpose is to show learners how to read a text, engage with it, decode it, construct meaning as they read, ask questions, think aloud, learn new words, learn new things, etc.

SR is divided into three sections: before, during and after reading, which according to CAPS, should happen in the first 15 minutes of the reading and writing focus time, usually over three days, where different aspects of the same text are read and discussed. Teachers can decide how many sessions there will be in those days. Often two, three, or four sessions can be planned per text, depending on what the teacher decides to do with each text. SR should take place in a relaxed learning environment.

For teachers to know what to do during SR, they need to select a teaching focus or a combination of things that can either be on phonics, a language feature, a print 'convention' (such as punctuation or the use of speech bubbles), referring to visuals to support reading, etc. This will provide the teacher with the teaching focus for the next sessions. Preparing questions (which should include literal and inferential questions) for the SR beforehand will keep the learners engaged in a reading text. The teaching focus for the different SR sessions should be

structured in such a way that it has before, during, and after reading stages, with accompanying relevant questions.

In the first session of SR, the teacher seats the learners and makes sure that they can all see the text clearly. He/she introduces the text and talks about the title, cover, and the author's name. This is the best time for the teacher to develop two strategies in particular – activating background knowledge and making predictions. The teacher can also discuss keywords that will be used in the text with the learners. This involves engaging learners in what they see on the cover page, and what they think it tells them about the text to be read. He/she then conducts a picture walk, briefly pointing out specific character actions or events, and asking probing questions to engage the learners in thinking about the pictures and the story, but not yet telling the story. Learners can also be invited to predict what will happen next. It is also important for the teacher to accept learners' responses positively by praising them. Thereafter, the teacher can read the text aloud with expression, while learners listen and pay attention. After reading, learners can be invited to give their personal responses to the text.

The second session involves practical reading aloud with the learners. The teacher uses the same text as before. He/she should reread the text, together with the whole class, and encourage them to experiment reading with expression and intonation. While reading at the Grade 1 level, the teacher should use a pointer under the text to help the learners follow the text. He/she may pause from time to time to encourage further discussion of interesting phrases or predict what is happening in the text or simply ask literal and inferential questions that engage learners.

A teacher can also use this opportunity to point out aspects within the text that may have been chosen as the lesson focus, such as analysis and discussion of the content through questioning and finding information in the text to support responses, discussing the illustration, explaining and defining new words and locating them in other parts of the text, and checking on the meanings of words. The teacher can further ask learners to confirm their predictions by asking questions such as, *Were you right/correct*? Discussions of this nature contribute extensively to teaching and modelling comprehension strategies, and showing learners how to engage with a text and construct meaning while reading (DBE 2011).

The third session focuses on the teacher giving attention to the children who may still need further reading sessions. In this case, the teacher reverts to the steps followed in the second

session, extending the focus to suit the needs of the class or groups. The theme or 'big idea' of the text is also discussed with the learners.

Group Guided Reading (GGR) involves a teacher working with small groups of children who demonstrate similar reading abilities and can all read similar levels of texts. GGR activities are important because they allow more individualised teaching and teachers can easily identify learners who are struggling – especially when the teacher is dealing with large classes.

In CAPS, GGR is done from Grades R to 3 in HL, whereas in FAL, it is done in Grades 2 and 3. It is conducted every day for 30 minutes, with two groups reading to the teacher for 15 minutes. CAPS recommends ability groups of between 6 and 10 learners. GGR can be used for different purposes, depending on the reading levels of each group (e.g., to develop decoding skills, practice fluency, focus on reading comprehension, etc.). Research demonstrates that small group instruction helps children improve their literacy and academic achievement (Hiebert, Colt, Catto & Gury1992; Connor et al. 2009).

Activities in this type of reading require the teacher first to select the text at the group's instructional level and introduce it in approximately 2 to 3 minutes. The second phase, which should also be conducted in 2 to 3 minutes, involves a brief talk through an illustration of a text, where a teacher points out important details and encourages learners to make predictions about what they have learned thus far from the text. This process works well if the same text used during SR is also used during GGR. However, if a teacher is dealing with older learners (Grade 2 or 3), CAPS recommends that the teacher must help these learners to use pre-reading strategies such as focusing on captions, chapter headings, table of contents, and/or sub-headings in the text.

The third phase involves learners taking turns to read a text individually. This will be conducted in such a way that learners are given support in the appropriate use of a variety of reading strategies so that they can identify words and construct meaning from a text. The teacher will have an opportunity to listen to each learner's reading and guiding them as they read, giving prompts or clues as required by individual learners, while at the same time observing their reading behaviours to make informed decisions based on what has been observed. Finally, a discussion on what learners have learned should follow.

During GGR, the teacher should make sure that all the other learners in the class are engaged in a range of literacy activities such as Paired/Independent Reading, handwriting, completing activities in their workbooks, etc., to further develop their literacy skills and avoid interrupting the teacher. This will materialise only if the teacher can plan and organise beforehand, establish clear routines, and teach learners how to self-regulate. Self-regulated learning skills help children manage their thoughts, behaviour, and emotions to successfully navigate their learning experiences (Zumbrunn, Tadlock & Roberts 2011).

Paired/Independent Reading **(**PR/IR) is reading in pairs or autonomously. These reading strategies are ideal for promoting fluency and, in the case of IR, allowing learners to select their own texts and read for pleasure. CAPS recommends that PR/IR should be done in 15 minutes, simultaneously with GGR activities. In order to maximize the time in these reading slots to develop reading fluency and enjoyment, the teacher should make sure that all learners are explicitly instructed on how to conduct these activities, particularly in terms of what to do and taking turns in PR and selecting the right text from a reading corner for IR.

PR provides opportunities for learners to practice reading extended text aloud to each other and asking or answering questions on them. It can occur between weaker and stronger learners, or between learners on the same reading level, reading to one another, and helping each other. As they read, their focus could be based on decoding, fluency, and/or comprehension, depending on their reading level. The pair takes turns reading per paragraph or per text. Both learners benefit from taking turns reading to each other. For example, a weaker reader may develop confidence by interacting with a peer role model, and a better reader may develop pride in assisting a weaker peer. Studies have demonstrated that learners who worked as tutors for other learners during PR also benefited substantially from the process (Limbrick, McNaughton & Cameron 1985; Nes 1997). Although learners work without supervision, the teacher guides them by giving the pair questions that they can ask about the text. After reading, learners are expected to provide each other with feedback. This is one way of monitoring their comprehension of a text (N'Namdi 2005). PR is also important for providing reading practice for learners from poor homes who are unlikely to get opportunities to read at home.

With IR, learners, in particular, more advanced readers, select a text of their own choice from the book corner and read on their own without assistance from the teacher. IR gives learners

opportunities to practice reading silently to themselves, particularly during Grade 3. This is very important for the transition to Intermediate Phase after Grade 3. In CAPS, IR is done in class; thus, having book corners is beneficial for learners who have acquired reading skills and do not need to be assisted in reading. Teachers can also encourage learners to do it as part of reading homework. Creating opportunities for additional reading out of school hours is beneficial in widening vocabulary. A study of out-of-school activities of Grade 5 learners by Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1988) shows that children who spent 15 minutes reading books per day out of school are exposed to approximately one million more words per year than those who read 1 minute a day outside school, who are exposed to approximately 50, 000 additional words only.

Teacher Read-Alouds (TRA), according to CAPS, is the final component of a balanced reading programme. It is an interactive reading process where the teacher assumes all the responsibility by reading a text aloud to the whole class, usually a text at a higher level than the learners could read by themselves. TRA is important because it serves as a motivating factor in encouraging children to develop a love of reading (Taberski 2000). After reviewing numerous studies, the NRP (2000) recommended that reading aloud to children is important because it provides them with opportunities to listen to a wide range of literacy genres while exposing them to rich vocabulary. TRA roughly follows the SR format, happening in three phases (before, during, and after reading). However, TRA is less 'teachy' than SR and happens at a slightly faster pace – the focus is on the story, it is intended to be fun and exciting, and it exposes learners to the joy of engaging with a text.

TRA, according to CAPS, should be done every day in the early stage of reading instruction (Grade R) to stimulate the children's interest in books and reading. It is not time-bound, meaning that the teacher can decide to do it at the beginning or later in the day before the school ends. Read-aloud activities can happen three times a week (i.e., 3 x 10 minutes). TRA is not included in the timetable for the Grade 1 classroom because it can also be done in other subjects (e.g., Life Skills or Mathematics). During TRA, the teacher reads to the whole class or a small group, using material at the learners' listening comprehension level. The content may focus on a particular topic related to a curriculum expectation or another subject, such as Mathematics or Life Skills.

Allocated time vs. engaged time

As stipulated in the curriculum, all the teaching and learning activities in the FP are allocated specific amount of time.

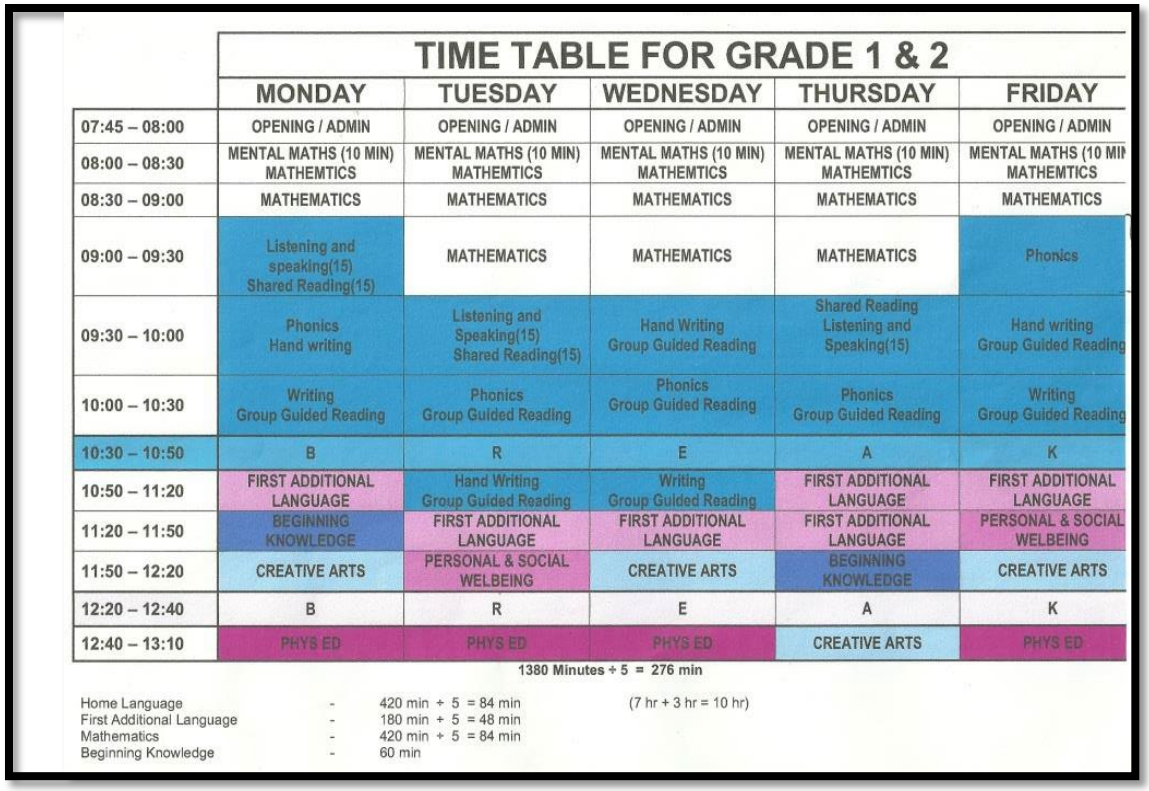
Allocated time refers to the time during which learners are supposed to be in school and busy with specific subjects (e.g., 15 minutes is allocated to SR three times a week). Engaged time refers to the time when learners are involved in instruction and learning in the classroom (e.g., how much of the 15 minutes for SR is actually spent on SR?). As mentioned in §3.1.2, one of the functions of the curriculum in schools is to provide a schedule that outlines a sequence for topics of what needs to be covered and the length of time various components will last. The amount of time for teaching different reading activities during early learning is also allocated in consideration of children's attention spans, which is approximately 10 to 15 minutes for the 6 year-olds (Moyer & Gilmer 1954; Statistic Brain 2015). Teachers, in this case, decide how they intend to use the official time allocated for developing early reading in the classroom.

Research in developing countries shows that often more than 80% of the official time allocated for instruction is wasted (DeStephano 2012). For example, a study in the Cabo Delgado Province of Mozambique showed that more than 90% of Grade 3 learners could not read a short, grade-level passage in Portuguese, the official language of instruction (Adelman, Schuh & Manji 2011). It was also found that out of 183 days in the official school year, only 30 days (i.e., only 16% of the allocated time) were actually spent on activities related to learning (ibid.). Other studies conducted in Asia, Africa and Latin America also reveal a large amount of time loss during the school day, resulting in many illiterate children by Grade 3 (Schuh, DeStefano & Adelman 2010).

Concerning time allocation for teaching in the FP, CAPS recommends 23hrs for Grades R to 2 and 25hrs for Grade 3 classes, per week. The timetable (Table 3.2) shows how instructional time in Grade 1 and 2 classes can be orchestrated. It is given according to the curriculum needs of the Grade 1 and 2 learners of a particular district, where the HL shaded blue is allocated a minimum of 7 hours, whereas, FAL is allocated a minimum of 3 hours, which makes up 10 hours per week for teaching languages/literacy. Mathematics is allocated 7 hours per week and Life Skills Beginning Knowledge is allocated 1 hour per week. The HL slot is allocated more time (e.g., 15 minutes per day every day in a week) so that teachers and learners may have

adequate time to conduct phonics lessons, handwriting/writing, SR and GGR activities, which assist in developing a strong literacy foundation in HL and 'building first additional literacy onto this' (DBE 2011, p. 8). The arrangement is intended to be beneficial to learners, as HL competency contributes extensively to literacy in other languages (Cummins 2001). Even though the amount of time for conducting oral work in the morning is not prescribed, teachers in this activity are expected to spend a brief moment with the learners.

Table 3. 2. Example of instructional timetable for Grades 1 & 2 *(Source: DBE 2016, p. 6)*



TIME TABLE FOR GRADE 1 & 2					
	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
07:45 – 08:00	OPENING / ADMIN	OPENING / ADMIN	OPENING / ADMIN	OPENING / ADMIN	OPENING / ADMIN
08:00 – 08:30	MENTAL MATHS (10 MIN) MATHEMTICS	MENTAL MATHS (10 MIN) MATHEMTICS	MENTAL MATHS (10 MIN) MATHEMTICS	MENTAL MATHS (10 MIN) MATHEMTICS	MENTAL MATHS (10 MIN MATHEMTICS
08:30 – 09:00	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS
09:00 – 09:30	Listening and speaking(15) Shared Reading(15)	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS	Phonics
09:30 – 10:00	Phonics Hand writing	Listening and Speaking(15) Shared Reading(15)	Hand Writing Group Guided Reading	Shared Reading Listening and Speaking(15)	Hand writing Group Guided Reading
10:00 – 10:30	Writing Group Guided Reading	Phonics Group Guided Reading	Phonics Group Guided Reading	Phonics Group Guided Reading	Writing Group Guided Reading
10:30 – 10:50	B	R	E	A	K
10:50 – 11:20	FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE	Hand Writing Group Guided Reading	Writing Group Guided Reading	FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE	FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE
11:20 – 11:50	BEGINNING KNOWLEDGE	FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE	FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE	FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE	PERSONAL & SOCIAL WELBEING
11:50 – 12:20	CREATIVE ARTS	PERSONAL & SOCIAL WELBEING	CREATIVE ARTS	BEGINNING KNOWLEDGE	CREATIVE ARTS
12:20 – 12:40	B	R	E	A	K
12:40 – 13:10	PHYS ED	PHYS ED	PHYS ED	CREATIVE ARTS	PHYS ED

1380 Minutes ÷ 5 = 276 min

Home Language	-	420 min ÷ 5 = 84 min	(7 hr + 3 hr = 10 hr)
First Additional Language	-	180 min ÷ 5 = 48 min	
Mathematics	-	420 min ÷ 5 = 84 min	
Beginning Knowledge	-	60 min	

As can be seen, instructional time allocated by CAPS for conducting various activities in the FP is tightly sequenced – every minute counts. Since teachers have a lot to accomplish in the classroom, they need to be well organised and plan for their engagement time. Routines for switching activities and moving the learners between whole class, group work or paired and individual work become very important. How these activities are arranged and how much time is spent each day per activity reflects the teacher's philosophy and the goals of what he/she has intended to achieve in developing early reading for the learners. Therefore, FP teachers need to understand the timetable and how different activities are designed to support language and

literacy development in different ways and each activity slot should have a clear focus and goal.

Within the time allocated, in addition to developing literacy and numeracy, teachers are also expected to set aside time for learners with learning difficulties while trying to balance their administrative responsibilities. This makes teachers see CAPS as a curriculum that is over-demanding, particularly in terms of assessing learners, where time spent on teaching is seen to be 'sacrificed.' Because of teachers' frustration, the Basic Education Minister proposed amendments to CAPS in September 2018, aimed at scaling down assessment and reducing teachers' administrative workload to afford them adequate contact teaching time with learners in the classroom (Nkosi 2018).

3. 1. 4. 3. Differentiated curriculum

CAPS supports the principle of inclusion, which provides teachers with opportunities to meet diverse learners' needs by adjusting the level of support and the intensity of the instruction (DBE 2017b). This is achieved by engaging a differentiated curriculum.

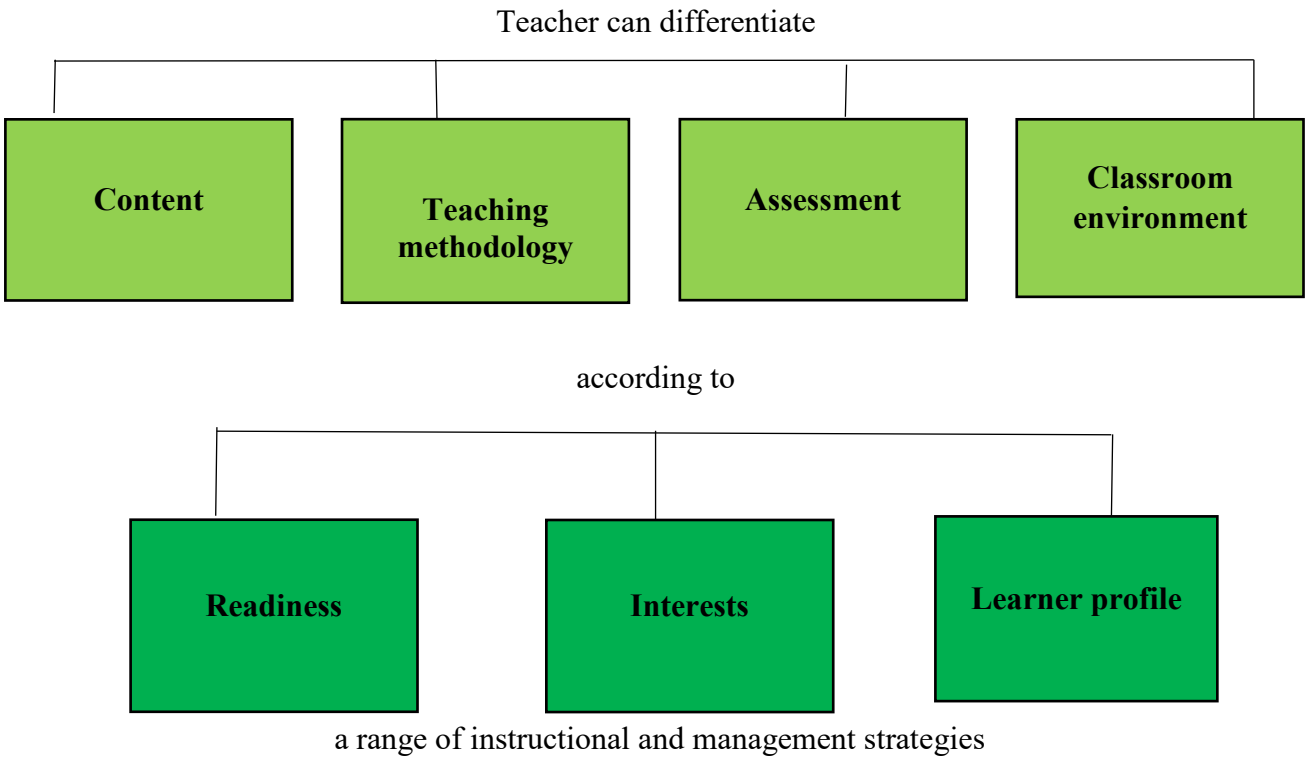
The differentiated curriculum caters for all learners, irrespective of diverse learning backgrounds. Ondigi, Ayot, Mueni & Nasibi (2011, p. 143) describe differentiated instruction as

> a teaching theory based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to individual and diverse students in classroom aimed at achieving diversified learning and common practices in the career.

Differentiated teaching is an attempt to get teachers to move away from undifferentiated whole class teaching and chorusing. It also provides opportunities for all learners to control their own learning (Ondigi et al. 2011). Oaksford and Jones (2001) add that differentiated teaching maximises learners' growth and success by enabling teachers to meet individual learning needs and to assist learners throughout the learning process.

It is imperative that reading teachers in the FP know how to cater for diverse learners in their day-to-day teaching by implementing differentiated teaching while bearing in mind the model illustrated below.

Figure 3. 3. Model of differentiation in language teaching *Source: DBE (2017b, p. 38)*



The diagram (Figure 3.3) shows the model which FP teachers can use to differentiate classroom elements (content, assessment, teaching methodology, and learning environment) according to the learners' characteristics (readiness, interests, and learner profile) and through a range of instructional and management strategies. This model is meant to assist teachers in ensuring that all learners, despite their differences, benefit from the entire learning process. Practical approaches that reading teachers can use to differentiate the curriculum in the classroom are outlined below.

A. Differentiating content

Content refers to what is taught by teachers and learned by students (Lunenburg 2011). It is differentiated on the basis of addressing individual differences (e.g., learning abilities, interests, and prior knowledge).

According to CAPS, content for the teaching of early reading includes five basic components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. As stated in Chapter 2 (§2.7.3), children entering school for the first time differ in terms of their learning experiences where some might have had the privilege of being read to and the opportunity to access a print-

rich environment, while others might have been deprived of these opportunities. CAPS recommends that learners with reading difficulties should be identified early so that necessary support may be implemented to remedy the situation. For the FP teachers to identify their children's learning abilities, they need to assess them first. This will help teachers plan differentiated reading instruction which requires content to be adapted according to learners' needs. For example, if a learner cannot read at all, the target areas that can support that particular learner may include teaching phonological and phonemic awareness, letter-sound identification, word recognition, and fluency during GGR, break, or after school. The DBE introduced EGRA for this purpose.

B. Differentiating teaching methodology

According to CAPS, the teaching of early reading in the FP includes five different reading activities: SR, GGR, PR/IR, RAs and phonics (including phonemic awareness). As indicated in §3.1.4.2, this is an attempt to get teachers to move away from traditional whole-class teaching. Based on the principle of 'No two learners learn alike' (Schumm & Arguelles 2006, p. 27), teaching methods and activities in the classroom are bound to be differentiated.

In respect of differentiating teaching methods according to CAPS, after assessing learners (e.g., using the EGRA tool), teachers should form different reading ability groups of 6 to 10 learners, depending on the size of the class. Each group should be given texts according to their instructional level and practice reading on their own with the teacher's support. This is the platform that the teacher uses to support learners with word recognition, decoding, oral reading fluency, and models reading if there is a need. The teacher can also use PR to provide opportunities for learners with the same reading abilities to practice reading to one another or pair learners with mixed abilities where a good reader is assigned the responsibility to assist a slow reader and then taking turns in practicing reading to each other.

C. Differentiating assessment

Assessment is a process through which teachers gather data before, during, and after instruction to facilitate the learning process (Chapman & King 2012). It provides teachers with a clear picture of each learner's readiness for learning specific skills (Chapman & King 2003). There are different kinds of assessments, viz., baseline (which is used to measure the level of knowledge before instruction), formative (which is on-going and used to monitor children's

learning and provide feedback for improvement) and summative (which assesses how much children have learned throughout the year) assessments.

In the FP, only baseline and formative assessments are required, both formally and informally. Baseline assessment is meant to be done before any teaching and learning can occur at the beginning of the year to establish what skills learners have and have not mastered and to assign learners to ability groups since they have varying experiences and knowledge. Baseline assessment helps teachers identify reading problems among learners early so that they can be remediated straightaway.

D. Differentiating classroom environment

Ramlee et al. (2014) describe the classroom environment as a medium for teaching and learning. They further indicate that the classroom environment can be divided into two parts, which are social and physical environment. Additionally, the classroom should be cognitively stimulating. For the teachers to provide children with a classroom full of print, they need to set up reading corners, themetables, offer a range of reading resources, etc.

CAPS recommends that teachers know the learners, their needs, strengths, weaknesses, interests, and learning styles. Seating arrangements in the classroom should enable learners to see and hear the teacher. Teachers should avoid seating learners permanently in ability groups. As already mentioned, a keen reader can be paired with a weaker reader for scaffolding purposes. The physical appearance should provide a rich language environment by using displays on the walls, including word walls, alphabet charts, etc. CAPS also requires teachers in FP to have book corners in their classrooms. It is also recommended for the teachers to provide positive and constructive feedback to encourage and motivate learners.

3. 1. 4. 4. Allocation of resources by the DBE

The allocation and availability of resources in FP classrooms has been one of the DBE's priorities for improving the quality of basic education for all South African learners. South Africa is in a better economic position with regard to the provisioning of resources than many other African countries. The country's education budget in relation to GNP was reported at 6.2% in 2018, which is considerably more compared to other African countries where it is usually below 5/6% of the GNP. In order to upgrade basic education quality in South Africa, the DBE has been pro-active in putting books in place for all learners. They have produced

colourful and well-illustrated workbooks for the FP learners in all nine official African languages, these being Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Northern Sotho, Setswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele and isiSwati, as well as in English and Afrikaans. These workbooks are used as additional support for teaching and learning in the FP classroom. The pictures below show the layout of Grade 1 learner workbooks in Tsonga.

Figure 3. 2. Grade 1 learner workbooks

As shown in Figure 3.2., the layout of the cover and a page inside the DBE Tsonga workbook is pleasing, colourful, with lots of drawings, tasks and pictures of diverse South African children in them. The DBE ensures that learners are given two workbooks to cater for two semesters (workbook 1 for January to June and workbook 2 from July to December), not only for languages, but also for Numeracy and Life Skills in FP classrooms. This has increased resources, particularly in lower quintile schools where many schools did not have any texts, and written work in exercise books was minimal. Each school has a budget for stationery and books that they can use, and they can also purchase books for book corners from this budget, but many teachers always claim that they do not have books, suggesting that the School Management Team (SMT) does not actually use the LTSM budget for the purpose that it has been allocated for.

Schools that are without libraries cite challenges of not having qualified staff or librarians who can manage library resources, while those who have a school library, have to sacrifice a teacher's post to appoint a school librarian. This is not actually a feasible option for quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools to go the library route because they seem not to have expertise in school library management and they cannot afford to replace a teacher with a school librarian. For this reason,

the DBE shifted their emphasis to developing classroom libraries which is more manageable and less expensive. Improving the provision of books in schools shows that there is a shift away from the habitual excuse of always saying 'it is difficult and expensive to have a school library.'

The *Vula Bula* graded reading series of 34 titles (published by the NGO Molteno) are also available in all African languages. This provides children with opportunities to read texts of increasing difficulty in their own language(s). Publishing houses like SAIDE also hosts the African story book project where stories in African languages from all over Africa can be downloaded online for free. Most of the stories available on their website include various languages from larger language groups such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, Northern Sotho, etc., but there are not many titles in Xitsonga (e.g., in January 2021, 144 titles of isiXhosa stories were listed on the African storybook website, as opposed to 85 titles in Xitsonga). Although we can never have enough books, in comparison to the situation between 10 and 15 years ago, the availability of storybooks (and to a lesser extent information books) in African languages in South Africa is much better than in many other African countries.

In South Africa, we have a sound and detailed curriculum and there is quite a lot of provision for resources in FP classrooms compared to our neighbouring countries. However, when teachers say they do not have enough books, very often it is true, especially in languages like Xitsonga. Obviously, there is still a great need for having more printed material in Xitsonga, even though compared to many other African countries, quite a lot has been done in this area.

3. 1. 5. Evaluative summary

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that, in theory, the early grade reading curriculum in South Africa is balanced. Unlike in many African countries, there is fairly sound provision of resources and CAPS clearly specifies how early reading in the FP should be taught and how teaching/learning time should be managed. Most importantly, the allocated education budget for South Africa is higher than other countries in the sub-Saharan region. However, despite sufficient resources, many African countries whose GNP is relatively low, perform much better in reading literacy than South Africa. This suggests that it is not only what is stipulated in policies and budgets that make teaching and learning in the classroom effective, but the

teachers' attitudes, knowledge and ability to make efficient use of time and available resources in the classroom.

Moreover, although South Africa accommodates multilingualism, particularly in the education domain, there is still a need for a change in commitment to the development of clear institutional language policies and investment in material development in the African HL languages across the curriculum and at all levels of education (Wildsmith 2013, p. 123). This is based on the fact that there are shortages of African HL resources. One criticism of the CAPS document available for use in African HLs is that it has been derived from the teaching of early reading in English, particularly in relation to decoding and the teaching of phonics (Shiohira 2017). Given that English and African languages differ in terms of the former being an analytic language with an opaque orthography and African languages, which are agglutinating in nature – this is not helpful for developing early reading in African languages (Pretorius et al. 2016). However, to its credit, the DBE has responded to this criticism by producing *the National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in the African Languages in Foundation Phase* that came out in 2020. The new framework document moves away from the English phonics bias in CAPS and attempts to provide more explicit guidelines for teaching early reading in the African languages, specifically the code based factors, according to the linguistic-orthographic features of African languages. It is available in all nine African languages.

I now move away from CAPS to describe the curriculum advisors' roles and responsibilities.

3. 2. THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CAs

As per the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act no. 27 of 1996), curriculum advisors are education specialists in a district or circuit office. They facilitate curriculum implementation and improve the environment and process of learning and teaching by visiting schools, and consulting with and advising school principals and teachers on curriculum matters (DBE 2013). The curriculum advisors of the General Education and Training band are responsible for supporting schools from the level of foundation (Grades R to 3), intermediate (Grade 4 to 6)

and senior (Grades 7 to 9) phases. In accordance with the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act no. 27 of 1996), each curriculum advisor is allocated 15 to 25 schools by the district office.

According to what is prescribed in the Collective Agreement 1 of 2008: Annexure A, minimum requirement for the appointment of curriculum advisors is a four-year degree, Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV 15), or an equivalent qualification in the subject area/phase (DBE 2013). Annexure A12 prescribes that curriculum advisors are ranked at post level 2, equivalent to their salary package. A minimum requirement for appointment in terms of experience for a curriculum advisor is six years in the educational field. Registration with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) is also a requirement for this position.

In terms of supporting teachers, curriculum advisors are expected to play an important role in upgrading the quality of the subjects that are offered at the school level. They are involved in the professional development of teachers, which in turn should facilitate curriculum implementation. They also serve as mediators of the curriculum; they mediate between the provincial education departments and the educational institutions (schools). As stipulated in the National Education Policy (DBE 2016), the curriculum advisors' core roles and responsibilities are outlined below; further details in their portfolio are given in Appendix I.

- *Leadership responsibilities*: they motivate and encourage teachers and school management team (SMT) to work diligently in implementing the curriculum.
- *Communication*: they serve as middlemen between different stakeholders, e.g., principals, teaching staff, parents, School Governing Bodies, the DBE, etc.
- *Financial planning and management*: they advise principals and school management teams on the planning, utilisations and monitoring of budget in order to meet school objectives.
- *Strategic planning*: they are also responsible for ensuring that all stakeholders work towards achieving the set goals by the curriculum.
- *Policy*: they make sure that policies are in place to guide relevant stakeholders in enacting their duties.
- *Research and development*: they get involved in research to keep abreast of the latest educational development.

- *Curriculum delivery*: they are expected to make sure that the curriculum is implemented effectively in schools and classrooms.
- *Staff development*: they ensure that teachers are trained and workshopped effectively for curriculum delivery.
- *General*: besides supporting schools and teachers, curriculum advisors are also responsible for administrative work in the circuit/district office.

The key role is that of mediating national policy and curriculum. This is often done via the provincial education departments. In terms of workshopping teachers for curriculum implementation, the curriculum advisors use the cascade model, which refers to the flow of information from one group to another (Jacobs & Russ-Eft 2001). This approach is advantageous in saving costs, but some believe that the knowledge conveyed as second-hand information may be distorted (Suzuki 2008), and teachers often need follow-up support to ensure that they are implementing the curriculum correctly.

Regarding the execution of duties for supporting teachers, curriculum advisors are allocated schools from the district level. The National Education Policy recommends that the maximum number of schools per curriculum advisor should be 25 (DBE 2013). However, some education districts and circuits are responsible for many more schools because many curriculum advisors' posts are not filled. Thus, if the education district or education circuit lacks manpower to cater for all the schools under its jurisdiction, curriculum advisors end up being assigned far more schools than they can reasonably support. Therefore, they are unlikely to visit some of the schools they have been assigned to. This creates a gap in effective curriculum implementation. For example, a qualitative case study of a sample of 20 Grades 1 to 6 teachers teaching mathematics and languages in South Africa examined the challenges faced by teachers in implementing curriculum changes. Findings revealed that teachers felt inadequately provided with sustainable professional development programmes and had minimal meaningful opportunities for classroom support, guidance and monitoring to assist in implementing the changes required (Govender 2018). Although the roles and responsibilities of curriculum advisors are clearly stated in the National Department of Basic Education's policy document, in practice, these are not always clearly enacted. The findings regarding the roles and responsibilities of curriculum advisors are presented in Chapter 6. The next section discusses the FP classroom practice in the South African context.

3. 3. FP CLASSROOM IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Learners' reading level in the early grades is a strong predictor of their future learning (Rabiner, Godwin & Dodge 2016; Snow & Matthews 2016; Leahy & Fitzpatrick 2017). It is imperative that during early learning, they should receive quality education to prepare them to cope with 'reading to learn' as they proceed to higher grades. However, developing good reading skills depends on how learners are taught to read in the classroom. This section discusses two main factors that impact reading outcomes: pedagogic and structural issues in identifying what happens in South African classrooms that affect children's reading literacy outcomes.

Based on her research of South African classrooms, Hoadley (2013) points to an impoverished pedagogy, leading to the following classroom factors: pedagogic content knowledge, limited writing opportunities, weak forms of assessment, and lost learning opportunities. In addition, Hoadley (2013), Khumalo and Mji (2014), and Spaull (2016) point to the structural factors endemic to the education system, which include overcrowded classrooms, lack of textbooks and texts, and lack of print material in classrooms. Taylor, Gamble, Spies and Garisch (2013) add that poor school management and weak leadership practices also have an effect on learning outcomes. All of the above factors identified as barriers to quality education are discussed below.

3. 3. 1. Pedagogic issues

The factors discussed below characterise poor classroom practices that are barriers to quality education. They are what Van der Berg et al. (2016) call 'weak instructional core.'

3. 3. 1. 1. Pedagogic content knowledge

Content knowledge entails what teachers need to know about a subject in order to teach effectively. In contrast, pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) integrates knowledge of what is to be taught with how to teach learners in the classroom. In literacy instruction, PCK involves teachers' knowledge about the basic elements of reading, how they relate to one another, how they develop, and what is required to teach them. Teachers acquire both content and PCK through experience and practice in teaching (Bertram & Christiansen 2012). Poor teaching practice can arise from both poor teacher content knowledge and poor pedagogic content knowledge, impacting negatively on learner performance, as documented in many developing countries. Several studies have reported ineffective pedagogic practices in South Asia and sub-

Saharan African countries such as Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. In a qualitative study involving 600 Grade 3 learners from different regions of Bangladesh, Prithvi (2013) examined primary school learners' experience of English language classroom practices. The findings showed that English language teachers tended to mix both traditional and communicative approaches during lessons. Using a mixed-methods approach, Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) explored factors that contribute to effective teaching and learning in primary schools in Zimbabwe and the high failure rate of Grade 7 learners. Findings revealed that teachers do not vary their teaching methods or use various media in the teaching and learning process, and their instructional materials are limited to textbooks and syllabus and do not go beyond that. The study makes several recommendations, including the need for schools to employ qualified teachers who have knowledge of effective teaching methods inter alia.

In a qualitative study involving 582 educationists and learners, Mmasa and Anney (2016) explored teachers' classroom practices in teaching early reading in Grades 1 and 2 in public primary schools. They examined Grades 2 and 3 learners' mastery of literacy skills in Kiswahili and investigated problems associated with the teaching and learning of literacy skills in Tanzanian primary school classrooms. Findings revealed that there were serious literacy problems in the way teachers teach literacy in public primary schools where most teachers do not have adequate skills in teaching literacy. This was reflected in learner performance which showed that 64% of Grade 2 and 45% of Grade 3 could not read, write, and do simple numeracy tasks.

Moving away from what research says about classroom practice in other countries, I now explore what is happening in the South African classroom context. The challenges of PCK in other countries are also applicable in the South African classroom context, where research shows that teachers rely on traditional teaching methods (NEEDU Report 2013; Pretorius et al. 2016; Charter 2016). For example, Pretorius (2014) examined Grade 4 learners' (n=31) literacy skills in both isiZulu HL and English FAL in South Africa and found that teachers in Grade 4 classrooms lacked knowledge of teaching early reading according to methodologies prescribed in the CAPS document, e.g., the teaching of syllables in the African languages such as *ba-be-bi-bo-bu-* were chanted in chorus from the chalkboard with little connection between these syllables and their occurrence in words and in sentences of extended texts. Gains and Graham (2011) also reported that pedagogical practices, especially in South African rural classrooms,

are not appropriate for teaching reading literacy in the FP, where chanting in a chorus with very little independent reading is very common. Teachers' challenges with teaching reading are evidenced by low performance in various large-scale assessments (e.g., SACMEQ 2000, 2007, and 2013; PIRLS 2006, 2011 and 2016).

Using a mixed methods study, Verbeek (2010) looked at how teachers in Grade 1 mainstream classrooms of KwaZulu Natal teach reading over a year. The findings showed that though fully qualified, teachers had neither a coherent understanding of how reading literacy develops nor appropriate pedagogical knowledge to inform their practice. The dominant practice in these Grade 1 classrooms was the whole class approach. Scant attention was paid to the development of print concepts in these classes, despite the literacy-poor background from which most learners come. Gains (2010) found teachers had narrow conception of literacy (as pronouncing words correctly) and tended to teach in ways that they had been taught. Mudzielwana (2014) explored teachers' (n=8) perceptions and understanding of learners' low reading performance in the FP classroom of Limpopo Province in South Africa. She concluded that teachers were not properly oriented to implement the new curriculum and could not teach reading according to what is recommended in the curriculum documents.

In their study in a rural KwaZulu Natal, Rule and Land (2017) revealed that an oratorical approach to reading dominated in classroom settings. The findings suggest that developing the teachers' understanding of the teaching of reading and transforming the teaching practices of those who teach as they were taught in the education system of the apartheid era are key to improving the teaching of reading in the South African FP classrooms. In their study of South African research on classroom comprehension instruction, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) found that many teachers were not themselves immersed in rich reading practices, they claimed to be doing more than what was reflected in their schools' literacy results, and in general, they (teachers) do not seem to understand reading concepts, reading development and reading methodology. In a mixed-methods study that analysed the English FAL teachers' (n=126) understanding and implementation of reading strategies in their classrooms, findings revealed that 'the majority of teachers seemed not to understand certain reading strategies and, therefore, implemented only a few that they understood, greatly limiting learners' potential to explore other reading strategies' (Madikiza, Cekiso, Tshotsho & Landa 2018, p. 1). The study also

established that some teachers only paid attention to traditional reading strategies that did not facilitate comprehension. Based on its findings, the study recommends that teachers should be trained to use various reading strategies to help learners develop good literacy skills.

In view of the findings outlined above, research shows that PCK in literacy context can be improved by changing classroom practices practically through coaching instead of theoretically explaining how things should be done in class (Cilliers, Fleisch, Prinsloo & Taylor 2018; Fleisch & Dixon 2019). For example, in a comparative study of two modes (centralised training via workshops and in-class coaching) of in-service professional development for South African public primary school teachers, Cilliers et al. (2018) show that coaching had a statistically significant impact on learning across all the domains of reading proficiency at endline, whereas, the effect of workshop training was muted.

3. 3. 1. 2. Limited opportunities for writing

Reading and writing are complementary skills. Writing is important for measuring the extent to which knowledge has been acquired after learning. It provides writers with opportunities to reflect upon what they have written (De Chaisemartin 2013). Giving children opportunities to engage in developmentally appropriate writing experiences is important for early and later literacy development (Watanabe & Hall-Kenyon 2011; Håland, Hoem, & McTigue 2018). Given the importance of developing writing skills right from the early years of schooling, education systems throughout much of the world recommend increasing teachers' instructional writing experience in the primary grades (Korth et al. 2016). Findings from a small-scale study on how teachers (n=5) implement writing activities with learners can be gleaned from a study of pre-primary to Grade 2 teachers (n=5) conducted in the USA, where Korth et al. (2016) found that learners were given opportunities to practice their writing skills, but the teachers acknowledged that obstacles impeded their attempts to provide age-appropriate writing instruction, such as insufficient time, student learning abilities, etc. Another study on how writing practices are enacted in Norwegian Grade 1 classes, revealed that limited time is devoted to writing, with 19% of teachers not giving learners opportunities to write their own text in the fall semester (Håland et al. 2018).

Back home, as mentioned in §3.1.4.1, handwriting/writing tasks are a follow up on reading activities in the FP classroom. CAPS recommends 15 minutes of handwriting/writing activities

per day for three days for all FP levels. However, similar to what is happening in other countries' classrooms, most South African teachers seem unable to achieve this goal. For example, Navsaria, Pascoe & Kathard (2011) examined written language difficulties experienced by learners and how these difficulties might be overcome in poor areas of the Western Cape. Findings in this study revealed that current opportunities for the development of written language were insufficient. Teachers identified a need for training and support, clear and consistent assessment guidelines, etc.

CAPS also recommends that written work in language and content subjects should be done at least four times a week where Grade 1 learners can be given a written task of at least two pages per week while Grade 3 learners can move to about four pages a week. However, the NEEDU report (2013) in terms of examining learners' books to assess the quantity and quality of written tasks given in a form of class exercises and homework found that nine of the 15 districts visited used fewer than three pages per week for Grade 2 and only four districts exhibited a mean of four or more pages per week in Grade 3. Findings also revealed that only two districts gave Grade 3 learners exercises containing paragraphs that exceeded one per week. The other districts only gave exercises which did not exceed three-quarters per week, while others hardly gave exercises that extended beyond isolated sentences.

In his study of identifying lessons for policy and practice, for government, principals, teachers, and parents, drawn from a sample of 268 schools (Grade 3 through Grade 5) in eight provinces, except Gauteng, Taylor (2011) found that on average, Grade 5 learners only engage in writing of any kind in language classes on average one in four school days per year, as shown in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3. 3. Number of exercises and frequency of writing in Grade 5 *(Source: Taylor 2011)*

Province	**Average number of exercises per class per year**	**Average number of school days to write one exercise**
Eastern Cape	31.2	5.8
Free State	40.9	5.1
KwaZulu Natal	47.1	3.6
Limpopo Province	38.1	4.0
Mpumalanga	39.3	3.9
North West	39.6	4.9
Northern Cape	44.2	4.0
Western Cape	63.8	2.6
Total	42.1	4.3

It is worrying to note that at the level of Grade 5, learners were still writing an average of 42.1 exercises comprising single words and 12 exercises of isolated sentences over a year. However, average number of written exercises in the Western Cape (WC) is slightly higher than the other provinces, with 16.7 more than KZN, which is the next highest province in terms of giving learners written exercises. In a small-scale study on the strategies that Grade 6 teachers (n=2) use to improve reading and writing in the classroom in the Mpumalanga Province, it was revealed that Grade 6 learners (n=10) have difficulties with punctuation, pronouncing and spelling words correctly in English. This suggested that the learners' literacy skills were not grade-appropriate (Lumadi 2016), possibly because of a lack of opportunities to practice enough reading and writing skills.

On the whole, findings reveal that writing is done very seldom in South African classrooms; hence, Taylor (2011) regards this as one of the biggest shortcomings.

3. 3. 1. 3. Weak forms of assessment

Another factor that contributes to poor classroom practices is weak forms of assessment. Assessment is integral for identifying learning problems and informing teaching as well as addressing specific learning needs. As mentioned in §3.1.4.4, there are different types of assessments, including baseline, formative and summative assessments, each administered for its specific purpose. Teachers are guided by what is stipulated in the curriculum and assessment policy documents, which prescribe the requirements for the assessments that are supposed to be carried out. However, regardless of clear guidelines in the assessment policy documents, the effective implementation of classroom assessment, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, remains a challenge (Browne 2016).

A Malaysian study involving Grade 1 and Grade 6 English language teachers' competency and practices in their classroom assessments found that the assessment given to learners was moderate, while the validity of the task was relatively low (Khatab 2012). Another study investigating 400 English Foreign Language (EFL) online teachers' preferences of common assessment methods found that most Turkish EFL teachers rely on conventional/traditional assessment methods rather than formative assessment processes (Öz 2014b).

Coming to South Africa, learners in the FP do not sit for summative testing, only formative assessment takes place. However, a study on Grade 1 to 4 classes at 20 primary schools in five

districts of the Limpopo Province, which aimed to improve the quality of literacy teaching and overall learner achievement, found that 76% of 46 record books showed fewer than five assessment records or marks specifically for HL reading activities, 72% of 46 record books showed fewer than five assessment records or scores specifically for HL writing activities/tasks per learner, and 74% of 42 record books showed fewer than five marks or assessment records for HL oral activities (Reeves et al. 2008).

In another study on assessment practices in the Maune circuit of Limpopo Province from a sample of Grade 9 Natural Science teachers from high performing schools, Kibirige and Teffo (2014) found that teachers' understanding of the roles of assessments ranged from 0% to 60%, with many items scored at 40%. This suggests a huge difference between actual and ideal assessment practices. These findings may also have far-reaching implications in light of compliance with what is stipulated in CAPS.

Given the findings highlighted above, it is clear that teachers do not assess learners according to the specifications highlighted in the assessment policy documents. This, according to Browne (2016), might stem from teachers lacking PCK, institutional support, and effective training for classroom assessment.

3. 3. 1. 4. Lost learning opportunities

Time spent on teaching and learning in the classroom is a widely discussed topic in most education systems. As stated in §3.1.4.3, the fact that educational time is represented by different measures (allocated and engaged time) does not necessarily mean that there are two different amounts of time, but different ways of conceiving time (Cotton 1989). The difference between allocated time and engaged time is determined by the level of planning, organisation, classroom management and appropriate instruction (Gettinger 1985). Research indicates that engaged time is far below allocated time (Schuh et al. 2010), possibly because productive teaching and learning time involves enacting different tasks which end up consuming time. However, there are different perceptions of what contributes to the loss of engaged time in the classroom. Some feel that engaged time is wasted on managing learner behaviour, routine paperwork, interruptions, delays, special events, and other off-task and off-topic activities (Smith 2000; Rogers & Mirra 2014). Others believe that engaged time is wasted due to informal school closures, teacher absenteeism, delays, early departures, and poor use of allocated time

(Abadzi 2009). Poor utilisation of engagement time in the classroom emanates from poor planning or no planning at all, lack of homework, lack of reading and writing activities, and superficial marking of learners' exercise books.

A meta-analysis conducted 24 years ago based on 37 direct instruction studies concluded that regardless of diversity in terms of SES, gender, learning abilities, or linguistic abilities, teachers have the power to make a difference in their learners' academic achievement (Adams & Engelmann 1996). In a study exploring how learning time is distributed across California high schools, it was found that students across different communities experience allocated time for learning in the classroom differently, where students attending poor schools were found to be unable to access as much instructional time as the majority of students from affluent schools (Rogers & Mirra 2014).

Researchers have identified delaying tactics as a common factor in engagement time in the classroom. In a Finnish study, lesson starts were delayed by an average of approximately six minutes, which, when calculated, the total loss of instructional time in the whole school year was about five weeks of schooling (Saloviita 2013).

Issues of managing instructional time seem to be a common challenge in many parts of the world. In South Africa, CAPS specifies allocated time per activity in all phases (FP, Intermediate, Senior, and Further Education and Training) so that teachers can plan their classroom activities according to the time allocated. However, many teachers do not take learners' work home to mark, and administration or planning that needs to be done is often done in class during engagement time.

Time wastage in South African classrooms is evidenced by off-task activities. In a study exploring the extent to which non-academic incidences impact on instructional time during the teaching of EFAL in the Western Cape Province, Tiba (2012) revealed that inappropriate use of pedagogic strategies, poor use of code-switching, and unsuitable teaching exemplars contributed to the loss of instructional time in the EFAL classroom.

Loss of learning time due to off-task activities compromises the time allocated for covering different topics and subtopics identified in the curriculum document. In their 2015/16 project undertaken to support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PPPD), Van der Berg et al. (2016) reviewed several South African studies and found that learners in the classrooms were denied

opportunities to learn. This was because half of the prescribed content knowledge and half of the officially scheduled lessons were not covered by the end of the school academic year.

Carnoy, Chisholm and Chilisa (2012), in their year-long evaluation of schools (*n*=58) in the North West Province and schools across the border in Botswana (*n*=58), also found that of the Mathematics lessons (*n*=130) scheduled for the year, Grade 6 teachers in the North West Province had only taught 50 lessons (40%) by the beginning of November (towards the end of the school academic year), in comparison to 78 lessons (60%) taught by teachers in Botswana.

Instructional practices of this kind possibly stem from a lack of content, pedagogic and curriculum knowledge. If teachers do not know what to do in the classroom, they may waste time engaging learners in activities that are not content-based and eventually fail to cover the scheduled curriculum within the prescribed time. The end product of what happens in the classroom when engagement time is used on profitless activities is evident in the learners' academic achievement.

Research further suggests that sometimes teachers waste time in the classroom by repeating the same knowledge or skills, like always focusing on decoding rather than on meaning and comprehension (Pretorius & Machet 2004; Verbeek 2010; Murris 2014; Prinsloo et al. 2015). However, even though they may focus too much on the same mechanical skill of decoding, this does not necessarily mean that the teaching of decoding is effective (Pretorius & Klapwijk 2016). Spaull et al.'s study (2020) indicates that many learners cannot even decode properly.

3. 3. 2. Factors endemic to the education system

These are also factors within the functionality of a 'weak administrative core' that affect literacy development. These factors are beyond the level of teachers' control, as their responsibility rests in managing classrooms, conducting classroom administration, teaching, and assessing learners. According to Van der Berg et al. (2016), administrative functionalities discussed below are also to blame for what happens in the FP classroom.

3. 3. 2. 1. Overcrowded classrooms

Following free access to primary education in the sub-Saharan African regions, classroom enrolment in schools has increased to a point where classes are overcrowded with learners. An overcrowded class refers to a classroom where the number of learners exceeds the optimum

level, such that it causes hindrance in the entire teaching and learning process (Akech 2016). Although an overcrowded classroom has no 'exact size,' in many instances, it is determined by the number of learners per teacher, i.e., learner-educator ratio (LER) within a particular context. As a result, some countries will consider 25 to 30 learners per teacher to be a large class, whereas others consider classes of 50 learners or more to be large (Gordon, Lokisso, Allen & Gernigon 1997). Regardless of varied perceptions of what constitutes an overcrowded classroom, teaching in large classes, according to Marais (2016), is a global challenge. A study that examined how teachers and learners cope during teaching and learning time in overcrowded classes in Papua New Guinea found that with over 80 learners per class, teachers experienced increased workload. As a result, they were often absent because of stress, while learners face difficulties in learning and many were often absent from school because their teachers could not support them in such a learning environment (Epri 2016).

A study that examined the enrolment trend in 50 public primary schools in Nigeria and the management strategies adopted by the headteachers in resolving overcrowded classrooms revealed that 41 primary schools out of 50 operate above normal class-ratio of 25 to 35 learners as recommended by UNESCO. It was also found that 90% of the headteachers use negotiation strategies and 60% use reduction strategies to solve overcrowded classroom problems. The study recommended an increase in government education budget allocation of 20% (Babatunde 2015) to curb classroom overcrowding.

Although the LER for primary schools, as stipulated in the DBE policy, is 40: 1 (Motshekga 2012), overcrowding is widespread in South Africa. The number of learners in South African classrooms, particularly in provinces like North West (SABC 2013), Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape, and to a lesser extent, Gauteng, exceed the recommended number of 40 learners per class (news24 2008). Spaull (2016) reported that class sizes of more than 60 learners in Limpopo Province and the Eastern Cape constituted between 10% and 15% of classrooms. Approximately 27% of the FP classrooms in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape Province have more than 55 learners per class (Charter 2016). This, according to John (2013), often means that three or four learners are seated at a desk intended for two. To some extent, the Western Cape adheres to the policy of 40:1 as only 3% of its Grades 1 to 3 class sizes housed 46 learners (Spaull 2016). Given the variation gap between provincial classes in South Africa, the bimodal distribution of achievement is inevitable since most overcrowding occurs in quintiles 1 to 3

schools. As stated in Chapter 1 (§1.2.2), bimodal distribution explains two different education systems according to quintiles. The level of SES determines the quintile ranking; hence, quintiles 1 to 3 schools have higher levels of poverty relative to quintiles 4 and 5, which are affluent. This is evidenced by the fact that quintile 4 and 5 schools perform better relative to quintiles 1 to 3 schools (Spaull 2011; Mpofu 2015). Teaching reading and writing in overcrowded conditions is unlikely to be effective, particularly in the lower grades. In a study investigating the impact of overcrowded classrooms on FP teachers (n=10) in Tshwane West district, West and Meier (2020) found that overcrowding in the FP classroom is associated with lack of discipline, ineffective assessment, and no individual learner support. In a small scale study involving eight teachers, Muthusamy (2015) found that overcrowded classrooms cause teachers to experience stress due to inadequate classroom space, issues related to safety and health, minimal learner and teacher interaction, disruptive behaviour, increased workload and inadequate teaching time.

Several researchers have identified possible strategies that can be used to deal with large classes. For example, Spaull (2016) suggests the practice of having multiple school 'shifts' inter alia, which allow learners to alternate classes in different sessions. This view is also supported by Bray (2008), who cites the significance of multiple 'shifts' in terms of resolving the challenges of teaching large classes. However, he cautioned that this practice could overwhelm teachers who may find themselves working in more than one session. Most importantly, this is likely to compromise the quality of teaching and learning. Taylor et al. (2017) believe that good classroom management practices such as establishing routines, reorganising classrooms, working in small groups while other groups are instructed to do different literacy activities enable teachers to provide better instruction in large classes of at least 38 to 45 learners. However, they noted that very large classes of 50 plus learners are difficult to conduct effective teaching. Strategies of dealing with large classes may be challenging for the teachers, but Pillay (2017) reiterates what is emphasised by CAPS, namely teachers' commitment to recognising and embracing their roles as agents.

3. 3. 2. 2. Lack of textbooks and texts

Easy and regular access to print resources is important for language and literacy development. Children should be encouraged and motivated to read and read for learning and enjoyment, as it is important for their educational success. However, this depends on whether reading

materials are available to enrich children's learning. The importance of the availability of textbooks and texts is also realised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), who suggests that textbooks and school resources are capable of countering socio-economic disadvantage, particularly in low SES communities (UNESCO 2005). Most importantly, in the review of research literature from 1990 to 2010 on which specific school and teacher characteristics appeared to have a strong positive impact on learning and time in school, Glewwe, Hanushek, Humpagne & Ravun (2012) found that textbooks and materials such as workbooks and exercise books, increase student learning.

Although there is strong evidence showing the benefits of easy access to reading resources, the challenges of shortage of books still affect many developing countries, regardless of the fact that every country's education system makes provision in the form of budget allocation to cover for the purchase of resources such as textbooks/learner books, workbooks, and teacher guides in schools. In essence, several studies have found limited access to reading resources (especially in HLs) in many developing countries. For example, in a survey of primary schools in eleven developing countries[11] regarding the diverse components and issues shaping policies and programmes in the primary schools, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2008) found that on average, 15% to 20% of Grade 4 learners did not have textbooks, or they had to share one in Paraguay, and between 31% to 51% of learners in the Philippines had sole use of a mathematics textbook.

Another study which investigated the cost of textbooks and the minuscule budget allocated to textbooks by many developing countries found that, in Cameroon, there was only one reading textbook for 12 learners and only one mathematics textbook for 14 learners in Grade 1, whereas in Togo, three Grade 2 learners shared a reading textbook (UNESCO 2016).

In South Africa, a shortage of relevant content and an appropriate level of books, especially in the African languages (DoE 2008a; Nel, Mohangi, Krog & Stephens 2016), has consistently been reported. This is exacerbated by the fact that only 7% of schools in South Africa have a functional library, while most classrooms do not have books at all (Cilliers & Bloch 2018). According to a survey (KPMG 2008), even though there are 30 libraries per million people in South Africa, only 46% of the population seems to be actively borrowing books from these

[11] The developing countries included Argentina, Brazil, Chile, India, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tunisia and Uruguay

libraries, suggesting that the rate of reading for learning and enjoyment is still low in our country, and this might be one of the contributory factors in the current literacy crisis.

Late, wrong, or non-delivery of textbooks is also a predominant factor in the South African classrooms - denying learners benefits that come with reading. For example, Chisholm (2013) reported the textbook saga in Limpopo, which resulted in learners being without textbooks and texts at the beginning of the school year. The issue turned into a legal battle for the textbooks to be finally delivered at schools, but very late on 31 May 2012. A similar matter was reported by the then South African Public Protector, Madonsela, in terms of investigating shortages and incorrect supply of school workbooks in the Eastern Cape. Findings revealed that the DBE failed to provide adequate school workbooks on time to all Eastern Cape schools for two consecutive years (2012 to 2013) (Madonsela 2013). One wonders what happened in classrooms without textbooks from the beginning of the school year. Weaknesses of this nature deny learners opportunities to learn and become lifetime readers.

The amount of reading in the classroom is determined by the availability and accessibility of a range of reading books. Lack of books in South African FP classrooms is not as much a problem now that schools are supplied textbooks/learner books, workbooks, and teacher guides from the provincial education departments, but the challenge is getting teachers to use them effectively with learners. There are books in many South African schools, but these are often packed away in boxes or storerooms. As a result, learners seldom have access to these books.

3. 3. 2. 3. Lack of print materials in classrooms

A good foundation for literacy development in the classroom is not only laid by using HL as the LoLT, but by also ensuring that various print resources (e.g., flashcard, theme posters, phonics charts, vocabulary charts, wordlists, word-walls, learners' writing, and a classroom library) are available so that learners have access to print and have opportunities to find more time to read authentically.

A study conducted in Kenyan public primary schools to establish the extent to which visual materials are available for use in the teaching of writing skills in English found that printed materials were the main resources available in most classrooms, with 36 out of 42 teachers indicating that adequate resources were available (Kurgatt & Omuna 2016). It is worth noting

that teachers can also make their own print resources rather than rely only on official or commercially available resources.

Coming back home, CAPS recommends that FP teachers should set up a print-rich classroom environment to increase learners' exposure to print and encourage and motivate them so that they can read freely on their own. However, a study conducted in rural South African schools of the Gauteng Province to provide an overview of the challenges which prevent Grade R teachers from teaching literacy adequately in Grade R classes revealed that teachers experience difficulties in delivering a literate curriculum in schools located in rural areas (Mohangi et al. 2016). Another study which was conducted in the Kwanobuhle area of Port Elizabeth found that although classrooms had print resources, on the whole, they were not print-rich enough to promote literacy development for the learners, and the teachers did not readily integrate the resources into their daily classroom practices (Harrison, Pretorius, Malila & Hodgskiss 2016).

As already indicated in §1.2.1, Currin and Pretorius (2010) argue that children's academic achievement need not be determined by their low economic status if schools create conditions conducive to learning. Similarly, Sithole and Lumadi (2013) recommend that regardless of SES, teachers should be more resourceful and attempt to improvise by fostering creativity in setting up print-rich classrooms for the benefit of expanding learners' literacy skills. Thus, even if some schools are surrounded by low socio-economic communities in South Africa, the fact that Kenyan teachers (teaching in similar poor schooling context) can provide learners with opportunities to read authentically is indicative that this can be achieved in any classroom regardless of SES.

3. 3. 2. 4. Poor school management and weak leadership

Leadership and management are two different concepts. As school managers, principals are responsible for ensuring that the school curriculum is implemented efficiently and effectively throughout the academic year. They oversee the day-to-day functioning of the schools (Lalonde 2010). As leaders, school principals are hands-on with what is supposed to be done to make sure that school curriculum is covered by the end of the year. Effective management and leadership skills are required for successful learning. However, numerous education studies elsewhere have shown that poor management and leadership practices are detrimental to students' academic success (Tsuut 2015; Wilson-Morgan 2015; Lileka 2017; Dlamini &

Mafumbate 2019). For example, in a quantitative study that investigated the effect of school principals' leadership styles in the performance of learners in Namibia, Lileka (2017) found that the principals' poor supervisory techniques and poor internal relations contributed to poor learner performance. Similarly, Dlamini and Mafumbate (2019), in their study of the effects of poor leadership practices in Eswatini secondary schools also found that poor leadership leads to students' failure. Thus, even if school principals perceive themselves as managers and administrators, they are not always doing justice to this portfolio. Hence, Van der Berg et al. (2011) recommend that principals should be made to account for learner performance by being given targets to meet and be replaced if they fail to meet that target.

Effects of poor management and weak leadership practices on learner performance also apply within the context of South African schools. Many principals in South Africa are not professionally prepared for their roles as school managers simply because they have not been inducted through structured preparation programmes in instructional leadership (Naidoo & Mestry 2019). This is further exacerbated by the criteria used for appointing school principals (often political criteria), which overlook the value of specialised preparation or development for school leaders, prioritising teaching qualification and teaching experience as the prerequisite for principalship positions (Bush, Bell & Middlewood 2010; Naidoo & Mestry 2019). Although the system of career pathing for school principals in developing their leadership and management skills has been identified as a priority by the DBE, little if any attempts have been made as yet. The Western Cape is the only province that has so far improved its system of recruiting school managers since 2012. They apply competence testing to help them select the best incumbent (Hoadley, Levy, Shumane & Wilburn 2018).

Local evidence has shown that school failure lies with poor management and weak leadership practices (Msila 2011; Mestry 2017; Hompashe 2018). For example, a qualitative study of 56 school managers in the Eastern Cape revealed that challenges of schools' under-performance are attributed to several factors which include inter alia, lack of vision in the leadership and management of schools (Msila 2011). In another study that examined the experiences and perceptions of school teachers and principals on how school principals monitor curriculum delivery, findings revealed the existence of a principal-agent problem in education because many respondents were of the view that curriculum delivery was not monitored effectively, suggesting poor management and weak leadership practices (Hompashe 2018).

Problems emanating from all the aspects mentioned above negatively impact the entire school population in many countries, regardless of the SES. As a result, children struggle to develop strong reading and writing skills in their HL or FAL/EFL. Thereafter, they perpetually lag behind in reading literacy (Pretorius & Spaull 2016).

3. 3. 3. Evaluative summary

The classroom factors discussed above indicate that many FP teachers, particularly in South Africa, do not understand how to use the current approach of teaching early reading because they have not been adequately trained. This is further exacerbated by the fact that some school principals who are the overseers of curriculum implementation lack effective and efficient management and leadership skills to motivate teachers to implement the curriculum and to encourage children to learn for academic achievement. Although the DBE and several NGOs have instituted various programmes to train FP teachers on teaching reading, most teachers still cannot teach effectively in accordance with what is prescribed in the CAPS documents. If teachers lack the knowledge and skills required to teach effectively in the classroom, learning outcomes are bound to be adversely affected, as evidenced in various large-scale assessments.

3. 4. CONCLUSION

This chapter explained what is happening in South Africa in terms of reading performance, what the curriculum looks like and what is available in terms of allocation of resources in FP. This was followed by consideration of the provincial level in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the district curriculum advisors, who are the relevant officials at the level of institutional management, to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the curriculum. Lastly, I reviewed the literature on foundational classroom practices in the South African context to identify what happens in schools and in the classroom that makes the greatest difference to children's literacy outcomes.

The next chapter describes the methodological approach used in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4. 0. INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methods and processes followed in this study. The aim of this study was two-fold. The first aim was to examine aspects of early literacy development in Xitsonga in a sample of 75 Grade 1 learners, who were assessed in Phase I (March 2018, referred to as baseline) and again in Phase III (September 2018, referred to as endline). The second aim, which formed Phase II (March 2018) of this study, was to examine how the curriculum advisors view their support of schools and teachers in developing and supporting learners' reading in Xitsonga in the FP and to establish what and how the Grade 1 teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and to reflect on whether their classroom practices are effective, in light of their teaching context and the learners' reading development during the year.

This chapter briefly outlines the philosophical worldview within which this study is situated and explains the design used. Thereafter, it describes issues relating to accountability and rigour in research, such as validity and reliability in quantitative approach, as well as trustworthiness in qualitative approach and ethical considerations that characterise the current study. This is followed by a description of the instruments and the implementation of the pilot study and how it informed the main study. Thereafter, the chapter provides an account of the instruments and procedures followed in the main study. Lastly, it presents details of the data analysis.

4. 1. PHILOSOPHICAL WORLDVIEWS

The term 'worldview,' also referred to as paradigm, is defined as 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Guba 1990, p. 17). Creswell (2014) sees it as a general orientation to what is happening in the world and the nature of research that a researcher can bring to a study. Identifying a philosophical worldview is important in clarifying the rationale behind choosing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed research for the study to be undertaken. According to Creswell (2014), four worldviews are widely discussed in the literature, namely postpositivism, interpretivism, transformativism and pragmatism.

Postpositivism is a combination of positivist and interpretivist approaches. Ryan (2006) describes it as a broad worldview, which can integrate theory and practice. Data through this lens is generated and analysed deductively. For example, a hypothesis is proposed first and then confirmed or rejected depending on the results of statistical analysis. It offers a practical approach to collecting and analysing data using multiple methods (Henderson 2011). This approach underpins quantitative methodology which relies on experiments or interventions to verify questions and test hypotheses. Data in quantitative research is collected from units or cases (often medium to large scale). The data collected can be categorised as different variables, which may represent gender, age, constructs such as self-esteem, socio-economic status, etc. Quantitative research is applied through descriptive and inferential statistics and it is also explanatory. This design enables quantitative researchers to identify the characteristics of an observed phenomenon, explore relationships between variables and examine the effects that specific variables may have on the characteristics of the observed phenomenon.

Interpretivism emerged in contrast to the beliefs of postpositivism. Interpretivism rejects the notion that a single, verifiable reality exists independent of the human mind. Thus, according to Grix (2004), researchers are not detached, but they form part of their investigation. The goal of interpretivism in terms of conducting an investigation is to explore participants' perceptions and also develop insights about the case (Bryman 2008). This paradigm emphasises humanistic qualitative method, which relies on collecting data through observation, open-ended questions, in-depth interviews (often small scale), and field notes, or through document analysis, and thereafter interpret the information by drawing inferences or by comparing the information gathered. Qualitative research is basically exploratory in that it tells the reader what the study intends to do by using verbs such as to discover (grounded theory), seek to understand (ethnography), explore a process (case study), describe the experience (phenomenology), or report the stories (narrative research) (Creswell 2008).

Transformativism emerged on the basis of criticism of postpositivism and interpretivism. It refers to a research framework that uses its research findings to mitigate disparities existing in marginalised groups (e.g., women, the poor and people with disabilities, etc.) (Jackson et al. 2018). Transformativism underpins the use of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. Mertens (2003) emphasises that researchers utilising this worldview should build strong relationships within their target communities by having a clear background (related to research) of that particular community. Participants, according to this worldview, should be involved in the research process by identifying the problem, defining the problem, collecting and analysing

the data, disseminating the findings and using the findings to inform practice (Chilisa & Kawulich 2012).

Pragmatism arose from criticisms of both positivistivism and interpretivism's beliefs (Morgan 2007, p. 67). It refers to a paradigm which focuses on 'what works' rather than what might be considered 'true' or 'real' (Frey 2018). It combines features of both postpositivism and interpretivism. The pragmatics argue that it is impossible to access the 'truth' about the real world by relying only on a single method that is insufficient to determine social reality (Kivunja & Kuyini 2017). Researchers utilising pragmatism are less restricted in choosing the methods, techniques, and research (Creswell 2014). This paradigm creates opportunities for both qualitative and quantitative approaches to be combined in a single research, whereby one approach can be used to complement the strengths or weaknesses of the other. It is regarded as the best worldview for mixed methods research.

For many years (during the 1970s and 1980s), there have been debates and wars between advocates of quantitative (quant) and qualitative (qual) research paradigms regarding the differences of what constitutes each paradigm. Given the usefulness of both paradigms, the third paradigm arose to combine the two approaches in the same study and end the wars between the opposing purists. However, some scholars claim that the assumptions are incompatible and that the two methods cannot be combined, while others disagree. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), a combination of the two methods is another way of reducing the weaknesses and the problems associated with a single method.

The pragmatic worldview underpins the current study given that the study 'uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches' (Maarouf 2019, p. 3) to answer the research questions posed in this study. Creswell (2014, p. 2) defines mixed methods approach as:

> an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical framework.

Creswell argues that mixed methods research is good at providing researchers with opportunities to use both quantitative and qualitative methods rather than a single design. This approach was chosen in this study because it opened up more possibilities of looking at both breadth and depth of the data collected qualitatively and quantitatively. In the educational context, mixed methods research uses a combination of tests or closed-ended questionnaires

(numerical data), together with interviews and classroom observations (text data) to gather data (Zohrabi 2013).

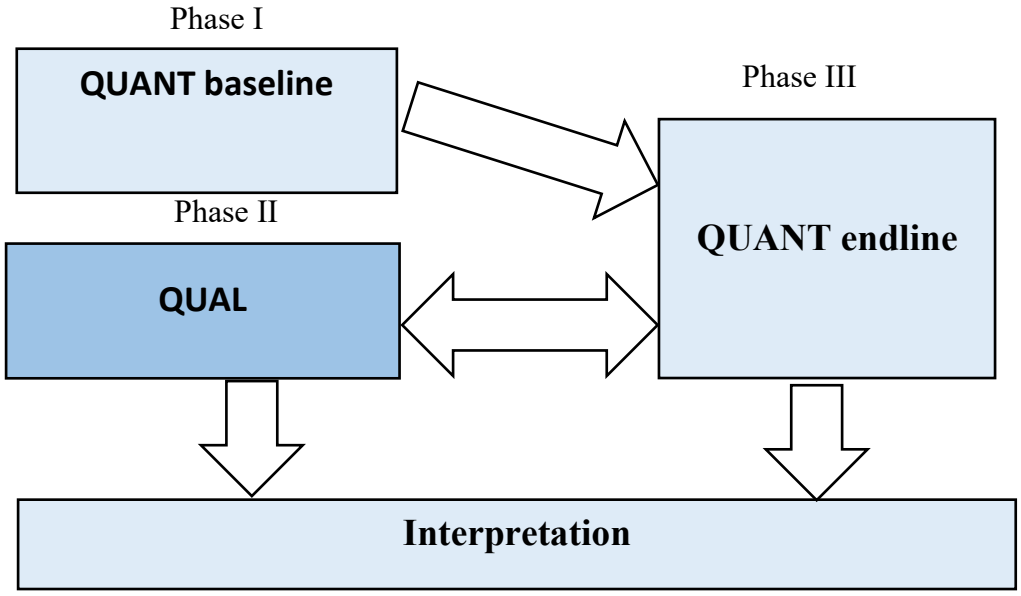
Another benefit is the fact that mixed research can also be used for complementary purposes, which enables the researcher to explain the results of analyses more fully (Greene, Caracelli & Graham 1989). For example, one research methodology can be used to counter the deficiencies of the other (Almeida 2018) or to complement the findings yielded by the other.

Moreover, data collected in mixed research is flexible – it provides opportunities for the researchers to select any design of their choice which involves a range of sequential and concurrent strategies. The sequential approach is used when the next phase depends on the outcomes of the previous phase, whereas in concurrent research, data for both quantitative and qualitative methods are collected simultaneously. Sequential and concurrent mixed methods provide options for the researcher to either give the same priority to both methods or to emphasise one method over the other. For example, in the case of sequential design, data from each method can be explanatory (equal priority), exploratory (equal priority, but priority can be given to either), or transformative (priority can be given to either or both), and for the concurrent design, data from each method can be 'concurrent (implementing two different designs at the same time), concurrent triangulation (results are compared simultaneously), concurrent embedded (one design is embedded in another design, and vice versa), and concurrent transformative (one design is transformed into another, and vice versa)' (Cresswell 2009, pp. 209-210).

As explained in §4.0, there were three phases to this study: In Phase I and Phase II (March 2018), I tested Grade 1 learners and conducted classroom observations and interviews. In Phase III (September 2018), I retested the same learners. Baseline quantitative data were only analysed after school visits. In this study, Phase I and II are concurrent. Phase III is sequential only by virtue of the study, including longitudinal data.

Figure 4.1 below is an illustration of the type of mixed methods approach used in this study.

Figure 4. 1. Exploratory design



To address the quantitative element of the current study, the following three research questions were posed:

RQ1: How do the Grade 1 learners perform on early literacy measures in Xitsonga in terms of:

- Phonological and phonemic awareness
- Letter-sound knowledge
- Word reading
- Oral reading fluency
- Oral reading comprehension

RQ2: How do gender, age and school variables affect early Xitsonga reading development?

RQ3: Which early reading skills at baseline are predictive of later reading accomplishment in Xitsonga?

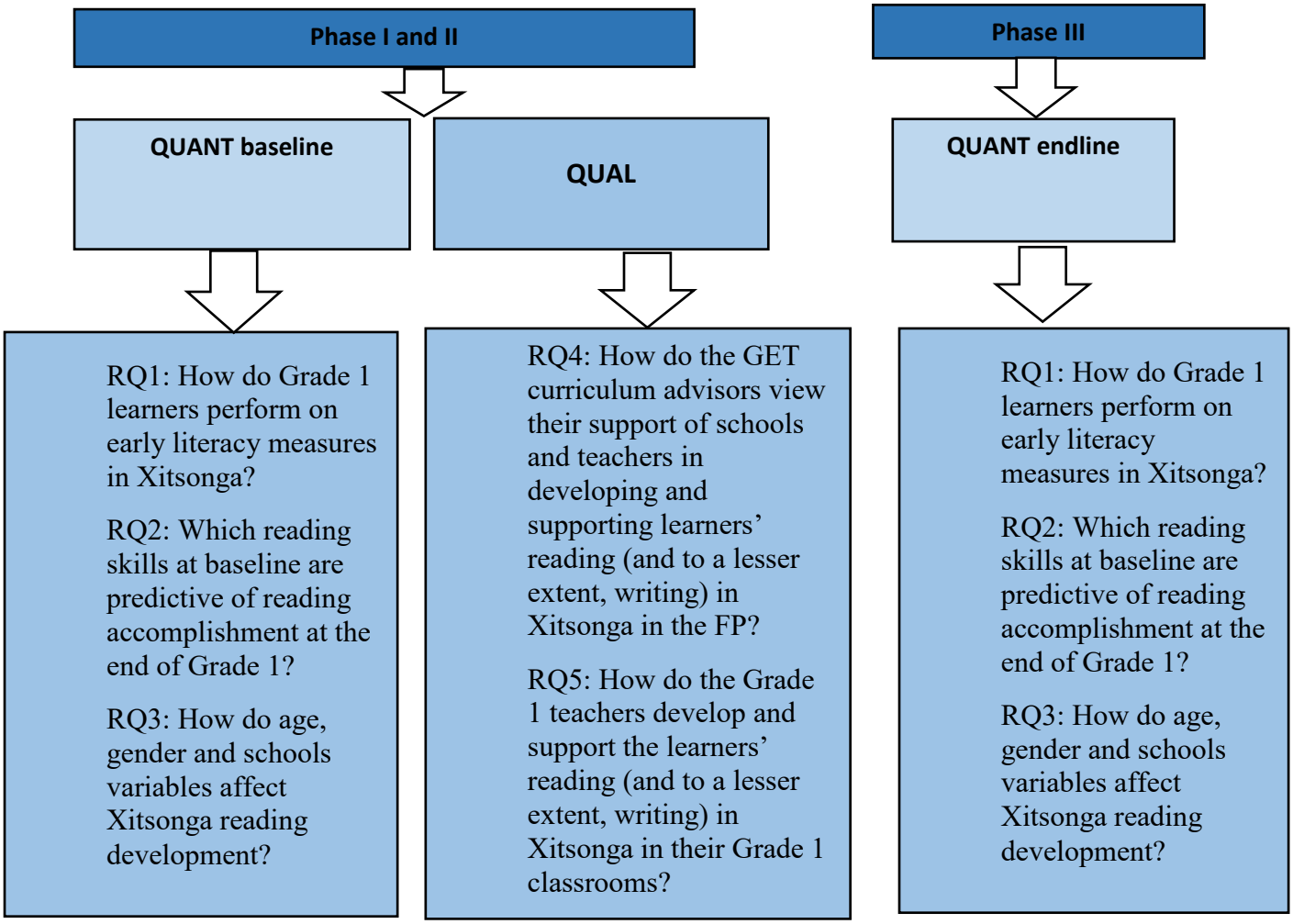
To address the qualitative aspect of the current study, the following two research questions were posed:

RQ4: How do the GET curriculum advisors view their support of schools and teachers in developing and supporting learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the FP?

RQ5: How do the Grade 1 teachers develop and support the learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the Grade 1 classroom?

Figure 4.2 below is a visual illustration that shows the different phases and concomitant research questions which were used to address both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the current study.

Figure 4. 2. Different phases of different research questions



A pilot study preceded the main study to test the instruments and procedures and to afford me opportunities to familiarise myself with the data collection process. More details are provided in §4.5.

4. 2. ACCOUNTABILITY IN RESEARCH

Accountability in research provides opportunities for individual researchers to bear responsibility for their actions in conducting research. However, the French playwright, Moliere said accountability 'is not only for what we do that we are held responsible but also

for what we do not do' (Moliere Quotes. n.d.). Thus, accountability in research relates to concepts such as responsibility, answerability, trustworthiness and liability (Gawadekar 2017). There are different approaches to ensuring accountability, depending on whether quantitative or qualitative research is undertaken. Accountability in this study was confirmed by considering the validity and reliability of the quantitative data, and trustworthiness for the qualitative data.

4. 2. 1. Validity and reliability in quantitative research

Lobiondo-Wood and Haber (2013) posit that the quality of the quantitative study can be enhanced through the measurement of validity and reliability of the instrument(s) and the study.

4. 2. 1. 1. Validity

Validity is the extent to which a particular instrument is used to measure what it purports to measure (Thatcher 2010), and that it does so accurately. In research, validity has two essential elements: external and internal validity.

External validity shows the level at which the findings of a particular study can be generalised across populations, contexts and time (Dellinger & Leech 2007). The validity of research tools are measured against construct and content instruments.

Construct validity describes the degree to which a test measures up to its claims, or purports to be measuring (Polit & Beck 2012). It means that research instruments designed for a study should address the construct, or the problem under investigation. For this study, the construct is early reading. In terms of cognitive-linguistic theory, early reading comprises different skills, contributing to early reading development. The EGRA test was specifically designed to assess these skills – it was further adapted to reflect the linguistic and orthographic features of Xitsonga so that early reading in this language could be validly assessed. Construct validity was also ensured by piloting the Xitsonga EGRA instrument. This was achieved by pre-testing a small number of Grade 1 learners before the main study began.

Content validity is the extent to which the questions on the instrument and the scores from these questions represent all possible questions that could be asked about the skill (Creswell 2005). The more the items represent the domain of the concept being measured, the greater the content validity (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). In this case, the content validity of the EGRA tool was determined by assessing learners' phonological and phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, word reading, oral reading fluency and oral reading comprehension. These are all

aspects of reading that teachers are expected to cover during the year, as per CAPS recommendations. Given that Xitsonga, like other African languages, uses long and multisyllabic words, for instrument validity, the adapted Word Reading activity in Xitsonga adapted EGRA started with easy, familiar texts (single consonant sounds and 2-syllable words) to complex ones (3-, and 4- syllable words) (Cf Appendix G).

Internal validity shows whether the results of a study are pertinent in experimental or quasi-experimental studies, where the researcher can be confident that any cause-effect changes were brought about by the intervention and not by other factors. It refers to the internal 'logic' and coherence of the study and whether the study can be replicated (Willis 2007).

Although the current study did not involve an intervention, in terms of replicability, internal validity was ensured in this study by using convenience sampling to select five schools. Since I worked with intact groups in these schools, I used systematic random sampling to select 15 learners within those groups. Instruments and procedures were explicitly described and samples of the instruments provided in appendices. Data collected through assessing learners were recorded systematically and entered into a computer database and analysed through the usual descriptive and inferential statistics in the SPSS programme.

4. 2. 1. 2. Reliability

Reliability 'measures the degree of consistency' in a study (Mohajan 2017, p. 1). A reliable research instrument must show that there would be similar results if it were to be carried out on the same participants in a similar context (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). There are three ways in which reliability can be ensured: test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and inter-rater reliability.

Test-retest reliability refers the extent to which the research instrument is used on multiple occasions but still provides accurate results on all occasions. Retest reliability in this study was ensured by piloting the EGRA tool which yielded the same results as the main study.

Internal consistency is when a test measures the consistency of results across items. It can be measured in three ways, viz. the split-half technique, Cronbach's alpha, and the Kruder-Richardson Formula 20 (Cohen et al. 2007). However, Nunally (1967, in Bannigan and Watson 2009) advises that Cronbach's alpha is the best in terms of measuring reliability of the instrument because most major sources of error are due to the sampling of instrument contents.

Demonstrating internal consistency in this study was achieved by using Cronbach's alpha and reporting them in the relevant section of the thesis in Chapter 5 (§5.2.).

Inter-rater reliability is the extent to which two or more people who rate or score assessments provide consistent results or outcomes. This can be measured by using the same administrators at the same time or administering two parallel forms of the same scales (Bannigan & Watson 2009) and ensuring that everyone rates the responses, in the same way, e.g., explicit memos, marking grids, etc. As far as this study is concerned, inter-rater reliability was not conducted because I was the sole test administrator.

4. 2. 2. Trustworthiness in qualitative research

Because reliability and validity are concepts associated specifically with accountability in quantitative research, trustworthiness is considered in the qualitative aspect of this study in terms of ensuring accountability. Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree of confidence in data and the methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit & Beck 2014). Although it is commonly accepted by research that trustworthiness for qualitative research is necessary, there are still ongoing debates in the literature as to what constitutes trustworthiness (Leung 2015). Trustworthiness was ensured in this study in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of trustworthiness which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the confidence we have in the plausibility and truth of the qualitative findings. It was demonstrated in this study through the use of multiple sources of data. For example, I used semi-structured interviews with the Grade 1 teachers and the CAs of the GET band. I also used classroom observations with respect to observing literacy lessons and evaluating classroom settings. To identify significant commonalities and discrepancies, the trustworthiness of the data was further secured by triangulating classroom observation data with interview responses from the teachers and the CAs. Credibility was also demonstrated in this study by writing extensive notes during the interviews to supplement data gathered through video and audio recordings and to contextualise the written description and provide supporting visual evidence where possible.

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of a particular study are applicable or useful to theory, practice and future research (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Unlike quantitative research, often it is impossible to demonstrate that findings or conclusions from qualitative research are applicable to other situations or populations because they generally relate to a small number of

participants (Shenton 2004; Flyvbjerg 2006; Drury, Homewood & Randall 2011). Although only 75 Grade 1 learners and five Grade 1 teachers and classrooms were used in this study, they share similarities to other primary schools in the Mopani district where Xitsonga is used in the FP, so findings in this study may be transferable to other Xitsonga research studies, for example, Spaull et al. (2020).

Dependability is the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the extent to which the findings can be supported by the data and be replicated. It includes aspects of consistency (Lincoln & Guba 1985), which compel the researcher to check whether the analysis process is in line with the acceptable standards for a particular design. This study ensured dependability by conveniently selecting five schools representing both rural and semi-suburban school settings in South Africa. To further assure dependability, interviews with the CAs of the GET band and the teachers teaching Grade 1 classes were carefully recorded by using an audio recorder and transcribed verbatim. Interview recordings were supplemented by the notes. All the data gathered were analysed and presented in as fair and unbiased manner as possible.

Furthermore, I attempted to provide adequately rich descriptions of the CAs and the teachers as well as the context of the research so that readers can determine to what extent the interpretations and evaluations are supported by the data, and to what extent the findings might apply to other contexts. Data collected from the classroom observation and interviews were analysed manually according to the thematic analysis, using the themes and subthemes that emerged across questions during interviews. The entire process of analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase framework for doing qualitative thematic analysis (Table 4.4). Dependability was further assured by leaving a clear audit trail and documenting all the research processes, providing full descriptions of settings, tape-recording and faithfully transcribing them, and by transcribing supplementary notes.

Conformability involves the aspects of neutrality. Here, the data interpretation should not be based on the researcher's viewpoints, but on the data that has been gathered (Korstjens & Moser 2017). To achieve conformability in this study, I provided a detailed methodological description by describing the worldview underpinning this study, explaining the rationale behind the employment of a mixed methods research design, explaining the methodological approach, and describing data collection methods.

Qualitative research is susceptible to researcher subjectivism but an attempt was made throughout the study to be as methodological, detailed and transparent as possible and to triangulate data so that claims could be reliably be backed up by evidence.

4. 3. ETHICS

Adhering to ethical issues when conducting research is obligatory. For this reason, it is mandatory in South Africa that all research involving animals or human participants be ethically approved before data collection begins. The term 'ethics,' according to Shah (2011, p. 205) and Akaranga and Ongong'a (2013, p. 8), refers to an 'ethos' or 'way of life,' 'social norms for conduct that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.' Acceptable behaviour in research is enhanced by adhering to the following ethical principles: informed consent, respect for privacy and confidentiality, no harm to research participants, and no deception of research participants (Gilbert 2008, pp. 146-147). Thus, once the research proposal was accepted, I applied for and was granted ethical approval from the University of South Africa (Cf Appendix A). Prior to collecting data for the current study, I also sought to obtain consent through an open communication process, which involved writing letters to the Limpopo Provincial Department of Education (Cf Appendix B) and the principals of the five sampled schools (Cf Appendix C), requesting permission to conduct research at these schools.

Consent forms from the Grade 1 teachers were used (Cf Appendix D), requesting permission to interview and observe their Xitsonga literacy lessons. I also sought to obtain letters/consent forms from the CAs of the GET band (Cf Appendix E), requesting permission to interview them in terms of understanding how they view their support of teachers in developing and supporting learners' literacy development in Xitsonga language in the FP. Given that the Grade 1 learners are too young to consent to procedures involved in research, I obtained their consent verbally (assent), and permission from their parents (Cf Appendix F). To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for the participants and also for the research settings (e.g., schools). Since I took pictures of the participants in the classroom during observations, I used a star sign to hide their faces for the sake of protecting their identity.

Data was stored in a locked office and no one else besides the supervisor and myself were privy to it. Strydom and Venter (2002, p. 66) state that qualitative researchers sometimes give incorrect information about the research aims or goals to hide what the research participants

will experience when they participate in the study. The goals of the current study and the research procedures were stated explicitly before the actual collection of data. For example, I held a meeting on the first day of each school's visit with the participants where I explained everything about the aims of the study as well as emphasising the research procedures that would be followed in the study. During the research process, reasonable steps were taken to prevent any harm from taking place or from creating undue stress to participants. All participants were put at ease, and I offered them an opportunity to make their decision about participating or not participating in the research. I also established a good rapport with the children and explained what would happen during the assessment.

4. 4. RESEARCH SETTING AND SAMPLING

Research involves delineating the geographic boundaries of a project's study area. Given (2008) describes a research site as the physical, social, and cultural site in which the researcher conducts the study. In this study, the testing of Grade 1 learners, classroom observations and interviews with five Grade 1 teachers and two curriculum advisors were conducted in five different schools located in Mopani East and Mopani West districts in Limpopo Province of the Republic of South Africa (Figure 4.3). With regard to the curriculum advisors, one interview (with CA1) was conducted at the provincial Department of Education offices and the other (with CA2) was conducted telephonically, as CA2 was unreachable during the day because of departmental workshops. Thus, the location of the schools was regarded as the natural setting where classroom observations, interviews and testing of learners occurred and the circuit office where one curriculum advisor was interviewed.

Figure 4. 3. Limpopo province showing Mopani district

The schools located in the Mopani district are rich in diversity in the sense that they comprise a variety of races, cultures, and languages (e.g., Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Northern Sotho, Shona and Gujarati). Since 1996, public schools in South Africa are classified according to quintiles based on the socio-economic characteristics of the community in which they are situated. Funding is allocated according to SES, with poorer schools receiving more financial support. As per the South African Schools Act (SASA) (No. 84 of 1996), schools that are classified under quintile 1, 2 and 3 are exempted from paying school fees, whereas quintile 4 and 5 schools are allowed to augment their revenue by charging school fees because they receive less funding from the provincial education department. In this study, four of the five schools were classified as quintile 2 and had Xitsonga as the LoLT, and one school which was classified as quintile 4 had Xitsonga as a FAL.

4. 4. 1. Sampling techniques

Sampling arises from the issues of defining the population on which the study will focus (Cohen et al. 2007) because it is unlikely for a researcher to collect data from all cases (Taherdoost 2016). In this case, sampling enables researchers to reduce a large number of cases to obtain a representative picture of the population. Generally, sampling techniques are divided into two types, namely, probability and non-probability sampling techniques. In probability sampling, every case in the population has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample through random sampling. Non-probability sampling is not random; it includes quota sampling (participants are sampled on the basis of predetermined characteristics); snowball sampling (selection of a set of initial cases, which contribute to selecting further fellow respondents); convenience sampling (cases are selected from accessible group cases); purposive or judgmental sampling (cases are selected based on warranted inclusion) (Taherdoost 2016).

For the purpose of the current study, purposive and convenience sampling was used to select five schools. Since the population in which I was interested was Grade 1 children learning to read in Xitsonga, I focused on school districts where Xitsonga was available as a LoLT or FAL in the FP. Schools in Mopani West district were selected based on accessibility as they were situated in the same circuit where I used to work as a teacher. A school in Mopani East district was selected based on the interest of checking whether Xitsonga reading develops differently when it is the LoLT compared to a FAL.

I worked with intact Grade 1 groups in these schools. Within the groups, 15 learners were selected through systematic random sampling. For example, from a classroom of 62 learners,

a sample of 15 learners was required; therefore, every fifth learner was selected from the class list. In classes of 40 learners, every third learner was selected. 75 Grade 1 learners aged between 6 to 8 years were sampled. The gender composition was 38 boys and 37 girls. This sampling automatically included five Grade 1 teachers of the sampled schools and two CAs who supported these schools. However, in cases where there were more than one or two Grade 1 classes in the same school, teachers volunteered to participate in the study.

Having discussed the broader methodological issues related to the study, the next section describes the pilot study.

4. 5. PILOT STUDY

According to Baker (1994, p. 182), 'a pilot study can be the pre-testing or 'trying out' of a particular research instrument.' Piloting before the main study is essential in minimising risks of failure, and as Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) argue, it leads to 'reassessment without tears.' They further emphasise the significance of piloting when stating that:

> You may think that you know well enough what you are doing, but the value of pilot research cannot be overestimated. Things never work quite the way you envisage, even if you have done them many times before, and they have a nasty habit of turning out differently than you expected (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 1996, p. 121).

4. 5. 1. Aims of the pilot study

Piloting was undertaken to test the research instruments and procedures of data collection in both quantitative and qualitative aspects before the actual main study was conducted. The qualitative and quantitative aspects of the pilot study were collected and analysed separately. The primary objectives of the pilot study were to:

- try out the Xitsonga version of the EGRA tool
- practice administering and managing classroom observations and interviews
- establish how much time was needed to administer learners' reading assessment, classroom observations and interviews in the main study, and
- establish whether the coding and analysis from trialling tests, interviews and classroom observations worked.

4. 5. 2. Pilot qualitative data

The qualitative data for piloting was done at the beginning of the second school term (April 2017) in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) because I had relocated to this province for work-related issues, so it was easier to practice conducting classroom observations and interviews in KZN schools.[12] In accordance with ethical procedures, participants were given a letter explaining the nature of the study and providing evidence that I had permission from the University of South Africa to conduct the study (Cf Appendix A). The two teachers, whose classrooms were observed in KZN, opted to participate in the pilot. Data were collected and analysed through interviews and classroom observations with regard to examining what and how the FP teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in isiZulu HL, why they do things the way they do, and whether this is effective.

4. 5. 2. 1. Instruments

Two instruments were used for classroom observations: one looked at activities and practices that occurred in the classroom, while the second focused on print resources in the classroom.

***Classroom observation schedule*:** A lesson observation instrument reflecting the realities and demands of the FP CAPS and prepared by Zenlit Intervention (2016) was used to gather data during the Grades 2 and 3 literacy lessons (Cf Appendix J). The lesson observation schedule was divided into 3 sections: **Section A** covered details of school visits. This information was needed to clarify details in terms of procedures followed in each school for data collection. **Section B** comprised lesson observations, including decoding activities (relating to phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and oral reading fluency). At the end of the lesson observation, there was provision for general comments on decoding and reading activities, general notes on classroom comments, theme tables and a reading corner, as well as the comments on the reading process. **Section C** focused on documents such as the Term Plan, Weekly/Fortnightly Planning, Lesson Planning, Planning for Reading – General, and the vocabulary book.

***Classroom checklist*:** A classroom checklist was designed and used to gauge the level of print-richness of the classroom (Cf Appendix K). The print-richness of the classroom was evaluated by ticking the appropriate cell of the checklist which comprises 11 items (e.g., reading corner,

[12] The qualitative aspect was more to give me practice and confidence in observing early grade classrooms in general – they didn't specifically have to be Tsonga classrooms, since CAPS requires early reading to be taught in the same way across languages.

theme table, birthday chart, word walls, tables and seating arrangements accommodating group work, tables and seating arrangements enabling learners to face the chalkboard, group chart, comprehension glove, and a list of classroom rules). The checklist also uses a Likert scale of 1-5 (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to measure a range of factors that relate to the amount and use of print-based materials in a classroom. At the end of the checklist, there is space for comments (e.g., areas to strengthen, areas to add/materials needed) which are directly informed by the checklist findings.

***Interview schedule*:** The interviews involved what Bernard (1988) calls an interview schedule, which followed a set of questions for the people interviewed (Cf Appendix N). Semi-structured interviews were used to interview teachers about their perspectives on the development of learners' HL in the FP phase and the coach's role[13] in developing and supporting learners' HL in the FP classroom. Since the interview questions were semi-structured, follow-up questions of the things observed during literacy lessons were also asked. The schedule for the interviews was divided into two sections: **Section A** dealt mainly with biographic data of the participants (e.g., gender, age, qualifications, work experience, etc.). This information was important because it enabled me to link the information provided by the participants to their experiences over time. **Section B** covered semi-structured questions based on the respondents' perspectives on CAPS, print-based resources, activities that support reading, and the development of learners' HL reading in the classroom.

4. 5. 2. 2. The schooling context and participants

Two primary schools in Ilembe district in KwaZulu Natal Province were used for piloting. They were both government schools. Most learners who attended these schools were from families that were either low-income category or unemployed. The schools were classified as quintile 2, which qualifies learners to be exempted from paying school fees. Both schools were governed by the School Governing Body (SGB), consisting of members elected to serve the school for a period of three years. The SGB is elected in terms of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996).

Grades 2 and 3 teachers from different schools participated in the pilot phase. Selection procedures were based on convenience sampling, but care was taken to ensure that the participants were chosen based on the fact that they were FP teachers.

[13] The coach was included in piloting because coaches were used in the Zenlit project.

4. 5. 2. 3. Classroom observation and teacher interview procedures

Classroom observations and interviews were done in one day for both teachers. Prior to conducting the classroom observation and interviews, the arrangements were first made with a coach from the Zenlit Foundation Phase Literacy programme,[14] who knew all the schools because she was responsible for coaching and supporting rural primary schools of Illembe district where piloting was conducted. Observations were the first activities to be conducted in both classrooms. Teachers welcomed me and gave me a space where I could work as they conducted their lessons. The lesson observation sessions for both classes lasted 1hr and 30 minutes, after which learners went out for a break.

After observing lessons, I interviewed the teachers in their respective schools. I managed to interview each teacher for about 30 minutes, but the memory of my recorder became full while interviewing one of the teachers. I only realised that after we had covered three unrecorded questions and responses. Fortunately, I had my cell phone, so I used it to cover the rest of the questions together with the three unrecorded ones.

Although I did some piloting of EGRA in isiZulu schools, I did not analyse the results properly as the aim was to familiarise myself with administration of the EGRA tool and to practice assessing young learners and becoming precise in the timed tasks. Once my expertise in administering the EGRA had improved and given that Xitsonga was the target language in this study, I then went back to Limpopo where I pilot tested learners in a Xitsonga school to pilot Xitsonga EGRA tool.

Classroom observations and interviews in KZN schools helped me become aware of issues that I needed to look out for in qualitative research. I also had an opportunity to deepen my understanding of reading literacy practices in the FP, given that I came from a background of teaching at high school level.

4. 5. 3. Pilot quantitative data

The quantitative pilot was carried out in Limpopo Province in Mopani district during the last week of August 2017 – a month before the end of the third school Term. In this piloting phase,

[14] The Zenex Foundation funded a 3-year literacy coaching intervention that aimed at improving early grade reading instruction in the Foundation Phase classrooms across three provinces (Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Western Cape) in South Africa (ZENEX Foundation 2018).

Xitsonga EGRA instrument was administered to six Grade 1 learners to assess five basic components of early reading.

4. 5. 3. 1. Assessment instrument

After completing the qualitative pilot study in KZN, and before piloting the Tsonga learners, several modifications were made to the EGRA tool. As stated in Chapter 1 (§1.3), EGRA comprises several subcomponents (e.g., letter-sound knowledge, word reading, oral reading fluency, and oral reading comprehension). Researchers can select which components they want to include, depending on their research focus and the age/grade of the learners. Thus, the phonological and phonemic awareness subtask is not included in all versions of EGRA, and it is not in the original version adopted by the DBE. Before the pilot, the EGRA tool was adapted by adding a phonological awareness (syllable and phoneme awareness) subtask. The letter-sound chart was adapted by adding Xitsonga digraphs, trigraphs, and 4-letter sequences and the word list was adapted by including longer words (3-, and 4- syllables) (Cf Appendix G). The letter-sound chart and the word list were adapted for two reasons: (1) because Xitsonga like other African languages is agglutinative, meaning that words in these languages tend to be long and multisyllabic, and (2) because of its complex consonant sounds, words in the word list should include these sounds and not just have words with single consonant sounds. However, complex sounds and the longer words only came later in the list. All assessment charts started with easy, familiar texts to complex ones. Although the font used on the EGRA tool was clear and large, it was adapted to the Teacher's Pet font which is commonly used for teaching learners in Grades 1 to 3.

Xitsonga adapted EGRA comprising five foundational skills, was used to test the Grade 1 learners' early reading skills (Cf Appendix G). It was divided into two sections. **Section A** included the usual demographic information (e.g., gender, age, school name, etc.). These details were added in the main study to elicit information in order to compare learners' scores according to different groups. **Section B** comprised the five foundational literacy skills, viz. PA (13 items), LSK (110 letters), WR (50 words), ORF (2 passages of 57 and 60 words each), and ORC (5 questions per passage, 4 literal and one inferential). Examples are given to practice and to ensure that the child understands what is read. Three tasks (LSK, WR and ORF) were timed in which learners were given a minute to perform. The reason for the timed tasks was to determine to what extent those foundational decoding skills have been mastered and automised

while the untimed tasks only assess whether children can answer the question or not, without a time limit.

4. 5. 3. 2. Reading assessment procedures

The reading assessment was administered to learners in Term 3 on the 28th of August 2017 from 9:30 am to 10:12 am. Learners were tested in a quiet classroom, one-on-one and they sat opposite me. It took approximately 7 minutes to assess each learner. They felt a little nervous before the test. To put them at ease, I established a good rapport with them and explained what would happen during the assessment. Examples for each task were given beforehand to make sure that learners had initial practice time before attempting the main task and to follow the instructions accordingly. If the learner could not read anything, or got 6 items incorrect consecutively, they were asked to stop and move to the next task.

Procedures for administering PA: The PA chart comprised 13 items. Because this was an oral task, the learner was not presented with the chart, but he/she was asked to listen carefully to the words said aloud for the purpose of deleting, substituting or identifying the sounds of each word. Two practice items were done beforehand. One point was awarded for a correct response.

Procedures for administering LSK: The letter-sound chart was presented to a learner containing 110 letters, 10 per row. A learner was given a chance to practice two items before. The learner was shown to read the letter-sounds from left to right across each row. A timer was set for a minute so that the learner could begin sounding the letters. In the process of the learner reading, incorrect items were noted. After one minute, the learner was asked to stop and a large circle was placed around the last letter that the learner had sounded. The total number of letters attempted was recorded, the number of errors was subtracted from that and a total obtained for letters correct per minute. One point was assigned for each letter sounded correct.

Procedures for administering WR: A chart of 50 words was presented to the learner. First, a practice of two items was done. Thereafter, the learner was given one minute to read each word while errors were noted. After a minute, the same scoring procedure as above was used.

Procedures for administering ORF: In this task, the learner was asked to read aloud the first passage in one minute and answered questions linked to the passage before reading the second passage. Errors were noted while the learner was reading. If the learner read very slowly and struggled, they were not asked to proceed with the second passage. The ORF score was the number of correct words read per minute.

Procedures for administering ORC: After learners had read for a minute, they were asked to respond to orally presented questions related to the passage as far as they had read. The score awarded for the reading comprehension was the number of the correct answer given per item.

4. 5. 3. 3. Pilot context and participants

I visited one primary school, which was situated in the village of Mohlaba Head Kraal in Mopani West of Limpopo Province. It was a small school with an average enrolment of 234 learners. This is a quintile 2 school with Xitsonga as the LoLT in Grade R to 3 and English as a FAL and switches to English as the LoLT in Grade 4. This school was also used in the main study; only one learner among the sampled learners in the main study repeated the grade.

Six Grade 1 learners were selected based on their HL performance, as 'Below,' 'Average' and 'Above Average,' according to their teacher. Gender composition was three girls and three boys, and the average age of the learners was 6.3 years.

4. 5. 3. 4. Data analysis and coding

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data. All learners' scores were entered into SPSS version 25 for statistical analysis, and a range of descriptive statistics was computed to build an overall picture of learner performance. Inferential statistics were not employed in the pilot study due to the small size of the sample (n=6).

The quantitative results of the pilot study

Descriptive statistics of the pilot Grade 1 learners in the five components of reading are presented in terms of the mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) as well as the minimum and maximum values in Table 4.1. An outlier at the top end was excluded from the cohort of the ORF.

Table 4. 1. Descriptive statistics for overall performance

	M	***SD***	**Min**	**Max**
PA	5.60	1.94	3.0	7.0
LSK	16.50	6.91	6.0	24.0
WR	3.0	1.73	2.0	6.0
ORF	21.0	17.16	3.0	38.0
ORC	2.80	1.09	2.0	4.0

Performance on the PA skill was fair, with a mean of 5.6 out of 13 items. Of the learners assessed, 4 or 5 of the 6 learners managed 7 out of 13 items correctly. The letter-sound

knowledge was low with a mean of 16.6 lcpm. Only one learner could sound at most 24 letters correct in 1 minute. As reflected in word reading and oral reading fluency scores, learners could hardly read isolated words even though the words in the first two rows were short. Surprisingly, they could read words in context much better. This showed a big discrepancy in word and passage reading. Although an outlier at the top end was excluded from the cohort of the ORF only, the mean values indicated that the learners had better ORF scores than word reading.

4. 5. 4. Discussion of quantitative results of the pilot study

In light of the aims of the pilot study, although learner performance across the five foundational skills was low and the fact that classroom observations and interviews were conducted in KZN schools, the adapted Xitsonga EGRA tool, for the items in each subtask were left unchanged. It also became apparent that I needed slightly more than 7 minutes for testing learners one-on-one, particularly in terms of accommodating examples and initial practice time before attempting the main task.

The fact that the learners' mean score in oral reading fluency was higher than word reading scores may be due to a certain extent by the occurrence of short grammatical morphemes that are written separately in a disjunctive orthography in the ORF passage (Spaull et al. 2020), or because two of the children were fluent readers (they managed to read between 36 and 38 wcpm), and they therefore pulled the mean up in this small sample.

4. 5. 5. Changes made after piloting

For the ORF task, rather than have a single passage only, as in the original version, another passage was added (with 60 words and longer) from a list of Grade 1 Xitsonga readers. I worked out an overall mean of ORF from the two passages. ORC was adapted by including another set of five questions (with 4 literal questions and one inferential question) related to the new passage. I thus tried to strengthen the validity of the instrument by increasing the data from which ORF and ORC scores were averaged.

Another important procedural issue noted as a red flag in the pilot study was that I began testing learners late after break. This would have been a challenge for fitting in the testing of 15 learners per school after midmorning break. I resolved to address this challenge in the main study by testing learners in the morning before the school break. With regard to establishing how much time was needed to administer the EGRA tool, I learned that besides spending three minutes for the timed tasks, one still needed to explain the procedure, do examples, etc., so it

took a bit longer. This was resolved in the main study by adapting the time of assessing learners one-on-one from 7 minutes to about 10 to 12 minutes per learner. However, the administration, coding and scoring of the research instrument during the pilot and the main study were quite similar.

4. 6. MAIN STUDY

As explained in §4.2, the main study comprised a quantitative and qualitative components, which were applied in three phases. This was in respect of testing learners' reading skills and conducting classroom observations and interviews in Phase I and II and again retesting the learners in Phase III. The main study differed from the pilot study in terms of the research setting and the number of participants. However, all the trialled instruments in the pilot study were also used for the main study.

4. 6. 1. Research context

The main study was conducted in five different public schools where one differed from the other four regarding socio-economic status and location. Four of the schools were classified as quintile 2 and one was quintile 4. The four quintiles 2 schools use Xitsonga as the LoLT and English as the FAL and the quintile 4 school uses English as the LoLT and Xitsonga as the FAL. A quintile 4 school (located in a suburban area) was included in this study to compare its literacy performance with quintile 2 schools (located in rural areas) for, as explained in Chapter 3 (§3.3.2.1), quintile 4 schools tend to perform better than quintile 2 schools (Spaull 2011; Mpofu 2015). It was also meant to see how Xitsonga reading develops when it is the LoLT compared to a FAL; hence, in quintile 2 schools, most of the learners tested had Xitsonga as HL.

For the purpose of the present study, these schools were labelled Schools A, B, C, D and E. The second school (School B) was described in the pilot study in §4.6.2.2. However, due to some changes from the previous year, School B is described together with the others for the main study.

School A was a medium-sized quintile 4 school (668 learners) with two Grade 1 classes comprising 41 learners per class. The learner enrollment qualified the school to have a staff of 22 teachers, including the principal and one head of department (HOD). The school was situated in the suburban setting of Giyani in Mopani East district. The school has English as

the LoLT in Grade R to 3. Tsonga, Venda, Northern Sotho and Indian children are taught Xitsonga FAL as a subject because it is the predominant language in the area. Since it is a quintile 4 school, this means that the school receives less funding from the provincial education departments and is allowed to supplement its revenue by charging school fees.

School B was a small quintile 2 school (286 learners) with one Grade 1 class comprising 34 learners. The school was smaller than the others. The enrollment qualified the school to have a staff of nine teachers, including the principal. It was situated in the rural area of Mohlaba Head Kraal in Mopani West district, predominantly Xitsonga speaking learners.

School C was a medium-sized quintile 2 school (465 learners) with two Grade 1 classes comprising 40 learners per class. The enrollment qualified the school to have 16 teachers, including the principal and two HODs. It is located in the rural area of Sasekani in Mopani West district. Besides Tsonga speaking learners, the school also admitted Venda, Northern Sotho and Shona HL speaking children.

School D was a large quintile 2 school (751 learners) situated in the rural area of Mohlaba-Cross in Mopani West. The enrollment qualified the school to have more staff. However, at the time of the research, the school had 23 teachers, including the principal, three HODs and a deputy principal. It had two Grade 1 classes of 69 (Grade 1A) and 62 (Grade 1B) learners, respectively. There were Venda and Northern Sotho speaking learners who were taught Xitsonga as the LoLT.

School E was the largest quintile 2 school (864 learners) of them all, situated in the rural area of Mohlaba-Cross in Mopani West. There were two Grade 1 classes of 57 learners per class. The enrollment qualified the school to have a larger staff contingent. At the time of the research, the school had 23 teachers, including the principal, a deputy principal and three HODs. Besides, Tsonga speaking learners, the school also admitted Northern Sotho and Venda HL speaking children. Summary information about these schools is provided in Table 6.1 in Chapter 6.

4. 6. 2. Participants

As explained in §4.5.1, the schools were selected by using convenient sampling. There were five Grade 1 female teachers, two CAs (one male and one female) of the GET band and 75 Grade 1 learners (37 girls, 49% and 38 boys, 51%). There were four (5.3%) grade repeaters in the main study, as indicated by the teachers during interviews. As already stated earlier in §4.1, all five teachers had FP teaching experience. Only one teacher was a Northern Sotho HL

speaker and the rest were Xitsonga HL speakers. The teachers also obtained the qualifications required to teach in South African primary schools. Further information about the teachers is given in Chapter 6.

The CAs' ages ranged between 50 and 60 years. Both CAs had FP experience as teachers. CA1 was a Northern Sotho HL speaker, and CA2 was a Tsonga HL speaker. Further information about the CAs is given in Chapter 6.

Fifteen Grade 1 learners were sampled from a single intact class in each school. According to the teachers' information, all sampled learners attended Grade R before they were admitted to Grade 1. The average age of the Grade 1 learners was 6.62 years. Further information about the Grade 1 learners is given in Chapter 5.

4. 6. 3. Data collection

Data in terms of testing learners (quantitative) and conducting classroom observations and interviews (qualitative) were collected concurrently in Phase I and Phase II (March 2018). Phase III, which was conducted in September 2018, focused on retesting the learners only. As indicated in §4.4, the current study took note of ethical considerations before administering all the research instruments. The procedures for testing learners through the EGRA tool will not be repeated in this section, as these details have already been given in §4.6.3.2. Therefore, only classroom observation and interview data procedures will be explained.

4. 6. 3. 1. Classroom observation and teacher interview procedures

Data related to the classroom layout was gathered after the learners were assessed. This was usually administered between 9:30 am to 10:00 am when learners went for break. I used the classroom Checklist to gauge the level of print-richness of the classroom. A camera was used to take pictures of the classroom setting. As explained in §4.6.2.1, this task was also conducted by ticking the appropriate cell of the classroom checklist that was used to gauge the level of print-richness in the classroom.

Classroom observations were administered after break from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm. I used the observation schedule and a video recorder to guide my focus throughout the observation period. Interviews were the last task to be conducted with the teachers from 1:35 pm. It lasted approximately 30 to 35 minutes with the teachers and for each CA, it lasted 45 minutes. I used the interview schedule, which comprised a list of open-ended questions for all the participants. I also used a video to record the observations, a camera to take pictures during reading lessons,

and an audio recorder for the interviews. I also used a notebook to complement video-recorded observations and audio-taped interviews.

4. 6. 4. Data analysis

Data in the current study were analysed by using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Since a range of data types was collected in this study, a variety of techniques and tools about the three phases of the study are discussed below.

4. 6. 4. 1. Quantitative data analysis

Data from the learners' reading performance were analysed through the usual descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Inferential statistical analyses included testing for significant differences, correlations and regression analyses. Before proceeding with the main analyses, preliminary analyses were done from the dataset to check assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance and multicollinearity. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences software, Version 25, was used for statistical analysis of the data.

4. 6. 4. 2. Qualitative data analysis

A great deal of research material in this study was generated through observations and interviews. The transcript segments from the recorded interviews and classroom observations were analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 5), thematic analysis provides a flexible, detailed and useful account of data. The entire process of analysis in this study followed Braun and Clarke's 6-phase framework for doing qualitative thematic analysis, as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4. 2. The six-step framework for doing thematic analysis

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data	Step 4: Review and reorganise themes
Step 2: Generating initial codes from the data	Step 5: Naming themes
Step 3: Searching for themes	Step 6: Writing-up

Step 1: Becoming familiar with data

First, I listened to the audio recording of teacher interviews and CAs interviews. Thereafter, I watched and listened to the video recorder of classroom observations several times, referring at the same time to my field notes. Through this process, I was able to immerse myself in the data and familiarise myself with it. Thereafter, I spent hours transcribing the interviews from

the teachers in Xitsonga and then translated them into English, manually. These transcription and translation processes acquainted me more deeply with the data. This was followed by transcribing interviews from the CAs, which did not take much time because the CAs opted to be interviewed in English. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and supplemented by the notes. Although the whole process of transcribing was time-consuming, it was worth enacting the task, as by listening to the interviews over and over, I thought of ways to code the data. Familiarity with the data was also achieved by ensuring that responses from audio-recorded interviews and observations were captured accurately. For fear of not missing important details, I returned to the originally recorded data a few times during the data analysis process and while writing up my findings.

Step 2: Generating initial codes from the data

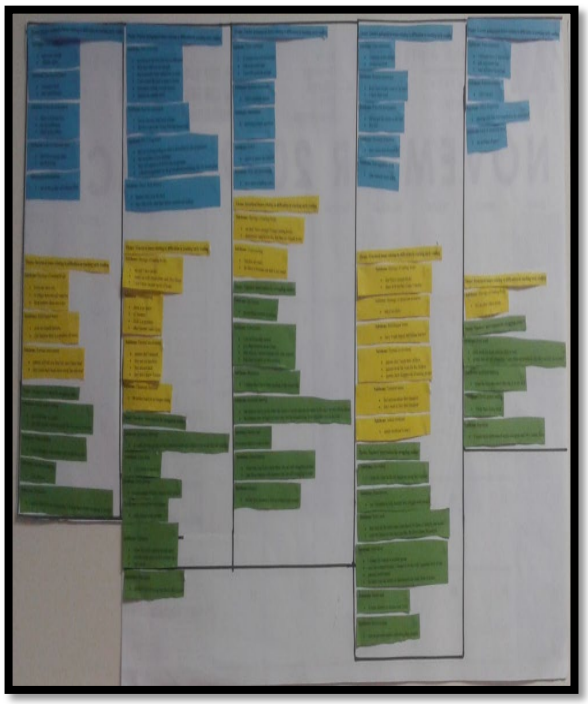
The task of coding and sorting data was done manually rather than using electronic means. I felt that this gave me a greater sense of connection to the data and the emerging themes and categories. Here, I began by generating the initial code from the data and printed out the transcripts. This was done by identifying and colour coding words and phrases within the data. For example, I identified phrases such as 'time is not enough as children differ,' 'we don't have enough books' and 'I don't normally record' in different colours to indicate different issues that emerged from their responses.

Step 3: Searching for themes

Here, I started by looking at the list of codes and their associated extracts and then collated the codes into broader colour-coded themes that reflected patterns or recurring threads emerging from the data. The task of searching for themes was an iterative process. It involved grouping the phrases that were highlighted in the second phase of this process. For example, the following time-related phrases were grouped together under the heading of *time constraints*: 'time is not enough;' 'three days and it is not enough;' '15 minutes is not enough;' '15 minutes but it is not enough.' It should be noted that some codes became subthemes to others while other subthemes became redundant; therefore, the colour-coded themes were stuck up on a whiteboard so that I could survey them and ponder over them. Most codes were associated with one theme, although some were associated with more than one subtheme, as highlighted in Figures 4.4 (themes in CAs) and 4.5 (themes in teachers).

Figure 4. 4. CAs' preliminary themes

Figure 4. 5. Teachers' preliminary themes



Step 4: Review and reorganisation of themes

In this phase, I read through all the extracts related to the codes to explore if they supported the themes, if there were contradictions, and to see if themes overlapped. When themes and subthemes were reviewed, I felt that some subthemes, for instance, baseline assessment and EGRA did not seem to be distinct enough to be considered two separate subthemes; therefore, I merged them into a new subtheme, for example, assessment/EGRA. The outcome of the refinement process is shown in Figures 4.6 (themes in CAs) and 4.7 (themes in teachers) below.

Step 5: Naming themes

Here, after identifying themes in the data, I found a descriptive name for each theme (e.g., relating to structural, pedagogical or support ideas). All the themes identified emerged explicitly from the data. Any arising 'ghost theme' was discussed towards the end of the qualitative chapter. For now, the themes and subthemes are listed below, but they will be explicated in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Figure 4. 6. Developed thematic map showing the main themes (round shape) and subthemes (square shape) for the CAs

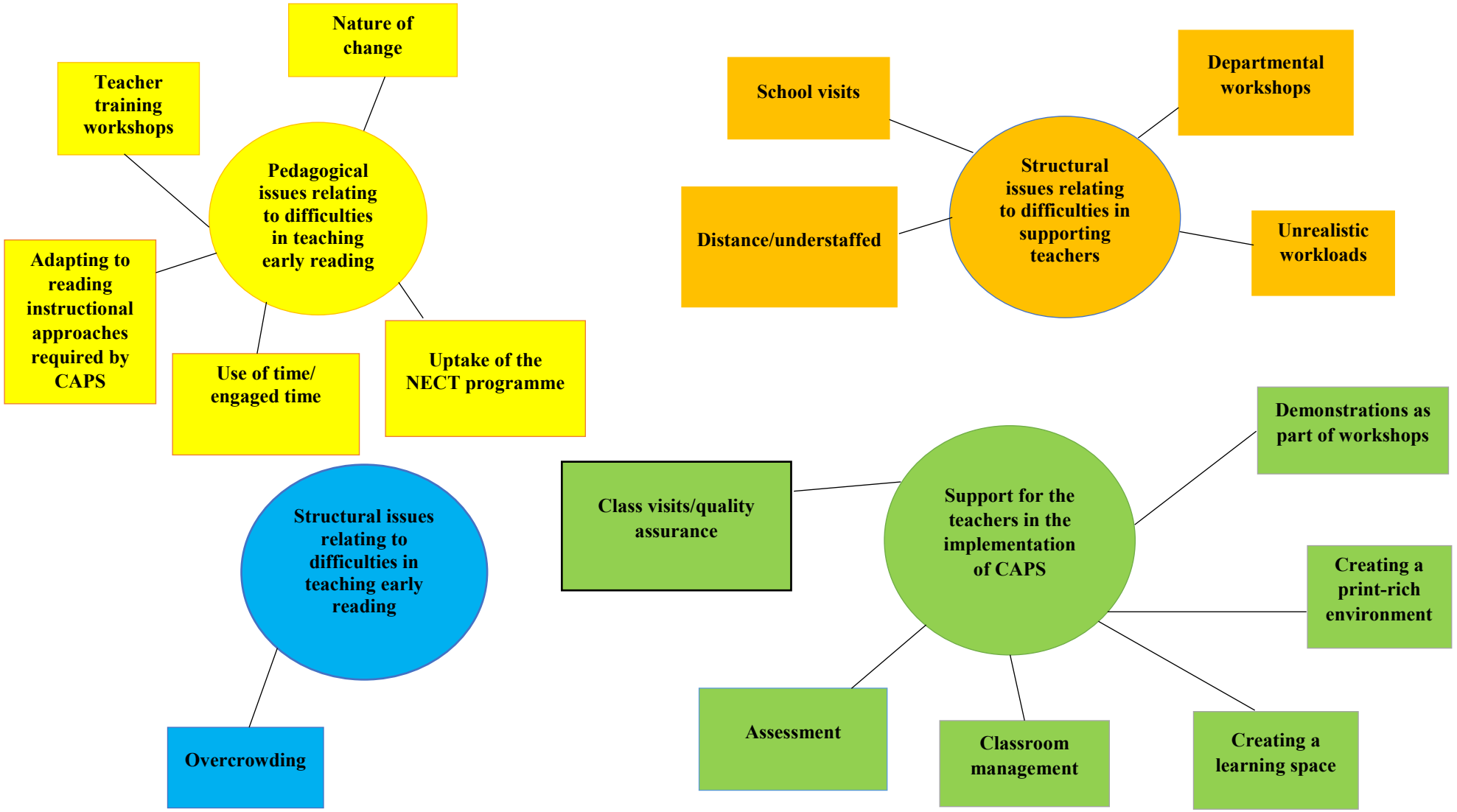
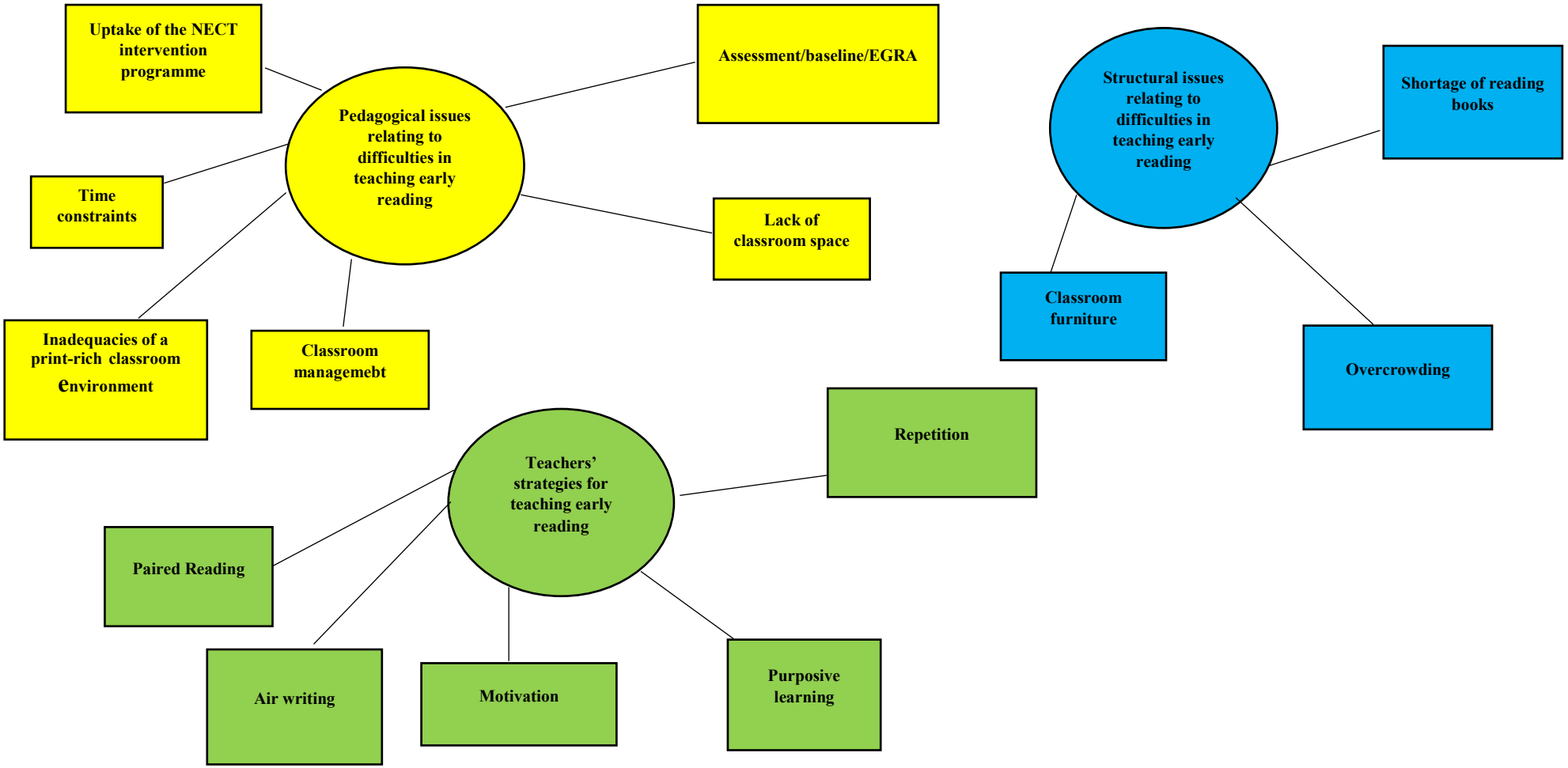


Figure 4. 7. Developed thematic map showing the main themes (round shape) and subthemes (square shape) for the teachers



CA theme 1: Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

- *The nature of change*
- *Adapting to reading instructional approaches required by CAPS*
- *Teacher training workshops*
- *Uptake of the NECT programme*
- *Engaged time*

CA theme 2: Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading.

- *Overcrowding*

CA theme 3: Structural issues relating to difficulties in supporting FP teachers

- *School visits*
- *Unrealistic workloads*
- *Distance/understaffed*
- *Departmental workshops*

CA theme 4: Support for the teachers in the implementation of CAPS.

- *Demonstrations as part of workshops*
- *Creating a print-rich classroom environment*
- *Baseline assessment/EGRA*
- *Creating a learning space*
- *Classroom management*
- *Class visits/quality assurance.*

Teacher theme 1: Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

- *Time constraints*
- *Uptake of the NECT intervention programme*
- *Inadequacies of a print-rich classroom environment*
- *Classroom management*
- *Lack of classroom space*

Teacher theme 2: Structural issues related to difficulties in teaching early reading

- *Shortage of reading books*
- *Overcrowding*
- *Classroom furniture*

Teacher theme 3: Teachers' strategies for teaching early reading.

- *Air writing*
- *Motivation*
- *Paired reading*
- *Purposive learning*
- *Repetition*

For the evaluation of classroom print resources, the following themes were identified:

The 1: Classroom print resources

- *Furniture and seating arrangements*
- *Alphabet chart*
- *Word wall chart*
- *Birthday chart*
- *Weather chart*

- *List of classroom rules chart*
- *Reading corner*

For the observation of literacy practices and activities, the following themes were described:

Theme 2: Literacy activities and practices.

- *Phonics*
- *Handwriting*
- *Shared reading*
- *Group guided reading/ independent reading/drawing activities*

Step 6: Writing up

This phase focused on reporting the findings of the analyses. A detailed account is given in Chapter 6.

4. 7. CONCLUSION

This chapter sketched the biographic information of the CAs and the Grade 1 teachers, together with a brief profile of the schools, outlined the philosophical worldview within which this study is situated and explained the design used. Thereafter, it described issues relating to accountability and rigour in research, such as validity and reliability in quantitative approach, as well as trustworthiness in qualitative approach and ethical considerations that characterise the current study. This was followed by a description of the instruments and the implementation of the pilot study and how it informed the main study. Thereafter, the chapter provided an account of the instruments and procedures followed in the main study. Lastly, it presented details of the data analysis.

The next chapter presents descriptive and inferential statistical analyses of the Grade 1 learners' early reading skills.

CHAPTER 5

QUANTITATIVE DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

5. 0. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the quantitative components of the study in line with the relevant research questions. Biographic information and descriptive results are presented first, followed by the inferential results. Thereafter, the main findings of the quantitative aspects of the current study are highlighted and discussed.

5. 1. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CONTEXT

To recap, one of the main purposes of this study was to examine aspects of early literacy development in Xitsonga over a year in a sample of 75 Grade 1 learners, who were assessed in Term 1 (baseline March 2018) and again in Term 3 (endline September 2018). The assessment of the learners' literacy levels complements the qualitative data (presented in Chapter 6) collected through classroom observations and interviews with Grade 1 teachers and curriculum advisors.

To address the quantitative aspects of this study, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: How do the Grade 1 learners perform on early literacy measures in Xitsonga in terms of:

- Phonological and phonemic awareness
- Letter-sound knowledge
- Word reading
- Oral reading fluency
- Oral reading comprehension

RQ2: How do gender, age and school variables affect early reading development in Xitsonga?

RQ3: Which early reading skills at baseline are predictive of later reading accomplishment at the end of Grade 1 in Xitsonga?

As stated in Chapter 4 (§4.5), four of the five schools selected in this study are quintile 2 schools, which use Xitsonga as the LoLT and English as a FAL, while one school is a quintile 4 school, which uses English as the LoLT and Xitsonga as a FAL.

5. 2. PRELIMINARY STATISTICS: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND RELIABILITY OF RESULTS

Both girls and boys were equally represented in the sample, as shown in Table 5.1 below. The average age of the Grade 1 learners was 6.6 years. The majority of the Grade 1 learners were 7 years old. According to the DBE's school admission policy, the official age for children entering Grade 1 should be 7 years; however, there is room to accommodate children at the age of 5 turning 6 by 30 June in the same year of admission. Eight-year-olds are considered 'overage' for the grade. The 8-year-olds (*n*=4) assessed in this study were still in Grade 1 because they were repeating the grade, as indicated by the teachers during interviews.

Of all the learners assessed (*n*=75) in March, three learners were not tested in September as they were either absent on that day or had transferred to another school, bringing the attrition rate of learners to 4% from March to September. Schulz and Grimes (2002) argue that a loss of 5% or lower is not a concern. Thus, the attrition rate in this study is acceptable in terms of ensuring internal validity.

Table 5. 1. Gender, age and attrition rate of the Grade 1 learners across schools

		March		September	
		n	**%**	***n***	**%**
Girl		37	49%	36	50%
Boy		38	51%	36	50%
Total		**75**		**72**	
Attrition rate				3	4%
Age	6	32	43%	32	44%
	7	39	52%	36	50%
	8	4	5%	4	6%

As indicated in Table 5.2, the sampled schools in the current study offer Xitsonga as LoLT (four quintile 2 schools) or as FAL (one quintile 4 school) in FP. However, the learners were fairly homogeneous, with most of them from homes where parents per school quintile were Tsonga HL speakers (63% quintile 2, 80% quintile 4) or where one parent per school quintile was Xitsonga HL speaker. Most of the non-Tsonga parents were also in quintile 2 schools rather than the quintile 4 school.

Table 5. 2. The home language of parents according to school quintile

School quintile	Language	HLF	%	HLM	%	HLF & HLM
Quintile 2	Tsonga	37	61.7%	38	63.3%	75
	Northern Sotho	22	36.7%	21	35.0%	43
	Shona	1	1.7%	1	1.7%	2
	Total	**60**	**100%**	**60**	**100%**	
Quintile 4	Tsonga	11	73.3%	13	86.7%	24
	Northern Sotho	2	13.3%	2	13.3%	4
	Venda	2	13.3%			2
	Total	**15**	**100%**	**15**	**100%**	

Home Language Father (HLF), Home Language Mother (HLM)

Only the September data was used to assess the reliability of the EGRA test because in Term 1, many children did not yet respond properly to most reading items. Internal consistency for two of the subtasks of EGRA (the untimed tasks), namely, phonological and phonemic awareness, and oral reading comprehension, was obtained by using Cronbach's alpha. The overall alpha value for phonological and phonemic awareness was 0.92, and for oral reading comprehension, it was 0.88. Both Cronbach coefficients indicate that these subtests were highly reliable.

Levene's test for homogeneity

At baseline, Levene's test was used to test for homogeneity. Table 5.3 showed that the variance across the schools was not equal as the *p*-value in four subtasks (PA, LSK, WR, and ORF) was less than 0.05, except for ORF.

Table 5. 3. Test of homogeneity of variance across schools

	F	df1	df2	*p*	Composite score
PA	4.57	4	70	.00	(1.95, 2.71)
LSK	3.67	4	70	.00	(4.96, 7.64)
WR	3.78	4	70	.00	(2.06, 2.27)
ORF	1.70	4	70	.15	(1.22, 1.82)
ORC	7.28	4	70	.00	(0, 0.16)

$p>0.05$

Test for normality

As shown in Table 5.4 below, the Shapiro-Wilk test revealed that four of the five schools were normally distributed, except for School E. However, despite schools showing normal distribution, because of the small sample size, non-parametric statistics were used for the inferential statistics.

Table 5. 4. Test of normality of variance within schools

	F	df	*p*	Composite score
School A	.91	15	.14	(1.95, 2.71)
School B	.98	15	.98	(4.96, 7.64)
School C	.91	15	.15	(2.06, 2.27)
School D	.91	15	.15	(1.22, 1.82)
School E	.83	15	.01	(0, 0.16)

5. 3. ANALYSIS OF EGRA DATA

In this section, I present the descriptive and inferential analyses of the data from the March (baseline) and September (endline) assessments. The results are shown in terms of overall learner performance, as well as performance between gender, age, grade repeaters and non-repeaters and across schools, and finally, the relations between EGRA components are presented.

5. 3. 1. Descriptive results: Overall learner performance across the EGRA measures

Table 5.5 below presents descriptive results for overall learner performance in raw scores at the beginning and final assessment. The results are presented in terms of the mean (*M*), standard deviation (*SD*), and standard error of the mean (*SE*). It includes performance at the 25th, 50^{th,} and 75th percentiles (i.e., showing the distribution of results at weaker, average and stronger levels), as well as the percentage of learners who scored zero on each task. A composite score was also computed, comprising the mean derived from all five measures for baseline and endline, respectively (This was not a weighted composite score; the aim was simply to get a general impression of overall performance for the cohort and for comparing performance across schools).

Table 5. 5. Descriptive statistics for overall performance

	March (N=75)							September (N=72)						
	M	*SD*	*SE*	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	% zero score	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	% zero score
PA	2.3	1.7	0.1	1	2	3	13.3%	3.2	3.5	0.4	0	3	5	36%
LSK	6.3	5.8	0.6	2	5	8	2.7%	17.2	15.3	1.8	4	13	27	0%
WR	2.3	1	0.1	2	2	2	1.3%	8.3	10.4	1.2	1	4	13.7	14.7%
ORF	1.5	1.3	0.1	1	1	2	14.7%	11.1	18.4	2	0	1	13	37.3%
ORC	0.08	0.3	0	0	0	0	94.7%	0.98	1.9	0.2	0	0	1	70.7%
CS	12.4							40,7						

PA=phonological and phonemic awareness, LSK=letter-sound knowledge, WR=word reading, ORF=oral reading fluency, ORC=oral reading comprehension, CS=composite score

As expected, performance on various subcomponents reflected a low knowledge base in the first term of the year. Even though all the learners had reportedly attended Grade R before starting Grade 1, their initial performance in PA was low, with learners at the 75th percentile managing on average only 3 items.

To further examine the development of phonological awareness, the PA task was disaggregated according to syllable and phoneme subtasks in terms of the operations, namely identification (developmentally, the easiest operation), deletion and substitution (more difficult operations). Table 5.6 provides the descriptive results for the Tsonga learners on these measures at baseline and at endline, including the percentage of incorrect responses (% of ICR) on syllable and phoneme awareness subtask.

Table 5. 6. Descriptive statistics: Phonological awareness measures

	March					**September**				
	M	SD	Min	Max	%ICR	M	SD	Min	Max	%ICR
Initial syllable deletion	.04	.19	0	1	96.0%	.55	.50	0	1	42.7%
Initial syllable deletion	.09	.29	0	1	90.7%	.52	.50	0	1	45.3%
Middle syllable deletion	.02	.16	0	1	97.3%	.45	.50	0	1	52.0%
Subtotal	**0.15**					**1.52**				
Initial phoneme identification	.64	.48	0	1	36.0%	.55	.50	0	1	42.7%
Initial phoneme identification	.46	.50	0	1	53.3%	.56	.49	0	1	41.3%
Initial phoneme identification	.61	.49	0	1	38.7%	.55	.50	0	1	42.7%
Initial phoneme identification	.01	.11	0	1	98.7%	.88	.31	0	1	10.7%
Initial phoneme deletion	.05	.22	0	1	94.7%	.45	.50	0	1	52.0%
Initial phoneme deletion	.05	.22	0	1	94.7%	.48	.50	0	1	49.3%
Initial phoneme deletion	.08	.27	0	1	92.0%	.51	.50	0	1	46.7%
Final phoneme deletion	.09	.29	0	1	90.7%	.52	.50	0	1	45.3%
Initial phoneme substitution	.04	.19	0	1	96.0%	.45	.50	0	1	52.0%
Initial phoneme substitution	.02	16	0	1	97.3%	.48	.50	0	1	49.3%
Subtotal	**2.05**					**5.43**				

Syllable awareness subtasks

The PA task did not include syllable identification nor syllable substitution, only syllable deletion subtasks. Table 5.6 indicated that learners did better on initial syllable deletion than initial phoneme deletion at endline; however, their performance in both subtasks was similar at baseline. The score for the middle syllable deletion was lower than the initial syllable deletion in both assessment times, suggesting that deleting syllables in the middle position of a word appeared more difficult for the learners than deleting syllables in the initial position. Even though there was a fair decrease of incorrect responses from baseline to endline, many learners were still struggling to manipulate sounds at the syllabic level by the end of the year.

Phoneme awareness subtasks

Learners also performed poorly in the phoneme awareness subtasks; however, performance in initial phoneme identification was better in baseline and at endline, relative to the other phonemic subtasks. There was an improvement of incorrect responses from baseline to endline. Even though performance across phoneme awareness subtasks was poor, final phoneme deletion seemed more easier for learners than initial phoneme deletion and substitution.

The unevenness in the PA subtasks makes it difficult to compare syllable and phoneme awareness. The importance of improving PA tests in African languages will further be taken up in the discussion section.

The results also revealed that learners had low letter-sound knowledge, even though their LSK scores were slightly higher in relation to the other measures; learners at the 75th percentile could read a maximum of 8 lcpm. Relative to the other components, LSK was the only aspect of early literacy that showed some growth over the year (from 6 to 17.2 lcpm). However, the growth from baseline to endline was still not very high.

When performance in LSK is disaggregated according to the simpler single letter-sounds on the one hand and the more complex digraphs and trigraphs on the other, the slow growth in alphabetic knowledge is further revealed as shown more clearly in the visual illustration of LSK performance on singles and digraphs in Figures 5.1a and 5.1b.

Figure 5. 1a. LSK performance on singles

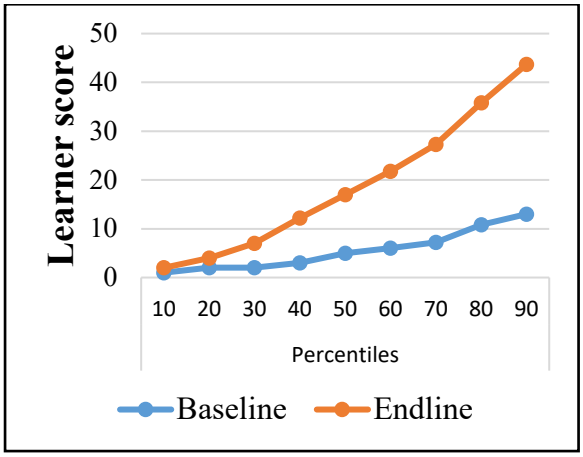


Figure 5. 1b. LSK performance on digraphs

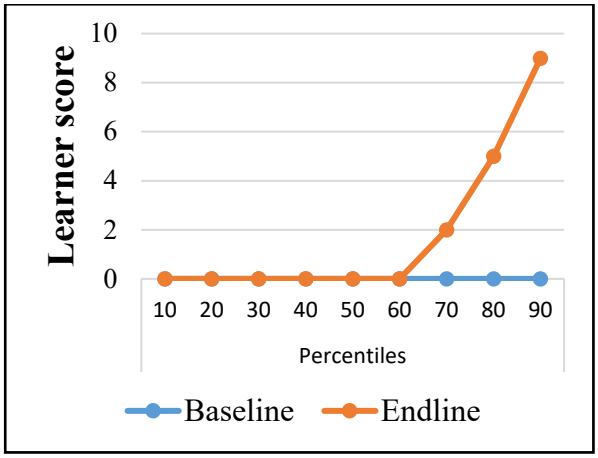


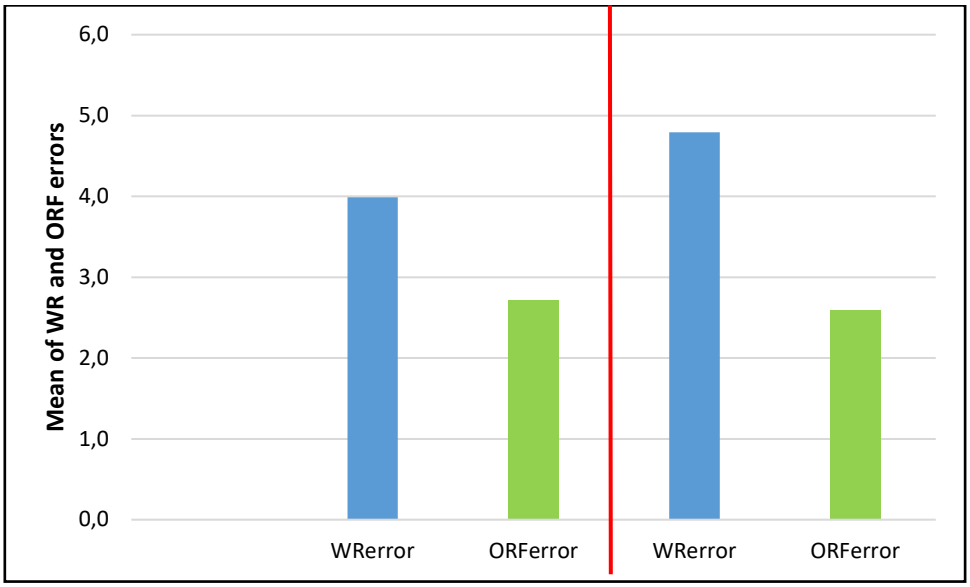
Figure 5.1a shows that learners' performance on the single consonants is better compared to the more complex graphemes. Although there seems to be almost negligible growth in knowledge of single consonants up to the 20th percentile, children's performance from the 30th

to 90th percentile shows steady growth, albeit with great variation within the cohort. Children at the 80th percentile know 35 lcpm; those at the 20th percentile know fewer than 5 lcpm. However, this is relative to performance on digraphs or trigraphs (Figure 5.1b), which shows that, unsurprisingly, none of the learners could read a single letter-sound on any of the complex graphemes at baseline. However, by the end of the third term, there were still over 60% of learners who could not read a single digraph, even though these occur commonly in Tsonga orthography; even learners at the 70th percentile only managed to identify 2 digraphs. There was a slight decrease of zero scores, with the top-performing learners (those at the 90th percentile) obtaining 9 lcpm and those at the 70th percentile managing 5 lcpm.

Unsurprisingly, in the first term of Grade 1 hardly any child could initially read more than a single word of connected text or read for meaning. Word reading scores improved slightly by September from a mean of 2.3 to 8.3 wcpm and ORF improved from 1.5 to 11.1 wcpm, respectively, with learners showing slightly greater improvement in ORF than single-word reading. Even so, most learners could still not read words in or out of context.

Figure 5.2 below shows the proportion of Grade 1 learners who could not read words out of context and in context, as reflected in the WR and ORF scores (Table 5.5). A line has been inserted between baseline and endline to make it easier to read the graphs.

Figure 5. 2. Errors in WR and ORF (Baseline and Endline)



The visual illustration (Figure 5.2) clearly shows fewer errors in ORF (shaded lighter green) relative to WR (shaded lighter blue) in both assessments. Table 5.5 shows that the number of zero scores in WR increased at endline. The mean WR and ORF scores at endline (see Table

5.5) in relation to letter-sound knowledge are actually very weak, even at the 50th percentile. Learners who knew 13 letters could only read on average about 4 words. Learners who knew more letter-sounds (27 lcpm) could read approximately 13 words on average.

ORC remained extremely low, with 70.7% of learners unable to answer basic questions on the text that they had read. In other words, the purpose of reading, namely reading for meaning, was not something that was achieved by most of the learners by the end of Grade 1.

Before exploring the relations between EGRA components, I will first examine the cohort's results to see if there are significant gender, age and school differences.

5. 3. 2. Performance on literacy measures between genders

The EGRA data were examined to see if there were gender differences in performance, as shown in Table 5.7. The results at face value indicate that girls generally outperformed boys at baseline and endline across different reading tasks. However, these differences were not statistically significant.

Table 5. 7. Performance on literacy measures between genders

	March Girl (*n*=37) Boy (*n*=38)								September Girl (*n*=36) Boy (*n*=36)							
	Gender	***M***	***SD***	***SE***	**25th p**	**50th p**	**75th p**	**% zero score**	**Gender**	***M***	***SD***	***SE***	**25th p**	**50th p**	**75th p**	**% zero score**
PA	Girl	2.5	1.8	0.3	1	2	4	8.1%	Girl	3.1	3.8	0.6	0	3	4.7	45.9%
	Boy	2.1	1.5	0.2	1	2	3	18.4%	Boy	3.3	3.1	0.5	0	3	5	26.3%
LSK	Girl	6.6	6.2	1.0	2	5	8	2.7%	Girl	19.6	17.4	2.9	4	14	33	0%
	Boy	5.9	5.4	0.8	2	4	8	0%	Boy	14.8	12.7	2.1	3	12	20	0%
WR	Girl	2.2	0.9	0.1	2	2	2	0%	Girl	10.0	11.9	1.9	2	5	16	10.8%
	Boy	2.3	1.2	0.2	2	2	3	2.6%	Boy	6.6	8.4	1.4	1	3	9	18.4%
ORF	Girl	1.7	1.4	0.2	1	1	2	8.1%	Girl	14.1	21.3	3.5	0	1	26	43.2%
	Boy	1.2	1.0	0.1	1	1	2	21.1%	Boy	8.3	14.7	2.4	0	1.5	8.5	31.6%
ORC	Girl	0	0.3	0	0	0	0	94.6%	Girl	1.3	2.2	0.3	0	0	2.7	62.2%
	Boy	0	0.3	0	0	0	0	94.7%	Boy	0.6	1.4	0.2	0	0	0	78.9%

p(percentile)

The non-parametric Mann Whitney test was used to test for significant differences between girls and boys. The results (Table 5.8) showed no significant differences between genders across all five tasks.

Table 5. 8. Mann Whitney test for gender

	March					September				
	PA	LSK	WR	ORF	ORC	PA	LSK	WR	ORF	ORC
Mann-Whitney U	645.50	655.00	690.50	555.00	702.00	1248.50	1237.00	1203.50	1300.50	1251.50
p-value	.52	.60	.87	.08	.97	.44	.38	.21	.87	.09

Grouping variable: Gender

5. 3. 3. Performance on literacy measures by age

The EGRA data were also examined to see if there were differences in performance between grade age learners (7 years) and learners older or younger than their grade age (8 or 6 years). Table 5.9 below shows the descriptive information about age group comparisons for the baseline and endline assessments. The 8-year-olds were excluded from this analysis because the number (*n*=4) was too small to test for significance.

The descriptive results showed that the 6-year-olds had similar scores to the 7-year-olds across various tasks at baseline. The performance was also similar at the 75th percentile. The endline results showed that the 6-year-olds had slightly higher means than the 7-year-olds on each of the subtasks. However, these differences were not statistically significant (see Table 5.10 below), and more younger learners scored zero than older learners.

Table 5. 9. Performance on literacy measures by age

	March 6 (*n*=32) 7 (*n*=39)								**September** 6 (*n*=32) 7 (*n*=36)						
	Age	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	% zero score	Age	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
PA	6	2.1	1.8	0.3	1	2	3	18.8%	6	3.5	4.1	0.7	0	3	5
	7	2.4	1.4	0.2	2	2	3	10.3%	7	2.8	3.1	0.5	0	3	4
LSK	6	6.0	6.1	1.0	2	4	7	6.3%	6	18.0	16.9	2.9	3	11	29
	7	6.2	5.5	0.8	2	4	8	0%	7	15.9	13.9	2.3	5	13	20
WR	6	2.3	1.4	0.2	2	2	2	3.1%	6	8.6	11.6	2.0	1	3	11
	7	2.3	0.7	0.1	2	2	3	0%	7	8.0	9.7	1.6	1	3	15
ORF	6	1.7	1.4	0.2	1	1	2	12.5%	6	14.0	23.3	4.1	0	1	20
	7	1.3	1.2	0.2	1	1	2	17.9%	7	9.1	13.5	2.2	0	1.5	10
ORC	6	0.1	0.4	0	0	0	0	90.6%	6	1.2	2.4	0.4	0	0	1.7
	7	0	0.3	0	0	0	0	97.4%	7	0.7	1.4	0.2	0	0	1

The Mann Whitney test results in Table 5.10 revealed no statistical differences between the 6- and 7-year-olds across different subtasks.

Table 5. 10. Mann Whitney test by age

	March					**September**				
	PA	LSK	WR	ORF	ORC	PA	LSK	WR	ORF	ORC
Mann-Whitney U	523.50	594.50	549.00	523.00	582.50	560.00	562.00	572.00	570.50	563.50
p - value	0.22	0.73	0.31	0.20	0.23	0.83	0.86	0.96	0.94	.066

Grouping variable: Age

5. 3. 4. Performance on literacy measures in terms of grade repeaters and non-repeaters

This section only presents descriptive results for the repeaters and non-repeaters. There were only four repeaters and 71 non-repeaters of Grade 1 learners. As mentioned in §5.3.3, the grade

repeaters' sample, which comprised 5%, was too small to detect any reliable patterns. Table 5.11 below only provides descriptive statistics in terms of repeaters and non-repeaters. Despite having spent two years in the same grade, the repeaters' early reading skills were still low. They had slightly better PA scores and they seemed to know more letter-sounds than their non-repeating peers, but blending them to form words was a challenge as they struggled to read words in isolation and in context, and this, in turn, hampered their reading comprehension.

Table 5. 11. Performance on literacy measures by grade and non-grade repeaters

	March Repeaters (*n*=4) Non-repeaters (*n*=71)								September Repeaters (*n*=4) Non-repeaters (*n*=68)							
	Repeaters Non-repeaters)	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	% zero score	Repeaters Non-repeaters	*M*	*SD*	*SE*	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	% zero score
PA	Repeaters	2.7	2.8	1.4	1	1	5	0%	Repeaters	3.5	2.6	1.3	0.7	4	5.7	25%
	Non-repeaters	2.3	1.6	0.1	1	2	3	14.1%	Non-repeaters	3.1	3.5	0.4	0	3	4.7	36.6%
LSK	Repeaters	9.0	6.2	3.1	2.5	10.5	14	0%	Repeaters	22.2	16.8	8.4	5	24.5	37.2	0%
	Non-repeaters	6.1	5.8	0.6	2	4	8	2.8%	Non-repeaters	16.9	15.3	1.8	4	12.5	26.7	0%
WR	Repeaters	1.5	0.5	0.2	1	1.5	2	0%	Repeaters	8.5	7.5	3.7	1.5	8	16	25%
	Non-repeaters	2.3	1.1	0.1	2	2	3	1.4%	Non-repeaters	8.3	10.6	1.2	1	3.5	13.7	14.1%
ORF	Repeaters	1.5	0.5	0.2	1	1.5	2	0%	Repeaters	7.7	12.3	6.1	0	2.5	20.7	50%
	Non-repeaters	1.5	1.3	0.1	1	1	2	15.5%	Non-repeaters	11.4	18.8	2.2	0	1.0	13	36.6%
ORC	Repeaters	0	0	0	0	0	0	100%	Repeaters	1.0	2.0	1.0	0	0	3	75%
	Non-repeaters	0	0.3	0	0	0	0	94.4%	Non-repeaters	0.9	1.9	0.2	0	0	1	70.4%

As shown in Table 5.5, the composite mean scores for both assessments (baseline and endline) revealed an improvement by an average score of 28.3 across different subtasks at the end of the year. However, even though there was an improvement in mean scores across all subcomponents, the question is whether such increases are good enough. In other words, do they reflect adequate mastery of foundational reading skills in the first year of schooling? This is further addressed in the discussion section at the end of this chapter.

5. 3. 4. Performance on literacy measures across schools

The results for the five different schools are shown in Table 5.12. Given the differential performance across the five tasks in the five schools, and in order to compare performance across the schools more readily, the final row reflects a composite score for each school, which was derived from the raw means of the five components of the EGRA tool. A composite zero score was also computed derived from zero scores in the different tasks.

Taking the descriptive scores at face value, there were three different school groupings at baseline. In terms of the composite scores, School E outperformed the others in March and also

had the lowest zero composite score, while School D started out poorly and continued poorly, producing learners with the lowest reading skills in all subtasks. By endline, School D was clearly the school with the weakest results, having the lowest composite score and the highest zero composite score. Schools A, B, and C were fairly similar and 'in the middle' at the beginning of the year, both in terms of composite scores and composite zero scores. However, by endline, the performance of Schools C and E had changed. By September, Schools A and B emerged as the two top-performing schools, while schools C and E seemed to drop back and form a middle group while School D produced the poorest results.

Figure 5.3 below shows the composite score (y-axis) at different percentiles (the 10^{th} to the 90^{th} percentile along the x-axis) for baseline (blue) and endline (orange) assessments more clearly, per school. There is an almost flat line in schools D and E up to the 50^{th} percentile. Only children at the 89^{th} to 90^{th} percentiles seemed to be learning in these schools. In schools A, B and C, there was still not much learning happening up to the 50^{th} percentile – half the learners in each cohort do not seem to be learning much. But in School A, a little more learning was happening across the percentiles; weak learners in lower percentiles at least seemed to be learning something.

Given that four of the five schools showed normal distribution, I used the repeated measures ANOVA to check for significant differences in early reading performance across the schools. The repeated measures ANOVA in Table 5.13 reports the degrees of freedom (*df*), test statistics (F), the *p*-value, and the effect size (*ηp2*).

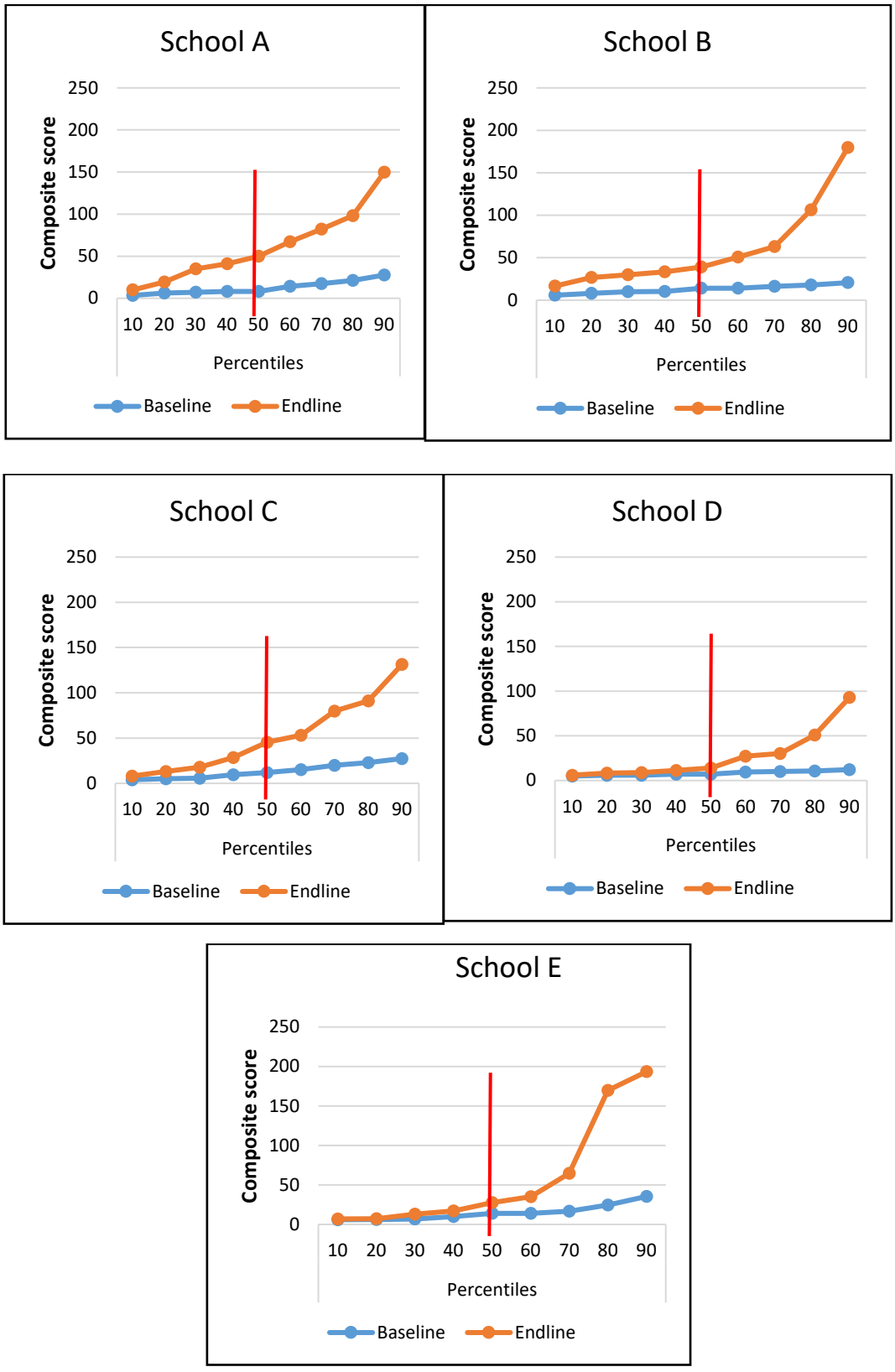
Table 5. 13. The repeated measures ANOVA across schools

		March				September			
Dependent variable		df	F	*p*	*ηp2*	df	F	*p*	*ηp2*
Schools	PA	4	5.35	0.01	0.24	4	0.97	0.42	0.05
	LSK	4	1.98	0.10	0.10	4	2.85	0.03	0.14
	WR	4	3.32	0.01	0.16	4	0.74	0.56	0.04
	ORF	4	0.39	0.81	0.02	4	0.74	0.56	0.04
	ORC	4	1.42	0.23	0.07	4	0.74	0.56	0.04
Error	PA	67	2.29			67	12.07		
	LSK	67	32.83			67	213.38		
	WR	67	1.12			67	110.18		
	ORF	67	1.83			67	347.07		
	ORC	67	0.13			67	3.80		

Table 5. 12. Performance on reading measures across schools

		March						September						
	***M, SD, SE*, % zero score**	**School A (n=15)**	**School B (n=15)**	**School C (n=15)**	**School D (n=15)**	**School E (n=15)**	**Overall *M***	***M, SD, SE*, % zero score**	**School A (n=14)**	**School B (n=15)**	**School C (n=14)**	**School D (n=15)**	**School E (n=14)**	**Overall *M***
PA	*M*	1.4	3.6	2.2	1.5	2.9	2.3	*M*	2.1	4.5	3.2	2.6	3.3	3.2
	SD	0.9	1.7	2.2	0.9	1.2		*SD*	3.2	3.7	2.1	3.0	4.6	
	SE	0.2	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.3		*SE*	0.8	0.9	0.5	0.7	1.2	
	% zero score	26.7%	0%	26.7%	13.3%	0%		% zero score	53.3%	13.3%	20%	46.7%	46.7%	
LSK	*M*	7.6	5.4	7.5	3.3	7.6	6.2	*M*	21.2	23.6	13.2	8.0	20.1	17.2
	SD	7.4	3.5	5.7	2.6	7.5		*SD*	13.4	14.6	11.7	9.3	21.3	
	SE	1.9	0.9	1.4	0.6	1.9		*SE*	3.5	3.7	3.1	2.4	5.7	
	% zero score	6.7%	6.7%	13.3%	6.7%	0%		% zero score	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
WR	*M*	2.2	2.2	1.9	1.9	3.1	2.2	*M*	11.6	8.4	7.5	5.1	9.2	8.3
	SD	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.2	1.5		*SD*	9.9	12.1	6.6	6.9	14.6	
	SE	0.2	0.2	0.2	0	0.4		*SE*	2.6	3.1	1.7	1.7	3.9	
	% zero score	6.7%	26.7%	20%	0%	0%		% zero score	13.3%	0%	13.3%	20%	26.7%	
ORF	*M*	1.4	1.4	1.8	1.4	1.4	1.4	*M*	14.6	12.2	14.3	4.3	11.0	11.2
	SD	0.9	1.6	1.7	1.0	0.9		*SD*	20.2	22.9	17.4	8.2	20.9	
	SE	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.2		*SE*	5.3	5.91	4.6	2.1	5.6	
	% zero score	13.3%	26.7%	20%	6.7%	6.7%		% zero score	13.3%	46.7%	20%	53.3%	50%	
ORC	*M*	0	0.2	0.2	0	0	0	*M*	0.5	1.2	1.6	0.6	1.0	0.9
	SD	0	0.5	0.5	0	0		*SD*	1.3	2.7	1.9	1.2	2.0	
	SE	0	0.1	0.1	0	0		*SE*	0.3	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.5	
	% zero score	100%	86.7%	86.7%	100%	100%		% zero score	80%	60%	46.7%	80%	73.3%	
	Composite mean score	12.6	12.9	13.7	8.2	15.7		**Composite mean score**	50.1	49.9	39.9	20.7	44.7	
	Composite % zero score	30.6%	29.3%	33.3%	25.3%	21.3%		**Composite % zero score**	31.9%	24%	20%	40%	39.3%	

Figure 5. 3. Percentile performance from baseline to endline on composite score per school



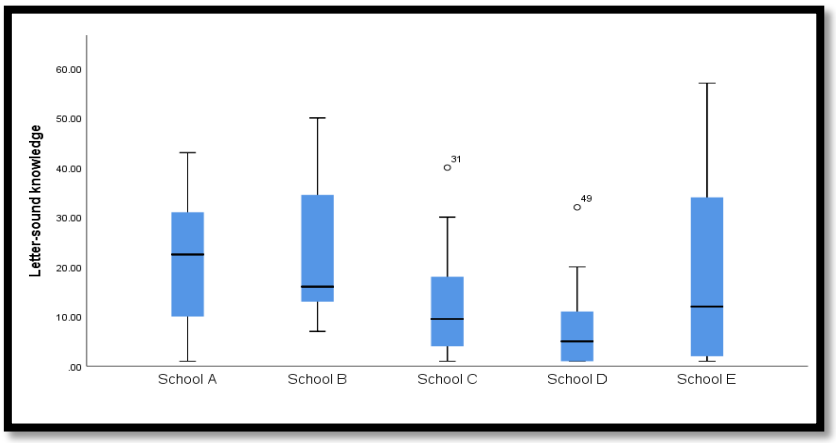
The results (Table 5.13) revealed small effect sizes at baseline for the PA, LSK and WR tasks and the LSK at endline. However, there were small effect sizes for the ORF at baseline and medium effect sizes for the PA, WR, ORF and ORC tasks at endline.

Table 5.14 contains the post-hoc test with Bonferroni correction (Cf Appendix H). The results showed significant differences in performance across schools on the PA (p = 0.00) task in March between School B and Schools A and D, and in WR (p = 0.03, p = 0.01) between School E and Schools C and D, while in September, significant differences were only on the LSK task (p = 0.04) between Schools B and D. However, these significant differences do not show a strong trend across the schools, i.e., no one school stood out as far better than the others, performance was low across all schools, with lots of variation within each school.

The variation at endline in one of the most basic early reading skills in alphabetic writing systems, viz. letter-sound knowledge, is noticeable and clearly displayed in the box-and-whisker plots (Figure 5.4). The black line in each box represents the median score, while the lower and upper limits of the box represent performance at 25th and 75th percentiles, respectively (i.e., the weaker and stronger learners in each school). The 'whiskers' show minimum and maximum scores. The outliers are the little circles above (or below) the whiskers. At endline, two learners in the cohort managed to read 57 lcpm in one minute, and four learners managed to read more than 40 lcpm (40 to 50 lcpm). In two schools (Schools C and D), most learners showed poor knowledge of letter-sounds, below 10 lcpm.

The long whiskers in most schools suggest wide variation within schools (very small or large data points). In Schools A and B, learners' results showed slightly less variation, suggesting more even development in reading across the learners (as also indicated in Figure 5.3 where the composite scores show that Schools A and B outscored the others in reading performance. The data in Schools D and E is negatively skewed, having the median closer to the stronger readers. The data in School B is positively skewed, with a median closer to the weakest reader. The box and whisker plots in School A have similar shapes, suggesting a more normal distribution of data in this school.

Figure 5. 4. Mean of LSK per school



5. 3. 5. Examining relationships between different EGRA components

Having presented overall learner performance, as well as examining whether there were any significant differences in early reading between gender, age and across the five different schools, we now investigate the relationships between various EGRA components.

As stated in §5.2, non-parametric tests were used on the grounds of smallish sample size. To check the relations between the different EGRA components at baseline and endline, Spearman's correlations were used, as shown in Table 5.15.

Because performance was still so poor at baseline, our main focus is on the associations between the variables at endline. Of all the subcomponents, PA showed relatively modest correlations with other subtasks. In contrast, LSK showed robust relationships with WR and ORF, but correlated moderately with ORC. WR showed strong associations with both ORF and ORC, while ORF and ORC were also strongly correlated. Although Spearman's rho revealed moderate to robust significant correlations across different subcomponents, none of these correlations were above 80%, except for WR and ORF (r_s=.85); hence, multicollinearity did not seem to pose a serious problem (Fields 2013).

Table 5. 15. Correlation between different components of EGRA

	March				September			
	LSK	WR	ORF	ORC	LSK	WR	ORF	ORC
PA	.40**	.51**	.01	.17*	.59**	.50**	.49**	.53**
LSK		.56**	.02	.08		.75**	.62**	.53**
WR			.12	.15			.85**	.69**
ORF				.23*				.77**

**p< 0.01 *p<0.05 **p<0.01

The relationship between PA and LSK was further examined by looking at syllable awareness and phonemic awareness separately. The results in Table 5.16 showed a robust relationship between syllable and phonemic awareness at both test times and a weak association between syllable awareness and LSK in baseline, while at endline, the relationship showed a moderate correlation. Phoneme awareness correlated moderately with LSK in March and September. However, these results must be treated cautiously, given the unevenness in the PA subtasks.

Table 5. 16. Correlation between syllable awareness, phoneme awareness, and LSK

	March		**September**	
	Phonemic awareness	Letter-sound knowledge	Phonemic awareness	Letter-sound knowledge
Syllable awareness	.705**	.384**	.801**	.614**
Phonemic awareness		.400**		.531**

p = 0.001** *p* = 0.001**

Because correlations only show relationships, and causal effects cannot be inferred from them, multiple regression analyses (MRA) were conducted using the enter method to see which variables functioned as best predictors to the dependent variable at endline, for performance on specific components of EGRA.

First, I was interested to see how syllable and phonemic awareness predicted performance in alphabetic knowledge. A significant model emerged $F(2,69) = 6.10$, $p < 0.01$. The model explains 15% of the variance in LSK (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.126$). Table 5.17 gives information about regression coefficients for the predictor variables entered into the model. Both syllable and phoneme awareness were significant predictors of LSK, with phonemic awareness slightly more so.

Table 5. 17. Results of MRA with LSK as a dependent variable

Model		*B*	Std. Error	*β*	*t*	*p*
1	(Constant)	2.832	5.105		.555	.581
	Syllable awareness	-5.221	1.849	-.456	-2.824	.006**
	Phonemic awareness	4.129	1.192	.560	3.464	.001**

**Significant at $p < 0.01$.

Next, the effects of PA and LSK on word reading were examined. A significant model emerged $F(2,69) = 53.74$, $p < 0.01$. The model explains 60% of the variance in WR (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.598$) with LSK as the only significant predictor. Table 5.18 gives information about regression coefficients for the predictor variables entered into the model. In other words, if learners' LSK improved by one *SD* (i.e., 15 lcpm), then they would on average be able to read 6.6 more words correct per minute.

Table 5. 18. Results of MRA with WR as the dependent variable

Model		B	Std. Error	*β*eta	*t*	*p*
1	(Constant)	-0.97	1.19		-.81	.41
	PA	0.56	0.30	0.18	1.86	0.06
	LSK	0.43	0.06	0.64	6.38	0.000**

**Significant at $p < 0.001$.

To see which early reading skills best predicted ORF, PA, LSK and WR were entered into the model. A significant model emerged $F(3,68) = 53.74$, $p < 0.01$. The model explains 79% of the variance in ORF (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.790$) with WR as the only significant predictor. Table 5.19 gives information about regression coefficients for the predictor variables entered into the model.

Table 5. 19. Results of MRA with ORF as the dependent variable

Model		B	Std. Error	*β*eta	*t*	*p*
1	(Constant)	-1.39	1.56		-0.88	0.37
	PA	0.09	0.40	0.01	0.22	0.82
	LSK	-0.08	0.11	-0.06	-0.73	0.46
	WR	1.64	0.15	0.93	10.46	0.000**

**Significant at $p < 0.001$.

Finally, to see which early reading skills best predicted ORC, PA, LSK, WR, and ORF were examined. A significant model emerged $F(4,67) = 92.28$, $p < 0.01$. The model explains 84% of the variance in ORC (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.846$). Table 5.20 gives information about regression coefficients for the predictor variables entered into the model. ORF significantly predicted

ORC. When it comes to the relation of PA and reading comprehension, the magnitude was weak (β = 0.21, $p < .05$). Thus, an increase of 1 *SD* in ORF (18 wcpm) could bring about an increase of 1.7 in the ORC score. It would seem thus the children's ability to read with meaning at the end of Grade 1 is strongly related to how accurately and fluently they can read aloud in Tsonga.

Table 5. 20. Regression of MRA with ORC as the dependent variable

Model		B	Std. Error	*β*eta	t	*p*-value
1	(Constant)	-0.17	0.14		-1.25	0.21
	PA	0.12	0.03	0.21	3.33	0.01
	LSK	-0.01	0.01	-0.07	-0.94	0.34
	WR	-0.01	0.02	-0.06	-0.53	0.59
	ORF	0.09	0.01	0.89	8.57	0.000**

**Significant at $p < 0.001$.

5. 4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

In this study the early Xitsonga literacy development in the FP classroom of 75 Grade 1 learners was assessed in the reading measures of EGRA (PA, LSK, WR, ORF and ORC). According to Stern et al.'s (2018) framework, the Grade 1 learners assessed in this study were already quite far behind on the developmental reading trajectory in Xitsonga. By endline, most of the Grade 1 learners should have been at the third, fourth or fifth profile, instead, most were still at the first profile, with only few high performers at the 90th percentiles.

This section discusses the findings that resulted from the descriptive and inferential statistics. The first part of this section discusses the main takeaways that emerged from the findings of the overall learner performance on the reading measures of EGRA. The second part discusses learner performance between gender, age and across five different schools. The third part focuses on the relationship between different components of EGRA and early reading skills, which are predictive of later reading accomplishment in Xitsonga.

5. 4. 1. Overall learner performance on the reading measures of EGRA

The first research question examined how learners' early reading measures in Xitsonga changed over time during Grade 1 in terms of PA, LSK, WR, ORF and ORC. As to be expected, there was an increase in scores from baseline to endline across the different EGRA components (Table 5.5). However, literacy development was slow over the year, and learners' performance on the various early reading measures was still extremely low at the end of the year. Disturbingly, the results also showed that more than a third of the learners could not read at the end of the year, particularly in four of the five schools visited (e.g., Schools A, C, D and E).

5. 4. 1. 1. Performance on phonological and phonemic awareness

As already mentioned in Chapter 2 (§2.2.1.1), PA is important for learning to read in languages with an alphabetic orthography, and this seems to cut across opaque and transparent orthographies (Mann 1986; Wimmer, Landerl & Schneider 1994) and language types. It is also important for children learning to read in agglutinating languages, e.g., Turkish (Durgonoğlu & Öney 1999); Finnish (Aro et al. 1999; Aro 2017); and Northern Sotho (Wilsenach 2019). Several studies conducted in various languages have shown the effect of PA in early reading development. In a study that examined the presence of early childhood development factors that might play a role in the subsequent poor performance of Setswana children (5½ and 7 years) from daycare centres in South Africa, Pretorius and Naudé (2002) found that these children were ill-prepared for formal education. They revealed inadequate literacy skills in terms of inadequate sound development and knowledge of the alphabet, poor knowledge of sounds, transposition of sounds within words, and replacement of a sound within a word by another.

In this study, the results showed that performance in the PA task at both baseline and endline indicates that most learners do not seem to be making much progress in PA development – only learners at the 75th percentile and above seem to be distinguishing and manipulating syllables and phonemes in words. This is consistent with the findings of Pouezevara, Costello and Banda (2013) who revealed that children in control schools in Malawi demonstrated little knowledge of pre-reading skills compared to the intervention group by increasing their zero scores from baseline (31%) to endline (59%) in syllable segmentation. Schaefer and Kotzé (2019) also revealed poor performance for isiZulu and isiSwati Grade 1 learners in the PA subtask, with high percentage of zero scores at baseline (62.4%) and at endline (70.3%). Many of the learners in the current study struggled even to identify the first sound occurring in their

names - a task used to ‘break the ice’ before they could hear and identify sounds in the other 13 items. The increase in zero scores from baseline to endline is worrying and shows some form of regression of knowledge during the course of the year, suggesting that effective teaching and learning might not be sustained throughout the year in a foundational aspect of language proficiency that should have become increasingly familiar to the learners.

Moderately strong correlation was found between PA and LSK, with phonemic awareness a significant predictor of LSK. This is similar to Wilsenach’s study (2019) which revealed that phoneme awareness of Northern Sotho Grade 3 learners predicted reading outcomes more accurately than syllable awareness.

Although the PA task was uneven, the descriptive results in this study showed that performance in syllable deletion was better relative to phoneme deletion. These findings coincide with several findings (Anthony & Francis 2005; Diemer, Van der Merwe & De Vos 2015; Pretorius 2015; Probert 2019; Wilsenach 2019).

Given that several studies across languages have established various findings between the two alternative factors (whether syllable awareness precedes phoneme awareness and predicts early reading), it is instructive to note that McBride-Chang (2004) and Alcock, Ngorosho, Deus & Jukes (2010) suggest that performance in PA tasks may be determined by the responses that children make on difficult or more manageable tasks. For example, the task of syllable or phoneme identification may be easier than manipulation of sounds. Furthermore, language structures may also influence phonemic awareness. In languages with simple syllable structures (Turkish, Italian, Greek, African languages, etc.), children tend to have better syllable awareness than languages with more complex syllables (e.g., French), and where syllables are not as salient (e.g., English which is a stress-timed rather than a syllable-timed language). The question of which skill exists before the other (between phoneme and syllable awareness) may also be determined by the extent to which children are exposed to literacy (Mann & Wimmer 2002). In other words, even if transparent languages use simple syllable structures (Durgunoglu & Öney 1999), children may still struggle to come to grips with developing awareness of different unit sizes if they had limited exposure to literacy during their pre-literate stage or if classroom instruction does not help develop their PA.

5. 4. 1. 2. Performance on letter-sound knowledge

As indicated above, mastery of PA helps children understand that letters represent sounds. As already stated in Chapter 2 (§2.1.2), research seems to suggest that letter-sound knowledge is important in all alphabetic languages – in both opaque and transparent orthographies (Grainger & Ziegler 2011). This is obtained, for example, in English (Snow et al. 1998; Perfetti 2007; McArthur et al. 2018), in European languages such as Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Finnish, etc. (Goswami 2010), and in transparent agglutinating African languages such as Xitsonga, Northern Sotho, isiZulu, etc. (Spaull et al. 2020). By the end of Grade 1, children are at risk for later reading if they fail to understand that letters in written words represent sounds at the phonemic level (Nieto 2005; Harrison et al. 2016).

Findings in this study showed that although performance on the single consonants was better relative to the more complex graphemes at baseline and at endline, going from an overall mean of 6 to 17 lcpm, it was generally low towards the end of the year. Our learners at the 75th percentile only knew 27 letters, while Mozambican Changana learners showed more substantive letter-sound learning at an average of 37.50 lcpm (Machel et al. 2018). Knowing only a few letter-sounds is not adequate to enable learners to read words and make sense of the text. In English, a benchmark score for knowledge of letter-sounds for Grade 1 is given as 40 lcpm (Kaminski & Good III 1996; Good, Simmons & Kame'enui 2001). Although this was drawn from learning to read in English, the understanding is that all languages that use the Roman alphabet should reflect fairly similar benchmarks (Spaull & Pretorius 2019). There is also strong empirical support for this from South African research on reading in the Nguni languages. Based on the largest local early reading databank to date comprising 16, 000 learners, the recommendation for letter-sounds benchmark scores for the Nguni languages is also 40 lcpm (Ardington et al. 2020). The researchers found that children who knew less than 40 lcpm could not reach the fluency benchmark of 35 wcpm. CAPS requires that the Grade 1 learners should have acquired the ability to identify 10 letter-sound relationships (5 consonants and 5 vowels) by the end of Term 1 and letter-sound relationships of all single sounds by mid-year (DoE 2008b). Given that learners in the current study could not reach the recommended letter-sound benchmark towards the end of Term 3, their learning profile, according to Stern et al. (2018), categorises them as non-readers.

Performance of the Grade 1 learners in this study is consistent with the results of several studies, which found that in 'business as usual' schools (i.e., schools in which there have been

no interventions) learner performance in letter-sound knowledge seems to be very low. Table 5.21 below presents information on these studies. Thus, even if 40 lcpm is a Grade 1 benchmark, this is not reached even in Grade 3.

Table 5. 21. Letter-sound knowledge research in African languages

Study	Setting	Language	Results lcpm	Grade
Zenlit 2017 (Pretorius 2018)	South Africa	isiZulu isiXhosa	Rural control: 6 Rural intervention: 18 Urban control: 24 Urban intervention: 46	Grade 1
EGRS 1 (Taylor et al. 2017)	South Africa	Setswana	Control: 5.4 (baseline), 22.7 (endline) Treatment 1: 4.1 (baseline), 22.0 (endline) Treatment 2: 5.8 (baseline), 25.1 (endline) Treatment 3: 4.7 (baseline), 20.7 (endline)	Grade 1
Schaefer and Kotzé (2019)	South Africa	isiZulu isiSwati	6.9 (baseline) 17.6 (endline)	Grade 1
Spaull et al. (2020)	South Africa	Xitsonga N. Sotho isiZulu	34.3 30.4 24.4	Beginning of Grade 3

The results in this study also showed a decline in zero performance from baseline to endline (2.7% to 0%) for the LSK, suggesting that some letter-sound learning is happening, but not enough to support word reading. Knowing on average 13 letters (those at the 50th percentile) is not sufficient to enable children to blend letters and read words.

Regarding learner performance on single-letter consonants and digraphs, the finding in this study (Figure 5.1a and 5.1b) confirms Ardington et al.'s (2020) findings that digraphs and trigraphs, not unexpectedly, pose more problems to the learners than single-letter consonants. This could be because these consonant sequences are visually more complex – and they may not be taught in Grade 1 - CAPS introduces them in Grade 2, much too late, given that digraphs and other complex consonant sequences are very frequent and occur in many words in Xitsonga.

5. 4. 1. 3. Performance on word reading and oral reading fluency

It is evident that foundational reading skills (phonological and phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge) predict children's ability to read at the word level (Hulme et al. 2012b). As mentioned above, the Grade 1 learners' performance in PA and LSK was very low and this, in turn, affected their ability to read words fast and accurately at their grade level.

The results (Figure 5.2) showed fewer errors in ORF relative to WR in both baseline and endline assessments, which suggests some learning during the year, but performance was so low at baseline that such increases do not reveal much. Being able to read only 8 words correctly at endline suggests that learners were not really engaging their LSK to blend sounds to read words, or that they do not know enough letter-sounds to do so. The visual illustration in Figure 5.2 clearly shows that increased accuracy in WR is associated with increased accuracy in ORF at endline, suggesting that the few learners who managed to read more words made fewer errors in WR and ORF (and they were also learners who knew more letter-sounds).

As depicted in the WR and ORF scores (Table 5.5), there were large numbers of learners who still scored zero percent by the end of Term 3. Although there was an improvement of scores in terms of reading context-free words, the descriptive results showed that learners' performance, even better readers at the 75th percentile, at baseline (2 wcpm at 75th percentile) and endline (13.7 at 75th percentile) was low, suggesting that learners have not mastered phonics principles in Xitsonga by the end of Grade 1. The ORF score (2 wcpm at 75th percentile) regarding context-dependent words was considerably lower at baseline, but at endline, it showed a small improvement (13 wcpm at 75th percentile). The results in this study are consistent with Zenlit 2017 results, which showed increased learning in the intervention schools compared to the control schools, and there was a rural/urban effect, e.g., rural isiZulu control ORF (1.4 WCPM), rural isiZulu intervention ORF (9.1 WCPM), urban isiXhosa control ORF (6 wcpm) and urban isiXhosa intervention ORF (19 wcpm) at the end of the year (Pretorius 2018) and Mozambique data which shows that Changana Grade 1 learners achieved 0.04 wcpm at baseline and 13.30 wcpm at endline (Machel et al. 2018). Even though a reading benchmark for Xitsonga Grade 1s is not yet clear, Spaull et al. (2020) suggest that by end of Grade 2/beginning Grade 3, a learner needs to manage at least 39 wcpm in Xitsonga to be a fluent reader. This seems to be a *minimum* decoding threshold for the Grade 3s. As indicated in Chapter 2 (§2.2.2.3), in Nguni languages, a benchmark score for reading with comprehension is recommended at accurately and fluently reading 35 wcpm (Ardington et al. 2020). However, despite the fact that by the end of the year, Grade 1s are expected to be reading at the grade level, according to Stern et al.'s (2018) reading profiles, learners in this study were still non-readers (i.e., their reading level requires support that focuses mainly on developing their foundational skills which will help them practice decoding words).

Discrepancies in the present study were noted regarding context-free words and context-dependent words, given that learners performed better in ORF than WR. Studies conducted

over the past four decades have found that context-free words are usually read faster than context-dependent words in languages with a highly opaque orthography (Hartley 1970; Ceprano 1981; Kibby 1989). Several studies based on transparent African languages have also shown similar trends. For example, Wilsenach (2013) found that the Northern Sotho Grade 3 learners fared better in WR (89.3 wcpm) relative to the ORF task (49.0 wcpm), Harrison et al. (2016) found that isiXhosa Grade 3 learners averaged 31.9 wcpm for WR and 24.1 wcpm for ORF, Wilsenach (2016) also found that the Northern Sotho Grade 3 learners achieved an average of 67.1 wcpm on WR compared to an average score of 29.0 wcpm in the ORF task.

Although researchers have reached consensus upon the fact that it is not possible for fluent reading to happen without accurate and fast word reading (Just & Carpenter 1980; Stanovich 2000; Hulstijn 2001; Macalister 2010), the discrepancy between WR and ORF scores in this study may be explained by the fact that learners might have found reading words in context in Xitsonga, which is written disjunctively, with some words shorter than others, easier than the context-free words, which contained nouns or verbs. Nonetheless, the results of this study resonate with some of the research on African languages, which found that Grade 3 learners were able to read more words in context than the context-free words, e.g., in Xitsonga 18.2 wcpm (WR) and 39.8 wcpm (ORF), Northern Sotho 19.3 wcpm (WR) and 36.3 wcpm (ORF), and isiZulu 17.8 wcpm (WR) and 21.0 wcpm (ORF) (Spaull et al. 2020).

In contrast to the view that single word reading can be achieved faster than the context-dependent words, findings in this study and Spaull et al. (2020) confirmed that children may still experience difficulties in decoding familiar words out of context.

5. 4. 1. 4. Performance on oral reading comprehension

The ORC task, which was used to test the Grade 1 learners' understanding of the text that they read in the current study, relied on a timed ORF, although the ORC itself was not timed. Sadly, very few learners could read very far into the text, and even if they did so, they struggled to read for meaning by the end of Term 3. Reading comprehension is complex; it relies on lower-level skills to achieve at least a literal understanding of words read. If both language and decoding skills have not been mastered sufficiently by the end of Grade 1, it is unlikely for comprehension to be achieved at the grade level. However, it is possible that learners might have done better on ORC had they been given more than one minute to read the passage. Piper and Zuilkowski (2016) found that the class 1 (Grade 1) and class 2 learners (Grade 2) did not perform well in their ORF and comprehension tasks despite having been allocated more time.

This suggests that extending time for the learners in the current study might not have made a difference, given that the poor performance on ORC is in line with their low performance in the other reading subtasks. Nevertheless, it is perhaps important in future studies to separate the timed ORF task from the ORC task, by adding an extra minute or two after the timed one minute so that learners can read further in the passage to more reliably assess their comprehension of what they have read.

The highest mean score for the ORC was 0.98, suggesting that even if learners managed to read some words, the majority could not understand what they had read by Term 3. They also read so slowly that they did not get far in the text, so the other reading comprehension questions could not be asked. The percentage of comprehenders was low in this domain, and even though we do not expect all Grade 1s to be expert readers by the end of the year, we also do not expect 70% of Grade 1s to understand nothing after a year of schooling.

The highest proportion of zero scores in this domain by the third term suggests that by the end of Grade 1, many learners are progressed to the next grade without having mastered the foundational reading skills necessary to prepare them for the later reading achievement. This illustrates the phenomenon of 'schooling without learning' as emphasised by Spaull and Hoadley (2017). The trend of achieving floor effects is also evident in the studies conducted by Harrison et al. (2016), Kim and Piper (2019a) and Spaull et al. (2020) who found that the performance of learners on the ORC task was the lowest relative to the others.

The Tsonga learners in this study showed limited reading with understanding in the language (Xitsonga) used by most as HL. Even learners at the 75th percentile were not yet reading with comprehension. This finding is in line with studies which found that learners struggle to understand what they read even in their HL (Harrison et al. 2016; Howie et al. 2017; Spaull et al. 2020). Reading performance of this nature, according to Piper, Schroeder & Trudell (2016), negatively affects children's ability to perform well in another language. The Annual National Assessment (ANA) English FAL results, in a three-year cycle (2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014) (DBE 2014), is confirmation that a sound literacy foundation in the children's HL is critical for laying a foundation for learning another language. Evidence from EGRS II shows a more direct link of the effect that HL reading outcomes have in learning English or any other language. For example, 45.7% of learners in Grade 1 could not read a single word correctly in their isiZulu/isiSwati HL and 35% could not read an English word correctly at the end of the year (Schaefer & Kotzé 2018).

5. 4. 2. Performance on reading measures between gender, age and across schools

The second question in terms of establishing how 'fixed effects' (i.e., independent variables such as gender, age, schools, etc.) affect early reading development was answered by using the Mann Whitney test for gender and age variables and the repeated measures ANOVA for the five different schools.

In contrast with much of the literature, the data analysis in the current study did not show significant differences between genders (Table 5.8) across different reading measures of EGRA. This is surprising because other studies have shown statistically significant gender differences (Harrison et al. 2016; Makaure 2016; Wilsenach & Makaure 2018). There was also no significant differences between grade age and those slightly younger, and the sample was also not large enough to compare grade age and older learners. Older learners might be having learning/reading difficulties that are not being addressed by retaining them in the same grade. The absence of statistically significant gender and age differences in this study could be explained by the low level of literacy performance across all subtasks. Gender differences may also be easier to pick up in a larger sample. However, even though significant differences for the groups (gender) are common, findings in this study also resonate with several studies which found no significant differences between gender in terms of the reading performance (Orago 2015; Cekiso 2016; Nxumalo 2016; Pretorius & Stoffelsma 2017).

Differences were also demonstrated across the schools in some of the EGRA components (Cf Appendix H), but not consistently to see a pattern. For example, School B significantly outscored School A and D in the PA subtask and School D in the LSK task at baseline, while School E performed better than Schools C and D in WR at endline. In terms of the HL-FAL distinction, which was meant to check whether Xitsonga reading develops differently when it is the LoLT compared to the FAL, the results revealed that rural School B outperformed suburban School A in the PA task. Descriptive statistics also showed that both schools' overall performance was similar. It was expected that suburban School A might perform better than rural schools on the basis of its SE, but on the other hand, since Xitsonga was not used as a LoLT in School A, it could also be expected that their Xitsonga reading would be poorer since less time is given to FAL literacy (3 hours per week) than HL literacy (7 hours per week). The small sample size did not enable one to see a trend beyond the results that Schools A and B produced better Xitsonga reading results despite HL/FAL differences than Schools C, D and E. This suggests that children in these schools experience different learning environments,

which can either enhance their learning opportunities or discourage them from achieving their learning goals, despite their SE backgrounds.

On the whole, as per Scholler's (2018) argument, it seems that as early as Grade 1, each class is a multi-grade class. There was lots of variation within these classes (slow learning, low performance, etc.) which is suggestive of poor quality teaching.

5. 4. 3. Relations between components in early reading development

The third question which focused on examining relationships between subskills and establishing which early reading skills are predictive of later reading accomplishment in Xitsonga, was addressed by using Spearman's correlation and multiple regression analyses.

There were moderate to robust relations between all the subcomponents of reading (Table 5.15). PA is strongly associated with LSK and modestly associated with other subtasks. The results also showed moderate and significant relations between the different phonological grain sizes (syllables and phonemes) and LSK. Adams (1990) and Schaefer and Kotzé (2019) also confirmed that PA skills contribute to the development of letter-sound knowledge. However, some scholars do not necessarily agree with this. They argue that phonics develops PA (Vihman 1996), while others regard the relationship to be reciprocal (Perfetti, Beck, Bell & Hughes 1987). Nevertheless, it certainly helps if children have developed some degree of PA when they start school.

Although PA was only weakly related to oral reading comprehension in this study, when all the predictor variables were entered, it was reported to have a direct impact on reading comprehension in other studies. For example, in Norwegian (Engen & Høien 2002), Northern Sotho (Wilsenach 2013), and Malayalam (Abdul & Remia, 2013), suggesting that teachers might not be paying attention to this aspect of early literacy, simply because it may not be informally or formally assessed like other reading skills.

Knowledge of letter-sound is strongly associated with accuracy and fluency in word reading, but to a lesser degree with oral reading comprehension. Thus, different processes come into play at different stages of development and contribute differently to performance as proficiency increases. Hierarchical regression analysis showed that letter-sound knowledge was the only significant predictor of word reading. These results correspond with several studies of children's early reading (e.g., Hulme and Snowling (2015) in English; Snel et al. (2016) in Dutch; Zenlit 2016 (Pretorius 2018) in isiZulu and isiXhosa; Schaefer and Kotzé (2019) in

isiZulu and isiSwati; Kim and Piper (2019a) in Swahili, Kamba and Lubukusu; Spaull et al. (2020) in Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu). According to de Jong and van Leij (1999) and Bowey (2005), letter knowledge influences word reading directly because it reflects recognition of the connections between graphemes and their corresponding phonemes (i.e., the link between written and spoken language).

There was a predictable and robust relationship between word reading and oral reading fluency. These results indicate the importance of word reading in reading fluently (with accuracy and speed), coinciding with several studies (e.g., Zenlit 2016 (Pretorius 2018) in isiZulu and isiXhosa; Roembke et al. (2019) in English; Kim and Piper (2019a) in Swahili, Kamba and Lubukusu; Spaull et al. (2020) in Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu;). The National Reading Panel (2000) also emphasises that fluency depends upon well-developed word recognition skills. Pikulski and Chard (2005) reiterate the importance of decoding when they argue that children who lack the necessary foundation for developing decoding skills are in no position to read. Developing accurate word reading skills may be difficult for beginner readers; however, Ehri (2005) maintains that children can retrieve knowledge acquired from letter-sounds to help them read known and unknown words. This is especially true in transparent orthographies. The research in the Finnish (Aro 2004, 2017; Hoxhallari 2006), German (Landerl & Wimmer 2008) and Spanish (Soriano-Ferrer & Morte-Soriano 2017) languages show that in transparent orthographies, children can achieve accuracy early – leading to outstanding achievement by the end of Grade 1, but they need to be taught phonics well.

Although some have suggested that strong effects between ORF and ORC are mainly obtained in English and that the relationship is not so strong in languages with transparent orthographies (Seidenberg 2017), research in transparent languages also shows strong associations between fluency and ORC (e.g., Piper and Zuilkowski (2016) in Swahili and English; Zenlit 2017 (Pretorius 2018) in isiZulu and isiXhosa; Spaull et al. (2020) in Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu). The results of this study also revealed strong relations between ORF and ORC in Xitsonga. These results support the findings from other studies conducted in Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu (Spaull et al. 2020) and in Kiswahili, on both timed and untimed passage reading (Piper & Zuilkowski 2016). Kim and Piper (2019a) also showed that reading fluency is important for developing reading comprehension skills in African languages. In their structural equation model, ORF was consistently strongly related to reading comprehension across the three languages, e.g., Kiswahili, Kikamba and Lubukusu.

This clearly suggests that even in transparent agglutinating languages, children still need to develop accuracy, fluency and speed to understand what they read, as this enables them to focus on understanding what the text means rather than spending much time on decoding. Regression analysis showed that ORF was the only significant predictor of reading comprehension. These findings coincide with Zenlit 2017 assessment results which showed that ORF significantly predicted reading comprehension in isiXhosa and isiZulu, and also in English (Pretorius 2018).

5. 5. CONCLUSION

This chapter provided the results of the quantitative aspects of this study in line with three of the research questions. The quantitative element was conducted to examine how early literacy develops in Xitsonga over time. This included determining how gender, age and school variables affected early reading development in Xitsonga and which early reading skills are predictive of later reading accomplishment.

In sum, the results showed some improvement of scores from baseline to endline across different reading measures of EGRA. Although most learners tested in this study were HL speakers of Xitsonga, performance across the reading measures of EGRA suggests that by the end of Grade 1, these learners' reading profile in terms of foundational literacy skills might depict characteristics of non-readers. Thus, although learners attend Grade R and once in Grade 1, they are not given adequate support in developing their foundational literacy skills in the classroom throughout the year.

The findings showed no consistent significant gender, age or school effects. Schools A and B appeared similar, Schools C and E also fairly similar, while School D was the weakest. The results also showed that more learning seemed to have occurred in rural School B (where Xitsonga is taught as LoLT) in some areas, but not in word reading and oral reading fluency, where School B scored high zero performance in ORF.

The results also revealed that LSK predicts WR, WR predicts ORF and ORF predicts ORC in Xitsonga. Different relations were found across the EGRA tasks. On the relationship between the subcomponents of EGRA, the results show evidence of the interaction of various skills in reading development, beginning from simple to more complex ones, confirming what has been found in other studies.

The next chapter will help to explain some aspects of the quantitative results in light of the qualitative findings which consist of analyses of classroom observations and interviews of curriculum advisors and Grade 1 teachers from five different schools.

CHAPTER 6

QUALITATIVE DATA PRESENTATION

6. 0. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 presented and discussed the findings of the quantitative aspect of this study. To complement the quantitative element, this chapter aims to address the following research questions:

RQ4: How do the GET curriculum advisors view their support of schools and teachers in developing and supporting learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the FP?

RQ5: How do the Grade 1 teachers develop and support the learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the Grade 1 classroom?

The findings in this chapter are used to inform our understanding of what is happening in Grade 1 classrooms and of the learners' literacy performance in Xitsonga in these classrooms. Data were collected through interviews with two curriculum advisors and five Grade 1 teachers and classroom observations from five primary schools in the district of Mopani East and Mopani West. One Grade 1 class was observed per school. In addition, as indicated in §5.1, one of the schools is a quintile 4, and four are quintile 2 schools.

In order to ensure that the teachers expressed themselves freely without linguistic barriers and so that I could elicit as much information as needed, the Grade 1 teachers were interviewed in Xitsonga. The curriculum advisors preferred to be interviewed in English. Interview data from the teachers and the curriculum advisors were transcribed without alterations to ensure that the meanings of the responses do not change, with exact words of the participants indicated in italics in this chapter. Presentation of the classroom observation data includes some pictures to give an idea of the appearance of each classroom and the literacy activities happening in them.

This chapter sketches the biographic information of the curriculum advisors and the Grade 1 teachers, together with a brief profile of the schools and describes the procedures followed during the fieldwork. Thereafter, the chapter presents themes from the curriculum advisors' interviews. This is followed by the classroom observations and interviews with the teachers in each one of the five schools, and integration of the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Finally, an interpretation of the main themes that emerged is proffered.

The use of letters A to E representing the five schools, CA1 and CA2 representing the two curriculum advisors and T1 to T5 representing the five teachers are used in this study to make the participants' data anonymous. T1 was at School A, T2 was at School B, T3 at School C, T4 at School D and T5 at School E.

6. 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CAs AND TEACHERS

Summary information about the CAs and the teachers is given in Table 4.1. Two CAs in the provincial education department (also referred to as subject advisors) from the district of Mopani East and Mopani West in Limpopo were interviewed. CA1 (male) was responsible for Mopani West and CA2 (female) for Mopani East. Both CAs had FP experience as teachers. CA2 is a Xitsonga HL speaker, and CA1 is a Northern Sotho HL speaker who also advises Tsonga primary schools. Both CAs had BEd honours and their ages and years of experience show that they had long been involved in the FP.

The five teachers interviewed were all females, and they all had FP teaching experience. Only one teacher was a Northern Sotho HL speaker and the rest were Xitsonga HL speakers. The teachers also had the requisite qualifications required to teach in South African primary schools, with two of them having BEd honours degrees, two had BEd degrees and one an education diploma. The youngest teacher was 26 years old and the oldest 50 years. T1, T3, and T5's ages and years of experience also show that they had long been teaching in the FP.

Table 6. 1. Background of the CAs and Grade 1 teachers

Participant	Gender	HL	Age	Qualifications	FP experience	Years of experience as CA/teacher
CA1	Male	Northern Sotho	60	BEd Honours	Yes	10
CA2	Female	Xitsonga	50	BEd Honours	Yes	8
T1	Female	Xitsonga	50	BEd Honours	Yes	25
T2	Female	Northern Sotho	26	BEd Degree	Yes	4
T3	Female	Xitsonga	49	BEd Degree	Yes	24
T4	Female	Xitsonga	48	Primary Teachers Diploma	Yes	10
T5	Female	Xitsonga	50	BEd Honours	Yes	23

Information about the schooling context, which was obtained from the principals of each of the five schools (Appendix M) is presented in Table 4.2. School A is situated in a suburban area, while Schools B, C, D, and E are located in rural areas. They are all government schools, and all five schools admit learners from Grade R to 7. The number of learners enrolled on an annual basis for each school determines the staff establishment. Schools A to C had class sizes that were compliant with policy recommendations, while Schools D and E had large classes.

Table 6. 2. The schools' profiles

School	Area	District	Quintile	Suburban/Urban Village/Rural	Government school	SGB	Enrolment	LoLT	FAL	No. of educators	No. of HODs per school	No. of Deputy principals	No. of principals	No. of Grade 1 classes	No. of Grade 1 learners per class
A	Giyani	Mopani East	4	Suburban	Yes	Yes	668	English	Tsonga	20	1	-	1	2	41 (1Y) 41 (1X)
B	Mohlaba Head Kraal	Mopani West	2	Rural	Yes	Yes	286	Tsonga	English	8	-	-	1	1	34
C	Sasekani	Mopani West	2	Rural	Yes	Yes	465	Tsonga	English	13	2	-	1	2	40 (1A) 40 (1B)
D	Mohlaba Cross	Mopani West	2	Rural	Yes	Yes	751	Tsonga	English	19	2	1	1	2	69 (1A) 62 (1B)
E	Mohlaba Cross	Mopani West	2	Rural	Yes	Yes	864	Tsonga	English	18	3	1	1	2	57 (1A) 57 (1B)

6. 2. PROCEDURES

To recap, I visited one suburban and four rural schools to observe and interview Grade 1 teachers. I also conducted interviews with two CAs. The qualitative data were gathered once in March 2018 (around the same time that the baseline test was done). Three instruments were used to help systematise the qualitative process of observation and questioning:

- observation and videotaping of the literacy (about 1½ hours) in each school and a classroom observation schedule, which looked at activities and practices that occurred in the classroom;
- a classroom checklist, which focused on print resources in the classroom; and
- a semi-structured interview schedule, which tapped into the respondents' perspectives on CAPS, print-based resources, activities that support reading, and the development of learners' reading in the classroom. Some questions in the interviews also referred to things observed in the classroom during the literacy lessons. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Interviews were done with the Grade 1 teachers of the classrooms observed and the CAs of the GET band. Arrangements to visit the schools for collecting data were made a week in advance by phoning and emailing the principals of each of the schools. I spent two days at each school. The CAs were interviewed after the visit to the first school. The first day in each school was used to explain the purpose of the observation and the interview.

The second day in each school was used to assess learners, conduct classroom observations and interview teachers. Although the learner assessments were conducted in two separate phases, namely baseline (March 2018) and endline (September 2018), the baseline data were only analysed after the school visits, so my observations in the qualitative aspect of the study were not influenced by the baseline EGRA results. For the CAs, I managed to interview CA1 in the afternoon. CA2 was attending a departmental workshop so I interviewed her telephonically later in the evening. The interviews with both CAs were recorded and lasted about 45 minutes each. These procedures were discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

6. 3. EMERGING THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS WITH CAs

In this section, the interview with the CAs and the analysis of how they see CAPS are presented to address the fourth research question:

RQ4: How do the GET CAs view their support of schools and teachers in developing and supporting learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the FP?

As indicated in (§4.6.4.2), four main themes and sixteen subthemes that emerged from the interview analysis and that were identified in Figure 4.6 are rearranged in table form and will be discussed in the order in which they appear in Table 6.3.

Table 6. 3. The main themes and subthemes reflecting experiences of CAs

Themes	Subthemes
1. Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading	1.1. The nature of change 1.2. Adapting to reading instructional approaches required by CAPS 1.3. Teacher training workshops 1.4. Uptake of the NECT programme 1.5. Engaged time
2. Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading	2.1 Overcrowding
3. Structural issues relating to difficulties in supporting FP teachers	3.1. School visits 3.2. Unrealistic workloads 3.3. Distance/understaffing 3.4. Departmental workshops
4. Support from CAs in the form of mentoring teachers	4.1. Demonstrations as part of workshops 4.2. Creating a print-rich classroom environment 4.3. Baseline assessment/EGRA 4.4. Creating a learning space 4.5. Classroom management 4.6. Class visits/ quality assurance

6. 3. 1. Theme 1: Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

Both CAs raised pedagogic issues that they perceived to be contributing factors to ineffective teaching of early reading in the FP. These include challenges in terms of the nature of change. In many ways, the change subtheme also infuses these other pedagogic subthemes, and underlies adapting to reading instructional approaches required by CAPS, teacher training workshops, uptake of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) programme and engaged time.

6. 3. 1. 1. The nature of change

Proponents of educational change agree that changes in schools must first occur in the classroom (Moyo 2017). However, change does not come about simply by telling teachers to change their classroom practices. Teachers can impede the effectiveness of curriculum change and implementation if they lack content knowledge and pedagogic skills, if they do not know

how to teach according to CAPS recommendations and if their perceptions of reading and how to teach it are different from those proposed in the curriculum. These factors, in turn, can delay the effective delivery of CAPS in the classroom. Since the implementation of CAPS in 2012, provincial education departments have held workshops, and several interventions (e.g., NECT)[15] have been implemented to help teachers adapt their classroom practices according to CAPS. However, some teachers, according to CA2, *have not reached the expected level* in teaching according to CAPS. CA1 added that *improvement is not that fast*.

Although teachers are still experiencing challenges in terms of adapting to the new curriculum changes, CAs seem to be trying their best to support them in various ways using the workshop model:

> **CA1:** *We invite teachers in each and every workshop so that they can learn from the workshops that it is important for them to do the same in their classrooms.*

If teachers are given opportunities to attend workshops for their professional development and still find it difficult to adapt to changes, this could suggest that the workshop training might not be effective for curriculum implementation. Even though teachers are expected to teach following what is prescribed by the curriculum, CA1 pointed out that *Teachers are not forced to follow exactly what the template dictates*, indicating that there is room for flexibility and creativity. The task of adapting curriculum materials to the learning environment depends on, inter alia, how knowledgeable teachers are about the curriculum content and its instructional strategies. The CAs acknowledged that teacher change remains a challenge, despite factors that they felt had been put in place to facilitate change. This subtheme also infuses the following pedagogic subthemes.

6. 3. 1. 2. Adapting to reading instructional approaches required by CAPS

Despite CAPS explicitly clarifying how things should be done in terms of teaching reading in the FP classroom, the CAs felt that teachers still do not know how to teach reading, for example:

> **CA1:** *Teachers don't understand how to teach learners – for some, it is still challenging to break away from the 'traditional way' (teacher-centered approach) of doing things in the classroom.*

[15] The NECT is a programme that provides schools with learning and teaching support materials such as lesson plans, readers, science kits, etc. It has implemented a literacy intervention in some provinces (including Limpopo) and plays an important role in schools in terms of providing lesson plans and other materials to promote literacy in the FP.

CA1 also confirmed teachers' difficulty in adjusting to reading instructional approaches required by CAPS. In particular, he was concerned about their difficulty in focusing on what was important and recognising that the approach to teaching reading in African languages differs in some ways from English (DBE 2019).

> **CA2:** *When I go to schools, teachers would complain that many learners struggle to identify and sound letters. But the bottom line of the challenge for teachers is teaching learners to master the sounds. For example, you will find that teachers have pasted letter cards on the wall. I usually tell them that if I could hear children naming letters instead of sounding them, they will have to explain themselves because those learners need to know sounds so that even if the learner has to write the letter, he/she must know how to sounds that letter.*

CA2 was concerned about teachers teaching letter names (common in English) instead of focusing on letter-sounds in African languages, given that these languages have larger sets of letters-sounds (Land & Lyster 2015) that are transparent and that mastery of this knowledge base is key to reading. It was also noted in all the classes observed that teachers are still struggling to teach reading in line with the reading methodologies prescribed in CAPS. This dilemma makes teachers stick to their 'traditional ways' of teaching reading, which compromises learner achievement in the classroom.

Local research has also indicated that teachers do not understand how early reading should be taught in the FP (DoE 2008c; Hoadley 2016; Pretorius et al. 2016). Phajane and Mokhele (2013) have also shown in their study that teachers are uncertain about the methods and approaches to be used for teaching early reading.

6. 3. 1. 3. Teacher training workshops

The DBE expects provincial education departments to arrange workshops to facilitate CAPS and support the teaching of reading during early learning.

> **CA2:** *We normally conduct workshops with teachers, but if time permits, I don't have to wait; if I see the gaps after the department's workshops, I normally arrange to meet with the teachers and clarify more on what has been presented in the workshop.*

While workshops seem to be the main medium through which curriculum change is mediated, this response suggests that workshop training may not appear to be adequately addressing the problems and difficulties encountered by teachers in implementing the curriculum. For this reason, CA2 indicated that she made follow-ups with teachers through ongoing support to assist with providing clarity on the implementation of the curriculum content. Nevertheless, the CAs'

support to the teachers depends on their availability. If a CA has other departmental responsibilities, teachers will remain unsupported. If they are teachers with poor content and pedagogic knowledge, and if they themselves are not strong enough readers to work their way through the CAPS document, then they may lack agency and a lack of follow-up support could make them revert to their former ways of teaching, despite what is prescribed by the curriculum. In contrast, competent teachers who familiarise themselves with the curriculum and with a strong sense of professional ethics can get on with their teaching irrespective of whether a CA visits the school or not. CA1 added that:

> *Every quarter we take them through a lesson plan, which has all the components or all the language skills, which shows how to teach phonics and handwriting skills and all these, just to remind them.*

This response suggests that although teachers are workshopped regularly and given support materials to help them teach according to CAPS, classroom practices are not yet filtering down to learner literacy performance, confirming findings by Luningo (2015) who established that despite the progress made by the DBE in providing training to teachers in the necessary skills, teachers are still experiencing challenges in implementing the curriculum.

6. 3. 1. 4. Uptake of the NECT programme

The NECT aims to see changes in the education of all children. The challenges around changing teacher practices are reflected in the uptake of current literacy interventions which are initiated by the NECT. Both CAs commented on challenges around the uptake of current literacy interventions.

> **CA2:** *The NECT gives teachers lesson plans, trackers, vocabulary words, and they are expected to laminate them to sustain them for at least a year - when I visit schools, I will find that they are not implementing the NECT; they rob these things. We give them basic charts like writing frames, etc. and when I get into class and find that the teacher did not put the charts on the walls, the class is dull; this means the teacher is not implementing the NECT.*

CA2 was of the view that teachers did not seem to use the resources provided by the NECT, relying on what she saw on the classroom walls as evidence of whether teachers followed the NECT programme or not. Whether or not her conclusion was justified, bare classroom walls do suggest that materials provided by the NECT are not being used.

The CAs further commented on the flexibility in the NECT lesson plans:

> **CA1:** *Teachers are advised to focus on the template provided by the NECT, but teachers are not forced to follow exactly what the template dictates; they can still adapt it according to their teaching environment.*
>
> **CA2**: *So for now, teachers are given ready-made lesson plans from the NECT, but even if they are given those lesson plans, I always advise them to adapt the plans according to their classroom environment.*

Even though teachers are free to align materials for teaching reading according to their learners' educational needs, as emphasised by the CAs, they seem reluctant to use the resources which are meant to enhance literacy in their classrooms. The reluctance in using learning teaching support material (LTSM) from the NECT could stem from the fact that curriculum support from the NECT is not yet adequate in most schools, or that there are other factors impeding instructional changes. Research in Africa suggests that the coaching model is an effective, albeit more intensive and expensive way of supporting teachers in changing classroom practice (Cilliers et al. 2018; Fleisch & Dixon 2019).

6. 3. 1. 5. Engaged time

As discussed in Chapter 3 (§3.1.4.3), engaged time (i.e., time-on-task) refers to when learners are involved in instruction and learning in the classroom. For teachers to effectively use engaged time, CAPS requires them to be well organised and be good planners. However, both CAs raised concerns about time management in the FP classroom.

> **CA1***: We expect them to divide their learners into different groups so that they can be able to at least see two groups per day for 15 minutes – but some will tell you that 15 minutes is not enough.*
>
> **CA2**: *There is time allocated for each component; sometimes, they complain that the time allocated is too little - so when I demonstrate, I show them that no-no-no…this time is sufficient.*

CA1 pointed out that t*eachers spend too much time singing with the learners.* Singing with learners in the classroom during early learning can be regarded as part of a hidden curriculum, which includes assumptions and expectations about learning that are not officially communicated within the learning environment (Alsubaie 2015). The hidden curriculum involves all the incidental lessons about behaviour, personal relationships, the use of power and authority, competition, and sources of motivation (ibid.). It is an undocumented curriculum, which is used to communicate acceptable or unacceptable behaviours, implicitly.

Singing is common in early grade classrooms and is also an integral part of African culture. It is also typically used in routines when teachers change from one activity to another, or to

change the rhythm of teaching or motivate feelings of solidarity. However, it can also be used to fill up the time or to create an impression of communal learning. The problem arises when teachers spend a lot of time on such activities to a point where they overspend the time allocated for the official curriculum. Spending time singing with learners will not necessarily develop their ability to decode words while developing alphabetic knowledge will.

According to both CAs, time seems to be an issue for the teachers. It was also noted during my observations that teachers spent more than the time allocated for teaching reading in the Grade 1 classroom. Despite extending teaching time with learners, most teachers did not seem to cover what they had planned to do with the learners and lessons often rambled on without a clear focus. As mentioned in Chapter 3 (§3.3.1.4), Carnoy et al. (2012) also found that Grade 6 teachers in the North West Province had only taught 40% of the scheduled lessons for the year. Most of the engaged time had been lost on activities that are not included in the official curriculum. In this respect, research confirms robust relationships between engagement time and student achievement (Cotton, Bennett & Franklin 1989; Hughes 2012; Fitzpatrick 2014; Lei, Cui & Zhou 2018), suggesting that if the allocated time for different reading activities is lost, it is likely to compromise learners' reading development and academic achievement.

6. 3. 2. Theme 2: Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

There are also external issues that can impede successful teaching in the classroom. Overcrowding was the only subtheme identified within this central theme. This factor is largely beyond the CAs' control as their responsibility lies primarily in supporting and advising teachers regarding curriculum implementation.

As indicated in Chapter 3 (§3.3.2.1), the learner-educator ratio for South African public primary schools is 40:1 (Motshekga 2012). The DBE has many sound educational policies, but problems persist because of classes with more than 50 learners (Spaull 2016; Charter 2016; Matshipi 2018). This also confirms the findings which have shown that class sizes in many South African public schools reflect unevenness in implementing policy. The CAs also acknowledged the challenges of overcrowding.

> **CA1**: *I will say classes may be overcrowded with learners...*
>
> **CA2**: *Mam – overcrowding is a problem to teachers because they can't handle teaching, "ke ra gore"* (I am saying) *there is nothing you can do to avoid it – it is beyond your control.*

According to CA1, despite overcrowding, teaching is still expected to take place. Similarly, CA2 is also aware that overcrowding is a problem, especially for teachers who do not have strategies to deal with large classes. Both CAs felt that teachers need to find ways of dealing with overcrowding because it seems to be escalating and teachers themselves do not have control over how many learners are enrolled in their classrooms. Marais (2016) agrees that overcrowding in the South African public schools is here to stay, but also indicates that this can be mitigated to some extent through training teachers on skills geared to dealing with overcrowded classrooms.

6. 3. 3. Theme 3: Structural issues relating to difficulties in supporting FP teachers

Structural issues relating to difficulties in supporting teachers include the following subthemes: school visits, unrealistic workloads, distance/understaffing, and departmental workshops.

6. 3. 3. 1. School visits

School visits by the CAs as departmental officials in South Africa are understood and practiced as administrative tasks for supporting teachers and monitoring curriculum implementation. The Mopani East district, where CA2 is attached, has 226 primary schools, whereas Mopani West district, where CA1 is attached, has 206 primary schools. In terms of visiting and supporting these schools, CAs said:

> **CA1**: *Sometimes, I visit four or five schools and find out that there are challenges in these schools, so I assume that the other schools have the same challenge...I normally visit schools that have serious problems and help through those challenges.*
>
> **CA2**: *My work specifically is to visit schools, Mon to Fri, but I have some other important things to attend*

The responses of both CAs indicate that school visits are not effective enough in guiding and coaching teachers properly for curriculum implementation; hence, they have to constantly juggle needs and priorities.

Although both CAs did visit schools, it is apparent that their limited visits could negatively impact on teaching and learning in the FP classroom because teachers are not given quality support. These results confirm the findings by Adendorff and Moodley (2014), who found that CAs seldom conduct school visits, leaving teachers with uncertainties about curriculum-related matters.

6. 3. 3. 2. Unrealistic workloads

The CAs in this study are overloaded with schools that need their attention. CA2 confirmed her inability to cope with work-related demands.

> *I am advising approximately 64 schools, and I have twenty days to see these schools, so it becomes difficult cos after workshops, I may not be able to see all the schools and you find that I am unable to see schools that need my attention most.*

Given these figures, CAs are unable to service all the schools due to heavy workloads and the majority of schools throughout the entire district may not be given attention. Out of twenty days in each month, a CA is not only expected to conduct school visits but also to attend departmental workshops and perform administrative duties. This further confirms that the CAs seem to be exposed to unrealistic or excessive workloads, which could lead to negative deviant behaviour (Radzali, Ahmadand & Omar 2013). The outcome of an unrealistic workload, as explained by CA2, affects the schools that they are assigned to support.

6. 3. 3. 3. Distance/understaffing

Distance between schools, according to the CAs, is also a challenge when it comes to conducting school visits. CA1 confirmed this by saying:

> *I won't be able to see all the mistakes because I have to travel long distance, as we have to report and thereafter visit schools, by then it's late, the teacher has covered most of the morning lessons, and you can't ask the teacher to go back and repeat what is already taught.*

Distance, according to Spies (2006), affects the job satisfaction of employees. In this case, teachers could relax and take things easy because they know that school visits from the departmental officials are usually far apart. CA1 also raised the challenge of first reporting to the office before conducting his daily school visits as another reason causing them to arrive late when visiting schools.

Travelling long distances is also exacerbated by the fact that CAs throughout the entire district are understaffed.

> **CA2**: *Since we don't have enough manpower as curriculum advisors, and we are only four in the district; I normally use workshops to address some of the challenges.*

CAs are allocated schools that are situated far in the rural areas. Since they are understaffed, they are unable to reach all the schools that are supposed to be supported, resulting in most schools not getting support from the departmental officials. CA2 further indicated that the only

way that helps her overcome some of these challenges is to generalise the problems of the schools and attend to them when teachers have gathered for workshops. Although this is a pragmatic solution to the problem, it might not be sufficient, as each school and teachers have their unique challenges. Lizer (2013) points out that CAs are unable to provide proper support to their assigned schools due to lack of human capacity.

6. 3. 3. 4. Departmental workshops

Besides facilitating teacher workshops, CAs are also required to attend departmental workshops relating to work issues and professional development. The demand of continually attending departmental workshops week in and week out, though important for upskilling and updating CAs, seems to interfere with their responsibility to support teachers.

> **CA1:** *Like for example, last week we have been to Bolivia up to Saturday for a workshop, tomorrow we are going to Mokopane up to Friday and next week we are going to attend the National workshop and come back Friday, so these are some of the things which makes it difficult for me to say how often do I go to schools because of other departmental commitments. But like say, for example, when I come back I make it a point that I visit at least three schools.*

There are benefits to attending workshops for professional development. Mizell (2010) emphasises that additional support in the form of workshops can set employees on the path to efficiency at work. However, the problem with professionally developing CAs is prioritising one activity at the expense of the other. Thus, although CA1 indicated that he normally conducts school visits after attending workshops, the support could be inadequate, given that CAs regularly attend lengthy workshops. Besides, there are also concerns about the quality of the workshops; they could be lengthy and ineffective. For example, in a qualitative study that investigated how curriculum advisors (*n*=4) and School Management Team (SMT) members (*n*=8) communicate curriculum changes to schools in Gauteng Province, Rasebotsa (2017) found that despite ongoing communication between curriculum advisors and SMT members, there were challenges between the two parties which included lack of clarity on what needs to be changed, poor planning and time management, lack of coordination in communicating the changes and communication barriers related to the use of written messages. It is evident that curriculum implementation is not only hindered by poor teaching practices, but also by those who are tasked to mediate and monitor its implementation simply because they may not be well equipped to transfer the required knowledge and skills needed to effect curriculum changes in the classroom.

6. 3. 4. Theme 4: Support for teachers in the implementation of CAPS

Despite challenges that CAs experience in executing their duties, the following subthemes emerged from their responses as confirmation of their commitment to supporting schools and teachers: demonstrations as part of workshops, creating print-rich classroom environment, baseline assessment/EGRA, creating learning space, self-regulated learning, and class visits/quality assurance.

6. 3. 4. 1. Demonstrations as part of workshops

The CAs use demonstrations during teacher training workshops to model pedagogic techniques.

> **CA1:** *Sometimes, I demonstrate how to teach phonics during workshops; after that I give each group a task to come and demonstrate.*
>
> **CA2:** *So of late, I am no longer demonstrating during workshops, I would ask the teachers themselves to role-play teaching reading by themselves.*

This response indicates that when workshopping teachers, CAs try to make them practical and hands on. Both CAs seemed to value the importance of demonstrating during workshops as a way of helping FP teachers understand how they are supposed to teach early reading. Through modelling, teachers can see and learn how they should teach reading in the classroom. As a result, after watching a step-by-step process on how the teaching of reading can be conducted in activities such as SR, GGR, or PR/IR, teachers are given opportunities to role-play the entire process during workshops. In this case, teachers are also encouraged to model good reading for the learners in the classroom.

> **CA1:** *I also advise teachers when reading the stories to the learners to dramatize these stories so the learners can understand.*

The CAs clearly try to go the extra mile to see the effective implementation of CAPS. However, as stated in §6.3.1.3, even though knowledge and skills during workshops are emphasised, there seems to be no obvious improvement, which could be the result of trying to cover too much in a short amount of time, in a context of work overload and understaffing. A study conducted by Maepa (2017) also revealed that teachers in Limpopo Province did not receive quality training for teaching social sciences in line with curriculum changes because of time constraints.

6. 3. 4. 2. Creating a print-rich classroom environment

Both CAs emphasised the importance of setting up a print-rich classroom environment.

> **CA1**: *When we invite teachers in each workshop, we make sure that we are also fully prepared where we make sure that the venues that we use for workshops, we decorate the walls with print-rich where we put charts and other print-rich related materials.*

Although the CAs are aware of the importance of a print-rich classroom, they do not seem to involve teachers practically in creating their own resources during the workshops. This could be beneficial for the teachers in terms of being shown how some of the print materials, such as comprehension gloves or word walls, can be made attractively and creatively at a low cost.

> **CA2**: *Print is not a matter of having something in the classroom; those pictures must talk to what I am teaching; if ever we can say the pictures are there and the class is bright but don't talk to what I teach it does not make sense.*

It is also commendable that besides advising teachers to set up stimulating print-rich classroom environments, the CAs also encourage teachers to put up the resources for use rather than mere decoration, as the primary purpose is to make written language meaningful and increase exposure, especially for poor schools that are located in print scarce areas.

6. 3. 4. 3. Baseline assessment/EGRA

Both CAs indicated the importance of baseline assessment.

> **CA1:** *I actually advise them to record the performance of the learner so that they can be able to follow up on whether there is progress or not because they don't do it once, they can assess first – they can determine the second term or even third term.*
>
> **CA2:** *Teachers should have a checklist where they record the results of baseline assessment so that when I request it, I can be able to see that they have tested the learners.*

CAs emphasised record-keeping for baseline assessment outcomes. CA1 further commented that:

> *EGRA is the tool that I usually advise teachers to use so that they can be able to test learners' oral reading skill and thereafter use the questions of the text from EGRA to ask learners questions based on the text that they have read – this will give teachers indication of whether learners are able to understand what they have been reading.*

The DBE promotes the use of EGRA for establishing learners' baseline because it helps teachers identify children who are not at grade level in early literacy skills (e.g., children with poor PA in Grades R and 1, poor LSK in Grade 1, or poor ORF and ORC in Grades 2 and 3), it helps teachers assign children to ability groups more accurately, and it provides a base for

monitoring progress. However, as will be noted later, most teachers observed did not seem to use EGRA to test what their children knew and instead seemed to rely on intuitive or informal assessments. For instance, T2 indicated that she assessed learners throughout the lesson by observing them, while T4 stated that she assessed learners one-by-one when they lined up to submit their handwritten work.

Despite CAs emphasising the importance of baseline assessments, from what was observed in the five classrooms, teachers did not seem to have done baseline testing; none of them was able to produce evidence to show that they had tested their learners.

6. 3. 4. 4. Creating a learning space

In terms of advising teachers to create a learning space conducive to learning, CA1 remarked:

> *I always tell teachers to make use of the space they have to arrange things in order, where there are tools that they don't need they should get rid of them so that they can have enough space to arrange tables and chairs according to groups that will save more space and it is important when it comes to managing the classroom that learners should be able to act according to the rules laid in the classroom.*

Despite the CAs' advice to teachers to clear their classes of congestion and to own their classroom space, this remained a challenge. It was noted during my observations that T1's classroom had redundant furniture, and T5's was filled with unopened boxes of books, which were piled up in a classroom corner.

6. 3. 4. 5. Classroom management

In respect of advising teachers to encourage learners to work independently while the teacher is busy with other literacy activities, the CAs said:

> CA1: *We normally encourage teachers to train learners to self-regulate so that it could be easier for them to focus on certain groups of learners while other learners know what is expected of them.*
>
> CA2: *One of the other ways that I normally advise teachers who have big classes is that I tell them to teach children in their classes what we call self-regulation skills.*

Given that a large number of learners in one classroom can impede classroom management and discipline (Mustafa et al. 2014), both CAs indicated that they advised teachers to use self-regulated learning strategies to minimise disruptions. However, none of the teachers observed seemed to have taught their learners to follow routines and rules right from the beginning of

the school year. For example, learners in T2, T3, T4 and T5's class made a noise, and they could not stay on task while teachers were busy with GGR.

6. 3. 4. 6. Class visits/quality assurance

In respect of evaluating progress for curriculum implementation, CA1 said:

> *When I visit schools, I quality assure whether there is progress to what I workshopped them on.*

The CAs' purpose for conducting school visits is aimed at supporting teachers to ensure that teaching and learning in the classroom are done within the prescripts of CAPS. Regarding quality assuring progress, it is not clear whether the CA1's visit to schools is mainly focused on monitoring policy implementation and checking whether teachers are just doing things for the sake of policy and compliance or whether they really are responding to the workshops. Thus, if it is aimed at providing support for curriculum implementation, it is expected that actual observations should be conducted to check if teachers are applying the knowledge acquired during workshops and actually implementing reading activities as recommended by curriculum policy. However, this seems unlikely, given unrealistic workloads, distance, and understaffing issues highlighted earlier in §6.3.3.2 and 6.3.3.3. A study of two districts in the Eastern Cape also established that CAs did not at any time observe classroom teaching to see if teachers were implementing the curriculum (Mavuso 2013). However, despite the challenges of supporting many schools, CA2 indicated that she uses school visits to evaluate teaching practices in the classroom.

> *When I go to school, I go to the class, check their walls, record somewhere, and check learners' books. Sometimes I would ask the teachers to remain behind after school just to conduct some mini-workshop about what I found in the classroom.*

Good teaching in the FP, according to CA2, is achieved by setting up a stimulating classroom environment, which positively influences children's attitude towards learning. Research has also shown that teaching practices in the classroom contribute immensely to learners' academic achievement (Stols, Kriek & Ogbonnaya 2008; Armstrong 2015; Isac et al. 2015). It is also interesting to note that CA2 uses mini-workshops to provide teachers with feedback on what was observed in the classroom. Workshops can have beneficial effects for the teachers. Kane (2012) suggests that they enable teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses, which can be used as feedback that CAs can tap for development in areas that need attention. However,

as indicated earlier, actual observation of classroom practices is time-consuming, and it does not seem to be a priority for the CAs.

6. 3. 5. Comments on CAs' interviews

It seems that most education systems have employees (e.g., Inspectors, CAs, etc.) who facilitate, mediate and monitor curriculum implementation in schools. In light of their roles and responsibilities, the CAs in this study seem to know quite well what is expected of FP teachers and they seem well informed about early reading in line with what is recommended in curriculum policy. Many of the challenges that the CAs mentioned are things that were noted during my own observations (and what local research has also identified). This suggests their familiarity with challenges on the ground. Given the CAs' working constraints, such as overseeing 64 primary schools with at least 5 to 6 teachers per FP per primary school, CAs in South Africa seem to bear a very big responsibility in improving teacher practice in accordance with policy guidelines. Usually, the main function of such officials is to monitor curriculum implementation and provide support where needed, the expectation being that teachers are well trained and basically know what to do (but may need support here and there). However, the question is, 'What happens when this expectation is not met?' CAs end up playing the role of being agents of change, they train and also coach teachers - and they still do all their other admin duties, all of which may not be feasible.

Other factors that contribute to making their situation untenable include dysfunctional provincial education management in terms of staff appointment and deployment. Furthermore, universities do not seem to be producing teachers who know what to do when they get to the classroom (Taylor 2014). This is further exacerbated by some teachers' unwillingness or inability to read the policy documents carefully, implement them, or read more to increase their content knowledge. They lack basic content knowledge about language and the nature of reading, and the pedagogical skills necessary to teach children how to read.

6. 4. FINDINGS FROM CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS AND TEACHER INTERVIEWS

This section presents results from the classroom observations, which include noting the overall literacy appearance of the classrooms, the activities and practices that occurred during the literacy lessons, teacher interviews and making sense of the quantitative results in light of the

qualitative data. This section addresses the fifth research question of the qualitative component in the current study:

RQ 5: How do the Grade 1 teachers develop and support the learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the Grade 1 classroom?

The main themes identified from the teachers' interviews are presented in Table 6.4.

Table 6. 4. The themes and subthemes reflecting observations and experiences of teachers

Themes	Subthemes
1. Classroom print resources	1.1. Furniture and seating arrangements 1.2. Alphabet chart/frieze 1.3. Word wall chart 1.4. Birthday chart 1.5. Weather chart 1.6. Chart of classroom rules 1.7. Reading corner
2. Literacy activities	2.1. Phonics 2.2. Handwriting 2.3. Shared Reading 2.4. Group Guided Reading/ Independent Reading/Drawing activities
3. Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading	3.1. Time constraints 3.2. Baseline assessment 3.3. Uptake of the NECT programme 3.4. Classroom management 3.5. Inadequacies of a print-rich classroom environment 3.6. Assessment/EGRA
4. Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading	4.1. Overcrowding/lack of classroom space 4.2. Shortage of books 4.3. Classroom furniture and print material

Regarding the print layout of the classrooms, I was interested in noting what printed based resources were available and whether teachers had established classroom seating that is conducive to foundational literacy development. None of the classes observed had a themetable or theme board for displaying objects that extended the 'Theme Context' for the week, as indicated in CAPS, suggesting a missed opportunity to stimulate curiosity, develop knowledge and vocabulary across the curriculum.

In respect of literacy activities and practices in the classroom, I was interested in observing how teachers familiarised children with books and written language and how they developed their learners' decoding and reading comprehension skills during the literacy period of ± 1½ hours. I was also interested in how teachers implement the CAPS literacy activities, which include listening and speaking skills, SR, GGR, RAs, PR/IR, and handwriting skills for the Grade 1 learners (as discussed in Chapter 3 (§3.1.4.2).

In light of the comments by the CAs about the NECT programme, in all schools observed, there was no overt evidence that these schools were included in the NECT programme. None of the teachers had lesson plans prepared, especially for literacy lessons observed during the time of research. Although the CAs indicated during interviews that schools were provided with teaching material (e.g., lesson plans, charts, trackers, etc.) from the NECT, lack of evidence of these materials suggests that teachers are not using the resources. Some teachers indicated during the interviews that the NECT materials are difficult to follow as they require time, a response that suggests that the effort in preparing lessons with these materials might cause discomfort to the teachers.

In the interviews with the Grade 1 teachers, my focus was based on their perceptions of CAPS, print-based resources, activities that support reading, and the development of learners' reading in the Grade 1 classroom. The aim was to understand how FP teachers view reading and how they support learners' reading in Xitsonga.

At the end of each school section, I include the baseline/endline descriptive statistics to link classroom practices and reading performance. These links will be elaborated further in Chapter 7. The qualitative themes that emanate from the CAs and the teachers are all connected to the outcome measured by the quantitative aspects of the current study. While classroom practice might contribute to the outcome of learner achievement in reading literacy, it is possible that teachers may also be lacking adequate support and guidance for curriculum delivery.

6. 4. 1. Observation of suburban School A and its classroom

School A was a medium-sized quintile 4 school (668 learners) with two Grade 1 classes comprising 41 learners per class. The current enrolment qualifies the school to have a staff of 22 teachers, including the principal and one head of department (HOD). Learners in this school pay fees. As already mentioned in Chapter 4 (§4.4), the South African Schools Act (SASA) (No. 84 of 1996) prescribes that schools which are classified under quintile 4 are allowed to supplement their revenue by charging school fees because they receive less funding from the provincial education department. This school is situated in the suburban setting of Giyani in Mopani East district. The buildings and the campus were clean and tidy. There was also a receptionist to help with administrative duties. Children and teachers were all in class when I visited the school. The school has English as the LoLT in FP. Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Northern Sotho, and Indian children are taught Xitsonga as FAL because it is the predominant language in the area.

I arrived at the school on Friday, 02 March 2018, at around 7:30 am. I waited only a few minutes at the reception as they were expecting me. After that, the receptionist took me to the principal's office, where I briefly recapped the purpose of my visit. From there, I was permitted to go to one of the Grade 1 classrooms.

The teacher in School A classroom was 50 years old. She had a BEd Honours and 25 years of teaching experience in the FP. Before the lesson started, she introduced me to the learners and informed them of the purpose of my visit. On that day, children had an opportunity to wear casual clothes after break because it was a casual school day. Although the class was congested with furniture, the teacher created a space for me at the back where I had a clear view of all the activities during the lesson. This arrangement was helpful because my presence did not unduly disturb the learners from paying attention. The literacy lesson in this class took approximately 1hr: 09 minutes.

6. 4. 1. 1. Print-rich set up in School A classroom

The wall space in the suburban School A classroom had several print resources. As indicated earlier, the class looked clean and tidy. Workbooks on the learners' desks were the only texts visible in this classroom.

Figure 6. 1. Furniture and seating arrangement

Figure 6.1 shows that the size of the classroom made it challenging to accommodate the seating of 41 learners in a non-traditional style. Although the traditional rows in this classroom enabled all learners to face the chalkboard, the learners sitting at the back could not see the text on the chalkboard as the font size was not big enough.

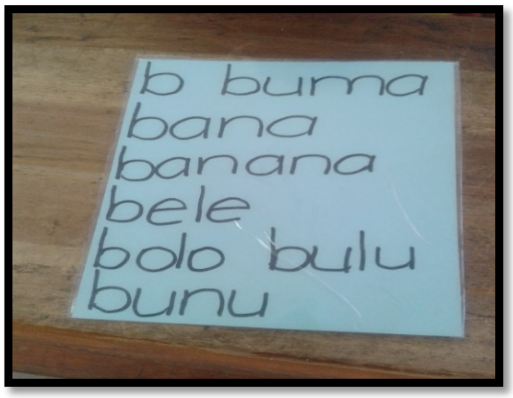
Figures 6.2-6.7 capture some of the print material displayed in School A classroom, which included an alphabet chart, word walls, birthday calendar, weather chart, classroom rules, and a reading corner.

Figure 6. 2. Alphabet chart

Figure 6.2 shows a ready-made alphabet chart in English, with pictures and words corresponding to the sound of each letter, which included lower and uppercase letters, displayed on the back wall of the classroom. It is a themed ABC chart with pictures and words corresponding to the sound of each letter. The chart was stuck high on the wall, where learners could not readily see details.

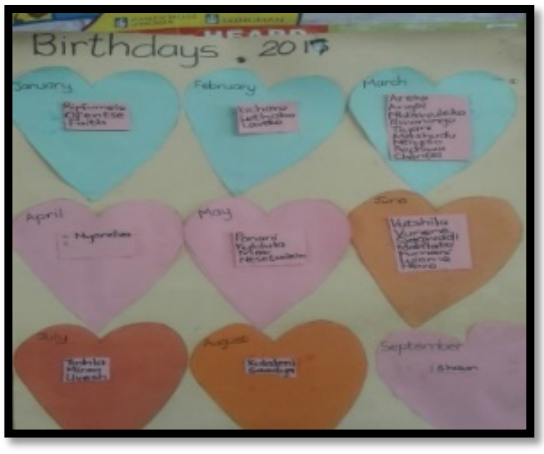
Figure 6. 3a. English word wall

Figure 6. 3b. Tsonga word wall



There were Xitsonga and English word walls (Figures 6.3a and Figure 6.3b), which were phonics-based, but with different word lists. This classroom did not have word walls that emphasised meanings or theme-based word walls.

Figure 6. 4. Birthday calendar

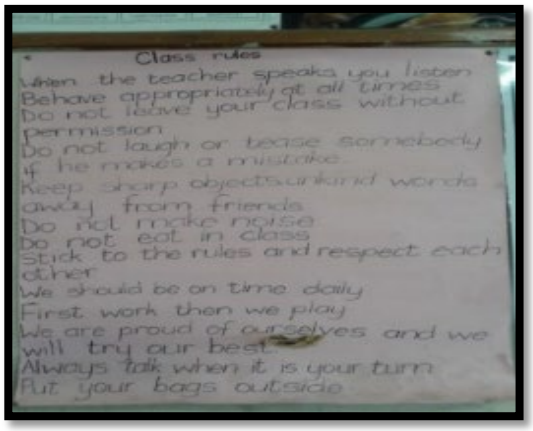


A handmade birthday calendar (Figure 6.4) with heart-shaped images depicting different months was displayed at the back of the class. It was also not clear whether the calendar had been updated for the new intake of Grade 1s as the year written on top of the chart seemed to be 2017, not 2018.

Figure 6. 5. Weather chart

The handmade weather chart (Figure 6.5) showing images of different weather conditions was displayed at the back of the classroom wall and was covered with plastic for protection. However, the plastic obscured visibility. The chart was also positioned high on the wall.

Figure 6. 6. Classroom rules



Classroom rules chart (Figure 6.6) included both behavioural regulations (be on time, do not eat in class, etc.) as well as social norms (do not tease those who make mistakes, respect each other, etc.). Rules in this classroom seemed well-intentioned, all of them contributing to co-operative class behaviour.

Figure 6. 7a. Reading corner

Figure 6. 7b. Reading corner

In School A classroom, there was an ostensible reading corner (Figure 6.7a), which did not seem to carry books. It looked like a letterbox. There was insufficient evidence to show that it was a reading corner, except for the label, 'Reading Box.' The reading box did not appear to

be used for reading purpose – but rather to demarcate a space for reading. Space ostensibly intended for reading (Figure 6.7b) was filled with functional workbooks. There was no theme table for displaying objects that extended the 'Theme Context' for the week.

6. 4. 1. 2. Literacy activities and practices in School A

The teacher dealt with the following literacy activities: phonics, handwriting, and SR, as well as GGR activities with the children. During her literacy lesson, T1 was able to give clear instructions. She addressed her learners by name, and when asking questions, she included various learners. However, T1 did not seem to be patient with struggling readers.

Phonics activities

The teaching of phonics was conducted in Tsonga. It was a whole class lesson, with all the learners sitting at their desks. The focus of the lesson was on identifying individual sounds within syllables and building two-syllable words from the designated letter-sound. The lesson lasted 30 minutes – double the time recommended by CAPS per week. The teacher began the lesson by singing two songs with the learners.

Figure 6. 8a. Mfenhe (first song)

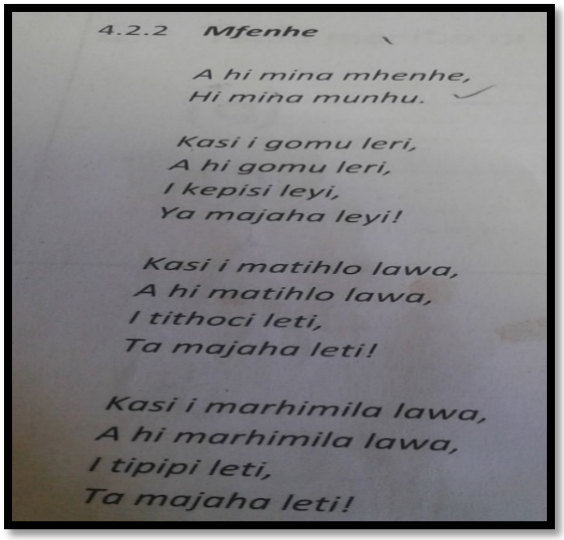
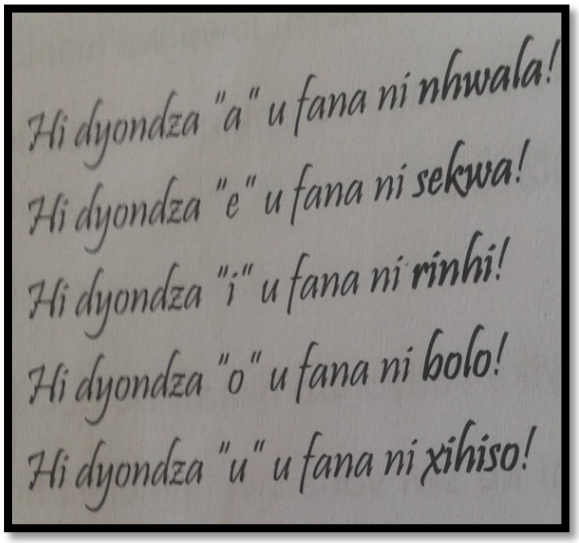


Figure 6. 8b. Hi dyondza (second song)



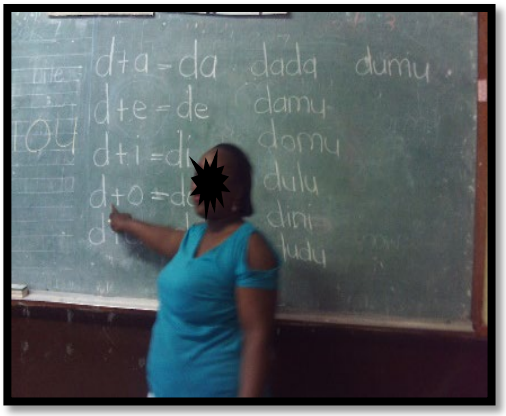
Mfenhe (baboon) was sung first (Figure 6.8a) as a whole class oral activity, and *Hi dyondza* (we learn) was sung thereafter. The latter (Figure 6.8b) was used to help learners recap the vowels, *a, e, i, o, u*. T1 further recapped the previous work by asking learners to identify words from the second song comprising letter-sounds *i* and *a*. Some learners confused the letter-sound *i* with letter *u* while they were singing. As is customary in Grade 1 classes, the teacher used the

physical act of air writing the letter-sound *i* as a way of reminding the learners how it is written. The designated letter-sound that formed the focus of the lesson was *d*. The teacher wrote the letter on the board and read the letter-sound relationships aloud together with the learners.

Thereafter, she asked the learners in chorus to blend the letter-sound *d* with vowels *a, e, i, o, u,* while writing d+a, d+e, d+i, d+o, d+u on the board. She displayed syllable cards with *da, de, di, do, du* on the board. T1 did not mix syllables in a different sequence; instead, she asked the learners to formulate words starting with *da, de, di, do, du*. As children said the words, sticking to the *a, e, i, o, u* sequence, she asked the whole class to count the number of syllables in each word aloud while writing each word on the board. T1 further explained the meaning of words given by the learners. Individually, learners were asked to write the words on the board in syllabic form while the rest helped those in front who were not getting it right.

The exercise of writing words on the board lasted approximately 10 minutes. By then, many learners were no longer attentive and some were making a noise. The teacher instructed the whole class to be quiet. She asked all the learners to read the words: *damu* (dam), *domu* (stupid), *dada* (confused), *dulu* (barn), *dini* (sour), *dumu* (doom), *duku* (head wrap), on the board aloud, and in the same order to make sure that all the learners were able to pronounce the words in chorus, correctly. The letters and words on the board were clear and visible to the learners in front, but less easy to see for learners at the back. Learners participated actively during the early stages of the lesson. As the phonics lesson advanced, some learners would occasionally slouch over their desks. The teacher did not seem to notice these learners as she spent most of the time in front. She concluded the phonics lesson by informing the learners that it was time for the handwriting activity. The pictures below (Figure 6.9) show the phonics steps (phonemes + syllables + words) used in School A classroom.

Figure 6. 9. Phonics activities



Handwriting activities

The handwriting task in School A classroom took 20 minutes, instead of the allocated 15 minutes. Learners had their pencil cases on their desks. The activity on the board was clear but not visible to the learners at the back (Figure 6.10) and some had to move closer to the front to see the text on the board. The teacher asked them to take out their classwork books from their backpacks so that they could write all the words containing the letter-sound *d* in a different sequence. She wrote the designated letter-sound *d* and the words corresponding with it again on a separate board while the learners were taking out their books. During writing, the teacher walked around – checking learners and showing them how to hold the pencil. She reminded the learners to write the date on top of the page. During writing, some asked permission to either sharpen their pencils behind the classroom door where there was a waste bin or visit the bathroom. After the handwriting task, the teacher asked all the learners to submit their books to her and get ready for SR, although some learners did not seem to have finished the work.

Figure 6. 10. Handwriting activities

Shared Reading activities

The teacher invited the whole group to sit in front of the class on the floor without a mat. The learners moved to the front somewhat noisily. They did not seem to know what they were supposed to do, until the teacher arranged them accordingly – beginning with the first group, moving to the next group, until the last one. All the learners were gathered in front close to the teacher. She informed the whole group that they were going to read together a story titled *Yindlu ya mina* (My house) from a big book. SR in T1's class focused on two phases (i.e., pre-reading and during reading), which lasted approximately 24 minutes. The activity was conducted in Tsonga. The SR lesson in this classroom was aimed at helping children develop the ability to read a text by themselves.

First, T1 showed the learners the outside cover of the big book. She drew the learners' attention to the picture by asking them to say what they saw on the cover of the book. The whole class responded by saying that they saw a big bird. Learning to name different items within a semantic field is essential. However, the teacher did not tell the learners what kind of bird it was - she continued asking them to explain what they thought the story could be about just by looking at the picture of a bird on the cover. The learners did not respond. It was interesting to note that the picture of the bird that the teacher used on the outside cover of the reader was misleading to the story of *Yindlu ya mina*. This suggests a superficial compliance with storybook procedure like discussing the outside cover of a book, but with weak understanding of the link between pre-reading, discussion and subsequent story content.

Before reading, T1 asked the whole class to say the title of the story aloud. After that, she read the entire story with expression. Learners followed silently with their eyes. The teacher did not ask questions after the first reading. After that, she started the story over again. She asked the learners to join in reading with her as she pointed to each word. Only learners sitting close to her were able to follow as she read the text. The teacher noticed this and asked the learners to move closer so that they could all see the text. In the process of reading, the teacher paused from time to time; she explained in detail what the story was about. T1 asked literal questions to the whole class and individual learners. Immediately, after the second reading, the bell rang for the first break. Learners were instructed to go for break. The picture below shows SR activities with children seated on the floor in a rather cramped space.

Figure 6. 11. Shared reading activities

Group guided reading activities

GGR was conducted after break, and it lasted 35 minutes. The purpose of GGR is to give children in a smallish group opportunities to practice reading a text on their own. This activity ran smoothly without interruptions, but instead of working with a specific group, it was done collectively, as in SR. T1 used a medium-sized reader entitled *Goza-hi-Goza: Ha hlaya, Ha tsala* (Systematically, we read, we write). The story read during GGR was titled *Ndzi nga endla hinkwaswo* (I can do everything). There was no reference to the story read during the SR activity. Learners did not have the text – they followed the teacher aurally, as she held up the book while reading.

Before reading, T1 told the learners about unknown words that they were supposed to read from the text using six flashcards she stuck on the chalkboard: *tsutsuma* (run), *nga* (can), *rivilo* (speed), *hinkwaswo* (everything), *tintanghu* (shoes), and *boha* (tie). She read each word aloud while the learners responded in chorus. T1 helped the learners construct simple sentences orally from the words above. She read the words aloud together with the whole class. After that, learners were instructed to read the words on the flashcards by themselves. All the learners were able to see the words on the board because the font used on the flashcards was big. After reading the words, T1 talked about the pictures in the story with the learners. They discussed the title of the story (*Ndzi nga endla hinkwaswo*). This introductory step lasted 15 minutes, while CAPS recommends 2 to 3 minutes for it.

During reading, the teacher first read the whole story aloud while pointing to each word with learners following silently with their eyes. The teacher pointed to each word so that all the learners could follow the reading. Learners at the back could not see the words because the font in the text was not big enough, given that it was a medium-sized book. Since she had the whole class during GGR, she could not observe how each learner was reading. It was also difficult for her to control the learners as some were not paying attention while others seemed to be reading from memory, as they did not have the text in front of them.

Learners were given opportunities to read the text individually, but voluntarily. The book was passed on from one learner to the other. Five learners had a chance to read. The reading for some learners was inaccurate (they could only read about 2 to 3 words correctly in a sentence and had to be helped by the others). Word attack strategies help children decode, pronounce and understand unknown words; however, in the process of reading, the teacher did not support the learners who struggled, and she did not suggest clues or word attack strategies like drawing

attention to the first letter-sound and then the syllable of the word. One learner volunteered to read, but she stumbled and the teacher immediately asked her to sit down without trying to guide her. The picture below shows the seating arrangement during GGR in School A classroom.

Figure 6. 12. Group guided reading activities

6. 4. 1. 3. Data from T1's interview

This subsection presents the results of the interview with T1 of School A classroom. The following three themes and eight subthemes emerged from interviewing T1.

Theme 1: Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

T1 perceived that time constraints, baseline assessment and inadequacies of a print-rich classroom environment hindered the teaching of reading in her classroom.

Time constraints

Given the official time allocated for teaching reading in the Grade 1 classroom, T1 said:

> *The department says we should spend 15 minutes, but for me, I think it's not enough as children differ, some can quickly catch up, but others take time to get the message.*

Singing an additional song that was not related to her teaching of phonics seemed to have contributed to lengthening the engagement time during literacy lessons, which resulted in some learners showing signs of fatigue. Although T1 lamented the lack of time to cater for the diverse learning needs in her classroom during her literacy lesson, it may have been a handy excuse for she did not seem to focus her attention on helping learners who seemed to struggle to read, nor did she use GGR for differentiated teaching.

Baseline assessment

T1 was aware of the need to conduct a baseline assessment in her Grade 1 classroom.

> *I tested them during the first weeks of reopening; it was orientation, so I used that opportunity to get to know the learners.*

Despite her claims of having done baseline assessments, it was noted during observations that T1 did not seem to have divided her learners into different ability reading groups – she conducted GGR with the whole group as in SR, neither did she have a daily schedule displayed on her classroom wall to remind learners of their groups and their times for GGR in the week.

In respect of keeping records of baseline assessment, T1 said: *Yes, I recorded somewhere, but most of my files were damaged because of the rain.* Her evasive answer claiming to have lost the records suggests that she was saving face and might not have done the assessment.

Inadequacies of a print-rich classroom environment

With regard to creating a print-rich classroom, T1 said: *Mine is not yet satisfactory.* From the charts and pictures displayed in her classroom, it was apparent that T1 had made some effort to create a print-rich classroom; however, some of her print resources were not clear, and some had not been properly updated for her new learners in Grade 1. Moreover, as indicated earlier, some charts were stuck high on the walls, making it difficult for children to properly access the information. T1 further added by saying:

> *I do have the charts in my filing cabinet. I have not pasted them - you don't paste words without introducing them to the learners because learners don't know what's going on.*

T1 was keen to show that she was aware of the importance of print indicators in her classroom, even though she had not got round to doing so consistently.

Theme 2: Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

T1 perceived a lack of classroom space and a shortage of books as structural factors relating to challenges in teaching early reading in her classroom.

Lack of classroom space

In terms of creating flexible classroom space, T1 said:

> *I don't have enough space to see individual groups, and the class is full; that is why I did not even bother to arrange desks into groups.*

This excuse was given despite the fact that she had the whole class on the floor in front of the classroom for SR. From what was noted during literacy lessons, the learning space in T1's classroom did not seem to encourage effective interaction between learners as the class was full of redundant furniture, which could have been removed to make space for other learning activities such as writing or language stations.

Shortage of reading books

> *I use the same book with different groups because we don't have enough books – that is why the few books that I have I share with another Grade 1 teacher. Whenever I want to use Tsonga books, I ask her, and whenever she wants to use English books, I will give her the few that I have.*

Although various books were not available in T1's class, she tried to mitigate the shortage of resources by sharing with a colleague who teaches another Grade 1 class in the same school.

Theme 3: Teachers' strategies for teaching reading

The following subthemes were identified as strategies used by T1 for developing reading in Tsonga in her Grade 1 classroom: air writing, motivation and paired reading.

Air writing

> **T1:** *Learners must learn letters and sounds, just like when they sound-letter 'm' when I teach them to sound the letter m, they must first write the letter in the air.*

T1 gave children opportunities to practice writing in the air. However, it was not done consistently; the children did not do the handwriting task of the letter-sound used for practicing air writing, probably because it was not the designated letter of the day, as the teacher used it to remind children who seemed to confuse the letter-sound *i* with *u* when they sang the second song (Table 6.8b) during oral activity in the morning.

Motivation

T1 also claimed to use motivation to encourage her Grade 1 learners to read through graded readers.

> *If the book has one or two stars, it is meant for those who still are struggling to read, but once there is an improvement, I change to the book that has upgraded stars.*

Despite her claims, she seemed unable to show courtesy to or support for children who struggled to read. This was noted during GGR when T1 immediately asked a learner to take a seat simply because she stumbled as she was reading the text.

Paired Reading

Paired Reading is another strategy that T1 claimed to use to encourage learners to read.

> *Normally, I would allow learners who have progressed with their reading to pair with those who are still struggling to read and they read together, but for now, I have not gone that far because these learners are still learning how to identify letter-sounds, they are not yet able to read in pairs or by themselves.*

It is surprising to note that children in T1's class were not yet ready to do Paired Reading as she indicated that it was still early at the beginning of the school academic year for her learners to have mastered the skill of reading one-on-one. However, pair work can be used to practice decoding skills, rather than assume learners have to have reached a level of reading before they can do pair work.

6. 4. 1. 4. Evaluative comments

Data from T1 showed that she is trying to follow CAPS, but not always getting it right. Her classroom was print-rich to some extent, but there were still many gaps. Some charts did not seem to be used as a reference because they were stuck high on the wall, where learners could not readily see details. T1 said that time allocated was not enough for conducting differentiated teaching, but in her daily teaching, she seemed to spend more than the allocated time for teaching reading, overlooking the fact that the maximum time allocated for developing literacy in the FAL is only 3hrs per week. Moreover, she did not seem to provide helpful feedback to learners who struggled to read. T1 also wasted her engagement time when she used a song (*Mfenhe*) which was not related to what was taught during phonics.

There were some discrepancies in her responses when she claimed to have done baseline assessment but had no evidence for it. She also claimed to use pair work but said it was too early in the year to do it. T1 only asked learners literal questions during reading, suggesting that she might not have trained her Grade 1 learners to use comprehension strategies which should help then make sense of the reading text. T1 also said she did not have enough space to do differentiated teaching, but she sat all the learners in front, for SR and GGR. She also conducted SR and GGR in similar ways. Conducting GGR with the whole group is not what CAPS recommends, where instead it should be conducted with a small group of 6 to 10

learners. This could be due to the fact that learners in Grade 1 do not do GGR activities in their FAL – this only begins in Grade 2. However, even if GGR is done only in the learners' HL in Grade 1, the classroom seating arrangement in T1's class suggested that this activity was not even possible during English HL teaching time, given the fact that her class was congested and full of redundant furniture, which could have been removed to create space for different learning activities. T1's reading corner did not seem well set up to encourage and motivate children to read any book of their choice. This was possibly due to her claim of not having enough books, despite being in a quintile 4 school where print resources are usually better provisioned.

6. 4. 1. 5. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Table 6.5 below presents descriptive results for learner performance in School A classroom.

Table 6. 5. Descriptive statistics for School A

	March			**September**		
	M	*SD*	Zero %	*M*	*SD*	Zero %
PA	1.4	0.9	26.7%	2.1	3.2	53.3%
LSK	7.6	7.4	6.7%	21.2	13.4	0%
WR	2.2	1.0	6.7%	11.6	9.9	13.3%
ORF	1.4	0.9	13.3%	14.6	2.3	13.3%
ORC	0.0	0.0	100%	0.5	1.3	80%
Composite score	12.6		30.6%	50.1		31.9%

Six months after visiting T1's classroom, the EGRA results showed that the sample of learners tested from her classroom achieved the highest composite scores across the five schools. Their average score of 21 LSK seemed to enable them to read words in and out of context and of all the scores, their word reading scores were the highest at 14.6 wcpm. However, performance was particularly poor in PA and ORC. As mentioned in Chapter 3 (§3.4.2.1), this is despite being a quintile 4 school, which are known to perform better relative to quintile 2 schools (Spaull 2011; Mpofu 2015). The teacher seemed to have managed to instil some level of decoding skill in the learners in that there were no zero scores for alphabetic knowledge, and they could read words separately and in a passage. Even so, alphabetic knowledge was not particularly high, and one wonders if learners would have had greater letter-sound proficiency if T1 had paid attention to developing PA. Comprehension was clearly a neglected area. Her failure to ask learners inferential questions during reading activities may have contributed to this outcome.

6. 4. 2. Observation of rural School B and its classroom

School B was the smallest of the schools; a quintile 2 school (286 learners) with one Grade 1 class comprising 34 learners. The current enrollment qualifies the school to have a staff of 9 teachers, including the principal. The classroom had the lowest number of learners relative to other classrooms observed. It is situated in the rural area of Mohlaba Head Kraal in Mopani West. The buildings were old but in good condition and the grounds were neatly kept.

I visited the school on Wednesday, 07 March 2018, at 7:35 am. Children and teachers were already in class when I arrived. There are several Venda and Northern Sotho speaking learners who are taught Xitsonga as LoLT. I only had a brief meeting with the principal, after which I went straight to the Grade 1 classroom.

T2 was 26 years old with BEd Degree and four years of teaching experience in the FP. First, she greeted the learners and introduced me by telling the learners about the purpose of my visit. She allowed me to use her table and chair as they were placed in the corner of the class in front. Although I was very visible, I tried not to disturb the learners. The time spent on a literacy lesson was approximately 1hr: 09 minutes.

6. 4. 2. 1. Print-rich set up in School B classroom

Although there was some evidence of print on the walls in this classroom, some parts of the walls seemed quite bare. The class was neat and tidy. Learners had workbooks on their desks, suggesting that they had already started with some literacy work. However, books for reading were not visible. The pictures below show the furniture and non-traditional seating arrangement in the School B classroom.

Figure 6. 13. Furniture and seating arrangements

Both pictures (Figure 6.13) show a tidy room. Desks were arranged to accommodate group work. The seating arrangement enabled some learners to face the chalkboard with ease,

whereas others had to turn sideways. Learners were seated two per desk. Each desk grouping was labelled names of different colours (e.g., Yellow Group). There was enough space to set up different activity stations (language activity station, mathematics activity station, Life Skills activity station, etc.), but they were not established at the time of the visit.

Figure 6. 14. Alphabet frieze chart

The alphabet frieze (Figure 6.14) was handwritten with large visible upper and lowercase letters. The chart did not include picture cues or words corresponding with letters, but it was colourful and neat. The font used was big enough for all the children to be able to read.

Figure 6. 15. Word wall

Figure 6.15 shows a Tsonga word wall chart with colourful pictures, which correspond with words. Children could not easily access the word wall as it was displayed high at the back. It was also not clear whether the words on the chart were drawn from a text frequently read in class. The font used was also not big enough to read clearly.

Figure 6. 16. Birthday calendar

A birthday calendar (Figure 6.16) was displayed high at the back of the classroom wall. It was a neat hand-made chart, showing learners' names and the dates of birth. From the way names were arranged, it was easy to see the number of learners sharing birth dates or a month. Learners' birth months were written in Tsonga.

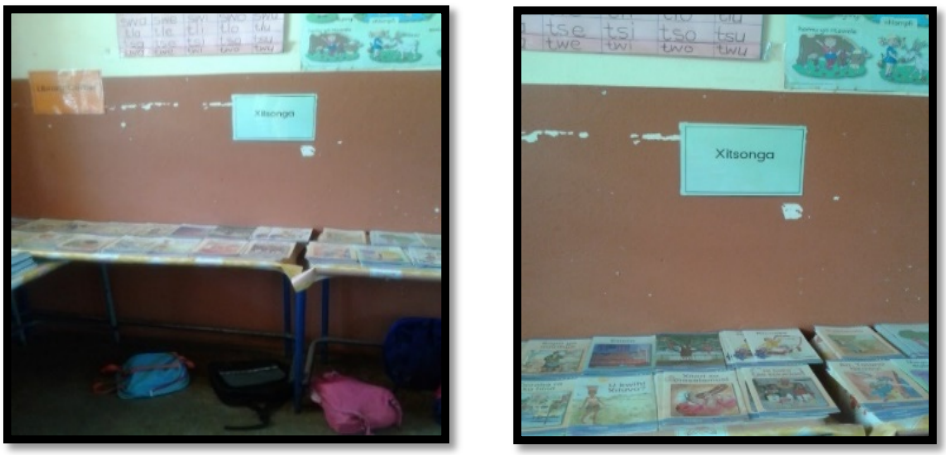
Figure 6. 17. Weather chart

The weather chart (Figure 6.17) was displayed high on the front wall (above the chalkboard) and was not easily accessible to learners. Words describing weather conditions were written in Xitsonga. Although the chart looked old, it was still eye-catching. Drawn images showed whether it was hot, rainy, cloudy, or windy.

Figure 6. 18. Classroom rules

The chart with a list of hand-written rules (Figure 6.18) was displayed high at the back of the classroom wall. The rules encourage learners to maintain good behavioural traits, such as avoid making a noise, stealing, and using offensive words in the classroom. Although the chart was clear and visible, it seemed to lack creativity.

Figure 6. 19. Reading corner



The reading corner (Figure 6.19) had a range of Xitsonga reading books from *Vula Bula* graded reading series that could be used for different reading activities, but there were no rules to guide

learners on how to use these books and the layout was not enticing. Books were arranged and packed on top of the tables. Learners' school bags were placed under the tables. There was no mat for the children to sit comfortably while reading.

6. 4. 2. 2. Literacy activities and practices in School B

During the literacy lesson, T2 dealt with phonics, handwriting, SR, and GGR activities only. She appeared friendly and supportive to all the learners. T2 also seemed tuned into what she was doing, but this may have been due to her phonics instruction seemingly being a repeated lesson.

Phonics activities

The teaching of Tsonga phonics was conducted with the whole class (learners sitting at their desks). The lesson lasted 19 minutes. The focus of the lesson was on letter-sound correspondence and the formation of new words from the designated letter-sound *c*.

T2 began the lesson by asking the whole class if they still remembered the letter-sound they had learned the previous day. One learner responded by saying the letter-sound *c* [tʃ]. The entire class was asked to sound the same letter aloud. T2 asked the learners if they could point out the letter *c* on any of the classroom walls. Children were quick to identify the letter on the alphabet chart (Figure 6.20).

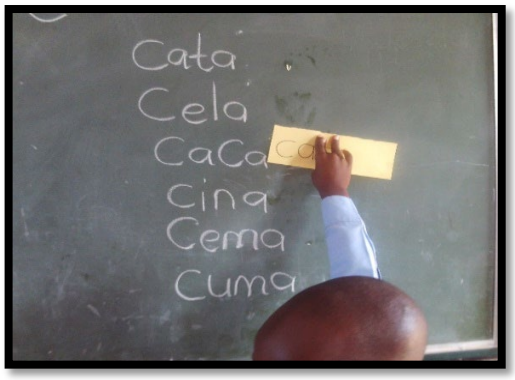
Figure 6. 20. Purposeful learning

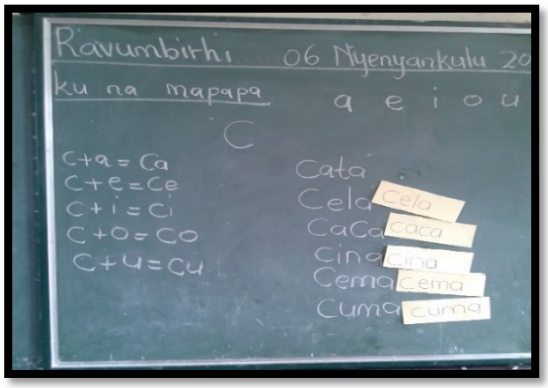
T2 then asked the learners whose names begin with the letter-sound *c* to raise their hands. The names of *Cheyeza* and *Prince* were written on the chalkboard. However, this showed confusion between letter and sound, as *c* in *Prince* is not [ʧ]. T2 asked if learners were able to see the letter *c* in *Cheyeza* and *Prince*. The whole class said, *ina, c yi le masunguleni ka rito, Cheyeza ni le xikarhi ka xitatisi /n/ na xitwari /e/ eka riviti Prince* (yes, *c* is at the beginning of the word *Cheyeza* and between the consonant *n* and the vowel *e* of the name *Prince*).

After that, T2 asked the whole class to say the vowels *a, e, i, o, u* in chorus. As the children said the vowels aloud, T2 wrote them on the board. She then asked the learners individually to blend the letter-sound *c* with the vowels on the board. While blending syllables c+a = ca, c+e = ce, c+i = ci, c+o = co, c+u = cu, the teacher wrote on the board. Thereafter, she allowed the whole class to practice *ca, ce, ci, co cu* in chorus. However, she did not change the syllable sequence, nor did she explicitly show learners how syllables are blended to form words; instead, she asked them to come up with words that they knew, containing the letter-sound *c*. Learners identified words such as *cata* (get married), *cina* (dance), *cela* (dig), *cuma* (lobola), *caca* (chase), *cema* (scream) following the relationship between the consonant *c* and vowels. Whenever a learner identified a word, the teacher asked them to write the word on the chalkboard. Some needed assistance as they could not write or spell the words correctly. As the learners said the words, the teacher would ask them to give the meaning of each word, and she would provide clarity by using examples to help the learners understand. After that, T2 re-wrote the words on the chalkboard and asked the whole class to read them aloud.

Then, she took out six flashcards, which included the words mentioned above, and asked the learners individually to collect the words on the flashcards and match them to the words written on the board (Figure 6.21). The task of matching words was carried out until most words were matched correctly. Every time the correct word was matched, the whole class would clap for the learner who matched the word correctly. The teacher concluded the phonics lesson by asking the whole class to get ready for the handwriting activity.

Figure 6. 21. Phonics activities





Handwriting activities

The phonics lesson was followed by a handwriting activity (Figure 6.22a), which lasted 25 minutes. The activity involved the whole class. The teacher asked the learners to take out their

workbooks and pencils for the handwriting task. While they were doing this, the teacher spent 2 minutes writing three lines of the uppercase letter *C* and three lines of the lowercase letter *c* on the board (Figure 6.22b). Before asking the learners to do the task, she explained the difference between the uppercase and the lowercase characters by telling the learners that the uppercase character is a capital letter *C,* and the lowercase character is a small letter *c*. Thereafter, she asked them to start writing the letters in their exercise books.

Figure 6. 22a. Handwriting task

Figure 6. 22b. Learners working on handwriting

The handwriting activity on the board (Figure 6.22a) was clear and visible to all the learners because the seating arrangement and the small class size helped them easily access the text in front. During handwriting, T2 moved around, checking and assisting learners who were struggling to hold a pencil and showing them that they should start writing from left to right and back. However, some children asked permission to visit the bathroom during the writing activity. Although the time for the handwriting activity was more than what is recommended by CAPS, some learners had not completed their work when the teacher asked all the learners to put away their books for SR.

Shared reading activities

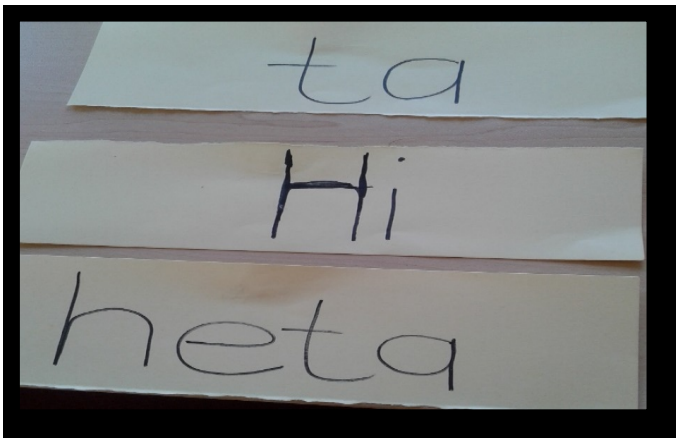
The SR activity was conducted in Tsonga. Children were not gathered in front on the mat; instead, they remained sitting at their desks, and the teacher moved up and down the aisles to access all of them. Learners were given a reader to share in pairs. The story read in this classroom was entitled *Ha tlanga* (We play). This lesson aimed to help children make connections between their previous experience and new information.

SR in T2's class focussed on two phases (pre-reading and during reading), which took 26 minutes. Before reading, the teacher introduced the story. She talked about the title of the story.

Then she drew the children's attention to the picture on the cover of the book. T2 used activities that consolidated children's learning from phonics when she helped them to blend letter-sounds, h+i=*hi*, t+a=*ta*, h+e+t+a=*heta* (We will finish). After that, she used three flashcards to show the words, *hi*, *ta*, and *heta* (Figure 6.23) and also used examples to clarify the meaning of these words.

During reading, T2 first read the whole story with excellent intonation from start to the end, with children following in the text. Then, she started again by reading a sentence at times, repeated by the children afterward. She paused from time to time, asking them questions, which connected the story to their own lives. For example, she asked the whole class a yes/no question to establish whether they enjoyed playing. They all responded affirmatively, with great excitement. However, asking close-ended questions does not provide opportunities for extended language in response. There was not much scope for discussion. T2 did not provide opportunities for children to read by themselves. After reading, it was time for the first break. Learners were then released so that they could queue for their daily meals, which are facilitated by the school nutrition programme.

Figure 6. 23. Words on the flashcards



The words on the flashcards were big and clear; even children at the back could see them. It was T2's way of showing some keywords in the text so that learners could understand and apply their knowledge of phonics to new words.

Group Guided Reading Activities

After break, T2 introduced the next activity by telling the whole class that it was time for GGR. GGR activities were conducted with two groups of 8 learners. The session lasted 19 minutes

for the first group and 20 minutes for the second group. The teacher asked the first group to join her at the back of the class on the floor without a mat (Figure 6.24a). The routine for getting into the group was not yet established, as the learners did not seem to know what to do. For example, they waited for the teacher to remind them that they were the first group to read that day. She called them by their names, and as they moved to the back, they made a noise which T2 tried to control by signalling them to be quiet.

While conducting GGR, the other groups were instructed to continue writing the designated letter-sound *c* in their workbooks (Figure 6.24b), as they were supposed to fill up the whole page. Learners were mostly on task during the first group's turn, but there was no new task for them during the second group's turn.

Before reading with the first group, T2 gave each learner a copy of a Tsonga reader entitled *Basisa* (Clean up). She discussed the title of the book with them. After that, she used five flashcards to explain the meaning of keywords in the text (e.g., *kunene* (only), *luya* (that one), *heyi* (hey), *yima* (wait), *suka* (go away). All the learners were able to see the words on the flashcards because the font used was big. No attention was given to blending word attack skills. The teacher read the words aloud, and the learners followed in chorus. She discussed the pictures with the learners and assisted them in making connections with the title of the story and their own experiences. For example, she asked the learners, 'Why is it necessary to do the cleaning?' One learner responded by saying she cleaned the place when it seemed dirty.

During reading, T2 read the text twice and aloud, while learners followed silently. Then, she gave them a chance to read individually. As the learners were reading, she helped those who could not read the words by saying the word, but did not model any phonics based word attack skills. The focus with the first group was on decoding, reading five words and then connected text. After meeting the first group, she called the names of the learners in the second group to join her at the back of the class. Since the other groups were given a handwriting task, the first group was also instructed to carry on with the same task; however, instead of doing the work, they started making a noise. T2 consistently asked them to be quiet or identified the noisy ones who would be invited to sit where she could closely monitor them as they continued with the handwriting task.

T2 followed the same procedure in GGR as with the first group. She used the same book and flashcards that were used with the first group. She also informally monitored the learners in both groups by asking them questions, but literal ones only. The focus with the second group

was on comprehension and decoding. T2 gave all the learners in each group a chance to participate. For example, all the learners in the second group were able to answer questions individually or as the whole group. However, she did not provide constructive feedback to the learners. It was evident when learners attempted to answer questions and T2 continued with the lesson without clarifying their answers.

Figure 6. 24a. GGR activities

Figure 6. 24b. Handwriting activities during GGR

6. 4. 2. 3. Data from T2's interview

In this subsection, I present the results of the interview with T2 of School B classroom according to the following three themes and six subthemes.

Theme 1: Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

Findings from the interview with T2 revealed that time constraints, baseline assessment, and uptake of the NECT programme were perceived to be barriers to the teaching of reading in her classroom.

Time constraints

In respect of time allocation, T2 said:

> *I am supposed to spend 15 minutes per group, but because there are learners who take time to learn, I sometimes overlap with extra minutes. When I feel that I still need to do more with the learners, I will extend the time or keep it shorter, knowing that I will use other open spaces to catch up with the lost time.*

Although T2 spent more time teaching reading than what is recommended by CAPS, she seemed unable to cover what she had planned to do with the learners. For example, some learners could not finish their written tasks, while others frequently asked permission to go to

the bathroom. Moreover, it was also noted that T2 used some of her engagement time in a hand-clapping ritual every time a correct response was given. While this may be intended to motivate the learners, it takes up time which, cumulatively, eats into teaching/learning time and which in the long run may disadvantage learners.

Baseline assessment

In respect of conducting baseline assessment with her class, T2 said:

> *I only assess learners during lessons by asking them questions to check how far they know, but I did not conduct the formal baseline assessment.*

Asking learners questions can help a teacher gauge their comprehension of text but does not provide an accurate or systematic assessment of decoding skills. As noted during observations, the class had been divided into small groups even though T2 had not done formal baseline assessments, and the names of the groups were labelled on the children's desks. However, as also noted, T2 followed the same procedure as with the first group. She used the same book, suggesting that she might have grouped the learners randomly or that all the learners in T2's class were on the same reading level.

Uptake of the NECT programme

Regarding the implementation of the NECT programme in the FP classroom, T2 said:

> *With this program we are given almost everything, like the lesson plans, so we have to work according to what is prescribed by this program, but sometimes it is a challenge, we are expected to spend so much time on a particular lesson, and you find that according to the time that we are allocated we can't follow what the program dictates.*

T2 indicated the challenges of using materials provided by the NECT when she emphasised that it required more time. As was also noted, there was no evidence in T2's class showing the implementation of the NECT programme. T2 further said:

> *When the curriculum advisers conduct a site visit for moderations, they will expect us to follow the program, and if they find that you are not working according to the program, it will give the impression that you are not following the program.*

Although T2 stated that implementing the NECT programme was at times a challenge, she mentioned that they were expected to use the material provided by the NECT.

Theme 2: Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

The shortage of books was identified as a factor relating to challenges in teaching early reading in T2's class.

> *I am supposed to read different books with the learners according to their groups, but we don't have books, so I use the same book even to learners who need a book of at least three stars.*

T2 seemed to be making the best of a bad situation. From what was noted during the evaluation of the classroom layout, the reading corner in T2's class was filled with a range of Xitsonga readers. Moreover, during SR, each pair was given a text, and in GGR, each learner had a text. Although she seemed to have resources, she felt that they did not adequately cater to a range of reading levels.

Theme 3: Teachers' strategies for teaching early reading

Two subthemes from T2's interview were identified within this central theme, namely, purposive learning and repetition.

Purposive learning

In respect of using purposive learning to provide additional support and exposure to children's learning. T2 said:

> *I encourage children to use the classroom wall charts as reference to support their learning.*

During the observation of T2's phonics lesson, it was also noted that she encouraged children to use the information on the wall to support their learning of other activities. For example, T2 began her phonics lesson by asking learners to look for the designated letter-sound that was taught in the previous lesson.

Repetition

Teachers rely on repetition to help children understand and remember what they were taught. T2 said *I repeat those letter-sounds again and again until they master them.*

Providing children with opportunities to practice what they were taught was evident in T2's class during phonics instruction, where she got them to repeat the letter-sounds often. Her phonics lesson also seemed to be a repetition of what was taught previously. Repetition seems to have paid off to some extent, since her learners in School B had the highest mean in LSK of the five schools, but even so, it is still a modest performance for the end of Grade 1.

6. 4. 2. 4. Evaluative comments

T2 seemed to comply with CAPS recommendations to some extent. Although some charts in her classroom were colourful and neat, they were displayed high on the wall where children could not easily access details, and although the reading corner was neatly stacked, it was not very enticing. She seemed to have a good relationship with her learners yet she did not provide them with supportive feedback when they struggled to read. T2 claimed that time allocated for teaching reading was not enough to conduct differentiated teaching, but she wasted some of her engagement time in minor things, like the clapping ritual. T2 also mentioned that she added extra time to cover what she intended to do with the learners; however, despite adding time, some learners did not seem to finish the work in time. This reinforces the fact that maximising the engagement time does not necessarily translate into a quality of teaching and learning. T2 mentioned that she did not do formal baseline assessment, and relied instead on her own informal assessments of learners. However, as per CAPS recommendations, the learners in her class were divided into different reading groups, but her criteria for grouping them seemed random and did not follow CAPS' recommendations of first testing learners with EGRA to understand their reading levels so that they can be grouped accordingly. Although T2 indicated that she has a short supply of books, her reading corner had a range of Xitsonga readers, suggesting that she made use of what was available - the *Vula Bula* range only has about 36 texts and good readers get through them quickly.

6. 4. 2. 5. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Table 6.6 below presents descriptive results for learner performance in School B classroom.

Table 6. 6. Descriptive statistics for School B

	March			**September**		
	Mean	*SD*	Zero %	Mean	*SD*	Zero %
PA	3.6	1.7	0%	4.5	3.7	13.3%
LSK	5.4	3.5	6.7%	23.6	14.6	0%
WR	2.2	0.9	26.7%	8.4	12.1	0%
ORF	1.4	1.6	26.7%	12.2	22.9	46.7
ORC	0.2	0.5	86.7%	1.2	2.7	60%
Composite score	12.9		29.3%	49.9		24%

After School A, the endline results showed that learners in T2's class achieved the second-highest composite scores across the five schools. Their average score of 4.5 PA and 23 lcpm was the highest of the five schools. T2's learners may have started from a slightly better base,

maybe due to the Grade R teacher, suggesting that some learners in her class might have acquired some PA skills before entering Grade 1. The average of 4.5 PA seemed to have enabled learners to identify and sound letters. They also seemed to have engaged their alphabetic knowledge to blend the letter-sound together to read words. However, it was noted that T2 did not use the phonics or any other lesson to practice PA with her learners. Although PA and LSK scores were better for T2's learners relative to the others, their PA growth by endline was not great, with only a 0.9 gain. If T2 had conducted formal baseline assessments, she might have identified strengths and weaknesses in her learners to help her focus on learning areas that needed attention.

Learners in this classroom did not get zero scores for either LSK or WR, suggesting that the teacher was able to develop their decoding skills to some extent, which helped them read some words out of context, particularly in context. The reading rate for these learners was not good. Although the teacher gave individual learners opportunities to read the text, it is likely that she might not be doing enough reading of extended texts with the learners. Even though T2 was able to conduct GGR with her small groups, she did not seem to understand that GGR can be used effectively for developing various language components, including reading comprehension, which requires explicit teaching of comprehension strategies for the learners to know how to respond to both literal and inferential questions.

6. 4. 3. Observation of rural School C and its classroom

School C was a medium-sized quintile 2 school (465 learners) with two Grade 1 classes comprising 40 learners per class. Besides Xitsonga speaking learners, the school also admits Venda, Northern Sotho and Shona HL speaking children. The enrollment qualified the school to have 16 teachers, including the Principal and two HODs. The school is situated in the rural area of Sasekani in the Mopani West. The buildings and the campus were clean and tidy.

I visited this school on Friday, 09 March 2018, at 7:30 am. Soon after my arrival, the principal took me straight to the Grade 1 classroom of the teacher with whom I was assigned to work.

T3 was 49 years old, with a BEd degree and 24 years of teaching experience in the FP. When I walked into the classroom, the teacher asked the learners to stand up and greet me. I was offered the teachers' desk in front, next to the classroom door. T3 spent approximately 34 minutes on her literacy lesson. This was the shortest of all the lessons observed across the schools.

6. 4. 3. 1. Print-rich set up in School C classroom

School C classroom was not print-rich. Walls in this classroom did not display many materials that promote literacy. The only resources that were readily visible were the functional workbooks and a few charts which were posted on the classroom noticeboard and the walls. The pictures below show the furniture and the non-traditional seating arrangement of the classroom.

Figure 6. 25. Furniture and seating arrangements

The seating arrangement (Figure 6.25) accommodated group work. The arrangement left enough space that the teacher could use for other reading activities, but she did not utilise it. Desks in this classroom seemed very old. Learners were seated four per desk. The class also lacked shelves where children could put their belongings (e.g., school bags, lunch boxes, etc.); they kept their school bags on their backs throughout class, a practice which must be tiring, uncomfortable and cumbersome for small children.

Figures 6.26-6.31 capture some of the print material displayed in the classroom, which included an alphabet chart, word chart, birthday calendar, weather chart, chart of rules, and a reading corner.

Figure 6. 26. Alphabet chart

The alphabet chart (Figure 6.26) displayed both upper and lowercase typed letters. However, the chart was not creative and was not visually interesting for the little Grade 1s.

Figure 6. 27. Word wall

Xitsonga word wall (Figure 6.27) was displayed on a cold, bare wall. The appearance of the word charts seemed unlikely to attract learners' attention. The font used was not big enough for easy reading.

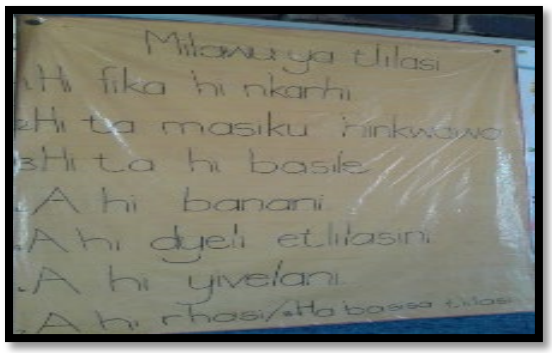
Figure 6. 28. Birthday calendar

The handmade birthday calendar, written in Xitsonga (Figure 6.28), did not show learners' names and birth months, but only days of the week and the title of the chart, and was not attractive. It was difficult to read birthday information from the way it was designed.

Figure 6. 29. Weather chart

The handmade weather chart (6.29) only showed the days of the week. It looked dull and lacked creativity. The chart did not indicate different weather conditions and only showed a few images of cloudy and sunny conditions. The image of this chart did not seem to convey any message. It was also not clear whether this was the weather chart or a timetable.

Figure 6. 30. Classroom rules



The chart of rules (Figure 6.30) was hand-written in large letters in Xitsonga. It was easy for the children to read, especially because the rules were worded succinctly. The chart was neat and covered with plastic for protection. It was posted on the classroom notice board.

Figure 6. 31. Reading corner

School C classroom (Figure 6.31) did not have a reading corner. There were piles of workbooks carelessly stacked on tables in the space that could have been used as a reading corner. The space was untidy. It was hard to tell which specific subjects or languages described these workbooks because some were still wrapped in plastic.

6. 4. 3. 2. Literacy activities and practices in School C

During literacy lessons, the teacher first dealt with SR, followed by phonics, GGR, and drawing activities. Paired/Independent Reading and handwriting activities were not observed. T3 knew her learners by their names and tended to be rather strict in her dealing with them.

Shared reading activities

SR in this classroom was conducted in Tsonga. The activity included two phases, namely, pre-reading and during reading, which lasted 11 minutes. The teacher first greeted the class. She introduced the lesson by telling the whole class that they were going to read together a descriptive story titled *Yindlu ya mina* (My house), from a Tsonga big book. Thereafter, she invited the whole group to come and sit in front of the class on the floor, where there was no mat (Figure 6.32a). Learners were rather noisy as they moved to the front.

Before reading, T3 did not introduce the purpose of the lesson. She began by showing the cover of the big book to the learners and asking them to explain what they saw on the cover. She then did a picture walk by showing the whole class pictures on each page of the book and asked the learners to explain what they saw in each picture. Some learners tried to give answers without raising their hands. T3 shouted at the learners and told them that they were expected to raise their hands. She asked the learners to explain what they thought the text could be all

about. One learner responded, but the teacher did not indicate whether the answer was correct or incorrect and she carried on with the reading.

T3 read the whole story with fluency and expression while pointing to each word, and learners followed silently with their eyes. Then, in the second round, T3 asked them to join in reading with her as she pointed to each word. It was easy for the learners sitting in front to see the text, but some learners at the back seemed to recite from memory while others were inattentive. Lack of participation was evident when a learner was seen tying his shoes at the back during the lesson (Figure 6.32b). The teacher noticed - she indicated that inattentive learners would be punished by sitting in the corner of the class until they could behave. After the second reading, the teacher told the learners to remain seated in front of the classroom as they were going to learn phonics spelling with letter-sounds.

Figure 6. 32a. Shared Reading activities **Figure 6. 32b. Shared reading activities**

Phonics activities

The phonics lesson was conducted in Tsonga. It was a whole class lesson, with all the learners sitting in front on the floor without a mat. The lesson lasted for 9 minutes.

The teacher introduced the lesson by telling the whole class that they were going to learn about the words they read in the story during SR. It was like a continuation of what was done during SR - teaching whole word reading and identifying sounds within the word (proceeding from the whole to the parts). T3 wrote the words *etlela* (sleep), *murhi* (tree), *yindlu* (house), and *ehansi* (on the floor) on the board while children sat quietly, looking at the board. She read the words aloud together with the learners while pointing at each word. T3 corrected the learners when they mispronounced the words. Reading the words aloud with the whole class was

conducted repeatedly until the teacher was somewhat convinced that the learners were able to read. She gave the whole class an opportunity to read the words in chorus by themselves. However, learners stumbled while reading. The teacher joined in to help them reread the words in chorus.

After that, she took out 23 letter cards illustrating different letter-sounds and put them on the chair. She asked individual learners to pick the letters on the letter cards and match them next to the words on the board. Only two learners were able to match the letters with the word, *etlela* correctly on the board. T3 helped learners who struggled to match the letters with the correct word by showing them where to stick the letter card next to the appropriate word on the board. However, this doesn't help the learners understand if the teacher does not help them sound out the letters on the cards. After all the letters on the letter cards were stuck on the board for everyone to see, the teacher read each word aloud. Thereafter, she took off the letter cards from the board and scattered them on the floor. She asked volunteers to pick and put the letters together so that they could match them with the words on the board again. Volunteers collected the letter cards individually, and T3 guided them so that they could finally find their way to assembling the letter cards and matching them with the words on the board.

After assembling and matching all the words, T3 gradually moved to introduce letter-sounds to give learners opportunities to sound and spell words. The activity was conducted without recapping the previous work about letter-sound knowledge. Interestingly, T3 showed inadequate knowledge of phonics when teaching learners to segment the word, *etlela,* into syllables. For example, she taught learners that the word *etlela* has four syllables (e.g., *e-tl-e-la*) when the word consists of six letters, five sounds, and three syllables *e-tle-la*.

With help from the teacher, learners segmented the following words into syllables, *mu-rhi*, *yi-ndlu*, and *e-ha-nsi* on the board. After that, she placed vowel and consonant cards of the word *ehansi* on the floor and asked individual learners to pick the letter-sound *e* from the letters that were lying on the floor. A learner incorrectly picked the letter *h*. T3 asked the learner to sound *h*, but the learner did not seem to know the letter-sound until the whole class came to the learner's rescue by reading the same letter-sound in chorus. T3 further asked the learners to blend the consonant *h* with vowels *a, e, i, o, u*. The whole class read *h+a=ha, h+e=he, h+i=hi*, *h+o-ho, h+u=hu* in chorus. Then, she pointed the word *ehansi* on the board and asked the whole class to read the word aloud. Learners were then asked to say the number of syllables constituting the word *ehansi*. A learner guessed five, but T3 did not provide feedback. Before

she could sum up the lesson, the bell rang. Learners were told to go for break. Ideally, learners should be given written work after the phonics lesson; however, T3 did not give them a handwriting task based on phonics. The pictures below show the whole-part-whole approach (Trupke 2007) used in School C classroom.

Figure 6. 33. Phonics activities

Group guided reading activities

GGR activities were conducted after break. The lesson lasted 14 minutes. T3 conducted GGR with only one group of 15 learners, suggesting that she only had three different ability groups. Learners in T3's class knew to which group they belonged because soon after T3 told them that it was time for GGR, they moved to the front, where they sat on the floor without a mat (Figure 6.34a). However, T3 had to remind them to hurry up, as some were still packing their backpacks to take with them to the front.

While T3 was busy with GGR, the other learners were instructed to draw pictures of the characters in the story read during SR (Figure 6.34b). Although the task kept the learners busy to some extent, it did not really develop literacy directly. If she had asked them to write the characters' names underneath, it would have helped develop handwriting and sound-letter knowledge. Before learners made their drawings, the teacher asked them if there was anyone who could briefly tell what the story read during SR was all about. One learner raised her hand and said it was a story about a mother and a daughter. The teacher further asked what the names of those characters were. All the learners in the other groups answered that it was Titi and Tete. The teacher reminded them that Titi and Tete were the names of the characters of the story read during the previous lesson. She reminded the learners that Lulu and Lolo were carrying wood to build their house. From the teacher's explanation, learners seemed to understand what they

were supposed to draw about the story. Sadly, most learners during the drawing activity could not stay on task and made a noise. The teacher would constantly remind them to do the work, but they continued making a noise.

During GGR, the teacher began by telling the learners that they were going to read a story titled *Ndzi nga endla hinkwaswo* (I can do all things). She did not formally introduce the title of the story to the learners. Before reading, the teacher spent three minutes writing the story on the board, while the learners were sitting quietly, awaiting further instructions. This task could have been conducted during break to save time. The words on the board were clear to all the learners, including those who were seated at the back.

After that, she read the whole story aloud from the board while pointing to each word. Learners observed and also seemed to follow along silently. After the first reading, T3 asked the whole group to join in reading with her. While reading sentence by sentence, she would sometimes pause to correct mispronunciation of words, e.g., learners read as *tano* instead of *tani* (in that way) and *languta* (look) as *nanguta*. Reading the whole story with the group was carried out three times without T3 asking questions about the text or asking individual learners to read. She asked the whole group to read the text on the board by themselves as she pointed at each word. Not all the learners were reading, while those who were reading did so slowly because they were struggling with sounding out words. T3 did not explain the meaning of keywords in the story; neither did she give individual learners opportunities to read the text. The reading was carried out until it was time for break. Learners were then released.

Figure 6. 34a. GGR activities

Figure 6. 34b. Drawing activities

6. 4. 3. 3. Data from T3's interview

This subsection presents the results of the interview with T3 of School C classroom. Only two main themes and three subthemes were identified.

Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

From the interview with T3, it was apparent that assessment/EGRA and inadequacies of a print-rich classroom environment were perceived to be challenges in successfully teaching reading in T3's class.

Assessment/EGRA

Regarding assessing learners' baseline, T3 said:

> *There is this program of EGRA, I used it to test the learners because in Grade R, as they teach the learners, they emphasise letter sounds, so this is basically what we assess most.*

Although T3 stated that she used EGRA to check her learners' reading levels, it was surprising to note that her ability group reading comprised 15 learners. This exceeded the maximum number of 10 learners recommended by CAPS in a group. Given that T3 had only 40 learners in her class, she could have divided the whole class into six groups of six or seven learners per group. Small group instruction provides all the learners with opportunities to benefit from learning (Ward 1987). She further said:

> *I don't usually record because after testing the learner, I have an idea of where the learner should fit- whether under the group of those that are slow or smart.*

T3 seemed to have informally assessed her learners' knowledge at baseline. However, they didn't do well on LSK at the end of the year, so assessing the learners as she claimed to have done did not seem to have informed her teaching – her learners knew very few letters at baseline and they made little progress by endline. Again, after assessing learners, teachers are expected to record the outcomes so that they can use the results for monitoring purposes, but T3 seemed to have lost the opportunity to use baseline data to inform her teaching; she seems to have done this rather superficially, for compliance, without understanding the potential usefulness of what teachers are expected to do with assessment information. Nevertheless, T3 indicated that she relied on a general impression to know her children's reading capabilities. This is a generalised approach that reveals lack of awareness of the importance of analytic detail in tracking learners'

literacy progress. Furthermore, teachers are unlikely to remember ongoing and changing details about 40 learners in their class.

Inadequacies of print-rich classroom environment

In terms of creating the print richness of the classroom, T3 said:

> *I do have them, it's just that some people were installing ceiling fans, so when they tried them over the weekend, they forgot to switch the fans off, so the air blew all the charts and pictures – when I arrived in the morning, I found them all over the classroom floor, but then I was lazy to put them back, I will put them back.*

Print material in T3's class lacked creativity, and the information on some of the charts was not clear. However, T3 seemed to use classroom maintenance as an excuse for the state of her print-rich classroom setting. T3 further said:

> *For now, we don't have a reading corner, but we use that space at the corner where there are piles of books that is our reading corner, but for now, I have not yet arranged it nicely because we are still struggling to teach learners to identify and sound letters*

T3 seemed to have a rather casual and laid-back approach to creating a stimulating classroom environment and was aware that her reading corner does not comply with the requirements of CAPS. Her excuse for first teaching phonics indicates that she is clearly missing the point of having a reading corner to help develop literacy.

Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

T3 perceived the shortage of books as a factor relating to challenges in teaching early reading in her classroom.

> *Most books are worn out because the covers are not strong. I no longer have enough supplies.*

The fact that there were challenges regarding books in T3's class was also noted during reading lessons where she had to use a chalkboard to write a text that was meant to be read during GGR.

6. 4. 3. 4. Evaluative comments

Based on what was observed during literacy lesson and evaluation in T3's classroom, there were lost opportunities in this classroom. For example, T3 claimed to have print materials but the excuse of classroom maintenance for not displaying them. Some of the materials that were displayed on the classroom walls were not appealing or conducive to promoting literacy

development, and her reading corner was not properly set up. She also claimed to have conducted baseline assessment but did not have evidence to show that she had tested the learners. Although T3 used phonics to practice phonemic awareness and syllable identification with learners, her whole-to-part approach was not systematically done and did not explicitly teach children letter-sound relationships. T3 also seemed to have some difficulty when teaching learners to segment words into syllables, suggesting that she may lack content knowledge for Xitsonga phonics. If teachers do not know their subjects in-depth, they put learners' academic achievement at risk (Smithers & Robinson 2005; NEEDU 2013). Her phonics teaching was very much a whole language approach because she did not show what letters represented phonemes and how they blended to form syllables. There was no letter-sound in particular that she focused on. In principle, it is commendable for T3 to ask learners to repeat the task of putting letters on the letter cards together and matching the letters with the words on the board, provided the teacher sounds out the letters and shows the learners how to blend them, but with 40 learners, it might not be practical to do the matching task in a large group and learners might end up doing a matching exercise without understanding the letter-sound relations. Her ability group was more than the maximum number of 10 learners, as per CAPS recommendations. She did not seem to use GGR for differentiated teaching; neither did she use it for developing individual decoding skills, vocabulary, reading comprehension, etc.

6. 4. 3. 5. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Table 6.7 below presents descriptive results for learner performance in School C classroom.

Table 6. 7. Descriptive statistics for School C

	March			**September**		
	Mean	*SD*	Zero %	Mean	*SD*	Zero %
PA	2.2	1.7	26.7%	3.2	2.1	20%
LSK	7.5	3.5	13.3%	13.2	11.7	0%
WR	1.9	0.9	20%	7.5	6.6	13.3%
ORF	1.8	1.6	20%	14.3	17.4	20%
ORC	0.2	0.5	86.7%	1.6	1.9	46.7%
Composite score	13.7		33.3%	39.9		20%

The results showed that in terms of the composite score, children in T3's class were in the middle of all the five schools at the end of the year. Knowing only 13 letter-sounds after a year forms a small knowledge base for accurate and fluent word reading in T3's class. Performance in PA was also low. Although T3's teaching of phonics was very much a whole language approach, she seemed to have managed to develop her learners' decoding skills to some extent

since there were no zero scores in the letter-sound knowledge. Nevertheless, performance in LSK was still low, suggesting that if T3's teaching of phonics was done systematically and if she had also properly conducted baseline assessment to understand her learners' reading levels, they might have performed better in the LSK task. Just under half the class scored zero percentage for ORC, so performance in this domain was particularly poor, suggesting that learning in T3's class happened very slowly.

6. 4. 4. Observation of rural School D and its classroom

School D was a large quintile 2 school (751 learners) situated in the rural area of Mohlaba-Cross in the Mopani West. There were Northern Sotho and Venda speaking children who were taught Xitsonga as LoLT. The current enrollment qualifies the school to have more teachers; however, the school only had 23 teachers, including the Principal, two HODs, and one Deputy Principal. The school had two Grade 1 classes of 69 (Grade 1A) and 62 (Grade 1B) learners. Despite a large number of learners in these classes, which is counter to departmental policy, the school was understaffed. Although the buildings were in good condition, the surroundings were untidy. Most of the playgrounds and the surrounding grounds were covered in bare sand.

I visited this school on 13 March 2018 at 7:30 am. When I arrived, I had to wait for a while at the principal's office, as the teacher in question was not in class. The principal had to ask the head of FP to look for the teacher. The school did not seem well managed. Children and teachers for the two days that I spent at the school were often seen outside.

T4 was 48 years old. She had ten years of teaching experience, with a Primary Teachers Diploma. In the classroom, T4 introduced me to the learners and informed them of the purpose of my visit. After that, she offered me her desk. Although I sat in front, I tried to work quietly to avoid disturbing the learners during the lesson. Observation of the literacy lesson in the School D classroom lasted approximately 1hr: 07 minutes.

6. 4. 4. 1. Print-rich set up in School D classroom

The classroom of School D was not print-rich. The walls were not covered in print material that promoted literacy – these only had two cursive handwriting paper sheets, which were not relevant to the Grade 1 learners. The classroom did not seem clean and tidy. Children did not even have books on their desks.

The pictures below show furniture and traditional seating arrangement in School D classroom.

Figure 6. 35. Furniture and seating arrangements

The size of School D classroom could not accommodate the seating of 62 learners in groups. For this reason, some learners were seated three per desk. Although desks were in rows, learners sitting at the back would have difficulty reading texts on the blackboard. The classroom notice board at the back of the class was damaged and empty boxes and resources piled up untidily on a table at the back.

Figures 6.37-6.38 capture some of the print material displayed in the School D classroom, which included word wall charts and a reading corner.

Figure 6. 36. Word wall chart

The words on the wall (Figure 6.36) were handwritten Xitsonga words. They were also displayed high on the wall in large visible letters. The word wall charts appeared incomplete, as some did not have lower and uppercase letters.

Figure 6. 37. Reading corner

The reading corner (Figure 6.37), such as it was, was not properly organised. Piles of workbooks, textbooks, and boxes were packed on top of the table and the floor. It looked more like a storage place than a reading corner. There were no small chairs, cushions, or a reading corner poster.

6. 4. 4. 2. Literacy activities and practices in School D

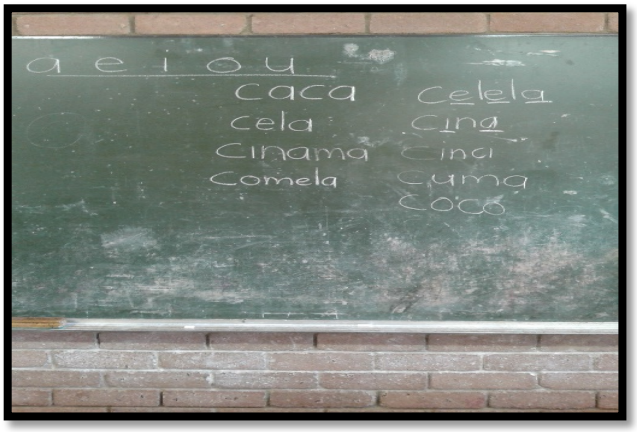
The teacher first dealt with phonics, followed by SR, and concluded with GGR activities. Although T4 was approachable to her learners, she did not seem to handle her large class effectively.

Phonics activities

The phonics lesson in School D classroom was conducted in Tsonga. It was addressed to the whole class and took about 36 minutes with children sitting at their desks. Before the lesson started, T4 informed the learners that they were going to focus on the letter-sound *c* [ʧ]. She recapped on the previous lesson by asking the whole class to identify the vowels *a, e, i, o, u,* while writing them on the board. T4 assisted the learners to blend c+a=ca, c+e=ce, c+i=ci, c+o=co, c+u=cu. She asked the learners to form words from the designated letter-sound *c*, sticking to the same sequence.

Learners were able to come up with words such as *caca* (chase), *cela* (dig), *cinama* (fake smile), *comela* (malt), *celela* (bury), *cina* (dance), *cinci* (coins), *cuma* (dowry), and *coco* (showing surprise). T4 did not use flashcards; she wrote all the words mentioned above on the board (Figure 6.38). She further used examples to clarify the meaning of the words on the board. Learners were asked to break the words down into individual sounds, which were written on the board. For example, *cinci* was segmented into /c/ /i/ /n/ /c/ /i/ and *comela* into /c/ /o/ /m/ /e/ /l/ /a/. During the process of segmenting words, she asked learners to say the last letters of the words written on the board or identify vowels in those words in chorus. The activity of segmenting words was carried out to the last word on the board. Although the board seemed a bit dirty and fuzzy, the letters and the words on the board were clear and visible for the learners in front, but learners at the back did not seem to see them clearly. This was observed when the learners sitting at the back were quiet when the teacher asked the whole group to say the last letters of the words on the board. Although T4 used Tsonga to teach phonics, some learners answered some questions in English, and she kept reminding them that they should respond in Tsonga. This behaviour would be expected in School A classroom, as English in that school is used as LoLT, but not in School D. Learners in T4's classroom were not given a handwriting activity. The picture below shows the phonics steps used in School D classroom.

Figure 6. 38. Phonics activities



Shared Reading activities

The SR activity in this classroom focused on two phases (pre-reading and during reading), which lasted approximately 16 minutes. Learners sat at their desks. The teacher read a descriptive text entitled, *Ndza swi tiva* (I know) from a Tsonga big book. Some learners were given a copy of the big book while sitting in threes. T4 only had six copies, which only covered six front desks. Learners who were seated without a copy of the big book on their desks read from the teacher's copy, as she pointed at the pictures and words while standing in front of the class.

Before reading, T4 introduced the lesson and talked about the title of the story, linking it to the learners' experiences. While standing in front, she showed learners pictures on each page of the book, pointing out specific character actions as a way of familiarising learners with the text. During that time, some learners were inattentive as they were having fun looking at the pictures in the book (Figure 6.39). Sadly, the teacher did not notice.

The text was clear to the learners who had the book or sitting in front, close to the teacher, but those who were seated at the back without books could not see the pictures nor the text, and some had to stand up or turn backward to access the book from other learners. The teacher explained the meanings of words by using examples, but she did not write the words on the board, neither did she use flashcards.

During reading, T4 read the text aloud – showing the pages to the whole class as she read. Learners were asked beforehand to follow along with their eyes. T4 did not ask questions after the first reading. She asked the whole class to join in reading sentence by sentence after her. During reading, T4 paused from time to time, clarifying aspects of the text, but she did not ask

them to make predictions about the text. She gave the whole group an opportunity to read the text sentence by sentence, but not all the learners were reading, as some seemed unable to access the text. The teacher noticed but did nothing to encourage the learners to participate. After reading, it was time for break. Learners who were given a copy of the big book were asked to put it on top of the teacher's table before going for break.

Figure 6. 39. Shared reading activities

Group Guided Reading activities

GGR activities in School D classroom were carried out after break and lasted 15 minutes. T4 conducted GGR with one group of 6 learners who were given a book to share in threes (Figure 6.40). She used the same big book that was read during SR. Learners did not seem to know the routine for GGR, or what groups they were in as they waited to be called by their names to know that they were in the first group. They sat on the floor without a mat. The teacher joined them on the floor, sitting on a cloth. She did not give other learners instructions as to what they were supposed to do while conducting GGR with her ability group. As a result, the remaining learners played and made a noise. T4 always reminded them to be quiet; there would be order for a few minutes, but then the noise would continue.

Before reading, T4 first conducted a picture walk on every page of the book. She discussed the pictures with the learners in the group. Learners were given a chance to participate only by answering literal questions about what they saw in the pictures. T4 did not provide feedback to learners' responses; she just accepted the answers and carried on with asking questions. Learners were not given opportunities to develop vocabulary from the text. T4 kept repeating the same questions asked during SR.

During reading, T4 followed the same process as in SR, where she first read the text aloud and then asked the learners to join in. While reading, she paused from time-to-time, asking literal questions. The lesson was concluded without giving individual learners time to read the text by themselves.

The fact that learners did not seem to know what to do during GGR and that no work was given to the rest of the class suggest that the teacher did this activity impromptu because her class was being observed and she wanted to show compliance with CAPS.

Figure 6. 40. Group guided reading activities

6. 4. 4. 3. Data from T4's interview

Two central themes and eight subthemes emerged from the interview with T4.

Theme 1: Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

Time constraints

Regarding the issue of time allocated for teaching reading in Grade 1, T4 said:

> *They say we should do shared reading in 15 minutes, but because my class is overcrowded, 15 minutes is not enough – it takes a lot of time to include the learners at the back as they can't see the words, so when I read, first, I stand in front so that the front rows can see, thereafter, I have to make sure that I move closer to the back rows as I read.*

Despite T4's concern of the amount of time allocated for teaching reading in her Grade 1 classroom, it was noted during observations that she literally spent most of the engagement time in front of the class during her teaching of reading. Furthermore, learners seated at the back in her class seemed less engaged because they did not have books. T4 also seemed

unconcerned that the rest of the class was not meaningfully occupied when she did GGR with one group.

Baseline assessment

In terms of managing baseline assessments with the Grade 1 learners, T4 said:

> *I know most of them by now, that's why when I give them handwriting activities, they line up one-by-one, here next to my table, then I check their work and if they did not do it correctly I show them the right way, so I know them as they come to the table as I check their work. I help them, but most are still struggling.*

It is interesting to note that T4 uses handwriting outcomes to assess her children's levels of learning. However, one can't assess phonics knowledge or fluency from checking written work. Besides, it was noted during observations that learners in T4's class were not given written work after conducting various reading activities (e.g., phonics, SR and GGR). The method of checking work that T4 describes is also one that wastes valuable learning-teaching time since learners wait in a line for their books to be checked instead of the teacher taking their books home for marking and using classroom time more productively.

Inadequacies of print-rich classroom environment

In terms of setting up a print-rich classroom, T4 said:

> *I don't have the reading corner, and it's just that when some learners have completed the task that I have given them, to avoid these learners disturbing other learners who are still working on their task, I remove them from where they have been sitting and put them in a place where I can give them something that will keep them busy.*

As also noted during observations, her classroom walls were bare. The impact of lacking a resourced reading corner was evident during SR where few learners were given a copy of the big book, and during GGR whereby the other groups could not visit the reading corner to pick up any book of their choice and read – instead, they played and made a noise.

Classroom management

The reasons T4 gave for not being able to do GGR properly suggested poor classroom management and routines. In respect of managing learners during GGR activities, T4 said:

> *Seeing groups several times even if I want is a problem because they are many – sometimes, I miss helping other learners who really need my attention because I will be rushing to attend other groups.*

T4 ostensibly claimed that she had challenges seeing two groups in one day, as per CAPS recommendations. Given that there were 62 learners, she could have established at least 8 to 10 learners per groups. T4's excuse for being unable to give full attention to her small group because other learners made a noise is refuted by the fact that she did not give them work to do during GGR. As noted during observations, learners played and made a noise because they had nothing to keep them busy.

Theme 2: Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

Findings from the interview with T4 further showed that overcrowding/lack of classroom space, shortage of reading books, and classroom furniture were factors she identified as obstacles to the successful teaching of reading in her class.

Overcrowding/ lack of classroom space

T4 expressed her frustration in managing an overcrowded classroom.

> *The class is crowded. I have to arrange desks the way you see them. Having 62 learners in one class in Grade 1 is a challenge. An overcrowded class like this will take you years to conduct each activity in the classroom.*

This suggests that she has not been trained to deal with overcrowded classrooms. T4 stayed in front during lessons instead of walking up and down the aisles. It was also noted that she missed the opportunity of giving the other groups work to do while she was busy with her ability group. T4 further said:

> *When I conduct shared reading, learners remain seated on their desks because there is no space to invite them to sit in front of the class. But I make sure that I read louder so that even children at the back can hear, but they can't see the words – those who can see are those who are sitting on the front desk.*

T4 seems not to understand the purpose of SR which is essentially meant to show learners how texts work. It is important for learners to *see* the text during SR. Due to overcrowding, T4's classroom space presented significant barriers to teaching and learning. Instead of conducting SR with learners gathered around on the floor in front of the class, they sat at their desks. However, learners sitting at the back were inattentive. The teacher did not walk up and down the aisles to show learners who did not have access to the text.

Shortage of reading books

In respect of shortage of reading books, T4 said:

> *We don't have books, and that is where the department is failing the learners – they can supply us with lesson plans and other things, but when it comes to stationery, it's a problem.*

T4 had a space designated for a reading corner in her class, but only functional workbooks and textbooks were visible in that space. The challenges of reading books were also noted during reading lessons, where T4 only had few copies of the big book, which she managed to share with a handful of learners. This resulted in most learners (especially those seated at the back) making a noise because they were not engaged. Although there was no evidence of NECT resources in her classroom, the fact that she made mention of resources that were supplied suggests that teachers have the NECT resources, but they may not be using them to supplement what they have for teaching and learning.

Classroom furniture and print material

Classroom furniture in T4's classroom was a challenge.

> *I did not put the charts on the wall - the reason why I did not put the charts is because they fall - the notice board is no longer strong, you can't paste anything on it. That is why every time I start a lesson, I have to take the charts or picture words from my filing cabinet because I can't paste them.*

As noted during classroom evaluation, the notice board was damaged, so T4 could not use it. However, it was noted that besides using the notice board, T4 could have opted for another available space in the classroom walls to put up the print material. She also claimed to have created her classroom print resources, but there was no evidence of this.

6. 4. 4. 4. Evaluative comments

While T4's classroom practice had elements that were commendable, there was also much that was less commendable. She did not organise a reading corner and her classroom was not print-rich. She did not bother to make resources (flashcards, letter/syllable cards) to enhance literacy teaching in her large class. SR and GGR seemed to be done in the same way, suggesting lack of understanding of their different aims and uses. T4 also said that she was unable to give all her learners equal attention because the amount of time allocated was not enough, but she did not walk up and down the aisle to make sure that learners at the back were also engaged, nor did she respond to their answers when she asked questions. She had excuses for not doing baseline assessment and said that she asked learners to stand in a queue next to her table to check their work and see if they were on the right track. From what was observed, this is not a very productive use of time because children stood waiting for a long time, doing nothing. They

should rather be called up one-by-one. Besides, checking written work enables the teacher to see how learners are doing in written work; it does not enable them to assess the learners' phonics knowledge or reading ability. T4 also claimed that she was unable to focus her attention on her ability group because learners in the other groups made a noise, but she did not give them work to do while attending her small group. Teachers need to teach children how to work unsupervised, especially when the class is big. Although she complied with CAPS by dividing learners into different ability groups of six learners per group, with a large class like hers, it would be more effective to have about 8 to 10 learners in a group.

6. 4. 4. 5. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Table 6.8 below presents descriptive results for learner performance in School D classroom.

Table 6. 8. Descriptive statistics for School D

	March			**September**		
	Mean	*SD*	Zero %	Mean	*SD*	Zero %
PA	1.5	0.9	13.3%	2.6	3.0	46.7%
LSK	3.3	2.6	6.7%	8.0	9.3	0%
WR	1.9	0.2	0%	5.1	6.9	20%
ORF	1.4	1.0	6.7%	4.3	8.2	53.3%
ORC	0	0	100%	0.6	1.2	80%
Composite score	8.2		25.3%	20.7		40%

The EGRA results showed that learners' composite score in T4's classroom was the lowest across the five schools. The majority of learners in this class scored zero percentage in three of the five subtasks, suggesting that teaching and learning in this classroom had not been effective during the course of the year. The learners had extremely poor alphabetic knowledge and they also did not seem to engage the little alphabetic knowledge they had to blend sounds to read words. The learners' ORF score was particularly low, and their word reading was the lowest (5.1 wcpm) in all the five schools. Performance was also poor in PA and ORC. Although there were no zero scores in alphabetic knowledge, the teacher did not seem to have done much in terms of developing learners' decoding skills - most learners still struggled to read words, in and out of context. T4's learners would likely have been able to read at their grade level by the end of the year if she had given them enough time to practice their early reading skills during GGR or Paired Reading activities. In none of the activities were the learners actually given a chance to develop their reading. Of all five teachers, T4 had only a diploma, and her classroom was also the most print scarce. She also did not seem to properly understand the main purpose of different reading activities and she seemed to go through the different reading

activities mechanically. Learners fared most poorly in both decoding and reading comprehension because she did not seem to pay attention to building their comprehension abilities.

6. 4. 5. Observation of rural School E and its classroom

School E was the largest of the schools; a quintile 2 school (864 learners) situated in the rural area of Mohlaba-Cross in Mopani West. The school admitted Northern Sotho and Venda speaking children who were taught Xitsonga as LoLT. The enrollment qualified the school to have more staff. However, at the time of the research, the school had 23 teachers, including the Principal, three HODs, and one Deputy Principal. The buildings of this school were old, but the surroundings were well cared for. There were two Grade 1 classes of 57 learners per class.

I arrived at this school on Thursday, 15 March 2018, at around 7:30 am. Learners and teachers were all in the class. I went straight to the principal's office. Given that they were expecting me, I only spent a few minutes in the office, as I wanted to make the principal aware of my arrival before I went to the Grade 1 classroom. Thereafter, I was permitted to see the teacher in her class.

T5 was 50 years old, with a BEd Honours, and also had 23 years of teaching experience in the FP. First, she introduced me to the learners. I was then offered the teacher's desk to sit in front of the classroom. The literacy lesson in this classroom was conducted for approximately 52 minutes.

6. 4. 5. 1. Print-rich set up in School E classroom

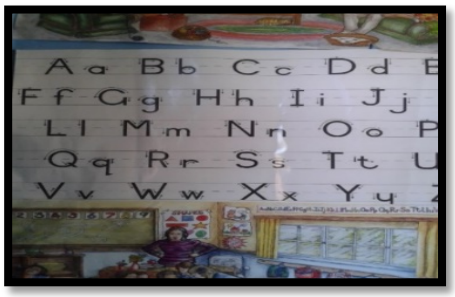
When I walked into this classroom, the learners were quiet, but they seemed to be doing nothing. There were no books on their desks. The teacher appeared to be doing something at her desk. Despite a large pile up boxes stacked to the ceiling in one corner, the classroom seemed neat and organised. The walls were covered with some print material. The size of this class looked big enough to accommodate 57 learners. The pictures below show furniture and traditional seating arrangement in School E classroom.

Figure 6. 41. Furniture and seating arrangements

The seating arrangement in this classroom did not accommodate group work. Learners were seated three per desk (Figure 6.41). From what was noted, there was enough space for T5 to set up learning stations for other reading activities even though there were boxes of books pilled in corner of the classroom.

Figures 6.42 to 6.46 capture some of the print material displayed in School E classroom. These included an alphabet chart, word wall chart, group chart, birthday calendar, and weather chart.

Figure 6. 42. Alphabet chart



School E classroom had a ready-made colourful alphabet chart with both upper and lowercase letters (Figure 6.42). It was stuck on the wall next to the chalkboard and also had a clear letter-only version for the Grade 1s.

Figure 6. 43a. Word wall

Figure 6. 43b. Learners pointing at the words

Tsonga word wall charts in School E classroom were neat, but they were displayed high on the front wall above the chalkboard (Figure 6.43a). For the children to access and read the words on the wall, they used a long stick to point at each word (Figure 6.43b). The charts showed a week's number. There was a simple sentence at the bottom of each chart.

Figure 6. 44. Group chart

Groups (Figure 6.44.) were written neatly on A4 paper and were placed inside plastic files for protection. They were displayed high on the wall (above the chalkboard). T5 had five groups, with approximately 10 to 12 learners per group. The group list only showed the group name, and the names of learners in each group.

Figure 6. 45. Birthday calendar

The eye-catching and colourful birthday calendar was hand-made and well crafted (Figure 6.45). It included a drawing of a cake with candles as well as pictures of flowers denoting learners' birth months. The chart was covered with transparent plastic for protection. The names, birth months and dates were not large enough for the Grade 1s to read. The months were not arranged chronologically.

Figure 6.46. Weather chart

The weather chart written in Xitsonga showed some creativity (Figure 6.49). It looked neat and colourful. Images used on the chart were clear and displayed different weather conditions. Although the chart was covered with plastic, the information was still clear and visible. There was no reading corner.

6. 4. 5. 2. Literacy activities in School E classroom

For her literacy lessons, T5 first dealt with phonics, followed by SR, GGR, and an Independent Reading activity, which was conducted concurrently with GGR. She was able to give her learners clear instructions. T5 also appeared to have a clear understanding of what she was doing with her Grade 1 learners.

Phonics activities

The teaching of phonics in the School E classroom was conducted in Tsonga to the whole class. The duration of the lesson was 16 minutes. Learners sat at their desks. Before introducing the purpose of the lesson, T5 talked about the weather with the learners. She asked them to identify the picture on the weather chart, which described the weather condition on that day. The learners kept guessing the answer until one learner was able to say that it was windy and pointed to a picture showing *Moya* (the degree of the stormy weather) on the weather chart. After the discussion of the weather, which lasted 5 minutes, the teacher stuck a flashcard of the letter-sound *t* and told the whole class that they were going to learn the new letter-sound *t* so that they could be able to link words they knew to the designated letter-sound.

T5 recapped on the previous work by asking learners to identify the vowels *a, e, i, o, u*. Thereafter, she helped the learners blend the designated letter-sound *t* with the vowels, in these sequence t+a=ta, t+e=te, t+i=ti, t+o=to, t+u=tu, but there was no practising to recognise the syllables in random order. As the whole class blended letter *t* with vowels, the teacher wrote the syllables on the board (Figure 6.47). She then told the learners to identify two or three-syllable words with the letter-sound *t*. Thereafter, she asked them for words starting with *t*. Learners came up with words such as *tatana*, (daddy), *buti* (brother), *tima* (switch off), *tiya* (tea), *tolo* (yesterday). Every time a learner said the word, T5 would give that learner a piece of chalk to write the word on the board. Learners walked to the front with bags on their backs (Figure 6.47). She assisted learners who struggled to write words on the board.

After all the words were written on the chalkboard, the teacher re-wrote them so that everyone could see. She took out five flashcards and asked the learners to pick the words on the flashcards and match them with the ones on the chalkboard. Sadly, not all the words were matched correctly. For example, learners mismatched *buti* (brother) with *mati* (water), and *tima* with *tolo* (yesterday). T5 helped the learners correct the mismatch by giving them the flashcards with the correct matching words, but not with letter-sound identification and blending word-attack strategies. Texts written on the board were clear and visible, but learners at the back

could not read them. T5 asked the learners to identify the syllable units of the words *tatana, mati,* and *tolo*, orally, while clapping for the syllables and counted phonemes making up the three words mentioned above. The word *tatana* was segmented on the board as /t/ /a/ /t/ /a/ /n/ /a/, comprising six distinctive sound units and three syllables, and so too with other words. Learners were not given a handwriting activity. T5 concluded the phonics lesson by telling the learners to be ready for the SR activities. The pictures below show the phonics steps used in the School E classroom.

Figure 6. 47. Phonics activities

Shared Reading activities

The SR lesson in this classroom focused on two phases (i.e., pre-reading and during reading), which lasted 21 minutes. The activity was based on Xitsonga large descriptive book entitled *Mavala* (Colours). This seemed like the first session of SR.

Before reading, the teacher asked the whole group to join her in front of the class. As the learners walked to the front, she arranged them so that they could all sit properly on the floor and have access to the text in front (Figure 6.48). T5 introduced the lesson by telling the learners that they were going to read together a book about different colour patterns on animals' skin. She showed the cover of the book to the learners and read the title, but did not discuss it with the learners.

T5 introduced the name of the author and the publisher of the book. She drew the learners' attention to the cover by asking them to explain what they saw in the picture. Learners gave different answers to the names of the animals shown on the cover page. Thereafter, T5 showed the learners pictures on each page of the book to align them with what an information text was

all about and showed them that animals have different colours. As illustrated in Figure 6.48, the teacher used five flashcards, which included different types of animals and insects, such as *mbyana* (dog), *yingwe* (leopard), *phaphatana* (butterfly), *nhlampfi* (fish), and *xifufunhunu* (insect) to show learners some keywords that they were going to encounter in the text. She explained and described the animals and insects according to their colours. The font on the flashcards was very big - children at the back were able to read, as a learner sitting in the back row gave the correct answer when asked to state what he saw in the pictures, but that does not mean the learner could read the word. Even though all the learners were able to see the text in front, the video camera easily distracted some as I was recording the reading activities up close. However, that was corrected when I moved a bit farther away.

Afterwards, T5 model read the whole text with expression, while all the learners observed and followed with their eyes. She did not ask questions about the text. Instead, she invited the whole group to join in reading with her, again using her hands to point at each word. During reading, she paused to clarify the text or correct learners if they mispronounced words. After reading the whole text with the learners, she asked them to return to their desks so that they could begin with GGR activities.

Figure 6. 48. Shared Reading activities

Group Guided Reading activities

The GGR lesson in this classroom focused on two phases (pre-reading and during reading), which lasted approximately 15 minutes with a group of 11 learners. The story read was from the Tsonga reader entitled *Famba na hina* (Walk with us). The teacher only worked from one book with all the learners in the group.

T5 introduced the lesson by informing the whole class that it was time for GGR. She asked the first group to join her in front of the class. The routine for getting into the group was not yet established as the learners waited to be told what to do by the teacher. Even the teacher herself

was not yet familiar with who was in which group - she had to use a class list to call all the learners who belonged to Group 1. As she called the learners by names, they walked to the front quietly, where they sat in a semi-circle on the floor without a mat (Figure 6.49). She then gave the other groups different Tsonga readers in pairs so that they could read while she was busy with GGR. However, the learners made a noise. T5 tried to control their noise by constantly reminding them to be quiet, but the noise persisted until she decided to ignore them and continued working with her small group.

Before reading, T5 gave each learner a book and told them about words that she wanted them to understand in the story. She used five flashcards, which included words such as *mukapu* (soft porridge), *xibava* (sour), *endzeni* (in my belly), *vabya* (sick), *murhi* (medicine) to show the learners keywords that they would come across in the text. However, the text did not seem to be at a level the learners could read in March. T5 showed each word to the learners and explained their meanings by using examples, which related well with the learners' background experiences. For instance, about describing the meaning of the word *vabya* (sick), T5 asked the learners to explain how they felt whenever they had flu. One learner responded by saying that it was not nice because she always had a runny nose.

After that, the teacher asked the learners to open the text on page 1. She read the text aloud while learners followed silently in their books. Then, T5 asked the learners to read the story together with her in chorus as in SR. She gave each learner a chance to read, but not every learner had the opportunity because the other groups always interrupted her by making a noise. During reading, the teacher intervened only when the learner was unable to read a particular word. She asked each learner literal questions after reading the whole text. Whenever a learner responded, whether the answer was correct or incorrect, the teacher would provide feedback on the response or praise the learner.

Figure 6. 49. Group guided reading activities

6. 4. 5. 3. Data from T5's interview

Three themes and five subthemes were identified from the interview with T5.

Theme 1: Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

The following subthemes were identified as barriers to the teaching of reading in T5's classroom: time constraints and self-regulated learning.

Time constraints

T5 expressed dissatisfaction regarding time allocated for teaching reading.

> *I normally spend 15 minutes, but it is not enough, sometimes as a class manager, I just decide to add some extra time depending on what I am doing with the learners.*

Although T5 was able to stick to the amount of time allocated for teaching reading in some of her literacy activities, she seemed unable to cover some activities during the engagement time with learners. For example, she did not give her learners written work after teaching phonics; neither did she give some learners in her ability reading group opportunities to practice reading the text. Even after finishing with the first group, she did not use the remaining time to see the second group.

Classroom management

Although T5 had formed groups, they did not seem to know the routines for GGR, neither could they work independently. In respect of managing her class during GGR, T5 said:

> *They make a noise like the way you hear them, but I make sure that I concentrate on a group that I am busy working with. Learners do make noise even if I have given them other tasks to keep them busy, but they make noise.*

As was also observed during her GGR lesson that routines for self-regulation were not yet in place as learners in the other groups could not stay on task and they made a noise. T5 seemed unable to control the learners; as a result, she decided to ignore them and focused on her ability group.

Theme 2: Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

Data collected from T5 further indicated that lack of classroom space and shortage of reading books were perceived to be challenges to effective teaching of reading in her class.

Lack of classroom space

In terms of the challenges of space in her classroom, T5 said:

> *I have the problem of space because of the piles of boxes that you see at the corner there, even the curriculum adviser also complained about the boxes, but I am still waiting for the boxes to be removed.*

Despite the large class size, from what was noted during the evaluation of her classroom setting, T5's class did not seem congested, as there was space available for her to create other learning stations. Moreover, with that space, T5 could have also created a non-traditional seating arrangement for the children to work in groups. The only issue which seemed to pose a challenge in terms of space could be the presence of boxes of books that were piled in the corner of the classroom. It seemed as if there was no agency for T5 to actually be proactive about removing the boxes; she seemed to tolerate this aspect of dysfunction in her classroom.

Shortage of reading books

T5 referred to the shortage of books:

> *We don't have enough Tsonga reading books, I only read from the book that is mine. The department supplied books, but they are Sepedi books, I submitted a complaint, but the books have not yet been delivered.*

T5 clearly has books and uses them with learners, and would welcome more. However, given the importance of books in literacy development, one wonders at the bureaucratic carelessness in delivering Northern Sotho books to a Tsonga school, and the seeming apathy that almost at the end of the first term the error had not yet been rectified.

Theme 3: Teachers' strategies for teaching early reading

From the interview with T5, motivation was identified as a strategy for teaching reading.

> *I encourage them in the form of giving them rewards or praises or I just give them a hug- other learners will be motivated and make sure that they complete their work in time to get a book to read so that they can also get rewards or praises - as they continue reading it keeps them busy so that they don't disturb those who are still busy working.*

It was also noted during the observation of her GGR lesson that T5 employed motivation strategies to encouraged children to learn. For example, she had a warm manner with the learners. She was often seen hugging and praising them whenever they were able to give correct responses. From what was also noted, T5 did not only seem to encourage and motivate learners

who gave correct responses, but she also provided clarity to those who seemed unable to give correct answers.

6. 4. 5. 4. Evaluative comments

T5's classroom practice showed both elements of compliance and non-compliance with the teaching recommendations in CAPS. Her classroom walls were displayed with neat and attractive charts. It was also commendable for T5 to conduct oral work with the whole class before the teaching of reading began through her little discussions about the weather and new words in a text. However, the weather discussion seemed rather cursory, like ticking off one activity and moving on to the next without much depth to the activity. T5 showed concern about the time allocated for teaching reading, yet she was lax about using the remaining time to give learners handwriting tasks after the phonics lesson, neither did she attend to the second ability group, although this might have been a pragmatic move, given the large number of learners in her class. There was not much difference between SR and GGR, except for size of group. T5 said learners in the other groups made a noise even though they had been given some work, suggesting that they had not yet been taught to work without supervision. To her credit, T5 used motivation to encourage children to learn. She regularly provided clarity and praised learners whenever a response was given.

6. 4. 5. 5. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Table 6.9 below presents descriptive results for learner performance in School E classroom.

Table 6. 9. Descriptive statistics for School E

	March			**September**		
	Mean	*SD*	Zero %	Mean	*SD*	Zero %
PA	2.9	1.2	0%	3.1	1.5	0%
LSK	7.6	7.5	0%	20.1	21.3	0%
WR	3.1	1.5	0%	9.2	14.6	26.7%
ORF	1.4	0.9	6.7%	11.0	20.9	50%
ORC	0	0	100%	1.0	2.0	73.3%
Composite score	15.7%		21.3%	44.7		39.3%

The EGRA results showed that in terms of the composite score, learners in T5's class were also in the middle of all the five schools. Although none of them scored zero in the PA and LSK tasks, the results at endline showed that performance in these domains was still low. Their PA growth from baseline to endline was not great with only 0.2 gain. The proportion of zero scores was high in ORF and particularly in reading comprehension, where mean scores were the

lowest of all the five tasks. Ideally, letter-sound relationships and handwriting are taught together to develop phonemic awareness and reinforce the letter-sound focus in the phonics lesson, but T5 did not give learners opportunities to practice their handwriting skills. This could have helped children in this classroom develop accuracy in letter-sound knowledge rather than being left much to chance. Many learners in this classroom could not read for meaning. The GGR slot had been utilised more productively for all the learners specifically for developing letter-sound knowledge, practicing decoding and building vocabulary, etc., then learners in T5's classroom would have managed to use their multiple reading skills to read and make sense of what they had read.

6. 5. INTERPRETIVE SUMMARY

In this chapter, the development of reading in Xitsonga was investigated from the perspective of curriculum advisors and Grade 1 teachers. The mixed-methods approach (using quantitative and qualitative methods) provided different and insightful lenses with which to view the early reading trajectories of Xitsonga Grade 1 learners and the classroom contexts in which they develop. I only observed each classroom once, so my observations are a single snapshot of what happened on that day. I have no way of knowing whether the lessons I witnessed on those days were genuine lessons or not, or whether teachers regularly did SR and GGR every week and not just on the observation day to create a good impression.

To give teachers their due, they might have done things on other days that I did not observe when I was there (e.g., Read Alouds, or handwriting). They might also have improved their teaching and done things more in line with CAPS later in the year (although the results do not seem to reflect this). In this chapter, I am simply reporting what I observed and trying to link baseline-endline performance with my classroom observations.

The quantitative findings revealed that most of the Grade 1 learners were still non-readers by the end of Term 3 – their knowledge of letter-sounds was low, with an average of only 17 lcpm, and they could hardly read words, in or out of context. There was some growth from baseline to endline across different subtasks; however, this was not good enough, given that by the end of the year there were still learners who read slowly. The average ORF of 11 wcpm is misleading because when the results are disaggregated, the only children who could actually read were those at the 75th percentile or above (i.e., only a quarter of the whole cohort); 37%

of readers could not read a single word of text and learners at the 50th percentile (half the class) averaged 1 wcpm in ORF. Of those remaining few who could read, 70.7% could still not answer basic comprehension questions on the text they had read. By the end of the third term, there were still large numbers of learners who scored zero percent in most of the subtasks; thus, most children were still non-readers after a year of schooling. Although letter-sound knowledge showed greater improvement relative to others, it was not close enough to help learners decode words accurately and fluently.

This performance suggests firstly that (i) there is very little development actually happening during the Grade 1 year of schooling, and secondly (ii) there are cracks in children's early reading development which can be detected early in the year – and which had in fact already manifested in the baseline ERGA assessment. From what I observed in each classroom, the teachers were trying to do some things according to CAPS, and they often work in difficult circumstances, but there are surely still some gaps. For example, teachers did not pick up the cracks in children's early reading development, possibly because they do not know what they are and/or how to detect them, or how to use the information to inform their teaching, or they do not really know what successful Grade 1 reading looks like, therefore, they do not know how to get learners to reading at their grade level. Few of them had done baseline assessments as required by CAPS when I visited the classrooms in March, or if they had, they had no formal records of their baseline assessments that could alert them to early cracks and inform their instruction accordingly.

Four of the five teachers had fairly good qualifications on paper and they all had quite a bit of experience in teaching FP classes, yet they seem to find it challenging to adapt to CAPS requirements. For instance, none of the classrooms were really print-rich and none had proper reading corners. The quality and quantity of resources is also an issue. Some teachers had gone to the trouble of making their own creative and interesting resources, while other home-made resources were quite crude and not very eye-catching. Some are often placed too high for the little Grade 1s to engage with. This makes one wonder whether these resources are put up on classroom walls as pedagogic tools or for window dressing.

Teachers also genuinely seemed to be trying to change and teach in line with the new curriculum. They seem to show some 'mechanical' compliance with CAPS but not really deep engagement. They teach phonics, but there was very little evidence of PA activities and rich vocabulary development interspersed throughout their teaching. They adopt a syllabic

approach in their phonics lessons (which makes perfect sense for African languages), but they were often stuck to *a, e, i, o, u* syllable sequence and they did not mix the sequence to check if learners can really read syllables.

Teachers say CAPS does not give them enough time to teach properly or attend to struggling learners, but they did not seem to provide helpful feedback to learners who struggled to read, or even to pay much attention to struggling learners. They ask some questions before reading (or ask some questions about the weather), but these do not lead to rich conversations or rich Xitsonga language use. They look at pictures before reading, but these too do not seem to lead anywhere enriching (sometimes the cover is of a reader, not the story inside). They ask questions but only literal ones, and they seldom provide feedback. They are also not well-trained teachers who understand the purpose of different literacy activities. For instance, they 'sort of' do SR and GGR, but not really and none of the teachers had conducted Read-Alouds nor organised Paired Reading activities. In other words, they follow some of the procedures but not all, suggesting lack of deep understanding of how early reading develops and how each of the reading activities contributes to different aspects of this development. Many of the teachers are not well prepared; hence, most of the lessons went on quite long – too long for Grade 1 attention span. Even though teachers indicated that they did not have enough time for differentiated instruction - forming large ability groups in a class of only 41 learners indicating quite a small class by the South African practices, suggests the teachers' reluctance to change. Or maybe they feel so overwhelmed by all the different requirements that they end up only doing a few that they think are manageable.

All these efforts are not sufficient to really impact the reading performance of the learners, mainly because teachers do not seem properly trained in the first place (i.e., in the pre-service stage) to teach children how to read. Teachers seem reluctant to take the initiative of reading CAPS documents to guide them in their teaching practice. They also seem aware of what they are expected to do in the classroom, but they teach some aspects of reading according to their own ways (e.g., their teaching of GGR was often a repeat of SR) because they do not seem ready to move from their comfort zone.

All the teachers knew that before instruction, learners are supposed to be assessed to check their reading levels, but none of them were able to do this. In fact, baseline assessment did not seem important to the teachers because even if they indicated that they had assessed the learners, none of them could provide evidence. Larger classrooms (above 50) have poorer

results, suggesting that this might have also contributed to ineffective teaching and learning in the classrooms, but there also seemed to be weaker teaching methodologies in these classrooms.

The CAs are also aware of the faultlines in the FP classrooms. They seem to be trying different things to see through the effective implementation of CAPS. For instance, they use teacher training workshops to explain and demonstrate how teachers should teach reading in the classroom. However, this does not seem to effect much change, or if it does, it does so slowly. The CAs also had their post-graduate degrees and FP experience. Despite all these endeavours, teaching practices in the FP classroom still fail to reach struggling readers. The CAs felt overloaded with work; therefore, they said they could not support most schools in their jurisdiction. Support from the CAs for curriculum implementation seemed to rely on teacher training workshops rather than conducting effective school visits. It is argued that teacher content knowledge can be improved by changing classroom practices practically. However, the cascade workshop model used by the CAs to change classroom practices does not seem to work, possibly because (i) occasional workshops are not enough and (ii) teachers need ongoing support after the workshop, but there are not enough CA capacity to do this. Despite conducting teacher training workshops, improvement in teacher classroom practice seems slow and ineffective, suggesting that effective change in the classroom does not only need workshops, but also coaching. Coaching models, according to Cilliers et al. (2018) and Fleisch and Dixon (2019) work better than theoretically explaining how things should be done in class. As mentioned in Chapter 3 (§3.3), the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act no. 27 of 1996) (DBE 2013) clearly spells out the duties of CAs which do not include literacy coaching for the teachers, but support for curriculum implementation. Besides, coaching unlike teacher training workshops is expensive.

Clearly, there are many factors and lots of complexities involved, but the bottom line is that children are the ones to pay the price of reading below their grade level.

6. 6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, data across the CAs and schools were presented to investigate how the CAs view their support of schools and teachers in developing and supporting learners' reading in Xitsonga in the FP and to investigate what aspects of reading the Grade 1 teachers teach and

how they teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do, and in light of the reading assessment findings, whether this is effective or not. This chapter briefly described the procedures followed during the fieldwork. Thereafter, data from the CAs' interviews was presented first, followed by the classroom observations, interviews from the teachers in each one of the five schools, and integration of the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Finally, an interpretation of the main themes that emerged was outlined. The next chapter presents the conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7. 0. INTRODUCTION

This chapter sums up the entire study. It begins by presenting an overview of what the study set out to do and then summarises the key findings. The chapter discusses the implications of the study which is followed by recommendations and a discussion of the contributions made by the study. Finally, the limitations of the study are acknowledged and recommendations made for further research.

7. 1. REVIEW OF THE STUDY

Very little research has been undertaken on reading in Xitsonga. This thesis reports on an exploratory mixed methods study of the development of early reading in Xitsonga, conducted in five different schools of Mopani district in Limpopo Province in South Africa.

The aims of this study were two-fold.

- To examine aspects of early literacy development in Xitsonga of Grade 1 learners.
- To examine aspects of the schooling context in which early reading in Xitsonga develops. More specifically, to examine how the CAs' view their support of schools and teachers in developing and supporting learners' reading in Xitsonga in the FP, and to establish what and how the Grade 1 teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and to reflect on whether their classroom practices are effective, in light of their teaching context and the learners' reading development during the year.

Data were collected in three phases, i.e., Phase I and Phase III (quantitative baseline and endline) from Grade 1 learners' performance on EGRA, and Phase II (qualitative), from interviewing Grade 1 teachers and the CAs of the GET band as well as observing literacy lessons and evaluating classroom settings. The aims of this study were addressed by five main research questions. The quantitative aspects of the study were addressed by the following questions:

RQ1: How do Grade 1 learners perform on early literacy measures in Xitsonga in terms of:

- Phonological and phonemic awareness
- Letter-sound knowledge
- Word reading
- Oral reading fluency
- Oral reading comprehension?

RQ2: How do gender, age and school variables affect early reading in Xitsonga development?

RQ3: Which early reading skills at baseline are predictive of later reading accomplishment in Xitsonga?

To address the qualitative aspect of the current study, the following two research questions were posed:

RQ4: How do the GET curriculum advisors view their support of schools and teachers in developing learners' reading in Xitsonga in the FP?

RQ5: How do the Grade 1 teachers develop and support the learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in their Grade 1 classrooms?

7. 2. OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1 discussed the background as to what prompted this study, presented the research problem and theoretical framework underpinning the current study, stated the aims and research questions of the study and outlined the methodology, and finally, presented an overview of the thesis, which comprises seven chapters.

Chapter 2 outlined what reading entails, discussed the purpose of reading and reading in relation to alphabetic writing systems. This was followed by a discussion of reading comprehension, which identified the foundational components of early reading in alphabetic texts, and then described how they enable comprehension. Next, I discussed factors that influence reading and then outlined theories of reading development. This was followed by a discussion of the Xitsonga language, its role in education, media, literature, and its orthography and grammar. Thereafter, some of the similarities and differences in early reading across languages were identified and the chapter concluded with a discussion based on developmental trajectories and profiles in early reading.

Chapter 3 reviewed the literature related to pedagogic issues and their relation to early reading. The chapter explained what is happening in South Africa in terms of reading performance, what the curriculum looks like and what is available in terms of allocation of resources in FP classrooms. This was followed by consideration of the provincial level in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the district curriculum advisors who are the relevant officials at the level of institutional management, to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the curriculum. Lastly, I reviewed the literature on foundational classroom practices in the South African context to identify what happens in the classroom that makes the greatest difference to children's literacy outcomes.

Chapter 4 dealt with methodological issues. The chapter sketched the biographic information of the CAs and the Grade 1 teachers, together with a brief profile of the schools. It briefly outlined the philosophical worldview within which the current study is situated and explained the design used. Thereafter, it described issues relating to accountability and rigour in research, such as validity and reliability in quantitative research, as well as trustworthiness in qualitative research, and ethical considerations that characterise the current study. A description of the instruments and the implementation of the pilot study and how it informed the main study followed. Thereafter, the chapter provided an account of the instruments and procedures followed in the main study. Lastly, it presented detailed procedures followed in terms of analysing qualitative data.

Chapter 5 presented descriptive and inferential statistical analyses of the Grade 1 learners' early reading skills. Data presented and discussed in this chapter addressed the first three research questions of the current study.

Chapter 6 presented and discussed data that were collected through interviews with CAs and Grade 1 classroom observations and interviews with their teachers. These steps address the fourth and the fifth research questions.

7. 3. MAIN FINDINGS

This section foregrounds and summarises the main findings. These are presented according to the research questions, first with regard to the quantitative aspects and then the qualitative aspects.

7. 3. 1. Quantitative findings of early reading in Xitsonga

Because so little is known about early reading in Xitsonga, the quantitative aspects of this study (Phase I and Phase III) were set out to track early reading development in Grade 1 Xitsonga classrooms. Thus, in terms of addressing the main RQ1, overall reading performance was considered in the light of five components (PA, LSK, WR, ORF and ORC) that form the foundation of early reading development.

Overall, the findings showed that the Grade 1 learners are acquiring foundational reading skills in Xitsonga very slowly during the first year of schooling and on all measures, performance was either low or very low. Over and above the slow rate of learning and low performance, a worrying trend emerged: PA, WR and ORF showed an increase of zero scores at endline; while LSK and ORC showed a decline of zero scores.

Performance in phonological and phonemic awareness

- Performance in this domain was very low. Most learners assessed in this study had been in Grade R, yet initial performance in PA was low, suggesting that a year spent in Grade R is not providing learners with skills that could support their early reading development in Grade 1. The results also showed very slow improvement from baseline to endline in the PA task.
- The results further showed a puzzling trend, viz., an increase of zero scores in the PA task from baseline to endline, particularly in four of the five schools visited (i.e., Schools A, C, D, and E). These findings reflect those of Pouezevara et al. (2013) and Schaefer and Kotzé (2019), who revealed zero scores increase from baseline to endline in the PA tasks of the Grade 1 children. In the current study, learners at the 25th percentile still could not do the PA task by Term 3, suggesting that weaker or more vulnerable learners are not getting attention during teaching and learning time. More importantly, effective teaching and learning might not have happened during the year in an area of early literacy that should have become increasingly familiar to the learners.

Through phonics, children learn to perceive sounds and words more analytically (which is needed for reading alphabetic writing), so one would imagine that even if teachers did not pay much attention to PA, but taught phonics well, children should show an increase in PA.

Performance in letter-sound knowledge

- Performance in LSK was low at the end of the year, with a mean of 17 lcpm. Although the mean at the end of the year increased by 10.9 letter-sounds, learners at the 50th percentile and below (i.e., half the cohort) actually knew few letter-sounds. Although growth in LSK was the highest relative to the other reading measures in this study, it was sluggish. Findings from a Mozambican intervention study that included Changana showed that Grade 1 learners' knowledge of their letter-sounds grew far more robustly from 0.61 lcpm (baseline) to 37.50 lcpm (endline) (Machel et al. 2018).
- As to be expected, the results in the LSK showed a decline in zero scores from baseline to endline. This suggests that LSK is one of the few aspects of foundational reading that shows some learning during the year, albeit very slowly.
- Learners performed better on single-letter consonants than digraphs, similar to the findings in Ardington et al. (2020). This poses a challenge for reading texts in Xitsonga, even simple texts at Grade 1 level, as there are many high-frequency words containing digraphs written in Xitsonga, yet classroom instruction is not preparing learners to read these words.

Although there was a growth of 10.9 lcpm from baseline to endline, the final LSK performance was nowhere near the benchmark of 40 lcpm suggested by other researchers (e.g., Kaminski & Good III 1996; Good et al. 2001; Ardington et al. 2020). These results are similar to those reported in several South African studies, which found that learners' performance in letter-sound knowledge seems to be very low, especially in 'business as usual' (i,e., schools not in an intervention), e.g., Zenlit 2017 (Pretorius 2018); EGRS 1 (Taylor et al. 2017); EGRS II (Schaefer & Kotzé 2019); Spaull et al. (2020).

Performance in word reading and oral reading fluency

- Performance in WR and ORF was generally poor. Learners could only read an average of 8 wcpm by the third term. Half the cohort could only read a mean of 1 to 4 words.
- Learners performed slightly better in ORF (11 wcpm) relative to WR (8 wcpm). This finding is quite surprising, given that several studies have demonstrated that context-free words are usually read faster than context-dependent words. Findings in this study corroborate with Spaull et al.'s (2020) findings, where the ORF score was slightly higher than the WR score, as mentioned in Chapter 5 (§5.4.1.3). Performance in the

present study showed discrepancies in the context-free words and context-dependent words which could be due to the conjunctive and disjunctive orthographies used in Xitsonga and other African agglutinative languages. However, correlations between WR and ORF are very high, as shown in Chapter 5 (Table 5.12).

- Like the PA scores, the findings also revealed that the proportion of zero scores increased from baseline to endline in both WR and ORF tasks, indicating a decline in performance by the end of Term 3. The trend should be the other way round, where learners should be able to read more common words in their HL towards the end of Grade 1.
- The results further showed that by the end of the third term, only 11.5% of learners were able to read context-free words, suggesting that they had not been taught how to blend-letter-sounds to read words.
- By September, even stronger children (at the 75th percentile) were only reaching 13 wcpm for ORF. Ardington et al. (2020) propose a *minimum* fluency threshold score of 20 wcpm for Nguni languages, arguing that children who read below this threshold are unable to comprehend what they read. This threshold would be higher in the Northern Sotho and Xitsonga languages because of their more disjunctive orthography.
- Only 15.5% of learners were able to read a passage fluently. These were learners who knew more letters, had stronger decoding skills and could read words in context relatively fluently.
- Given that WR and ORF scores were generally low, this affected the learners' comprehension score. By the end of the year, one would expect the Grade 1s to be able to read words accurately and at a relatively steady pace at their grade level, but the results in this study point to the contrary. Findings in this study relate to a similar trend in Zenlit 2017 findings (Pretorius 2018) and similar trends in Spaull et al.'s (2020) findings, where word reading and fluent reading are generally low across grades.

Performance in oral reading comprehension

- By the end of the third term, there were still large numbers of learners who could not read. At baseline, over three-quarters of the learners (94.7%) could barely answer oral reading comprehension questions on two passages, but this is not unexpected at the beginning of Grade 1. Even though the percentage of zero scores dropped to 70.7% at endline, two-thirds of the Grade 1 cohort could still not read more than a few words and could not understand what they read.

- The very high proportion of zero scores showed that learners fared worst in this domain of all the tasks. This is the main aim of reading, yet the majority of learners are still struggling with understanding what they have read.
- These results coincide with several studies which also found that learners scored poorly in comprehending what they read in their HLs (e.g., Harrison et al. 2016; Kim & Piper 2019a; Spaull et al. 2020)

RQ2 focussed on exploring possible differences between gender and age and across schools. Contrary to the findings from other studies, there were no significant differences between gender (Harrison et al. 2016; Makaure 2016; Wilsenach & Makaure 2018) and age (Konarzewski 2014; Vlachos & Papadimitrious 2015) across the different reading components of EGRA. This might be explained by the relatively small sample and the generally low level of literacy performance across all tasks.

Little differences were demonstrated between schools in some of the EGRA measures. For instance, rural School B (a quintile 2 school), where Xitsonga is used as the LoLT, outscored suburban School A (a quintile 4 school), which uses Xitsonga as the FAL, in three of the five tasks (PA, LSK and ORC). However, one could argue that this was unexpected, given that quintile 4 schools are regarded as the best performing schools compared to quintile 2 schools. Hence, it is likely that the amount of time allocated for teaching reading in FAL might have contributed to School A's learners' performance, but given that teachers have the tendy of teaching reading activities more that the time allocated, extending or not extending time does not make a difference in learner performance because none of the researched schools produced emergent readers.

As far as addressing RQ3 is concerned, the focus was on establishing which early reading skills are predictive of later reading accomplishment.

- **Syllable and phoneme awareness predict LSK**

Both syllable and phoneme awareness were significantly associated with and predicted letter-sound performance of Xisonga language learners in both assessment times, but phonemic awareness more so. The finding replicates studies by Hulme et al. (2002) in English, Alcock et al. (2010) in Swahili, and Wilsenach (2019) in Northern Sotho, who revealed that both small (phonemic) and larger sound units (syllabic) are related to letter reading ability. This study supports other findings which revealed that phonological awareness measures are important in

developing reading acquisition in alphabetic languages (Foy & Mann 2006; Duranovic, Huseinbasi & Tinjak 2012).

- **LSK predicts WR**

LSK correlated strongly with WR at endline, but to a lesser degree, with ORF and ORC. The MRA results also confirmed that LSK is a strong predictor of WR in Xitsonga. This finding also supports studies which revealed that letter-sound knowledge relates to children's ability to read words fast and accurately, e.g., Hulme and Snowling (2015) in English; Pretorius (2018) in isiZulu and isiXhosa; Snel et al. (2016) in Dutch; Schaefer and Kotzé (2019) in isiZulu and isiSwati; Kim and Piper (2019a) in Swahili, Kamba and Lubukusu; Spaull et al. (2020) in Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu). Children in this study only knew, on average, 17 lcpm, which is unlikely to provide them with a good enough alphabetic base for reading words. For example, at the 75th percentile, they knew more letter-sounds (27 lcpm) and hence could read more words (13.7 wcpm) than those at the 25th percentile with knowledge of 4 letters and only managing an average of 1 wcpm.

- **WR predicts ORF**

WR skills were strongly associated with both ORF and ORC and uniquely predicted ORF. These findings coincide with several studies, e.g., in isiZulu and isiXhosa (Pretorius 2018); in English (Roembke et al. 2019); in Swahili, Kamba and Lubukusu (Kim & Piper 2019a); in Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu (Spaull et al. 2020); and in Turkish (Yildirim et al. 2020). Fluent text reading cannot happen without accurate and fast word reading, and although learners in this study performed slightly better on ORF than WR, WR was a strong determinant of being able to read connected text.

- **ORF predicts ORC**

The results showed that ORF correlated with and strongly predicted the ability to read with comprehension. This finding resonates with many studies which show the importance of ORF in terms of facilitating reading comprehension, e.g., Pretorius and Spaull (2016) in English; Piper and Zuilkowski (2016) in Swahili and English; Pretorius (2018) in isiZulu and isiXhosa; Spaull et al. (2020) in Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu. Although fluency in reading does not necessarily guarantee comprehension, developing accuracy and speed frees up attention and working memory, thereby enabling readers to focus on understanding what the text means rather than spending more time and cognitive effort on decoding. Although there are some who argue that speed does not matter in reading (Bua-lit 2019)[16], in their study of 16, 000 readers

[16] Critical response to the National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in African Languages.

in Nguni languages, Ardington et al. (2020) found no evidence of learners who read slowly but still comprehend what they read. Rather, slow readers are caught in a zone of low accuracy and low comprehension.

These are not just random skills that help children to read in alphabetic writing systems; they are interlocking and hierarchical; some early reading skills are basic for other skills to build on them – children can't read syllables or words if they don't have some letter-sound knowledge. Accuracy is important, and so is processing speed (for the age level). Letter-sound knowledge, accuracy and processing speed all develop through daily practice in meaningful ways, and through active engagement in a range of reading and writing activities.

All in all, the main findings from RQ1 to RQ3 show that learners in this study are not getting off to a good reading start in Grade 1, even for those who have Xitsonga as LoLT. Most of them are not yet reading at the grade level, for example, many are still non-readers by the end of the year irrespective of the school they attend. Some teaching and learning seem to occur slightly more at some schools than others, but overall the pace is slow and performance remains low.

7. 3. 2. Qualitative findings from interviews with CAs

RQ4 examined how the CAs view their support of schools and teachers in developing and supporting learners' reading in Xitsonga in the FP. From interviews with the CAs, the following issues emerged which seem to pose challenges in their duties of supporting schools and teachers:

- pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading
- structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading
- structural issues relating to difficulties in supporting FP teachers
- Support for teachers in the implementation of CAPS

Pedagogical issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

- The CAs felt that the rate of implementing change in the classroom seems to be happening very slowly since the introduction of CAPS in 2012. Although it is their responsibility to bring about change in teachers' practice, simply telling people how to change does not necessarily make them change and this slow rate of change has a negative impact on children's reading achievement.

- Both CAs indicated that teachers find it difficult to teach according to what is prescribed in the policy. It is also interesting to note that although the CAs are aware of the pedagogical challenges faced by teachers, they seem to lack effective means to help teachers improve their classroom practices, even though they seem to try different things (e.g., workshops, demonstrations, role playing, follow-up workshops, encouraging teachers to use the NECT material, etc.).
- Although the CAs pointed out that teachers are provided with teaching and learning materials such as lesson plans, learning charts, etc., to supplement what they have in the classroom, in their view, teachers seem unwilling to use these materials, suggesting that they resist change.
- Another important factor identified as a challenge is the practical use of time allocated for teaching and learning in the classroom. Both CAs were concerned about two things, exceeding allocated time on the one hand, and wasting engaged time on the other hand. They felt that time is ineffectively overspent on some activities, and a lot of instructional time is wasted on activities that are not included in or directly relevant to the curriculum. All this takes away the precious time allocated for developing children's reading skills.
- The CAs also expressed concern about the lack of mastery of letter-sounds. They felt that teachers are unable to teach phonics in line with CAPS recommendations because they are still holding onto their traditional ways of teaching children how to read.

Structural issues related to difficulties in teaching early reading

- Both CAs acknowledged that overcrowding is a challenge in many FP classrooms; however, they felt that teachers are also using it as an excuse for not following the curriculum, and that teachers can manage large classes to some extent, but they need to be trained how to deal with large classes. This is an area that continues to receive little attention in the South African education system.

Structural issues relating to difficulties in supporting FP teachers

- The CAs felt that they are unable to support most schools in their jurisdiction because of unfilled posts and the lack of human capacity. They also indicated challenges of travelling long distances to visit their schools, some of which are situated in deep rural areas. The challenge of supporting schools seems to be a common problem experienced in many South African public schools and has been reported in local research. Adendorff and Moodley (2014), in their study of intermediate and senior phase

mathematics (Grades 4-9) teachers' experiences of curriculum advisory services at schools in the Western Cape, found that the CAs seldom visit schools.

- Before workshopping teachers for curriculum implementation, the CAs first undergo in-service training. Although CAs are obliged to attend lengthy workshops which are important from a professional development perspective, these may not always be effective and seem to interfere with their schedule of supporting schools and teachers. In this study of how curriculum advisors and SMTs communicate curriculum changes to schools, Rasebotsa (2017) found that there are challenges in terms of lack of clarity, poor planning, time management, etc. between both parties possibly because the CAs do not seem well informed on some issues relating to the curriculum even if they attend lengthy workshops.

Support for teachers in the implementation of CAPS

- CAs use teacher training workshops to explain and demonstrate how teachers should teach reading in the classroom, but this does not seem effective enough, and teachers cannot be away from their classrooms for extended periods of time; they need follow-up support and they can benefit from coaching and mentoring.
- In contrast, opportunities for the CAs to conduct practical classroom visits seem to be countered by lack of human capacity and time constraints.
- The CAs acknowledged the importance of print richness in the classroom – a factor which is also dealt with at workshops. Teachers may be resistant to change, but involving them in preparing some of the print materials at the workshops can assist in helping them overcome their resistance. Also having a workshop specifically on making one's own resources and drawing attention to good design principles in resource development could help to improve the quality of teacher-made resources.
- The importance of baseline assessment was also raised. Both CAs mentioned that they encourage teachers to use EGRA and to record their learners' baseline outcomes. The CAs' commitment to supporting teachers is shown by their concern for teachers to take seriously the importance of doing baseline assessments. However, teachers seem to be doing this task superficially to comply with policy. From my observations, assigning children to different groups seemed to be done somewhat randomly, and none of them could produce evidence showing that they had actually conducted their learners' baseline.

- Although the CAs stated that they advise teachers to clear their classes from congestion to create space for accommodating learning activities, teachers do not seem to heed this call.
- The CAs also indicated that they encourage teachers to use self-regulated learning strategies to minimise disruptions. However, from what was observed in the classroom, teachers do not seem to be on track with this task. None of them seem to have trained learners to work without supervision.
- The CAs also mentioned that they support teachers by conducting classroom visits and quality assure if teachers are following CAPS. Given the number of schools assigned per CA, it is unlikely that all but a very small number of classrooms will be observed or evaluated.

7. 3. 3. Qualitative findings of Xitsonga classrooms and literacy practices

RQ5 examined how the Grade 1 teachers develop and support learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga in the Grade 1 classroom. This question was addressed by evaluating classroom print resources, classroom layout and observing literacy lessons as well as interviewing the Grade 1 teachers. Classroom print was assessed in light of resources that are typically expected to be present in Grade 1 classrooms: alphabet chart, word walls, birthday calendar, weather chart, classroom rules, and a reading corner.

7. 3. 3. 1. Print-rich classroom resources and classroom organisation

- Some of the five classrooms were fairly interesting learning space to step into. They were neat and tidy, and some of the print materials displayed on the walls were colourful and eye-catching. However, none of the classrooms had a 'Wow-this-is-stimulating!' impact and some classes had bare walls.
- Most charts in all the classrooms observed were stuck high on the walls, where learners could not readily access details, suggesting that understanding the purpose of having such resources is missed, and that putting up charts was done in superficial compliance with curriculum requirements.
- There were no charts to show groups (except School E) and GGR timetable, suggesting that differentiated teaching by way of ability groups and in GGR was not yet deeply embedded in classroom practices. The consequences of this type of classroom practice were evidenced by the fact that learners did not always seem to know to which group they belonged and what they were supposed to do (even in T5's class with lists for the

groups). Admittedly, it was still Term 1, but by March routines should be in place and teaching/learning should be proceeding smoothly.

- Many resources were hand-made, often poorly so. Teachers covered them with plastic to preserve them, but often the plastic makes the print less visible. This is not to say that only commercial resources should be used. Indeed, hand-made resources have an important role to play, but they should be well designed and clearly visible. Teachers in resource lean schools may not have access to laminating machines – yet these are not very pricey and are a vital resource for FP teachers. This lack of consideration for the needs of FP teachers is [perhaps] a reflection of school management and which commodities are valued or not.
- Classroom rule charts in all classes were set explicitly for the learners to know what they were expected to do in the classroom. Most classrooms highlighted general classroom rules – they mentioned nothing about group work, use of materials and equipment, etc. A common rule in all the classes was for the learners to avoid making a noise, yet this rule was consistently violated. In some classes, rules included every aspect of the classroom and none of the teachers ever reminded children of the rules or referred them to the chart, suggesting that learners might not have been involved in the process of establishing these rules.
- None of the classrooms had proper reading corners or themetables. Corner spaces in some of the classes were used to store workbooks and textbooks. This unconsciously conveys a message to the children that reading is not important. More likely, it suggests that teachers do not see this as a priority. In this way, books and reading are rendered less visible. Maybe the teachers themselves never attended schools with classrooms that had print-rich resources, so they do not really see the purpose or need for it. Given the emphasis on differentiated teaching and GGR/group work in CAPS, rearranging the desks would facilitate the creation of a reading corner.
- The seating arrangement in most classrooms observed used traditional rows. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with using rows in a classroom, particularly when the class is overcrowded. However, row seating accommodates individual task completion (Simonsen et al. 2008); learners do not readily get to work together in groups.
- Furniture in some of the classrooms was damaged. This affected the seating arrangement in School C classroom, where learners were seated in three or four per desk, contrary to CAPS recommendation of two learners per desk. The damaged notice

board in School D classroom seemed to have prevented the teacher from displaying learning charts; however, other available spaces, such as the classroom walls, would have been better utilised for displaying print material.

In the classrooms observed, it was evident that there were some attempts to set up print-rich classrooms, but most displays were not quality indicators of print, some print materials appeared incomplete, and some classrooms were not properly organised. This finding supports that of Harrison et al. (2016), who found that although classrooms showed some signs of being print-rich, on the whole, they were not print-rich enough to promote literacy development for the learners.

Setting up a classroom with quality print materials seems to be a challenge for all the teachers. The fact that they had incomplete/outdated calendars, ability groups, the latest week's phonics words, etc., suggests that they do not really regard a print-rich environment as an important pedagogical element for teaching and learning.

7. 3. 3. 2. Literacy activities and practices in the Grade 1 classroom

Data from observing literacy activities in all the five classes revealed that teachers seemed to comply with CAPS recommendations to some extent – some things were done, but others were not. None of the teachers conducted Read-Alouds and Paired Reading on the days that I observed them; although they did SR and GGR, they did not seem to properly understand the difference between them.

Some challenges in the classrooms observed relate to the following factors:

Relationship with the learners: Some teachers' relationship with their learners was good. They appeared friendly, supportive, and approachable, and some even showed their affection by motivating and encouraging children to learn, as well as calling the learners by name. Surprisingly, others were unsupportive toward children. This was evidenced by their inability to provide learners with constructive feedback during in-class activities. CAPS recommends that teachers should clarify things to children whenever they experience uncertainties related to subject areas in the classroom.

General time management: Regarding time management, most teachers could not adhere to the time allocated for teaching different reading activities in the classroom. They exceeded the engagement time because they raised challenges of inadequacy of the time allocated, which

according to the teachers, was not enough to conduct differentiated learning. However, none of the teachers implemented differentiated instruction.

Classroom routine: Routines did not seem to have been established in all the classrooms, suggesting that transitions between activities were not smoothly managed, and children were not taught how to self-regulate when they were required to work on their own. This was demonstrated by the children's inability to stay on task when they were instructed to do some work. They also waited to be told what to do during transitioning between activities.

Literacy lessons that were observed in the classrooms involved the following reading activities: phonics, SR, GGR, Independent/Drawing activities.

Phonics

- Teachers explained the meaning of words on the flashcards and also used examples to clarify for learners.
- Learners participated actively in all the five classrooms.
- Instruction was explicit to some extent.
- Letter-sound relations were clearly made in most classrooms.
- However, phonics lessons were conducted by a few minutes more or quite a lot longer than 15 minutes recommended by CAPS. Learners were no longer attentive and made noise when phonics went on for too long.
- Only one teacher used phonics to practice phonemic and syllable awareness with learners.
- The chalkboard was used a lot (but mostly in School D classroom), also sometimes flashcards illustrating the designated letter-sound that formed the focus of the lesson, but the font was not easily visible, especially for learners at the back.
- When learners read from the flashcards, teachers did not mix their sequence to make sure that the learners can read them.
- The syllabic approach of combining a consonant with a vowel in the *a, e, i, o, u* sequence was always used in all classes, but none of the teachers ever explicitly drew attention to blending the sounds, and none ever changed the sequence. This meant that children could chorus the syllables or words predictably, without actually reading them.
- 3 of 5 teachers used flashcards. Letter cards and syllable cards were seldom used.

Handwriting and follow up phonics tasks during GGR

- Handwriting activities after the phonics lesson was only done in two classes (Schools A and B), but not in the other classes. This finding is similar to several studies which have found that teachers do not give learners enough writing opportunities, as per CAPS recommendations (Reeves et al. 2008; Navsaria et al. 2011; NEEDU 2013).
- The two teachers who did give handwriting tasks supervised the children to make sure that fine motor skills were being developed properly, and gave assistance where needed.
- Handwriting was conducted for more than 15 minutes.
- Some children did not seem to complete their task within the allocated time, even though the time was extended.
- No follow-up of phonics activities in group work with letter or syllable cards or working in DBE workbooks when teachers were busy with GGR.

Shared reading

- All teachers did Shared Reading; they read aloud texts fluently and with intonation. However, routines for mat work were not established during this slot.
- Shared Reading took more than 15 minutes in three (Schools A, B and E) of the five classes.
- In all the classes, the SR slot seemed to be the first session of SR (CAPS requires the same story to be discussed at different levels in three SR slots per week). Teachers mainly focused on pre-reading and during reading activities. No post-reading activities were done. Sometimes there was a mismatch between the cover and the story, but pre-reading questions were asked about the cover picture anyway. There was no evidence of SR being done in the second and third sessions, even though some of the classes were visited towards the end of the week.
- None of the teachers explained or modelled the elements of a story read to the learners, suggesting that they might not be aware that there are various strategies (e.g., making a story 'glove') that can be used to teach learners to identify the main elements of a story. According to the NRP, explicit instruction on the strategies of comprehension is useful in enabling learners to understand what is read.
- In all the five classrooms, teachers only asked questions which required providing basic literal information. No higher-order questions were asked, which required greater cognitive effort and rich language use, indicating that learners in these classes are deprived of opportunities to develop their thinking skills.

Group guided reading

- All teachers did GGR; however, this activity was not properly done, and often seemed to mimic a SR activity. In particular, it comes across that only School A did not do GGR well, while all the others did. This misrepresents the situation. Although the text read during GGR in one of the five schools was written on the chalkboard, this is better than no text.
- GGR activities were conducted for more than 15 minutes.
- The routine for GGR in all the classes was not established. Most teachers did not have a daily schedule for the learners to check their groups and the times for their turns for GGR.
- The purpose of group work and the activity done with a specific group in GGR was also not clear. It was often a repeat of SR. Teachers do not seem to understand the different functions of these two reading methods. Their limited use of GGR deprived children opportunities to practice a range of reading skills.
- Most groups exceeded the number of learners required per group, as per CAPS recommendation of 6 to 10 learners.
- Teachers did not give the other learners (those not in the small group) work to do while she worked with GGR; therefore, learners played and made a noise while the teacher was busy with her small group.
- In some classes, learners were given work to do, but they could not stay on task, suggesting that they might not have been trained to work unsupervised.
- Most teachers only conducted GGR with one group instead of the two recommended by CAPS.
- There were no follow-up activities done for phonics during the GGR slot in any of the classrooms, such as practising to read words and blend letter-sounds when encountering new or difficult words.

Teachers do not seem to have deep knowledge of how differentiated teaching should be conducted. They are doing some differentiated teaching, using desks, mats, Shared Reading whole class, groups in GGR, etc., but this reflects more superficial compliance than deep understanding.

7. 3. 3. 3. Findings from interviews with the Grade 1 teachers

According to CAPS, teachers are expected to plan effectively, be organised and respond positively to their roles as agents of change so that they can accommodate learner diversity, teach according to the time allocated for various learning activities and assess learners in line with what is prescribed in the CAPS document. In this study the teachers indicated several issues which they regard as posing challenges to their effective teaching of early reading in the Grade 1 classroom.

Pedagogic issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

- Teachers do not seem satisfied with the time allocated for teaching different reading activities in the FP classroom, citing challenges of not having enough time to address diverse learning needs. Although teaching time is a real challenge, especially in large classes, and although CAPS 15-minute literacy activity slots do seem constraining, the lack of time seems sometimes to be a handy excuse, as there was no evidence of attending to diverse learning needs during lessons, even when they extended teaching time. Time for teaching and learning in the FP is tightly sequenced and attuned to the short attention spans of young children.
- Teachers perceived the NECT to be demanding, suggesting that they did not seem overtly to implement it. Because teachers are more used to an ad hoc approach, they seem to perceive the NECT provision of teaching and learning materials as an extra workload rather than an extension and support of what they are expected to do in CAPS.

In terms of being attuned to learner diversity, which seems to be the core of teaching and learning, effective teaching needs to engage with learners at both a communal and an individual level, yet many teachers seem unfamiliar with this approach – they are more comfortable with group teaching at a low cognitive level and reliance on oral chorusing, which requires little planning or attention to small details. As mentioned in Chapter 1 (§1.2.2), the quality of teaching matters a lot in learner achievement (Barber & Mourshed 2007).

Structural issues relating to difficulties in teaching early reading

- Teachers also expressed their frustration in managing large classes. In two of the five schools, classes were larger than 40 learners. Teaching in a congested or overcrowded classroom is a challenge for effective teaching. Studies have also shown that overcrowding poses challenges for effective teaching and learning in the classroom (Muthusamy 2015; Epri 2016; West & Meier 2020). Large numbers in two of the

classrooms observed ranged from 57 to 62 learners. These were the classes where performance was poorest, especially School D classroom with 62 learners.

- All the teachers indicated that they have challenges with inadequate supplies of books. Others pointed out that although they have books, most are worn-out. Although there is provision of resources in South African schools via the LTSM budget in each school, shortage of books, especially in the African HLs, are reported consistently (DBE 2008b; Nel et al. 2016), and especially in the smaller language communities.
- Teachers also stated their challenges of being unable to create print-rich environment classroom which included that their classroom furniture were no longer in good condition. Classroom furniture in two of the five classes observed were in bad condition to a point that learners were seated in 3 to 4 in a desk meant for two. This presents challenges to teachers and make their teaching task so much more difficult.

Some of the challenges teachers face in the classroom require them as FP teams and schools to adopt a solution to their challenges by becoming agents of change rather than always blaming external factors.

7. 4. IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Based on the findings from the present study, evidence point to the conclusion that what is happening in the Grade 1 classroom is not sufficient to develop grade-level readers by the end of the year. This section presents implications relating to teaching and learning outcomes in the Grade 1 classroom. By implications, I mean consequences (whether these are unintentional or not) of the current status quo of doing things in FP classrooms as outlined below.

Learner outcome: Reading outcomes showed that by the end of Term 3, children only knew 17 lcpm. If children are unable to reach the benchmark of 40 lcpm by the end of Grade 1, obviously they will still be in the first (non-reader) and second (emergent reader) reading profiles, meaning that they cannot read at all. This is evidenced by generally low performance across all the subtasks and the high proportion of zero scores in most of the other subtasks, especially the reading comprehension, which is what reading is all about.

Mismatch between qualifications/experience and reading outcomes: Although this study did not directly assess teachers' knowledge of the subject, indirect evidence is assumed in formal qualifications and teaching experience where four of the five teachers had BEds and quite

considerable teaching experience in the FP. However, regardless of their qualifications and teaching experience, these teachers seem to find it difficult to adapt to CAPS requirements, and learner literacy outcomes in their classrooms were low, suggesting that whatever pre-service or in-service training teachers receive does not seem effective enough to change classroom practices for the better.

Inadequate classroom print-resources: The finding that a print-rich classroom environment was not properly set up in most classrooms observed, denied children (especially those who are coming from low SES) authentic opportunities to develop foundational skills necessary to help them achieve future reading success. Setting up a print-rich classroom environment should be a priority in schools that serve low-income families, but teachers do not seem to take this seriously, possibly because they lack effective curriculum support.

Many FP teachers tend to do things in the classroom for the sake of compliance. Thus, even if they put up learning charts on classroom walls, learners do not seem to engage with these charts because they are placed too high on the wall.

Although none of the classrooms had a proper reading corner, they all had the DBE workbooks. However, most of these workbooks were still wrapped in plastic, indicating that they did not make use of these books, possibly because they feel overloaded with what they perceive to be the unrealistic demands of CAPS.

Themes are recommended for Life Skills – but very few teachers seem to apply them to literacy and numeracy in their classrooms, denying children opportunities to develop knowledge across the curriculum. The actual CAPS document provides full information in terms of managing projects, themes, or topics that provide rich opportunities for children to learn holistically across boundaries. The fact that teachers did not have themetables or theme boards in their classrooms could possibly suggest that teachers do not consult CAPS, or if they do, they might be selective in what they implement.

The role of content knowledge and pedagogic knowledge in bringing about classroom change: The teachers are all trying to teach according to what is prescribed in the CAPS documents, but they are not always getting it quite right. This raises questions about the nature of change and the role of content knowledge and pedagogic knowledge in changing classroom practices. Teachers are currently producing non-readers rather than emerging readers because they seem to lack a deep understanding of what reading involves, what to teach and how to teach early reading in accordance with the methodologies prescribed in the curriculum (Charter

2016; Pretorius et al. 2016). Both the 'what' and the 'how' aspects of knowledge are important, but we have not yet figured out to bring them together in terms of teacher training workshops or interventions.

Assessment (properly done) is an important part of effective teaching: Teachers have been urged to use EGRA and do baseline assessments; however, the message does not seem to be coming across. They do not look for early cracks in reading development because they do not know what they are and/or how to detect them or how to use the information to inform their teaching. This disinclination to use assessment as a teaching tool also suggests that teachers do not really have a common vision of what early reading success looks like; therefore, they do not know how to get there or how to evaluate whether they are getting there. If teachers do not assess learners properly, then mediocrity in performance passes undetected literacy crisis throughout schooling.

Less frequent reading for pleasure: Change should include not only formal reading instruction but also reading for pleasure. However, some CAPS activities such as phonics, SR, GGR and handwriting were implemented to some extent (where for example, one teacher was not able to identify the syllables in the word and teachers failing to understand the difference between SR and GGR), but some, such as Paired Reading (in Grade 1, PR is more of a practice opportunity) and Read-Aloud activities, were not observed in any of the five classrooms. Thus, Grade 1 children in the classrooms observed were denied opportunities to experience reading for pleasure. In Grade 1, this is a great way for the teachers to demonstrate the pleasure and skill of reading.

Low cognitive demands: In teaching, low cognitive demands perpetuate low reading performance. Teachers did not really engage learners in terms of developing their thinking skills, they literally focussed on asking only simple basic questions during reading (often only requiring a Yes/No answer) and this does not really stimulate interest and curiosity, nor does it provide a basis for role modelling higher-order critical thinking skills. This may have also contributed towards the performance of learners in terms of achieving high proportion of zero scores in their reading comprehension by the end of the third term. All these are signs of poor teacher content and pedagogic knowledge.

Ineffective routines: Routines facilitate transitions and enable more effective management of learning time. However, this was not always in place in all the classrooms observed. Even if learners were given work to do during GGR, they could not stay on task, or maybe they finished

the task quickly, and then made a noise because there was nothing to occupy them. As a result, a lot of learning time was lost simply because learners did not seem to have been trained how to follow classroom routines.

Poor planning/organisation: Teachers are not yet used to organising and managing group work effectively. This was manifested in different ways, where some teachers formed large groups which exceeded the maximum number of 10 learners according to CAPS, while others did not have groups at all, suggesting that even if the curriculum is reviewed for the purpose of moving teachers away from the whole classroom approach, most of them are still used to a more laissez-faire approach.

Time management: This is a tricky challenge. There is a fine balance between spending too much time teaching something and not having enough time to teach something properly. Teachers did not observe the time allocated for teaching different reading activities. Consequently, some of the learners who experienced lengthy reading or handwriting activities showed signs of fatigue, while others became inattentive or constantly asked permission to go to the bathroom. Tiba (2012) cautions that inappropriate use of instructional time contributes to the loss of learning opportunities in the classroom. It is possible that a lot of time is wasted in the classroom due to poor management of instructional/engagement time, as observed in the classrooms where teachers spend time singing with the learners, clapping hands or teaching without planning the focus of the lesson beforehand.

When teachers are accustomed to undifferentiated whole class teaching, relying on the repetition and chorusing of isolated words or sentences on the chalkboard at a low cognitive level, it is fairly undemanding and repetitive. The focus is on communal learning via mainly oral chorusing, and there is little need to concern oneself with a range of literacy activities or print resources to achieve this. In such communal teaching, there is not really a need to be well organised, to plan small details and select and use a range of print materials from letter cards and flashcards to connected text for developing literacy across a range of learners. However, CAPS with its differentiated approach, is attempting to get teachers to move away from their whole class teaching and chorusing techniques to a more individualised and print-based orientation to teaching/learning. Even though there are some teachers who are trying to make their classrooms more print-rich and include a variety of literacy activities, they are not quite getting it right. Doing things only for superficial compliance can be the result of one or a combination of factors such as a reluctance to move out of one's comfort zone, failure to

understand the power behind a print-rich classroom or a print-based activity, or a lack of know-how or efficacy in creating and using print resources effectively.

In light of the low and slow Grade 1 reading trajectory in this study, Tsonga learners in Grade 1 do not show signs of really starting to read by the end of the year - catching up is likely to be needed in later grades, or not done at all. By far, the majority of South African learners are still lagging behind in Grade 4; for example, 88% of the learners could not reach the international benchmark in the 2016 PIRLS Literacy which assessed their comprehension skills in the HL. This should come as no surprise, given the slow and low reading trajectory that emerged from the current study where most children were still in the first non-reader profile and very few in the second emergent reader profile by the end of the third term, whereas, in actual fact, they should already be in profiles 3, 4 or 5 (grade-level readers) by the end of Grade 1, so that they are ready to progress to Grade 2. Schollar (2018), in referring to the wide variation that occurs within grades and classes, argues that multi-grade classes within the same grade are the norm in South Africa. The results from this study suggest that this wide dispersion of performance (learners who learn nothing at all during the year together with learners at the 75th or higher percentiles who can perform relatively well, despite the odds) starts in Grade 1 and likely continues throughout FP classrooms, where teachers have a whole range of children, more than half of whom actually can't read yet, but should have already become readers. As Mlachila and Moeletsi (2018) point out, the literacy battle is usually won or lost at primary school level. I agree, but I would refine their point further, according to the findings in this study, the battle is actually won or lost in the first grade already. If we do not get reading right in Grade 1, then it is really difficult to fix it later on and this is what causes poor performance in the rest of the primary school. It is not surprising that Tsonga children cannot read by the time PIRLS assesses them in Grade 4 because so many things are not really happening in Grade 1.

Although much has been done in our country for the past 10 to 15 years to improve school performance, and although the DBE has made concerted efforts in terms of policy and resources, and although a lot of money has been invested in education, we are not really seeing fundamental changes yet. Although teachers play a pivotal role in 'winning the battle' in primary school, we can't just blame them; they have also inherited some of their problems, way back from the inequalities in apartheid as well.

7. 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings and implications of the current study, this section presents recommendations with regard to policy, CAs, classroom practices and in-service/pre-service teacher training in terms of promoting the development of literacy in Xitsonga. There are many recommendations to be made, but only those that are strongly informed by the findings in this study are highlighted.

- **Policy recommendations**

Inclusion of complex multigraphs*:* As stipulated in the CAPS document, digraphs and complex consonants are not introduced in Grade 1, but only in Grade 2. This has a negative impact on learner performance, given the findings that digraphs and trigraphs were more problematic for the Grade 1 learners than single-letter consonants. Although it has been recommended in the *National Framework for Teaching Reading in African Languages in the Foundation Phase* that teachers can teach high-frequency digraphs and trigraphs in the second half of Grade 1 (DBE 2019), according to the findings in this study, it is recommended that the FP curriculum policy document should also include these complex multigraphs for easy access so that teachers can help learners develop knowledge of these complex consonant sequences early in their first year of schooling.

Benchmarks and thresholds: Xitsonga is one of the least researched languages in terms of early reading development; neither does the language have existing benchmarks and thresholds for identifying early reading skills that children should master. Although other researchers recommend a benchmark score of 40 lcpm and a *minimum* of ORF threshold of 20 wcpm for the Nguni languages, this is specifically derived from data from reading the conjunctive orthography of the Nguni languages, not Xitsonga. Thus, it is recommended that curriculum policy-makers should encourage the establishment of reading benchmarks and thresholds in Xitsonga across all grades in the FP.

In-service/pre-service teacher training workshops: Currently, universities are training teachers how to teach reading, but provinces are struggling with trying to change teachers (at the in-service level of professional development), who are already in the system and who have not been trained properly. In-service training is typically done via workshops which do not really seem to be addressing the challenges faced by teachers in understanding and implementing the curriculum. The other alternative is coaching, but this is an expensive option.

In line with findings in this study, it is recommended that provincial education departments try and improve what they do in workshops which should include adapting training workshops to more intensive and long-term interventions that have some kind of coaching or mentoring elements, as they have the potential of improving learner performance (McEwan 2015; Evans & Popova 2016). This, in terms of the promise made during the SONA of 2019 by President Cyril Ramaphosa, will help to ensure that every 10-year old learner is able to read for meaning by 2030. Although this literacy journey starts well before school, Grade 1 is an important milestone in being able to read for meaning. The failure to teach children to read in Grade 1 is not trivial.

In this study, I only interviewed two CAs, but clearly they are overwhelmed. Although the CAs are trying very hard, they can't actually achieve much if they have so many schools that they have to look after. A policy recommendation in this case would be to appoint more CAs because a lot of these posts are not actually filled. This needs to be urgently addressed because the current set up does not help much. In countries like Malawi, which is much smaller and much poorer than ours, the equivalent of their CAs only get 14 schools under their jurisdiction (Ministry of Education Sports and Culture 2007), and they seem to work quite well with fewer schools – they are able to give them lot of attention and make sure that teachers are doing what they are expected to do.

- **CAs recommendations**

Designing checklist: One of the duties of the CAs is to conduct school visits to support and guide teachers in terms of implementing the curriculum. Given that CAs have challenges of supporting teachers due to manpower shortage, they are allocated a large number of schools. Distance also seems to be a challenge in terms of accessing schools that are located far. Challenges of this nature, according to the findings in this study, may be better managed by developing checklists that focus on different things at different times – with suggested courses of action (for example, attending to specific items to enhance the print-richness of the classroom; making a specified number of syllable cards; printing out and laminating a specified number of extra stories for paired reading from the African Story Project website for Term 1). Copies of the checklists can be given to the teachers and the HOD, and originals may be filed. This will help teachers focus on specific things at a time and will also be useful for monitoring purposes.

Workshop on setting up a print-rich classroom: It is imperative that teachers understand the significance of setting up a truly print-rich classroom which has displays of all the indicators of print (e.g., themetables/posters, phonics charts, vocabulary charts, word-lists, word-walls, learners' writing, and a reading corner), as per CAPS recommendations. Therefore, practical workshops that specifically focus on showing teachers how to make creative print resources (size, colour, interest, and basic design and layout issues) are needed.

Although it is a challenge for the CAs to support all the schools that they have been assigned, they seem to be trying their best to help the teachers whenever they have time. For this reason, CA2 indicated that whenever they invited teachers for departmental workshops, they make sure that all the walls of the workshop venue are decorated with print-rich materials so that teachers can learn how to set up print resources in their classrooms. The efforts of the CAs are commendable; however, they should also consider organising workshops that focus specifically on teachers making resources (e.g., flashcards, letter/syllable cards, charts, story gloves, theme posters, etc.) at low cost. Further resources can be created at home, after workshops and used in their classrooms for teaching and learning. HODs can be assigned the responsibility of reporting back on resource making for the purpose of ascertaining implementation.

Strategies for teaching self-regulation skills: None of the teachers seemed to have taught their learners to work without supervision. This was evidenced during my classroom observations where routines and procedures were not yet established, suggesting that teachers do not understand how to teach learners to self-regulate during classroom activities. The findings in this study suggest that CAs should include strategies for teaching self-regulation in teacher training workshops so that they can apply the knowledge and skills with their learners.

In-service/pre-service teacher training recommendations: Although most teachers were qualified, well experienced and had possibly all attended teacher training workshops at some point or another in teaching early reading in FP classes, this did not seem to have impacted their understanding of the curriculum, suggesting that these teachers were not trained effectively for teaching reading. In this case, the inclusion of the coaching model where teachers are developed practically would suffice; however, given that coaching is expensive, it is recommended that provincial departments and CAs should develop effective strategies which will provide teachers with further support and deep understanding of how they should do things according to what is stipulated in the curriculum. For the pre-service training, it is

recommended that formal university qualifications should be less theoretical and more practical, and ensure that students are taught how to teach reading effectively, following evidence-based practices.

- **Classroom practice recommendations**

The need for teachers to understand the purpose of reading activities: It is also important for teachers to understand the purpose for teaching a particular reading activity - this ties in with content knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge. Simply telling teachers what and how to teach (i.e., Do Shared Reading, and do it like this) does not mean that they understand the 'Why?' Deep understanding lies in knowing the 'Why?' as well as the 'How?' Clearly, a balance is needed; thus, content knowledge and pedagogic knowledge should inform one another. We need to find the right way of doing this, and we don't know yet how to achieve it at in-service training (which is usually short and needs to be practical). It is much easier to do in over 4 years in a BEd programme than in 3 to 4 workshops per year, which is why it is crucial to provide a standardised and accredited in-service training course/programme for teachers.

Managing groups effectively: CAPS recommends the formation of small ability groups, which should be established from the outcomes of baseline assessments. Teachers in this study did not seem to understand that GGR is meant for conducting differentiated teaching – they conducted GGR (intended for a small group) and SR (intended for the whole group) in similar ways. In line with the findings in this study, it is recommended that irrespective of the size of a class, teachers should explicitly teach learners at the beginning of the year how to work independently. Richardson (2016) also supports the strategy of establishing routines at the beginning of the year to help learners understand what they are supposed to do during GGR or any other learning activity.

How to use data from reliable assessments: Although teachers said that they had tested their learners' baseline, during my observations, none of the teachers were able to show evidence that they had tested the learners. It is recommended that teachers should be taught *why* baseline assessment is critical and also be shown in practical ways *how* to test learners' baseline authentically and accurately (i.e., one-on-one, using EGRA, or to analyse samples of learner writing) and keep records of learner outcomes so that they can use the results to group learners according to their reading profiles and to inform their teaching generally. This should be closely linked to a shared vision of what successful reading (and writing) looks like at different grades

and what kinds of cracks to look out for along the way. This will also help teachers in planning lessons that accommodate individual learning needs.

Using reading profiles to identify learners' needs and move them along the reading trajectory: Learners in this study only knew on average 17 lcpm, they could not read out of context and in context words, and they could not understand what they read. It might be helpful to use Stern et al.'s reading profiles to help teachers provide instruction according to the learners' needs, so that they can use appropriate intervention strategies to develop areas that need attention.

Planning and organising: Planning and organising are essential skills for teachers. None of the teachers observed in this study had a literacy lesson plan prepared during the time of the research. It was unexpected because FP teachers are provided with resources from the DBE and other non-governmental organisations such as the NECT (lesson plans, assessment programmes, learning programmes, etc.) to teach according to what is prescribed in the curriculum. Because teachers did not seem to have planned well for their daily teaching and learning activities, some conducted oral discussions which did not relate to the main topic of the lesson, while others used the outside cover of the reader which was not linked to the story read during SR activities, and exceeded the time allocated for teaching different reading activities. Challenges of this nature can be avoided by effectively training teachers on how to plan and manage time, which is why many interventions use planned lessons, (e.g., Atkinson & Bolt 2010; Piper, Sitabkhan, Mejía & Betts 2018). This also calls for teachers to prioritise activities so that the most important ones are dealt with earlier and still have time to attend the outstanding ones.

Creating a print-rich classroom environment: In terms of setting up a print-rich classroom environment, most classrooms were not interesting learning space for the Grade 1s to develop their language and literacy skills because teachers did not seem to have adequately prepared their classrooms for their new entrants. Even though some classes had print resources on the walls, charts were displayed high on the walls where children could not easily access details. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should use the school's orientation week to create print-rich classrooms and to continue updating these throughout each term. It is also important that teachers put up the displays where learners can easily access them for learning.

Managing large classes: Large classes are a reality in South African schools, so all teachers in the FP need to be taught strategies to manage such classes effectively and to teach them in

meaningful ways. Although it is well-known that a large class limits effective teaching and learning, small class size does not necessarily guarantee good classroom practices. For example, teachers should consider forming slightly larger groups for large classes. This means that a teacher can divide the whole class into different groups of 8 to 10 learners per group, rather than 6 to 7 learners. The group is still manageable enough for a teacher to support learners at their different levels.

Time management: Time management is a problem which manifests in different ways (e.g., through routines, length of literacy activity, lack of preparation, etc.). Teachers indicated their dissatisfaction in respect of the time allocated for teaching different literacy activities in the Grade 1 classroom; however, it was noted during my observations that some teachers wasted time by hand-clapping ritual every time a correct response was given. According to the findings in this study, it is recommended that teachers should encourage children to make a quiet signal by merely waving when applauding. This will save lots of teaching and learning time.

7. 6. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

In addition to the provision of recommendations presented above, this study has made contributions to the literature on the development of literacy in the Xitsonga language.

Xitsonga is recognised as one of the official languages in South Africa; however, besides some data from a Mozambican study (Machel et al. 2018), very little if any research has been done on early literacy development in Xitsonga. The research literature also confirmed that, like many other African languages, Xitsonga reading in South Africa is under-researched (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009; De Vos et al. 2014; Spaull et al. 2020). This study has made a contribution to the field of early reading by providing findings on early literacy development, which include various reading measures of EGRA in Xitsonga as one of the smaller language communities in South Africa. Most studies in this area focused mostly on other African languages (Pretorius & Mokhwesana 2009; De Vos et al. 2014; Spaull et al. 2020). These included Setswana (Lekgoko & Winskel 2008; Malda et al. 2014; Taylor et al. 2017 EGRS I[17]), Northern Sotho (Wilsenach 2013, 2015, 2019; Makaure 2016), isiZulu (Schaefer & Kotzé 2018 EGRS II, Pretorius 2018 Zenlit,[18] Menendez & Ardington 2018 SPS; Pretorius 2015),

[17] EGRS I – Early Grade Reading Study in North West by the Department of Basic Education.
[18] Zenlit 2016 – literacy coaching in FP classooms by Zenex foundation in KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape.

isiXhosa (Zenlit, SPS;[19] Diemer 2015; Rees 2016; Pretorius 2018), Changana (Machel et al. 2018); isiSwati (Schaefer & Kotzé 2018 EGRS II;[20] Schaefer & Kotzè 2019), isiZulu and isiXhosa (Pretorius 2019), Northern Sotho, Xitsonga and isiZulu (Spaull et al. 2020 ESRC[21]).

This study has also adapted the original EGRA, which originally only had single consonants as used by the DBE. The original designers of EGRA recommend that it can be adapted to whatever language it is being used in. If EGRA is used for Xitsonga, it must be adapted to the features of Xitsonga orthography, as has been done in this study. In its adapted Xitsonga EGRA version, it included digraphs, trigraphs and 4-consonant sequences because they are common in Xitsonga. A phonemic awareness task was also added for testing learners' aural phonological skills in Xitsonga, and a second passage comprising 60 words was also added to the ORF task. Given that FP teachers are expected to test learners' baseline to establish their reading levels, this adapted Xitsonga version of EGRA will be a useful tool for Grade 1 teachers to conduct baseline assessments.

Adapting the EGRA to Xitsonga was also useful in that it showed trends in early reading development in Xitsonga over time, and hence, it can be further adapted. The study further contributed by adding interesting data to the African reading research in terms of investigating how learners performed on single consonants and digraphs. The findings have confirmed Funda Wande's findings (Ardington et al. 2020) that digraphs pose more problems to learners than single consonants.

The study has also contributed by showing that increased accuracy in letter-sound knowledge is associated with increased accuracy in word reading.

The current study has provided findings that are supportive of previous studies that show the relationship between different reading components, confirming that foundational skills (e.g., phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge) are important for word and text reading. Moreover, the current study has demonstrated that ORF is a strong predictor of reading comprehension in African languages. This confirms findings by Piper and Zuilkowski (2016), Pretorius (2018) and Spaull et al. (2020).

[19] SPS – Nalibali Story Powered Schools in KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape.
[20] EGRS II – Early Grade Reading Study in Mpumalanga by the Department of Basic Education.
[21] ESRC – Early Study of Reading Comprehension undertaken by ReSep and funded by DFID.

From assessing what is happening in the Grade 1 classroom during literacy instructions as well as testing learners' reading skills, this study has confirmed that South Africa has a reading crisis which plays out in Grade 1 already. As a result, this adds support to the evidence that learners fare poorly in reading despite being tested in their HL (e.g., ANAs 2012, 2013, and 2014 (DBE 2014); PIRLS 2006, 2011, 2016 (Howie et al. 2006, 2012, 2017; Spaull & Pretorius 2019). Thus, the findings of this study indicate that the current literacy crisis facing South Africa needs to be resolved right from the level of instructing and promoting literacy practices in African home languages in the FP classroom. Therefore, stronger monitoring and accountability measures in Grade 1 are required to pre-empt mediocrity and failure.

By examining early reading performance in relation to classroom practices, this study also supports Carnoy and Arends' (2012) and Shepherd's (2015) findings that what is happening in the classroom makes a difference in learner performance.

The current study provided evidence to the growing body of research showing that whatever is happening in the classroom is not very effective – there are big gaps between instructional time and productive learning. Although teachers tend to exceed allocated time on the assumption that more time than given by CAPS equates with better teaching and reaching struggling children, there are few signs yet of differentiated teaching and nothing that they did in the extra time indicated that they were reaching all the children.

The study also found that teachers dealt with Shared Reading and GGR in similar ways, suggesting that they lack a deeper understanding of the different purposes of these activities and how to teach them effectively.

Moreover, teachers might also feel that most of the CAPS requirements take them out of their comfort zone, but this, after all, is what change is all about. To move out of their comfort zone, teachers will need more support, and their progress should be more effectively monitored. There are as yet no consequences for schools/teachers for not responding to change, besides the failure of children learning to read. And the failure of children learning to read in FP has serious consequences for their later school achievement, subsequent career opportunities, chances of earning a decent wage and breaking out of the cycle of poverty (Branson & Leibbrandt 2013).

7. 7. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although this study certainly adds value to our current understanding of early reading development in Xitsonga in the FP in South Africa, the study was not without limitations. This was evidenced by the small sample size of the study which requires caution in generalising the findings to all Xitsonga Grade 1 learners, teachers, and CAs of the GET band in Limpopo Province or to South African Grade 1 learners in general. Because of time, funding, and manpower constraints, my findings are based only on assessing 75 Grade 1 learners and observed literacy lessons related to five Grade 1 classrooms and interviews with five Grade 1 teachers and two CAs.

Due to logistical issues and factors beyond my control, the qualitative aspects of the pilot were undertaken in quintile 2 schools in KwaZulu Natal rather than in Xitsonga schools in Limpopo. The main purpose of the qualitative pilot was so that I could become acquainted with Grade 1 classroom observation schedules and procedures which are more generic aspects of qualitative classroom observation and not specific to Xitsonga Grade 1 classroom only. However, piloting both quantitative and qualitative research instruments in the same schooling context helps to ensure continuity in the research process.

Although the EGRA tool was adapted to Xitsonga linguistic and orthographic features, further fine-tuning would enhance its reliability and usefulness. For example, the PA task added to the EGRA comprised 13 items, which included only three subtasks for syllable awareness but 10 for phoneme awareness; therefore, this may have skewed the findings. Designing an equal number of items for identification and manipulation of both syllables and phonemes would enable one to assess the role of syllable and phoneme awareness more accurately.

Furthermore, although using the one-minute timed ORF task for assessing ORC is not unique to this study and is part of the EGRA toolkit, other ways of assessing ORC independently of a timed ORF test will help to strengthen the assessment of text comprehension. One way to strengthen confidence in the ORC scores is to allow an additional 2 minutes for reading, after recording ORF at the one-minute mark. This extra reading time enables learners to get further into the text and so answer more questions on what they have read.

In this study, qualitative data were collected only once in March 2018. Although collecting and analysing classroom data is time-consuming, doing follow up classroom observations later in the year might have enhanced the data. This could have given the study an opportunity to

establish whether there were any changes in classroom practices from what was observed in the classrooms in March.

Given the paucity of research conducted on Xitsonga literacy in general and Xitsonga reading in particular, it is recommended that further studies explore a wide range of issues. Future directions for Xitsonga literacy research include the following recommendations:

- Research should be conducted across the grades, from FP to Intermediate Phase, so that one can better understand reading development in Xitsonga over time.
- Future research can also include larger sample sizes and studying a cohort over a more extended period of time to give more detailed generalisable results.
- Refining the current PA test so that it contains a more balanced array of items to test both syllabic and phonemic awareness.
- Further research can explore whether PA taught in Grade 1 includes phoneme substitution and deletion.
- A wide range of tests in Xitsonga that assesses different aspects of language and literacy, should be piloted and developed reliably and accurately, e.g., listening comprehension, phonological awareness, decoding skills, morphological awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing to see how they develop over time and to examine how these different components interact and support each other in literacy development.
- Further studies may also do follow up classroom observations and an audit of children's books in Xitsonga to check what is available for different age groups and genres such as graded readers, any information texts, etc. This may assist in closing the gap of a dearth of research in the early reading of Xitsonga.
- Further qualitative studies involving classroom observations to establish patterns of how teachers teach reading in Xitsonga in the FP is also required to see how they are adapting to new teaching requirements, and more research on the role of the HODs and how they can be supported are also vital.
- Data from the CAs in this study were gathered through interviews only, hence, further research may consider involving observation and analysis of actual CAs' practices to understand both of the challenges in classrooms and in pointing to ways that CAs' role can be improved or enhanced.

7. 8. CONCLUSION

In South Africa, Xitsonga is spoken by a smallish community. Such groups can easily be marginalised in the political playing fields. Developing strong literacy in schools in the HL from an early age is a way of empowering individuals. Thus, it is worth noting that what teachers do in Grade 1 is important and can lay a foundation for future pathways in life.

'*To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.'*

– Victor Hugo

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL APPROVAL UNISA CERTIFICATE

UNISA university of south africa

DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS AND MODERN LANGUAGES:
RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

13 February 2017

Ref #: AL_MK025_2017
Ms M Khosa
Student #: 5576 0600

Dear Ms Khosa

Decision: Ethics Approval

Name: Ms M Khosa
P. O. Box 997
Letaba
0870
Tel: 0790799164
khosamar@gmail.com

Supervisor: Prof EJ Pretorius

Proposal: Developing Tsonga Home Language: A study of Grade 1 teachers in a rural setting

Qualification: PhD – Applied Linguistics

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance, first received on *09 December 2016* by members of the Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC) for the above-mentioned research. Your application has since gone through several revisions and the committee is now satisfied that it meets ethical criteria. Approval is granted for the research undertaken for the duration of your doctoral studies.

For full approval: *The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages Research Ethics Review Committee in February 2017.*

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

1) *The researcher will ensure that the suggested changes will be made to the questionnaire before it is administered to the students.*

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2) *The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*

3) *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*

4) *Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages Research Ethics Review Committee Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.*

5) *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 (top right corner of this communiqué) 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 Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages RERC.

On behalf of the departmental RERC, we wish you everything of the best with your research study. May it be a stimulating and fruitful journey!

Kind regards

Prof EJ Pretorius

Chair: Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages RERC
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APPENDIX B: ETHICAL APPROVAL DBE CERTIFICATE

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Ref: 2/2/2 Enq: MC Makola PhD Tel No: 015 290 9448 E-mail:MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

Khosa M
P O Box 997
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0870

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"DEVELOPING TSONGA HOME LANGUAGE: A STUDY OF GRADE 1 TEACHERS IN A RURAL SETTING".**
3. The following conditions should be considered:

3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.

3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the schools concerned.

3.3 The conduct of research should not anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.

3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.

3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: KHOSA M

CONFIDENTIAL

Cnr. 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X9489, POLOKWANE, 0700
Tel: 015 290 7600, Fax: 015 297 6920/4220/4494

The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people!

4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.

5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.

Ms NB Mutheiwana
Head of Department

30/11/2016
Date

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF PERMISSION TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The title of this research: Early Reading Development in Xitsonga: A Study of Learners and Teachers in Grade 1 Classrooms in Limpopo Province

My name is Martha Khosa from the University of South Africa, Department of Languages, Linguistics and Literature.

I am examining what and how teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga HL in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and whether this is effective. I am further seeking to investigate some of the contributing causes underlying literacy performance in the Grade 1 classroom, and I am collecting data from the Grade 1 teachers, the curriculum adviser from the GET band and the Grade 1 learners to enable me to understand 'How is Tsonga HL early literacy instruction actually being done?' and 'How does this impact on learners' reading performance at the end of Grade 1?'

The research involves conducting classroom observations, which will focus on the appearance of the classroom and what is happening in the classroom through the engagement of five basic components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency) and five different reading methods and activities (shared reading, group guided reading, paired reading and independent reading, and teacher read-alouds). Interviews will be conducted with the Grade 1 teacher to establish what and how he/she teaches reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Tsonga in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and to reflect on whether their classroom practices are effective, in light of their teaching context and the learners' own reading development during the year. I will also use the Early Grade Reading Assessments prepared by the RTI international, with the cooperation of the Department of Basic Education (2013) to assess Grade 1 learners' reading tests. Please feel free to ask questions now if you have any.

CONSENT STATEMENT

1. I understand that participation is voluntary and that my staff may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason.
2. I am aware of what participation of my staff will involve.
3. I am aware that no remuneration is involved in participation of the research project.
4. I understand that there are no risks involved in the participation of this study.
5. All questions that I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

I agree that my staff may participate.

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's name (please print): _____

Tick this box if you would like to receive a summary of the results by e-mail: ☐

E-mail: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Martha Khosa

Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages

UNISA

Tel: 0312603163

E-mail: KhosaM1@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX D: LETTER TO THE TEACHER

The title of this research: Early Reading Development in Xitsonga: A Study of Learners and Teachers in Grade 1 Classrooms in Limpopo Province

My name is Martha Khosa from the University of South Africa, Department of Languages, Linguistics and Literature.

I am examining what and how teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga HL in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and whether this is effective. I am further seeking to investigate some of the contributing causes underlying literacy performance in the Grade 1 classroom, and I am collecting data from the Grade 1 teachers, the curriculum adviser from the GET band and the Grade 1 learners to enable me to understand 'How is Tsonga HL early literacy instruction actually being done?' and 'How does this impact on learners' reading performance at the end of Grade 1?'

The research involves conducting classroom observations, which will focus on the appearance of the classroom and what is happening in the classroom through the engagement of five basic components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency) and five different reading methods and activities (shared reading, group guided reading, paired reading and independent reading, and teacher read-alouds). Interviews will be conducted with the Grade 1 teachers to establish what and they teache reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Tsonga in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and to reflect on whether their classroom practices are effective, in light of their teaching context and the learners' own reading development during the year. I will also use the Early Grade Reading Assessments prepared by the RTI international, with the cooperation of the Department of Basic Education (2013) to assess Grade 1 learners' reading tests. Please feel free to ask questions now if you have any.

CONSENT STATEMENT

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason.
2. I am aware of what my participation will involve.
3. I am aware that no remuneration is involved in my participation.
4. I understand that there are no risks involved in the participation of this study.
5. All questions that I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

I agree to participate.

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's name (please print): _____

Tick this box if you would like to receive a summary of the results by e-mail: ☐

E-mail: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Martha Khosa

Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages

UNISA

Tel: 0312603163

E-mail: KhosaM1@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX E: LETTER TO THE CA

The title of this research: Early Reading Development in Xitsonga: A Study of Learners and Teachers in Grade 1 Classrooms in Limpopo Province

My name is Martha Khosa from the University of South Africa, Department of Languages, Linguistics and Literature.

I am examining what and how teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga HL in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and whether this is effective. I am further seeking to investigate some of the contributing causes underlying literacy performance in the Grade 1 classroom, and I am collecting data from the Grade 1 teachers, the curriculum adviser from the GET band and the Grade 1 learners to enable me to understand 'How is Tsonga HL early literacy instruction actually being done?' and 'How does this impact on learners' reading performance at the end of Grade 1?'

The research involves conducting classroom observations, which will focus on the appearance of the classroom and what is happening in the classroom through the engagement of five basic components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency) and five different reading methods and activities (shared reading, group guided reading, paired reading and independent reading, and teacher read-alouds). Interviews will be conducted with the Grade 1 teachers to establish what and how teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Tsonga in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and to reflect on whether their classroom practices are effective, in light of their teaching context and the learners' own reading development during the year. I will also use the Early Grade Reading Assessments prepared by the RTI international, with the cooperation of the Department of Basic Education (2013) to assess Grade 1 learners' reading tests. Please feel free to ask questions now if you have any.

CONSENT STATEMENT

1. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason.
2. I am aware of what my participation will involve.
3. I am aware that no remuneration is involved in participation of the research project.
4. I understand that there are no risks involved in the participation of this study.
5. All questions that I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

I agree to participate.

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's name (please print): _____

Tick this box if you would like to receive a summary of the results by e-mail: ☐

E-mail: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Martha Khosa

Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages

UNISA

Tel: 0312603163

E-mail: KhosaM1@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX F: LETTER TO THE PARENT

The title of this research: Early Reading Development in Xitsonga: A Study of Learners and Teachers in Grade 1 Classrooms in Limpopo Province

My name is Martha Khosa from the University of South Africa, Department of Languages, Linguistics and Literature.

I am examining what and how teachers teach reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Xitsonga HL in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and whether this is effective. I am further seeking to investigate some of the contributing causes underlying literacy performance in the Grade 1 classroom, and I am collecting data from the Grade 1 teachers, the curriculum adviser from the GET band and the Grade 1 learners to enable me to understand 'How is Tsonga HL early literacy instruction actually being done? and 'How does this impact on learners' reading performance at the end of Grade 1?'

The research involves conducting classroom observations, which will focus on the appearance of the classroom and what is happening in the classroom through the engagement of five basic components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency) and five different reading methods and activities (shared reading, group guided reading, paired reading and independent reading, and teacher read-alouds). Interviews will be conducted with the Grade 1 teacher to establish what and how he/she teaches reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Tsonga in the Grade 1 classroom, why they do things the way they do and to reflect on whether their classroom practices are effective, in light of their teaching context and the learners' own reading development during the year. I will also use the Early Grade Reading Assessments prepared by the RTI international, with the cooperation of the Department of Basic Education (2013) to assess Grade 1 learners' reading tests. Please feel free to ask questions now if you have any.

CONSENT STATEMENT

1. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw him/her from the research at any time, without giving any reason.
2. I am aware of what my child's participation will involve.
3. I am aware that no remuneration is involved in his/her participation.
4. I understand that there are no risks involved in the participation of this study.
5. All questions that I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

I agree that my child can participate.

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's name (please print): _____

Tick this box if you would like to receive a summary of the results by e-mail: ☐

E-mail: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX G: EVALUATOR'S AND LEARNERS' EGRA

EVALUATOR'S EGRA

GRADE 1

READING ASSESSMENT

Learner Test Booklet

XITSONGA

Province						
District						
Name of School						
School EMIS Number						
Name of Learner						
Home Language of Mother			**Home Language of Father**			
LoLT			**Attended Grade R**			
Gender	**Boy**			**Girl**		
Birth Information	**Year**		**Month**		**Age**	
Grade and class	**Grade**			**Term**		
Teacher's name						
Day of Assessment	**Day**		**Month**		**Year**	
Name of Evaluator						

CHATI I: NDZEMUKO WA TIFONIMI (nghingiriko wo yingisela)

	Pfuxeta Vula Vula Vula	Vula Vula Yena Yena	..... Yena	Vula vito leri u susa mpfumawulo wa le masunguleni Vula mpfumawulo wa le masunguleni ka rito Vula rito leri u susa mpfumawulo wa /y/	Lulamile	Lulamangi	A kuna nhlamulo	Nhlamulo leyi nga lulama /y/ ena
	Xiyenge							
Syllable deletion	1	Vula	yimbelela	Vula rito leri u susa mpfumawulo wa /yi/	0_____	0_____	0_____	mbelela
Syllable deletion	2	Vula	namunthla	Vula rito leri u susa mpfumawulo wa /na/	0_____	0_____	0_____	munthla
Syllable deletion	3	Vula	chumayela	Vula rito leri u susa mpfumawulo wa /ye/	0_____	0_____	0_____	chumala
Phoneme identification	4	Vula	kambe	Vula mpfumawulo wa le masunguleni ka rito	0_____	0_____	0_____	/k/
Phoneme identification	5	Vula	hleka	Vula mpfumawulo wa le masunguleni ka rito	0_____	0_____	0_____	/hl/
Phoneme identification	6	Vula	pfuka	Vula mpfumawulo wa le masunguleni ka rito	0_____	0_____	0_____	/pf/
Phoneme identification	7	Vula	vona	Ehleketa marito yan'wana lama sungulaka hi mpfumawulo /v/	0_____	0_____	0_____	vita, vila, veka, vutomi, vana,
Phoneme deletion	8	Vula	tana	Vula rito leri u susa mpfumawulo wa /t/	0_____	0_____	0_____	ana
Phoneme deletion	9	Vula	fanele	Vula riti leri u susa mpfumawulo wa /f/	0_____	0_____	0_____	anele
Phoneme deletion	10	Vula	tsalwa	Vula rito leri u susa mpfumawulo wa /ts/	0_____	0_____	0_____	alwa
Phoneme deletion	11	Vula	Mutirhi	Vula rito leri u tirhisa /x/ ematshan'wini ya /m/	0_____	0_____	0_____	xitirhi
Phoneme substitution	12	Vula	fumani	Vula rito leri u susa mpfumawulo wa /i/	0_____	0_____	0_____	fuman
Phoneme substitution	13	Vula	sungula	Vula rito leri u tirhisa /r/ ematshan'wini ya /s/	0_____	0_____	0_____	rungula
				Total correct	____/13			

CHATI 2: MIMPFUMAWULO WA MALETERE

Swikombiso: b M s f

B	L	h	g	S	y	R	W	L	N	/10
I	K	T	D	K	T	p	d	r	w	/10
hl	W	r	m	U	r	j	G	p	u	/10
g	R	B	J	I	f	I	R	s	r	/10
S	ndl	A	b	pf	Y	F	a	a	E	/10
Y	S	P	M	M	b	O	t	nw	P	/10
R	A	e	e	f	F	hlw	u	A	nt	/10
W	G	H	b	S	I	g	m	i	L	/10
L	L	o	o	P	ndz	E	Y	mpfh	p	/10
N	K	a	D	d	y	tshw	j	R	b	/10
B	mpf	W	p	B	I	h	g	S	ndzh	/10

Make a tick **( ])** if task was discontinued because the learner couldn't read	
Number of sounds read in 1 minute	
Number of sounds read incorrectly	
Total number of sounds read correctly	/110
Task completed in less than a minute	

CHATI 3: KU KAMBELA KU HLAYA MARITO

Xikombiso: buti tatana

i	u	tala	vula	haha	/5
eka	ya	bizi	amu	ri	/5
mina	rila	kuku	fana	duku	/5
fela	zama	nga	zava	gege	/5
lori	dya	buti	nga	tovi	/5
fika	ndzi	nwa	dabu	vika	/5
titi	deva	boha	movha	mpfhuka	/5
nwa	siya	xisa	manana	tshikela	/5
nyake	juva	zuzu	vona	tsakani	/5
hlamba	huku	tandza	jika	ntshava	/5

Make a tick **( ])** if task was discontinued because the learner couldn't read	
Number of words read in 1 minute	
Number of words read incorrectly	
Total number of words read correctly	/50
Task completed in less than a minute	

Chati 4: KU HLAYA NDZIMANA

Vongi u tlanga bolo ekaya. Vongi u tlanga kusuhi na lori. /11

Vongi u raha bolo. Bolo yi faya fasitere ra lori. /21

Vongi u tsutsuma a ya tumbela. A chava leswi nga humelela. /32

Loko tatana wa vongi a vuya a kwatile swinene. /41

Vongi u byeriwile leswaku a nga tlangi bolo ekaya. /50

Vongi a nga yingisanga tatana wa yena. /57

Make a tick **( ])** if task was discontinued because the learner couldn't read	
Number of words read in 1 minute	
Number of words read incorrectly	
Total number of words read correctly	/57
Task completed in less than a minute	

XIKAMBELA-NTWISISO

Xivutiso	**Swivutiso leswi mudyondzi a koteke ku hlamulo**	**Swivutiso leswi mudyondzi a nga hluleka ku hlamulo**	**Nhlamulo**
1. I mani loyi a tlanga hi bolo?			Vongi.
2. A tlangela kwihi?			Ekaya.
3. Xana ku humelele yini eka fasitere?			Ri fayekile.
4. Hikwalaho ka yini Vongi a tsutsume a ya tumbela?			Hikuva a chuhile. Hikuva a faye fasitere.
5. Xitori lexi xi hele ku tsakisa xana? Hikwalaho ka yini?			E-e. Hikuva Vongi u tsutsume a ya tumbela. E-e. Hikuva tata wa Vongi a kwatile.

Total number of questions answered correctly	/5

Chati 5: KU HLAYA NDZIMANA

XIKAMBELA-NTWISISO

Xivutiso	Swivutiso leswi mudyondzi a koteke ku hlamulo	Swivutiso leswi mudyondzi a nga hluleka ku hlamulo	Nhlamulo
1. I mani loyi a ya exikolweni?			Amukelani/Amu
2. U ya sungula ntangha muni?			Ntangha n'we.
3. I mani a heleketa Amu exikolweni?			I mana wa yena.
4. Hikokwalaho ka yini Amu a tsakile?			Hikuva u ya exikolweni/ Hikuva u lava ku dyndza.
5. Hikokwalaho ka yini mana wa Amu a n'wi heleketa exikolweni?			Hikuva aku ri siku ra yena ro sungula ku ya exikolweni.

Total number of questions answered correctly	/5

GRADE 1

READING ASSESSMENT

Learner Test Booklet

XITSONGA

Province										
District										
Name of School										
School EMIS Number										
Name of Learner										
Home Language of Mother				**Home Language of Father**						
LoLT				**Attended Grade R**						
Gender	**Boy**					**Girl**				
Birth Information	**Year**		**Month**			**Age**				
Grade and class	**Grade**					**Term**				
Teacher's name										
Day of Assessment	**Day**		**Month**			**Year**				
Name of Evaluator										

CHATI 2: MIMPFUMAWULO YA MALETERE

Xikombiso: b d

B	**L**	**h**	**g**	**S**	**y**	**R**	**W**	**L**	**N**
I	**K**	**T**	**D**	**K**	**T**	**p**	**d**	**r**	**w**
hl	**W**	**r**	**m**	**U**	**r**	**j**	**G**	**P**	**u**
g	**R**	**B**	**J**	**I**	**f**	**I**	**R**	**s**	**r**
S	**ndl**	**A**	**B**	**pf**	**Y**	**F**	**a**	**a**	**E**
y	**S**	**P**	**P**	**M**	**b**	**O**	**t**	**nw**	**P**
R	**A**	**e**	**e**	**f**	**F**	**hlw**	**u**	**A**	**nt**
W	**G**	**H**	**b**	**S**	**I**	**g**	**m**	**i**	**L**
L	**L**	**o**	**o**	**P**	**ndz**	**E**	**Y**	**mpfh**	**p**
N	**K**	**a**	**D**	**d**	**y**	**tshw**	**j**	**R**	**b**
B	**mpf**	**W**	**p**	**B**	**I**	**h**	**g**	**S**	**ndzh**

CHATI 3: KU KAMBELA KU HLAYA MARITO

Xikombiso: buti tatana

i	u	tala	vula	haha
eka	ya	bizi	amu	ri
mina	rila	kuku	fana	duku
fela	zama	nga	zava	gege
lori	dya	buti	nga	tovi
fika	ndzi	nwa	dabu	vika
titi	deva	boha	movha	mpfhuka
nwa	siya	xisa	manana	tshikela
nyake	juva	zuzu	vona	tsakani
hlamba	huku	tandza	jika	ntshava

Chati 4: KU HLAYA NDZIMANA

Vongi u tlanga bolo ekaya. Vongi u tlanga kusuhi na lori.

Vongi u raha bolo. Bolo yi faya fasitere ra lori.

Vongi u tsutsuma a ya tumbela. A chava leswi nga humelela.

Loko tatana wa vongi a vuya a kwatile swinene.

Vongi u byeriwile leswaku a nga tlangi bolo ekaya.

Vongi a nga yingisanga tatana wa yena.

Chati 5: KU HLAYA NDZIMANA

Swikolo swi pfurile, Amukelani u tsakile hikuva u ya exikolweni.

U ya eku dyondzeni.

U ya eka ntlawa wa n'we.

Yena na Javurisa va ta dyondza swin'we.

Mana wa Amu wa n'wi heleketa.

Endleleni u vona van'wana na vona va heleketiwa.

Van'wana va ganyula, van'wana va gungula.

Amu u fika exikolweni.

U yima egedeni.

A vona xikolo.

Xikolo xa Masana.

APPENDIX H: THE POST-HOC TEST WITH BONFERRONI TABLE 5.14

			March					September				
											95% Confidence	Interval for Difference
Dependent variable	(I) School	(J) School	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
PA	School A	School B	-2.10*	0.56	0.00	-3.73	-0.46	-2.39	1.29	0.68	-6.13	1.35
		School C	-0.85	0.57	1.00	-2.52	0.80	-1.14	1.31	1.00	-4.95	2.66
		School D	-0.03	0.56	1.00	-1.66	1.60	-0.52	1.29	1.00	-4.27	3.22
		School E	-1.50	0.57	0.10	-3.16	0.16	-1.21	1.31	1.00	-5.02	2.59
	School B	School A	2.10*	0.56	0.00	0.46	3.73	2.39	1.29	0.68	-1.35	6.13
		School C	1.24	0.56	0.30	-0.39	2.87	1.24	1.29	1.00	-2.50	4.99
		School D	2.06*	0.55	0.00	0.45	3.67	1.86	1.29	1.00	-1.81	5.55
		School E	0.60	0.56	1.00	-1.03	2.23	1.17	1.29	1.00	-2.57	4.92
	School C	School A	0.85	0.57	1.00	-0.80	2.52	1.14	1.31	1.00	-2.66	4.95
		School B	-1.24	0.56	0.30	-2.87	039	-1.24	1.29	1.00	-4.99	2.50
		School D	0.82	0.56	1.00	-0.81	2.46	0.61	1.29	1.00	-3.12	4.36
		School E	-0.64	0.57	1.00	-2.30	1.02	-0.07	1.31	1.00	-3.88	3.74
	School D	School A	0.03	0.56	1.00	-1.60	1.66	0.52	1.29	1.00	-3.22	4.27
		School B	-2.06*	0.55	0.00	-3.67	-0.45	-1.86	1.26	1.00	-5.55	1.81
		School C	-0.82	0.56	1.00	-2.46	0.81	-0.61	1.29	1.00	-4.36	3.12
		School E	-1.46	0.56	0.11	-3.10	0.16	-0.69	1.29	1.00	-4.43	3.05
	School E	School A	1.50	0.57	0.10	-0.16	3.16	1.21	1.31	1.00	-2.59	5.02
		School B	-0.60	0.56	1.00	-2.23	1.03	-1.17	1.29	1.00	-4.92	2.57
		School C	0.64	0.57	1.00	-1.02	2.30	0.07	1.31	1.00	-3.74	3.88
		School D	1.46	0.56	0.11	-0.16	3.10	0.69	1.29	1.00	-3.05	4.43

			March					September				
											95% Confidence	Interval for Difference
Dependent variable	(I) School	(J) School	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSK	School A	School B	2.52	2.12	1.00	-3.65	8.71	-2.38	5.42	1.00	-18.14	13.37
		School C	0.00	2.16	1.00	-6.28	6.28	8.00	5.52	1.00	-8.02	24.02
		School D	4.59	2.12	0.34	-1.58	10.77	13.14	5.42	0.18	-2.61	28.90
		School E	-0.14	2.16	1.00	-6.43	6.14	1.07	5.52	1.00	-14.95	17.09
	School B	School A	-2.52	2.12	1.00	-8.71	3.65	2.38	5.42	1.00	-13.73	18.14
		School C	-2.52	2.12	1.00	-8.71	3.65	10.38	5.42	0.60	-5.37	-26.14
		School D	-2.06	2.09	1.00	-4.00	8.14	15.53	5.33	0.04	0.04	31.01
		School E	-2.67	2.12	1.00	-8.85	3.51	3.45	5.42	1.00	-12.30	19.21
	School C	School A	0.00	2.16	1.00	-6.28	6.28	-8.00	5.52	1.00	-24.02	8.02
		School B	2.52	2.12	1.00	-3.65	8.71	-10.38	5.42	0.60	-26.14	5.37
		School D	4.59	2.12	0.34	-1.58	10.77	5.14	5.42	1.00	-10.61	20.90
		School E	-0.14	2,16	1.00	-6.43	6.14	-6.92	5.52	1.00	-22.95	9.09
	School D	School A	-4.59	2.12	0.34	-10.77	1.58	-13.14	5.42	0.18	-28.90	2.61
		School B	-2.06	2.09	1.00	-8.14	4.00	-15.53	5.33	0.04	-31.01	-0.04
		School C	-4.59	2.12	0.34	-10.77	1.58	-5.14	5.42	1.00	-20.90	10.61
		School E	-4.73	2.12	0.29	-10.91	1.44	-12.07	5.42	0.29	-27.83	3.68
	School E	School A	0.14	2.16	1.00	-6.14	6.43	-1.07	5.52	1.00	-17.09	14.95
		School B	2.67	2.12	1.00	-3.51	8.85	-3.45	5.42	1.00	-19.21	12.30
		School C	0.14	2.16	1.00	-6.14	6.43	6.92	5.52	1.00	-9.09	22.95
		School D	4.73	2.12	0.29	-1.44	10.91	12.07	5.42	0.29	-3.68	27.83

			March					September				
											95% Confidence	Interval for Difference
Dependent variable	(I) School	(J) School	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
WR	School A	School B	0.01	0.39	1.00	-1.12	1.16	3.13	3.90	1.00	-8.14	14.50
		School C	0.28	0.40	1.00	-0.87	1.44	4.14	3.96	1.00	-7.37	15.66
		School D	0.35	0.39	1,00	-0.79	1.49	6.51	3.90	0.99	-4.81	17.83
		School E	0.92	0.40	0.23	-2.09	0.23	2.42	3.96	1.00	-9.08	13.94
	School B	School A	-092	0.39	1.00	-1.16	1.12	-3.17	3.90	1.00	-14.50	8.14
		School C	0.25	0.39	1.00	-0.87	1.40	0.96	3.90	1.00	-10.35	12.29
		School D	0.33	0.38	1.00	-0.78	1.45	3.33	3.83	1.00	-7.79	14.46
		School E	-094	0.39	0.18	-2.09	0.19	-0.74	3.90	1.00	-12.07	10.57
	School C	School A	-0.28	0.40	1.00	-1.44	0.87	-4.14	3.96	1.00	-15.66	7.37
		School B	-0.26	0.39	1.00	-1.40	0.87	-0.96	3.90	1.00	-12.29	10.35
		School D	0.06	0.39	1.00	-1.07	1.20	2.36	3.90	1.00	-8.95	13.69
		School E	-1.21	0.40	0.03	-2.37	-0.05	-1.71	3.96	1.00	-13.23	9.80
	School D	School A	-0.35	0.39	1.00	-1.49	0.79	-6.51	3.90	0.99	-17.83	4.81
		School B	-0.33	0.38	1.00	-1.45	0.78	-3.33	3.83	1.00	-14.46	7.79
		School C	-0.06	0.39	1.00	-1.20	1.07	-2.36	3.90	1.00	-13.69	8.95
		School E	-1.28	0.39	0.01	-2.42	-0.13	-4.08	3.90	1.00	-15.40	7.24
	School E	School A	0.92	0.40	0.23	-0.23	2.09	-2.42	3.97	1.00	-13.94	9.08
		School B	0.94	0.39	0.18	-0.19	2.09	0.74	3.90	1.00	-10.57	12.07
		School C	1.21	0.40	0.03	0.05	2.37	1.71	3.96	1.00	-9.80	13.23
		School D	1.28	0.39	0.01	0.13	2.42	4.08	3.90	1.00	-7.24	15.40

			March					September				
											95% Confidence	Interval for Difference
Dependent variable	(I) School	(J) School	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
ORF	School A	School B	-0.11	0.50	1.00	-1.57	1.35	2.44	6.91	1.00	-17.62	22.51
		School C	-0.57	0.51	1.00	-2.05	0.91	0.28	7.03	1.00	-20.12	20.69
		School D	-0.11	0.50	1.00	-1.57	1.35	10.31	6.91	1.00	-9.75	30.37
		School E	-0.07	0.51	1.00	-1.55	1.41	3.57	7.03	1.00	-16.84	23.98
	School B	School A	0.11	0.50	1.00	-1.35	1.57	-2.44	6.91	1.00	-22.51	17.62
		School C	-0.46	0.50	1.00	-1.92	1.00	-2.15	6.91	1.00	-22.22	17.91
		School D	2.77	0.49	1.00	-1.43	1.43	7.86	6.79	1.00	-11.85	27.58
		School E	0.03	0.50	1.00	-1.42	1.50	1.12	6.91	1.00	-18.94	21.19
	School C	School A	0.57	0.51	1.00	-0.91	2.05	-0.28	7.03	1.00	-20.69	20.12
		School B	0.46	0.50	1.00	-1.00	1.92	2.15	6.91	1.00	-17.91	22.22
		School D	0.46	0.50	1.00	-1.00	1.92	10.02	6.91	1.00	-10.04	30.09
		School E	0.50	0.51	1.00	-0.98	1.98	3.28	7.03	1.00	-17.12	23.69
	School D	School A	0.11	0.50	1.00	-1.35	1.57	-10.31	6.91	1.00	-30.37	9.75
		School B	-2.77	0.49	1.00	-1.43	1.43	-7.86	6.79	1.00	-27.58	11.85
		School C	-0.46	0.50	1.00	-1.92	1.00	-10.02	6.91	1.00	-30.09	10.04
		School E	0.03	0.50	1.00	-1.42	1.50	-6.73	6.91	1.00	-26.80	13.33
	School E	School A	0.07	0.51	1.00	-1.42	1.55	-3.57	7.03	1.00	-23.98	16.84
		School B	-0.03	0.50	1.00	-1.50	1.42	-1.12	6.91	1.00	-21.19	18.94
		School C	-0.50	0.51	1.00	-1.98	0.98	-3.28	7.03	1.00	-23.69	17.12
		School D	-0.38	0.50	1.00	-1.50	1.42	6.73	6.91	1.00	-13.33	26.80

			March					September				
											95% Confidence	Interval for Difference
Dependent variable	(I) School	(J) School	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	*M* Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
ORC	School A	School B	-0.20	0.13	1.00	-0.59	0.19	-0.62	0.72	1.00	-2.73	1.47
		School C	-0.21	0.13	1.00	-0.61	0.18	-1.07	0.73	1.00	-3.21	1.06
		School D	1.48	0.13	1.00	-0.39	0.39	-0.02	0.72	1.00	-2.13	2.07
		School E	1.58	0.13	1.00	-0.39	0.39	-0.42	0.73	1.00	-2.56	1.71
	School B	School A	0.20	0.13	1.00	-0.19	0.59	0.62	0.72	1.00	-1.47	2.73
		School C	-0.01	0.13	1.00	-0.40	0.37	-0.44	0.72	1.00	-2.54	1.66
		School D	0.20	0.13	1.00	-0.18	0.58	0.60	0.71	1.00	-1.46	2.66
		School E	0.20	0.13	1.00	-0.90	0.59	0.20	0.72	1.00	-1.90	2.30
	School C	School A	0.21	0.13	1.00	-0.18	0.61	1.07	0.73	1.00	-1.06	3.21
		School B	0.01	0.13	1.00	-0.37	0.40	0.44	0.72	1.00	-1.66	2.54
		School D	0.21	0.13	1.00	-0.17	0.60	1.04	0.72	1.00	-1.06	3.14
		School E	0.21	0.13	1.00	-0.18	0.61	0.64	0.73	1.00	-1.49	2.78
	School D	School A	-1.48	0.13	1.00	-0.39	0.39	0.02	0.72	1.00	-2.07	2.13
		School B	-0.20	0.13	1.00	-0.58	0.18	-0.60	0.71	1.00	-2.66	1.46
		School C	-0.21	0.13	1.00	-0.60	0.17	-1.04	0.72	1.00	-3.14	1.06
		School E	-3.06	0.13	1.00	-0.39	0.39	-0.40	0.72	1.00	-2.50	1.70
	School E	School A	1.58	0.13	1.00	-0.39	0.39	0.42	0.73	1.00	-1.71	2.56
		School B	-0.20	0.13	1.00	-0.59	0.19	-0.20	0.72	1.00	-2.30	1.90
		School C	-0.21	0.13	1.00	-0.61	0.18	-0.64	0.73	1.00	-2.78	1.49
		School D	3.06	0.13	1.00	-0.39	0.39	0.40	0.72	1.00	-1.70	2.50

APPENDIX I: THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CAs

The core roles and responsibilities for the curriculum advisors as stipulated in the National Education policy include the following:

Leadership responsibilities

- to an environment that creates and fosters commitment and confidence among colleagues and educators, while promoting the values of fairness and equity in the workplace.
- to assist educators to identify, assess and meet the needs of learners.
- to disseminate and encourage the application of good work practices in all areas of work.
- to implement systems and structures and present innovative ideas that are congruent with policy frameworks and plans.
- to create and maintain sound human relations among colleagues and enhance the spirit of co-operation at all level.

Communication

- to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, with principals, other staff, parents, School Governing Bodies (SGBs), external agencies and the Department as well as to ensure timeous feedback from institutions.
- to consult with stakeholders on decisions that affect them.
- to explain the objectives of any intervention/s to learners, educators and other.
- to chair workshops, case conferences and meetings when needed.
- to serve on recruitment, promotion, advisory and other committees as required.
- to assist in the development of the use of information (statistics/surveys) and communication technology as a means of gathering and disseminating information about learners.
- to liaise with other education offices for the purpose of co-ordination.
- to liaise with other Government Departments, for example, Department of Health and Welfare, Public Works, etc., as required.
- to maintain contacts with sports, cultural and community organisations.

Financial planning and management

- to undertake activity-based costing (ABC) for planned projects/activities.
- to prioritise activities in terms of costs and educational needs in preparation for strategic planning.
- to plan budget in terms of a medium term expenditure framework (MTEF)
- to manage projects within the set budget.
- to advise principals and school management teams on the planning, utilisation and monitoring of budget in order to meet school objectives.
- to maintain records to disseminate information for financial accountability.

Strategic planning

- to analyse the external environment and internal working environment.
- to identify the needs of all clients (learners, educators and others).
- to prepare strategic plans with the intention of achieving the goals of the Department.
- to prepare management to achieve targets as well as the needs of clients (educators, learners and others).
- to provide guidance to institutions on strategic planning.
- to support and co-operate with principals, staff and SGBs in whole school development.

Policy

- to formulate policy for operational reasons.
- To analyse policy
- to implement policy
- to monitor and evaluate policy implementation.
- To provide guidance to institutions on policy formulation and implementation.

Research and development

- to keep abreast of the latest research in the field of education.
- to undertake small scale as well as large scale research to improve service delivery and policy formulation.
- to encourage and support research initiatives with Universities and other Agencies.
- to apply research findings after carefully analysing the context.

- to maintain a database of learners/educators' needs, e.g., professional development needs of educators.

Curriculum delivery

- to assist in equitable deployment of staff and resources to facilitate teaching and learning.
- to provide pastoral support (e.g., guidance and counselling) to educators and learners whenever requested by institutions.
- to maintain effective partnership between parents and school staff to promote effective teaching and learning.
- to develop systems for monitoring and recording progress made by learners towards achievement of targets set.
- to facilitate curriculum development at institution/District/Provincial/National level.
- to support initiatives to improve numeracy, literacy and information technology as well as access to the wider curriculum.
- to provide guidance/assistance in learner assessment.
- to promote the National campaign on Culture of Teaching, Learning and Service (COLTS).

Staff development

- to assess professional development needs by using questionnaires, informal methods and developmental appraisal.
- to support/plan staff development activities based on needs and which are congruent with the principles and values of the applicable policy framework and plans.
- to contribute to implement and participate in staff development programmes.
- to evaluate success/problems of staff development programmes in terms of the goals of the institutions/Department.
- to assist in capacity building programmes for Student Representative Councils, School Management Teams (SMTs) and SGBs.
- to provide support for professional growth of educators within an appraisal an appraisal programme.
- to participate in agreed educator appraisal processes in order to regularly review their professional practice.

General

- to keep and update records of the office, district or area under his/her control.
- to ensure that Departmental circulars and other information received which affect colleagues or their work are brought to their notice as soon as possible.
- to handle all correspondences referred to his/her office.

APPENDIX J: LESSON OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

ZENEX LITERACY PROJECT: LESSON OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

This instrument includes the following sections:

SECTION A: LESSON OBSERVATION
SECTION B: LOOKING AT DOCUMENTS

SCHOOL VISIT DETAILS	
1. Teacher name and surname	
2. Grade and Class	
3. School	
4. Date of visit	
5. Name of ERA researcher	

1. Main Language (circle applicable language): HL / FAL
2. Indicate (by circling number) which reading process(es) was/were covered in this lesson

Decoding Activities	1
Shared Reading	2.1
Group Guided Reading	2.2
Paired Reading	2.3
Independent Reading	2.4
Read Aloud	2.5

1. DECODING ACTIVITIES: Phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) **NB: Items 1 & 2 are related to Grade 1 teachers only. Item 3 is related to Grades 2 & 3 and the rest of the items to Grades 1-3**		NO	YES - NEEDS WORK	YES - SATISFACTORY	YES - EXCELLENT	N/A	NOT OBSERVED
Good decoding practice	**1.** The **Grade 1** teacher does phonological/ phonemic awareness activities with all learners as a whole class						
	2. The **Grade 1** teacher first explicitly teaches phonics to the whole class						
	3. The **Grade 2/3** teacher does phonemic awareness activities with struggling readers						
	4. The teacher uses appropriate letter cards/syllable cards/flashcards when she teaches decoding						
	5. Phonics lessons are followed up with handwriting/writing activities to be done by the whole class						
	6. Phonics lessons are followed up with handwriting/writing activities to be done by smaller groups						
	7. The teacher switches between HL and FAL						
	8. The teacher does ORF activities with the learners						
	9. The teacher gives reading homework						
Vocab	**10.** Even though the focus is on phonics, the teacher ensures that learners know the meanings of words (e.g. on flashcards, word walls)						
	11. The teacher uses her interactive word wall for word building and word recognition						
Response	**12.** When learners work in small groups on phonics/decoding activities, they stay on task and self-regulate						
	13. The teacher makes decoding activities interesting / fun						

1.1 Comments on DECODING ACTIVITIES

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. THE FIVE READING 'METHODS' 2.1 SHARED READING (Day ____of interaction with the text)		NO	YES - NEEDS WORK	YES - SATISFACTORY	YES - EXCELLENT	NOT OBSERVED
GOOD READING PRACTICE	**BEFORE READING, the teacher …**					
	1. shows the cover of the book to the children					
	2. reads the title					
	3. discusses the title with the children					
	4. reads the name of author					
	5. draws the children's attention to the picture					
	6. asks questions about what the story might be about					
	7. shows important words in the text to the children					
	DURING READING, the teacher …					
	8. reads clearly and with good intonation					
	9. shows the children the pictures on each page					
	10. explains words					
	11. asks literal questions (e.g. *what is the boy wearing*?)					
	12. asks higher order questions (why-questions)					
	13. asks learners to identify elements of the story [i.e. setting, characters, problem, resolution, 'big idea']					
	14. asks learners to identify relevant parts of information texts					
	15. provides opportunities for the learners to read together					
	16. provides opportunities for modelling ORF					
	AFTER READING, the teacher …					
	17. asks questions that help children connect the story to their own lives (e.g. what would *you* have done?)					
	18. asks questions that help children see the point /message of the story					
	19. uses Shared Reading time to help build up the word wall					
	20. engages learners in activities/an activity which consolidates their learning from the text (eg phonics/writing)					

	21. When the teacher does Shared Reading, she shows enthusiasm and interest					
	22. The teacher uses a reading glove/poster to summarise the story/ideas in the information text					

RESPONSE	**23.** The teacher asks learners what part they liked best, or what new information they learned.					
	24. The teacher makes reading activities interesting / fun					

2.2.THE FIVE READING 'METHODS' GROUP GUIDED READING (GGR) GROUP 1 FOCUS: DECODING/COMPREHENSION/ORF – (circle one)		**NO**	**YES - NEEDS WORK**	**YES - SATISFACTORY**	**YES - EXCELLENT**	**NOT OBSERVED**
ROUTINES	1. The learners know to which group they belong					
	2. The routines for getting into GGR groups are well established (fast, quiet, effective)					
	3. Before the teacher starts with GGR, she first gives instructions to the other groups as to what they must do					
GOOD READING PRACTICE	4. The teacher uses different books in GGR according to ability groups (e.g. more advanced books for the stronger group)					
	5. The teacher prompts learners to use/practise strategies relevant to the focus					
	6. The teacher asks literal questions (e.g. *what is the boy wearing?)*					
	7. The teacher asks higher order questions *(why-questions)*					
	8. The teacher asks learners to identify elements of the story [i.e. setting, characters, problem, resolution, 'big idea']					
	9. The teacher gives all the learners in the group a chance to participate					
	10. The teacher provides effective feedback to learners in GGR					
	11. The teacher assesses the learners when she does GGR (she uses a book / cards / sheets)					
	12. The teacher gives reading homework					
VOCABULARY	13. The teacher uses appropriate resources (such as flashcards, sentence strips, word recognition games to consolidate vocabulary/phonics during GGR					
	14. The teacher makes use of GGR for vocabulary building opportunities					

	15. The teacher ensures that children understand key words in GGR					
RESPONSE	16. The learners in other groups self-regulate when they work in small groups while teacher is busy with GGR					
	17. The teacher shows patience when working with learners in GGR					
	18. The teacher makes reading activities interesting / fun					
	19. She asks learners what part they liked best, or what new information they learned					

2.2.THE FIVE READING 'METHODS' GROUP GUIDED READING (GGR) GROUP 2 FOCUS: DECODING/COMPREHENSION/ORF – (circle one)		**NO**	**YES - NEEDS WORK**	**YES - SATISFACTORY**	**YES - EXCELLENT**	**NOT OBSERVED**
ROUTINES	1. The learners know to which group they belong					
	2. The routines for getting into GGR groups are well established (fast, quiet, effective)					
	3. Before the teacher starts with GGR, she first gives instructions to the other groups as to what they must do					
GOOD READING PRACTICE	4. The teacher uses different books in GGR according to ability groups (e.g. more advanced books for the stronger group)					
	5. The teacher prompts learners to use/practise strategies relevant to the focus					
	6. The teacher asks literal questions (e.g. *what is the boy wearing?)*					
	7. The teacher asks higher order questions *(why-questions)*					
	8. The teacher asks learners to identify elements of the story [i.e. setting, characters, problem, resolution, 'big idea']					
	9. The teacher gives all the learners in the group a chance to participate					
	10. The teacher provides effective feedback to learners in GGR					
	11. The teacher assesses the learners when she does GGR (she uses a book / cards / sheets)					
	12. The teacher gives reading homework					

VOCABULARY	13. The teacher uses appropriate resources (such as flashcards, sentence strips, word recognition games to consolidate vocabulary/phonics during GGR					
	14. The teacher makes use of GGR for vocabulary building opportunities					
	15. The teacher ensures that children understand key words in GGR					
RESPONSE	16. The learners in other groups selfregulate when they work in small groups while teacher is busy with GGR					
	17. The teacher shows patience when working with learners in GGR					
	18. The teacher makes reading activities interesting / fun					
	19. She asks learners what part they liked best, or what new information they learned					

2.3 THE FIVE READING 'METHODS' **FOCUS: Paired Reading (PR)**		**NO**	**YES NEEDS WORK**	**YES SATISFACTORY**	**YES EXCELLENT**	**NOT OBSERVED**
ROUTINES	1. The teacher explains clearly before she starts with GGR what work allocation/activities the learners will do in PR					
	2. The routines for getting into PR are well established (fast, quiet, effective)					
	3. There are visible rules of behaviour for PR (e.g. a poster)					
	4. Pairs adopt the EEKK position correctly					
GOOD READING PRACTICE	5. Pairs have appropriate books to read from					
	6. Pairs practice Oral Reading Fluency					
	7. Pairs ask each other comprehension questions					
	8. Pairs provide corrective feedback to each other					
RESPONSE	9. Learners seem to be motivated to read when they do PR					
	10. The learners can self-regulate when they work in pairs while teacher is busy					

2.4 THE FIVE READING 'METHODS' **Focus: Independent Reading (IR)**		NO	YES NEEDS WORK	YES SATISFACTORY	YES EXCELLENT	NOT OBSERVED
ROUTINES	1. The teacher explains clearly before she starts with GGR what work allocation/activities the learners will do in IR					
	2. The routines for getting into IR are well established (fast, quiet, effective)					
	3. There are visible rules of behaviour for IR (e.g. a poster)					
GOOD READING PRACTICE	4. Learners in IR have appropriate books to read					
	5. Learners or teachers keep a record of the books they read					
	6. Learners do independent reading for homework					
RESPONSE	7. Learners seem to be motivated to read when they do IR					
	8. The learners can self-regulate when they do independent reading while teacher is busy					

General Notes:

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

THEME TABLE AND READING CORNER:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2.5 THE FIVE READING 'METHODS' **Focus: Read Aloud (RA)**	NO	YES - NEEDS WORK	YES -SATISFACTORY	YES - EXCELLENT

GOOD READING PRACTICE	1. The teacher does RA in HL				
	2. The teacher does RA in FAL				
	3. The teacher follows good **BEFORE READING** practice when she reads the book aloud **[REFER TO # 1-7 IN SECTION 2.1 ON SR]**				
	4. The teacher does not interrupt the story too much **DURING READING** - except to ask a few questions (e.g. *What will happen next?)* or to explain a word quickly **[REFER TO # 8 – 14 IN SECTION 2.1 ON SR]**				
	5. The teacher follows good **AFTER READING** practice when she reads aloud **[REFER TO # 15 – 21 IN SECTION 2.1 ON SR]**				
	6. The teacher reads books during RAs that are slightly in advance of the learners' own reading level (i.e. not graded readers at their level)				
VOCABULARY	7. The teacher explains 3-4 key words before reading the story				
	8. The teacher uses vocabulary building opportunities during RAs				
RESPONSE	9. The focus in RA is on enjoyment/following the story rather than 'teaching'				
	10. The learners are attentive during RAs				

2.6 Comments on Reading Process:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION B: LOOKING AT DOCUMENTS

3. TERM PLANNING	**YES**	**NO**		
3.1 The teacher has a Term Plan				

If Item 3.1 is "YES", answer items 3.2 – 3.5 below:	YES	NO		
3.2 The weeks of the term are defined by date or week.				
3.3 The term plan indicates when periods of formal assessment occur				
3.4 The term plan highlights days which affect regular schooling, such as public holidays, scheduled co-curricular activities or visits by education partners				
3.5 The term plan is aligned with CAPS				
4. WEEKLY/FORTNIGHTLY PLANNING	YES	NO		
4.1 The teacher has a Weekly/Fortnightly Plan				
If Item 4.1 is "YES", answer items 4.2 – 4.11 below:	YES - NEEDS WORK	YES - SATISFACTORY	YES - EXCELLENT	NO
4.2 These plans are kept in a file, folder or book				
4.3 The number of the week of term ***(i.e. Week 1)*** and/or the dates of the week are indicated				
4.4 The days of the week are indicated (i.e. Monday/Day 1 and/or the date)				
4.5 The themes for each week/fortnight are indicated on the planning sheets				
4.6 The teacher has a weekly schedule/timetable for her reading groups (i.e. in her file or visible to the learners)				
4.7 There is evidence that appropriate resources are prepared for planned vocabulary development activities for the week/fortnight (flashcards, word wall)				
4.8 Writing activities are planned for the week/fortnight				
4.9 Stories for enhancing comprehension in SR each week/ fortnight are planned				
4.10 Stories for enhancing comprehension GGR each week/ fortnight are planned				
4.11 Stories for enhancing comprehension RA each week/ fortnight are planned				
4.12 The phonics sounds to be dealt with each week/fortnight are identified and planned (guided by CAPS or Vela Bula sequence)				
4.13 The activities in the reading wheel (Zenex Materials Section D, p45) are used when planning the week/fortnight				

5. LESSON PLANNING	**YES**	**NO**			
5.1 The teacher has written Lesson Plans					
If Item 5.1 is "YES", answer items 5.2 – 5.5 below:	**YES - NEEDS WORK**	**YES - SATISFACTORY**	**YES - EXCELLENT**	**NO**	**N/A**
5.2 The lesson plans are kept in a file/folder/book					
5.3 The lesson plans are linked to the weekly/fortnightly plans					
5.4 The teacher has a well-planned phonics lesson, with appropriate resources such as letter/syllable cards and flash cards					
5.5 The teacher has a well-planned reading lesson, with appropriate resources					
5.6 There is a link between the planned lesson and the activities observed					

6. PLANNING FOR READING – GENERAL **[VERIFY 6.1 BY ASKING THE TEACHER AND LOOKING AT THE EVIDENCE]**	**YES - NEEDS WORK**	**YES - SATISFACTORY**	**YES - EXCELLENT**	**NO**
6.1 The teacher did baseline decoding assessments of her learners in Term 1 (e.g. alphabetic knowledge/phonemic awareness in Grade 1; ORF in Grades 2-3)				
6.2 There is a poster about comprehension strategies in the classroom				
6.3 The teacher files a record/list of books she reads to the class in Read Aloud				

7. VOCABULARY BOOK	**YES**	**NO**		
7.1 Does the teacher have her vocabulary book on her person/ in her classroom?				
If you have answered "yes" to the item above, refer to the teacher's vocabulary book and tick your rating for items 7.2 – 7.4:	**YES - NEEDS WORK**	**YES - SATISFACTORY**	**YES - EXCELLENT**	**NO**
7.2 The teacher has written goal/s for vocabulary development in her vocab book (Goals must be clear and realistic e.g. "Improve my vocabulary test score by 10% overall; "Achieve 85% for Section A of the vocabulary test)				

7.3 The teacher has set weekly goals for the number of words she will write in her vocab book (Goals must be clear and realistic e.g. "Write 10 new words per week")				
7.4 The teacher has been writing new words in her personal vocabulary book				

APPENDIX K: CLASSROOM CHECKLIST

Classroom checklist

Name of school: …… Date: ……..

Literacy Rich Classroom checklist

	Is your classroom prepared for a literacy rich teaching environment? **Mark a cross (X) through one of the key responses**					
	Physical classroom environment					
1	Reading corner	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	A mat/carpet to allow a learner to sit at floor level	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	Large cushions to allow the learner to sit comfortably on the floor	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	Small chairs to allow the learner to sit comfortably while handling a book	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	Age appropriate books to ensure that the reading material is accessible	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	Books in learners' HL to allow learners to relate to what is being read and to meet curriculum requirements	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	A bookcase/shelves to display the books to ensure accessibility and to make them more inviting, facilitating selection of something of interest	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	A poster about the handling of books to promote appropriate care of reading materials	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	Other items, such as puppets or soft toys, which supplement reading and invite story-telling. This leads to development of language with learners practising story-telling and reading with, for example, a teddy as an audience	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2	Theme table	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3	Birthday chart displaying learners names according to birth months and dates	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4	Word walls are displayed	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5	Tables and seating arrangement accommodates group work	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6	Tables and seating arrangement enables learners to face chalkboard	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7	Establish classroom rituals, such as daily greetings	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8	Group chart	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9	Comprehension glove	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10	Alphabet charts	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
11	List of classroom rules is posted (using pictures, words, objects and photographs)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

COMMENTS ON CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Areas to strengthen

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____

Areas to add/materials needed

_____
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_____

Key: 1 = strongly agree

2 = agree

3 = neither

4 = disagree

5 = strongly disagree

APPENDIX L: CLASSROOM LITERACY ACTIVITIES

School A literacy practices and activities

Extract 1

Phonics activities
The teacher greets the learners.
She introduces the researcher
Learners are instructed to stand up
They are reminded to stand next to their chairs, not on top of the chairs.
The teacher says, "We are going to sing a song called:
Mfenhe
A *hi mina mfenhe, hi mina munhu*
Ho kasi i gomu leri, a hi gomu leri, i kepisi leyi, ya majaha leyi
Ho kasi i tinhompfu leti, a hi tinhompfu leti, i timpimpi leti, ta majaha leti
Ho kasi i tindleve leti, a hi tindleve leti, i swiphawu leswi, swa majaha leswi
Ho kasi i matihlo lawa, a hi matihlo lawa, i titochi leti, ta majaha leti
Ho kasi i switshamo leswi, a hi switshamo leswi, i masofa lawa, ya majaha lawa
Ho kasi i milenge leyi, a hi milenge, i tibutsu leti, ta majaha leti'
(learners all singing, clapping hands and stamping their feet)
(After the first song, the teacher tells the whole class to sing with her the second song - again in Tsonga The song identifies with the following alphabets: a, e, i, u, o,)
Hi dyondza 'a' u fana nhwala
Hi dondza 'e' u fana na sekwa
Hi dyondza 'i' u fana na rinhi
Hi dyondza 'o' u fana na bolo
Hi dyondza 'u' u fana na xihiso
(The song is concluded by singing vowels, a, e, i, o, u, and it is repeated twice).
However, some learners cannot identify with the letter-sound *i* as they are singing, they confuse letter *i* with letter *u*. Teacher: Some of you don't know what *i* looks like - what does letter *i* look like? Learners: Letter *i* is similar to the word *rinhi* (thin stick). Teacher: (*The teacher models the writing of letter 'i' in the air*) Let us all write letter *i* in the air – ok, letter *a* can be used against which word from the song? Learners: 'a' *yi fana na rito nhwala* (like a biting insect). Teacher: Let us write *a* in the air. *(All the learners write letter 'a' in the air)*. Teacher: Write all the vowels in the air, while singing and matching each vowel with the appropriate word from the song. Learners: (singing) *'Hi dyondza 'i'*, *u fana na xihiso* (large deep earthware grater) *(while writing letter 'i' in the air*). Teacher: learners, tell me, what do you know about letters a, e, i, o, u? Learners: *i switwari* (they are vowels). Teacher: Thank you - *Xana switwari i incini?* (What are vowels?) – raise up your hands, yah! Vutomi. Learner: *Switwari swi kota ku yima swi ri swoxe* (Vowels can stand alone). Teacher: Good let us clap hands - give us examples of vowels that can stand-alone. Learners: *(choral response*) *e-e, aa, oo, eh, uh, ah*. Teacher: a, e, i, o are the common vowels that are used in Tsonga - Ok, take your seat and be quiet. Teacher: Let us all sound letters 'm' and 'n'. Teacher: (*sticks a flashcard illustrating letter /m/ on the board*). Teacher: Why is letter 'm' a consonant? Learners: *Hikuva a xi swi koti ku tirha xi ri xoxe* (because 'm' can't stand alone). Teacher: *m* can't stand alone but needs friends, what are those friends? Teacher: *m* needs vowel friends a, e, i, o, u - *loko hi tatisa hi xitwari 'a' yi taku yini?* (When we add the vowel *a*, how are we going to sound it?). Learners: *yi ta ku 'ma'* (it will sound like 'ma'). Teacher: *Loko ni thlela hi tatisa hi 'm' yin'wana na xitwari 'a'?* (What about if we add another 'm' and 'a'?). Learners: *mama* (mum). Teacher: Hlanganisani xitatisi /l/ na xitwari /a/ (blend l+a). Learners: *(shouts*) /la/.Teacher: Consonants and vowels make words *(She sticks the word card illustrating the word 'da' on the board)*. Teacher: Ok, children, I want to add vowels *a, e, i, o, u*, to the letter sound /d/. This is what the teacher writes on the board d+a=da, d+e=de, d+i=di, d+o=do, d+u=du as the learners blend vowels a, e, i, o, u with the letter 'd'. Teacher: *Vulani marito lama sungulaka hi xitatisi /d/ (*Make words starting with letter /d/). Learner: *dana* (disappointed) *(clapping hands).* Teacher: *Ku dana swi vula ku swava*. (*She continues helping learners identify words beginning with the letter,'d' by writing the words on the board)*. These are the words beginning with the letter-sound *d* - *damu* (river), *domu* (slow learner), *dada* (not knowing where to go), *dulu* (granary), *dini* (sour maize), *dumu* (doom), *dudu* (name of a girl). *(All the learners read the words on the board louder*). The teacher explains the meaning of each word. Teacher: Let us all spell the words *damu* and *domu* by sounding letters /d/ /a/ /m/ /u/ and letters /d/ /o/ /m//u/. Teacher: Spelling tells us how the word is created – who can tell us the use of spelling? Learner: Spelling helps us to know how words are created. Teacher: go and write the spelling of the word *dumu* on the board. This is the spelling that the learner wrote on the board, *du > mu.*

Extract 2

Handwriting activities
Teacher: We are going to write the letter /d/ - but some of you can't tell the difference between /d/ and /b/. Let's open the book of *Goza Hi Goza* (Step by step) on page 29, where there is letter /d/. Children, what do we call the first month in a year? Learners: *Nyenyenyani* (February). Teacher: *E-e! A hi hlayeni tinhweti hinkwato elembeni* (No-no! Let us read all the months of the year). Learners: *Sunguti* (January), *Nyenyenyani* (February), *Nyenyankulu* (March), *Dzivamusoko* (April), *Mudyaxihi* (May), *Khotavuxiko* (June)…. *Nhweti ya vunharhu I mani?* (What is the third month?) Learners' response: *I Nyenyankulu* (March). Teacher: *kambe hi te Nyenyankulu I nhweti ya vungani?* Teacher: By the way, we said March is which month? Learners: *ya vunharhu* (the third month). Teacher: *Eka masiku ya vhiki namuntlha i ra vungani?* (What is today's date?). Learners: *i ra vunthlanu* (it's Friday). Teacher: *hahaha se mi ta ta exikolweni hi mudhivela* (hahaha, you mean you will come to school on Saturday?). Teacher: *kasi mi te ka ngani vhiki leri exikolweni?* (How many times did you come to school this week?)Learners: *ka mune* (Four times). Teacher: *se swivula ku ri namunthla i ra vungani?* (So, it means today is which day of the week?) *Learners: i ra vumune* (it's Thursday). Teacher: Good, *ende I siku ro sungula ra nhweti ya vunharhu* (Good, it is also the first day of the third month). Teacher: *kasi hi ya rini ekerekeni?* When do we normally go to church? Learners: *hi ya hi sonto* (we go on Sunday). Teacher: *Loko ni ku nyika buku u sungula ku tsala* (when I give you your books, you should start writing). *Mi ta ya mi ya tsala nhweti na siku etibukwini ta nwina, kutani mi tsala xitatisi 'd' hi ku ya hi leswi ndzi nga swi tsarisa xiswona ebodweni* (you will write today's date in your books and then copy letter /d/ the way it is written on the board). *Kutani mi ta ya emahlweni mi tsala marito lawa ya sungulaka hi xitatisi 'd', ku nga dema, dini, dulu, duma na domu hi ku ya hi leswi swi nga tsarisiwa xiswona ebodweni* (thereafter, you will continue copying all the words as they are on the board). As the learners were writing in their exercises books, she was moving around checking how each learner is writing, showing them how to hold the pencil and telling them to write the date on top of the page. When some were done they submitted their books. Those who were still writing continued writing as she corrected the books of those who were finished. Teacher: Make sure that you write in between the lines and fill the whole page. (Some learners will constantly stand up to sharpen their pencils and throw the dirt in the dustbin behind the door and some would ask permission to go to the bathroom). For such learners, the teacher indicated that learners who constantly ask permission to go to the bathroom use it as an excuse to avoid writing the activity.

Extract 3

Shared Reading Activities
(The teacher asks all the learners to leave their books and come sit in front of the class on the floor). Teacher: *Hi ta hlaya swin'we buku leyi leyi kulu* (we are going to read the big book together*).* Teacher: Please seat and face me. Teacher*:* Do we all see the book? Learners: ina (yes). Teacher: *Mi vona yini ehandle ka buku? (*What do you see in front of the book?)*.* Learner: *Ndzi vona xinyenyana* (I see a bird*).* Teacher: *Xana mi ehleketa yini loko mi vona xinyenyana la ka buku leyi?* (What do you think when you see a bird in this book?). Learners: *(no answer).* Teacher: But you said you see the bird - this book is from Via Afrika, the title of the book is called *Ririmi ra le kaya Giredi 1 buku leyikulu ya 4 (*Home language Grade 1 big book number 4*).* Teacher: The book is written by R Ntsan'wisi – I will read and you must follow while listening. Teacher: the title of story is called, *Yindlu ya mina*, (my house) - *se loko va vula yindlu ya mina, va vula yindlu ya mani*? (when they say my house, whose house is it?). *Learners: va vula ya vona* (they are referring to their own house). Teacher: *va vula ya yena loyi a vulavulaka, aniri?* (the house belongs to the speaker, isn't it?)Learners: *Ina* (yes). Teacher: Ok, let us read *(reading with learners*) *manana hi ta etlele ehansi ka murhi ku fika rini?* (mother, how long are we going to sleep under the tree?). Se lahaya o vutisa mana wa yena leswaku va ta eltela ehansi ka murhi ku fika rini. A ndzi na mali yo aka yindlu, ku vula mhani wa vona. *Se loko hi twa buku leyi leswi va vula vulaka hi yona la xitorini, va ti komba ku endleka yini hi vanhu lava?* (What do you think could have happened to this people?). Learners: *va ti komba va ri ehansi* (they seem to be underneath). Teacher: vanhu lavaya va ti komba va ti keriwa, ava fani na n'wina – n'wina mi etlela endzeni ka yindlu mi etlela ehenhla ka mubedo mi thlela mi pfuka mi hlamba mi basa mi ambala swimbalo swo kufumela mi dya mi ya exikolweni. (This people are facing challenges different from what you are facing because you have your house where you sleep in bed, wake up in the morning, bath, put on clean clothers and go to school). *Se ma n'wi vona n'wana luya u vutisa mani n'wana luya*? (you see that little girl, she is asking, who is she asking a question? *Hi te hi yimisa voko* (please raise up your hands) – yes, Danisile. Learner: *u vutisa vamhana yena* (she is asking her mother). Teacher: Good, she wants to know how long it will take for them to sleep under the tree. Teacher: (*continues reading, with learners)* Lolo na mhani wa yena, va pandzela tihunyi enhoveni, Lolo u veka tihunyi endhawini yin'we. *Se lahaya loko mi languta hi*

vona mani? (When we look at this picture, who do you see?). Learner: I Lolo na mutswari wa yena. Teacher: *va endla yini*? (what are they doing?). Learners: *Va pandzela tihunyi* (they are cutting woods). Teacher: *se loyi un'wana a kha a endla yini*? (what is it that the other one is doing?). Learner: A kha a ti paketela (the other one was packing the woods). Teacher: *(reading continues with learners*) Lulu na Lolo va rhwala tihunyi va tiyisa ekaya, tihunyi ta tika – tihunyi ti endla yini? (what is wrong with the woods?). Learners: ta tika (the woods are heavy). Teacher*: I va mani vana lavaya va nga na mutswari wa vona lahaya*? (who are the children standing there with the parent?). Learners: *I Lolo* (it is Lolo). Teacher: *Loyi u n'wana ke?* (what about the other one?) Learner: Lulu. Teacher: very good – se i Lolo na Lulu, va endla yini? Learners: va rhwala tihunyi. Teacher: va rhwala tihunyi kwihi? Learners: enhoveni. Teacher: enhoveni – se va tiyisa kwihi? Learners: ekaya. Teacher: se ma nga ni byela, tihunyi leti ku pandzela mani? Yes Matadji. Learner: mhana Lili. Teacher: hayi mhana Lili – mhana Lolo na Lulu – ku pandzela mana wa vona. Teacher: se va ri ti hunyi ti endla yini? Learners: ta tika. Teacher: tihunyi ta tika aniri – ma va vona vanhu va karhi va rhwala tihunyi hi nhloko minkarhi yo tala? Learners: Ina. Teacher: ina – ende tihunyi ta tika, kambe loko wo ka u nga rhwali u ta pfumala swo tshivela hi swona – eka n'wina a ku nge swekiwi, mi ta va mi pfumala swakudya hambi mugayi wu ri kona – manana, Lulu na Lolo va aka yindlu ya vona va tirhisa timhandze na byanyi – se ma swi vona lesawku timhandze letiya a va lava ku endla yini? Learners: ina. Teacher: a va lava ku endla yini? Yes, Vunene. Learner: a va lava ku aka yindlu. Teacher: good – swi sukela kwihi? Swi sukela eka xivutiso lexi n'wana a nga vutisa loko aku: "manana, xana hi ta etlela ehansi ka murhi ku fika rini? Mara mi tshama mi va vona vanhu lava etlelaka ehansi ka murhi? Learners: Hayi. Teacher: a mi si tshama mi va vona? Learners: ina. Teacher: mara mi ehleketa ku ri loko munhu a etlele ehansi ka murhi loko ku na mpfula ku endleka yini? Learners: wa tsakama. Teacher: loko ku ba moya ke? Yes, Kudzayi. Learner: u twa ku titimela. Teacher: ina, loko ku ba moya u twa xirhami – se kambe va ri va aka yindlu ya vona hi yini? Learners: hi timhandzi na mabyanyi. Teacher: Good, se va ri yindlu ya vona yi akiwile, yi akiwile hi timhandze na mabyanyi, manana, Lulu na Lolo va rhandza yindlu ya vona – se va ri yindlu ya vona yi herile lahaya. Kambe tiyindlu leti hi ti tivaku lani hi leti ti nga fuleriwa hi yini? Learners: hi timhandzi. Teacher: haa! Leti hi ti vonaka tifuleriwile lani ti fuleriwe hi yini? Learners: Hi switina na tisemende. Teacher: E-e! switina na tisemende a swi fuleli, swo aka – leswi swi fuleleka yindlu I yini? Leaners: (She reads louder, modelling the reading). Teacher: *Xana mi vona I nga ku xitori lexi xi vulavula hi yini?* (What do you think the story is all about?). Learners: *xi vulavula hi xinyenyana* (it is the story of a bird). Teacher: No! the story is about a house it means you were not listening when I read. *(She goes on reading, and explains the story to the learners*). She asks questions. Learners respond by raising hands. She models the reading. While reading, pauses to ask questions. Learners respond in a choir.

Extract 4

Group Guided Reading

The teacher invites all the groups (group 1 to 5) to come and sit in front of the class. She asks the first group to sit in front, then the second group, third group, fourth group and the last group. Teacher: It is time to read – *loko hi hlaya vanhu vafanele ku tshama va langute mina leswaku va ta kota ku vona leswi hi hlayaka* (when we read you should make sure that you sit and face me so that you can be able to see what we are reading). Teacher: But before we read, there are words that I want us to know first. Teacher: Ok, the first word that we must know is nga (can) – let us all read. Learners: nga (the word was repeated louder). Teacher: *Ndzi nga famba* (I can walk) – yes, let us all say, *ndzi nga famba*. Learners: Teacher: Yes, that is the first word that we need to know. Teacher: *Se hi thlela hi va na rin'wana rito lahaya, rona i tsusuma* (we have another word called, run) – I mani? Learners: *tsutsuma*. Teacher: We have another word called, *rivilo* (speed) – hi te I mani? Learners: *rivilo* (repeatedly). Teacher: *Kambe marito ro sungula hi te ya hlayeka njhani?* (By the way, what were the words we identified first?). Learners: *nga*. Teacher: I mani? Learners: *nga (the teacher helps learners read the rest of the words that were already identified such as tsutsuma and rivilo repeatedly)*. Teacher: We have other words like *endla* (do), *hinkwaswo* thing), *yini* (what), *tintanghu* (shoes), *koti* (can't), *boha* (tie). The teacher reads the words louder as the learners read after her. Teacher: All the words that we have identified are in the story book that we are going to read. She helps them to construct simple sentences like '*ndzi nga famba*' (I can walk). Teacher: *Sweswi hi ta ya hlaya marito lawa hinkwawo hi ri hexe – a hi sunguleni* (you are now going to read all the words without my help – now let's start). Learners: (read the words one-by-one as the teacher is showing each word from her flashcards) She tells them that all the words that are on the flashcards are the words they are going to read in the storybook. Learners read the words repeatedly. Teacher: Ok, thank you - now we are going to read the story, thereafter, I will ask you individually to read the story so you must pay attention as I read. Ok, do we all see this book, can you see that it is a beautiful book. Teacher: So now what do you see in the picture of the book? Raise up your hands! Learner: (responded in English), I see a boy. Teacher: Hey *wena* (you) - it is time for the Tsonga language, so you must answer in Tsonga not English – what do you see in this picture? Leaner: *ndzi vona mufana* (I see a boy). Teacher: What is he doing? Learner: *wa tsutsuma* (he is running). Teacher: Yes, he

is running - how is he running? The boy is running fast. So on the outside cover of the book, they wrote, *Ndzi nga endla hinkwaswo* (I can do everything) – let us all read the sentence. Learners: (reading louder) *ndzi nga endla hinkwaswo*. Teacher: So it means what we are going to read about in the story is everything that the boy can do. *Ndzi nga endla hinkwaswo* is the title of this story. The picture shows us the boy who is running and seems to can be able to do everything when you look at the picture where do you think the boy is standing. Learners: (no response). Teacher: the boy is standing on top of a thin board – that is why he says he can be able to do everything – it is because he is able to stand on top of the thin board and is still able to run fast. So now let us open the book and find out how the boy is able to do everything. (reads the text pointing to each word, while learners are following). Teacher: pauses to ask simple questions. Teacher: let us start reading *(teacher read the story while learners follow louder*) ndzi nga endla hinkwaswo, ndzi nga tlula, Teacher: so now, the boy shows us that besides running, he can also jump – lets continue reading – ndzi nga tlula-tlula, Teacher: he is showing all the things that he can do after saying that he can be able to do everything – ok, let us continue reading – ndzi nga tsutsuma hi rivilo, ndzi nga yimi. Teacher: Good, now you see, the boy is running fast and he does not stop – (reading continues) kambe a nzi nge swi koti ku boha tintanghu – Teacher: (interrupts) E-e! I said you will only read when I point to the words because if you don't wait for me to point on the words, it means you will not be reading but singing (reading continues) Kambe a ndzi nga swi koti ku boha tintanghu- Teacher: let us all read – wa swi kota xana? Teacher: the boy says, "I can do everything, but I can't tie my shoes" but now the boy asks his friends if they know how to tie shoes because he is unable to tie the shoes. Teacher: children, do you know how to tie shoes? Learners: yes, teacher. Teacher: now, you are going to read by yourselves, I am not going to read with you – but let me read for the last time- then you will read (the teacher reads while modelling the reading and after reading she gives learners time to read). Learners: (listening silently). Teacher: so now it is your chance to read – I will be pointing at each word as you read – now let us read. Learners: (while reading, the teacher helps learners to pronounce some words). Teacher: If you read without looking at the book you will not be able to read what is in the book. *(Learners at the back are unable to see the text; however, they rely on the learners who are sitting closer to the teacher*). Teacher: After reading, I will give you chances to read individually. Learners are given chances to read the story individually as the teacher points to the words. Only few learners are able to read as the teacher points to the words. Most learners are unable to read because they only rely on hearing the choral sound of the reading without looking at the words when the teacher points to each word. Teacher: We are now going to read for the last time, thereafter, the first group will read. Group 1: (reading but some are unable to read the words as the teacher points to each of the words). Teacher: If you want to be able to read you must listen and look at the text - the next group must read now and the rest of you must be quiet. Teacher: you must read as I point to the words – you cannot read without looking at the text. Teacher: read the word *Wa* – what is the first sound of the word *wa*. Learner: /w/. Teacher: ok, let us read wa swi kota xana. (Reading continues with all the groups). Teacher: Is there anyone who can the story for us? (She reminds the learners that they should not laugh at each other, as they are all here to learn). The teacher points to each word as the learners read - she praises them for trying their best. Teacher: I see Mahlatsi is raising up her hand - she wants to read – ok, stand up and read Mahlatsi. Learner: (reading). Teacher: raise up your voice, Mahlatsi. Learner: ndzi...ng…(stumbles). Teacher: you know what you can do, just sit and give another learner a chance to read, we will come back to you – yes, Danzile, you can read. Learner: (reading). Teacher: Good! Let us clap hands for her. Teacher: ok, thank you children – go back to your seats, don't make noise – so, I want you to copy all the words in your homework books, you will read at home.

School B literacy practices and activities

Extract 1

Phonics Activities

Teacher: Good morning children. Learners: Good morning teacher. Teacher: Good morning, ok, you may take your seat. Teacher: Today is Tuesday, what about yesterday and tomorrow. Learners: yesterday was Monday, tomorrow is Wednesday. Teacher: What about the weather? Learners: The weather is cloudy today. Teacher: We said today is Tuesday, isn't it learners? So yesterday was 5 March 2018, what is today's date? (Learners raising their hands) Yah Neo. Learner: It is the 6th day of March 2018. Teacher: ok, let us all repeat the date louder in Tsonga (the whole class repeat the date louder).Teacher: All right, children, today we have a visitor, her name is Ms Khosa, and she will be with us throughout the day to observe how we learn to read. I would like you to behave, no sleeping, so that we can all learn. Teacher: we said today's date is 6 March 2018 and that the weather is cloudy. If I say, go and show from the weather chart the condition of today's weather, will you be able to point the picture that shows cloudy weather? Learners: yes (they ran to the wall and pointed at the picture showing cloudy weather). Teacher: ok, children do you still remember the sound we learned

yesterday, who can tell us the sound, raise your hands, yes, Lwandle. Learner: letter 'c' (the whole class sounded the letter 'c'). Teacher: do we have letter 'c' here in the classroom. Learners: yes. Teacher: where is the letter? (All the learners show the letter on the wall). Teacher: We have a big letter sound *C*. Teacher: check if letter *c* appear in your name and raise up your hand if it does appear, (*the learner raises her hand*). Teacher: what is your name? Learner: my name is Cheyeza. Teacher: another one whose name has letter *c* (a learner raises his hand). Learners: my name is Prince (the teacher writes both names on the board). Teacher: children, do you see letter *c* in these two names. Learners: Yes mam. Teacher: do you still remember that I said if we blend c+a=ca. Teacher: What do we call a, e, i, o, u. Learners: They are vowels. Teacher: What is the spelling sound of c+a, c+e, c+i c+o and c+u? Learners: (in a *choral response) ca, ce, ci, co, cu*. Teacher: which words do you remember starting with the spelling sound, *ca*. Learner: *cata* (getting married). Teacher: ok, who can tell us the meaning of the word *cata*? Learner: *hi loko vanhu vambirhi va famba va khomanile va khome na mabulomu* (it when a couple walk together hold each other's hands and carrying flowers). Teacher: very good, so we all know what *cata* means, neh? Learners identified different words beginning with the letter sound *c*: *cela* (dig), *caca* (chase away) *cina* (dance), *cema* (scream), *cuma* (lobola money). As they identify the words, the teacher explains the meaning of each word, while writing the words on the board. Teacher: let us all read these words (*the whole class read aloud all the words*). The teacher takes out flashcards with words similar to the ones written on the board. Teacher: Let us read the words louder again– who can match the same word as this on the board (*showing the word, cela to the learners*)? (*Learners running at the same time to collect and match the word*) no-no! Please, let us have one learner at a time. The activity of matching words continues until all the words are matched. Every time a learner matches the correct word, the whole class would clap their hands to complement the other learner. Ok, we will stop here for today because we need to do the handwriting tasks

Extract 2

Handwriting activities

Teacher: We are going to do a handwriting activity, we will be writing the letter sound that we learned. Do you still remember the letter sound learners? Learners: yes. Teacher: Can you tell us the letter sound? Learners: /c/, Teacher: Good! - we are going to write small letter *c* and a big letter *C* - but when we write - how many lines should we skip learners? Learners: two lines. Teacher: And the letters are written in how many lines children? Learners: It is two lines. Teacher: (shows learners how the lines are skipped when writing the letter sound, 'c'). The teacher models the writing so that learners can see that letters should be written neatly and skipping lines. Teacher: children, take out your handwriting books and write letter 'c' as I have written on the board, make sure that you fill the entire page just as I filled the whole board. Teacher: *(moving around, checking and correcting learners as they are doing handwriting activity)*. Those who are done please don't make noise carry on writing letters that you see on the walls.

Extract 3

Shared Reading Activities

Teacher: We are going to read together the story called, *Ha tlanga* (we play), when I give you a book, look at the picture of that book- you must be able to see the picture because we are going to read about that picture, so we are going to read together. Please make sure that you sit properly, (*the teacher gives learners books, learners are sitting on their desks)*. Children, look at the picture - this is the picture that we should look at, now can we talk about the picture. There are words that we need to learn before we read the story. Teacher: (displays the word /ha/ on the board) children, read this word louder? Learners: (*reading louder*) /ha/. Teacher: Let us blend /h/ with the vowels a, e, i, o, u. Learners: *ha, he hi, ho, hu.* Teacher: Very good *(sticks the word /ta/ on the board*) children let us read this word louder. Learners: *(reading louder*) /ta/. Teacher: Let us blend he+ta. Learners: *(reading louder) heta* (finish). Teacher: Let us blend tl+n+g_a. Learners: (no response). Teacher: When we blend tl+n+g+a, it becomes the word, *tlanga* (play). Teacher: let us all say the words *hi* (we), *heta* (finish) and *tlanga*. Learners: *(reading louder*) *hi*, *heta*, *tlanga.* Teacher: Do you enjoy playing? Learners: Yes! Teacher: Can anyone tell us what you see in this picture? *(Each learner has an opportunity to explain what he/she sees on the picture)*. Teacher: Before we read, let us practice reading the words, *ha* and *tlanga*. Teacher: On this picture there are words written, so we are going to start reading from there - first, we must read the words again on the board. *(All the learners read the words repeatedly on the board*). Teacher: Let us all say,

Ha tlanga. Learners: *Ha tlanga*. Teacher: Children, *Ha tlanga* is the name of the story. (learners open the book and read *'Ha tlanga'* repeatedly). Teacher: When you look at the pictures you will see children playing their own games – (*reading together with the learners) mufana u khandziya murhi* (a boy is climbing a tree), do you see a boy climbing a tree? Learners: Yes! (*Teacher and learners continue reading*) *nhwanyana u chinginya hi rirhavi* (a girl is swinging on a branch), *nhwanyana wa tlulatlula* (a girl is jumping around) - what do you think the girl is playing? Learners: *nhwanyana u tlanga khadzi* (the girl is playing with her rope), (*reading continue) vafana vambirhi va tlanga bolo ya milenge* (two boys are playing soccer), *nhwanyana u famba ehenhla ka mavhilwa* (a girl walks on wheels). Teacher: this is what the pictures are all about - *Se kwalano ehenhla ka xifaniso kuna xivulwa lexi hi faneleke ku xi hlaya* (on top of that picture, there is a sentence that we need to read). Teacher: *Se a hi lungutiseni haleni exitsalelweni hi ta kota ku xihlaya hi ndlela leyi faneleke* (let us all look at the board so that we can read the sentence accordingly) *(reads together with the learners*) *hi ta heta* (we will finish). Teacher: By the way, learners, can we all say these vowels? *(pointing on the board*) Learners: (*reading louder)* a, e, i, o, u. Teacher: *Aha! A hi hlayeni nakambe* (yes, let us read again). Learners: *hi ta heta.* Teacher: Now, read the sentence, *hi ta heta* in your books (*reading repeatedly*). Teacher: Now I am going to ask you questions about what we have been reading - tell me, what are the two boys doing in the picture? Learners: they are playing a soccer ball. Teacher: Now what is the girl in the tree doing? Learners: the girl is swinging on a branch. What is a girl with a yellow short doing? Learners: She is playing with her rope. How many boys are playing soccer in the picture? Learner: they are three. Teachers: Really! Do you all see it this way? Learners: no – they are only two boys. Teacher: What is the dog doing in the picture? Learner: the dog is running. Teacher: *Seni hi ta hlengeleta tibuku ta hina hi miyerile hi ya ti veka le ti tshamaka kona* (now we are going to collect our books quietly and put them back to the reading corner).

Extract 4

Group Guided Reading Activities

Teacher: Children, we are now going to conduct GGR, the rest of you, please continue with the handwriting. Learner: (raising her hand) Teacher, I have completed my handwriting task, can I continue writing anything I see on the walls? Teacher: Yes, that's good, Gavaza. Teacher: Let us have the white group first. (the first group siting at the back of the classroom, facing the teacher). Teacher: We are going to read the book, titled, *Basisa* (Clean), published by VulaBula - let us open on page 22. (Uses word cards to help learners identify with words that they are going to read in the story). Teacher: (reads) *luya* (that one) – children, say the word louder. Learners: luya. Teacher: Say the word, *yima* (wait). Learners: yima. Teacher: say *wena* (you), *suka* (depart), *heyi* (hey) (reading each word repeatedly). Teacher: So now we are all going to read. Teacher: (reading as learners follows) *vana va basisa* (children are cleaning), *vona luya* (see that one), *heyi wena* (hey you), *basisa kunene* (just clean). Teacher: Let us look here, *vana va basisa,* what is the first letter sound of the word, *basisa*? Learner: /b/. Teacher: Very good! - let's clap hands for her. Teacher: *vona luya* - who can show us the letter sounds /n/ and /l/ in this sentence? Learners: (no response). Teacher: (pointing at the letters /n/ and /l/ in the book), this is the letter sound /n/ and the other one is /l/ - let's continue reading, *heyi wena, basisa kunene, vana va basisa, suka, yima*. Teacher: Tell me learners, what does it mean *ku basisa* (to clean)? Learners: *hi loko u basisa laha u tshamaka kona* (it is when you clean where you stay). Teacher: *Xana u basisa loko swi te yini?* (When do we normally clean where we stay?) Learners: *U basisa loko ku thyakile*. (You clean when the place is dirty). Teacher: Ok, you can go back to your seats, please don't make noise, join the others in writing the letter sound on the board, make sure you fill the whole page. Teacher: It is time for the second group - yellow group, please come. Teacher: Let us look at the picture outside the book. When you look at this picture, what do you think the story is about? (Learners keep on guessing and the teacher follows-up by asking them leading questions). Teacher: Look at the pictures on page 2 - what do you see on the pictures? Learners: (no response). Teacher: Children let us look at the words on these word cards; we must read these words before we read the story - the words that are on the reading cards are also in the story. Teacher: let us read this word (She takes out the word card with the word, *suka* and shows it to the learners). Teacher: (reading with learners) *suka* (depart). Teacher: Let us all read the word, *yima* (wait). Learners: *yima*. Teacher: Let us say *Kunene* (at once), *luya* (that one), *wena* (you), *heyi* (hey). Teacher: When we read, let us make sure that we also point to the words in order to see that what you are reading is according to what is in the book. Teacher: Let us now read, *vana va basisa*, *vona luya* - Do you see the words *vana* and *vona*? Show me the letter sound /n/ in these words. Learners: (pointing the letter /n/, while reading). Teacher: Can anyone identify the letter sound, /l/ - I don't want a choral response, please raise up your hands, yes, Ntsako, please show us the letter sound /l/ in the word, *luya*. Learner: (pointing to the letter sound /l/. Teacher: Very good, let us clap hands. Teacher: Now that you can identify letter sounds /n/ and /l/, let us add vowels, a, e, i, o u, to the letter sound /l/. Learners: (louder) la, le, li, lo, lu. Teacher: Good, (reading continues) *heyi wena, basisa Kunene*. Teacher: let us look at the word *basisa*, what is the first sound of this word? Learners: (in a choral

response) /b/. Teacher: children, read aloud the syllables using the letter sound /b/. Learners: ba, be, bi, bo, bu. Teacher: Tell me - who is cleaning? Learners: Schoolchildren. Teacher: Where are they cleaning? Learners: In the classroom. Teacher: What makes you think that it is the schoolchildren? Learners: Because they are wearing school uniform. Teacher: How many schoolchildren are cleaning the class? Learners: They are two (other learners say, four. Teacher: Do you clean your class? Learners: Yes, we do clean our class. Teacher: "Why is it necessary to clean the class? Learners: Because it is dirty (others say, it keeps the class clean). Teacher: Thank you, you can go back to your seats.

School C literacy practices and activities

Extract 1

Shared Reading activities

Teacher: I want all of you to come and sit in front - here on the floor. Yes, please, make sure you sit properly so that others can have a space - let us all look here. Teacher: Let us all look at the outside cover of this book, what do you see children? Learners: *hi vona gama* (we see a crow). Some say, hi vona mhankhudu (we see an owl). Teacher: *langutisisani kahle, mi vona yini? Mhankhudu kumbe gama?* (Check properly, what do you see? Is it an owl or a crow?) Learners: *hi vona mhankhudu* (we see an owl). Teacher: Is this a crow or an owl, do you see an owl here? Learners: No, it is a crow. Teacher: What is the colour of this bird? Learners: it is white. Others say: It is black. Teacher: Yes, we see a crow, with brown, white, and black colours. What is this crow doing here? Learners: It is standing on the tree. Teacher: I want us to open this book, and see what this crow is telling us in the story. Teacher: what do you see here, raise up your hands and tell us what you see, yes, Muhluri – what do you see? Learner: I see a sister and a mother carrying woods. Teacher: Raise up your hands and tell us what else you see in the pictures. Learner: I see a mother and a sister cutting the woods. Teacher: Do you see a person cutting the woods? The whole class: (chorally response) A sister is cutting a tree. Teacher: What do you see in this picture? Learner: I see a mother and a daughter cutting grass. Teacher: Good, let's clap hands for her. Teacher: Now, what do you see here? Learner: I see a mother carrying grass. Teacher: What did she say she is seeing? The whole class: It's a mother carrying grass. Teacher: What else do you see besides seeing a mother-carrying grass? Learners: We see a sister. Teacher: Raise up your hands, this is what makes you give wrong answers, yes, Joy. Learner: I see other sisters collecting grass. Teacher: Let us continue telling what we see in the pictures. Right, what do you see in this picture? Learner: I see a brother and a sister and grass. Teacher: What are they doing? Learners: They are talking. Teacher: Let us continue to see what is further going on in these pictures, what else do you see? Learners: I see a brother sitting on top of the stone. Teacher: What do you see here? Yes, Modjadji. Learner: (no response). Teacher: You want to tell me that you can't see what people are doing in these pictures. Now, according to your understanding, what do you think this story is all about? Learners: It tells us about a crow. Teacher: So now, we are going to read. Besides looking at the pictures, we are going to read the whole story. There are words, which we are supposed to know so that we can understand the story as we read. So I am going to read first so you will follow as I read, ok. *Manana hi ta etlela ehansi ka murhi ku fika rini? Ku vutisa Lolo na Lulu. A ndzi na mali yo aka yindlu, kuvula mhani wa vona.* Teacher: ok, let's read together, again *(reading continues). Manana hi ta etlela ehansi ka murhi ku fika rini? Ku vutisa Lolo na Lulu. A ndzi na mali yo aka yindlu, kuvula mhani wa vona. Manana, Lulu ana Lolo va rhwala tihunyi va ti yisa ekaya. Tihunyi ta tika. Mnanana, Lulu na Lolo va aka yindlu ya vona, va tirhisa timhandze na byanyi.* Teacher: Some of you are not reading. Learner: (*raising a hand)* Masana is pushing us. Teacher: Those who are disturbing us will go and sit at the corner until they can behave – we are going to learn the words in the story so that we can dentify the letter sounds and spelling sounds of these words.

Extract 2

Phonics activities

Teacher: Learners, today we are going to learn about the words we read in the big book during Shared Reading *(the teacher writes the words on the blackboard*) - now let us read these words - all of us. (*The teacher reads and the learners join in*) *etlela* (sleep), *murhi* (tree), *yindlu* (house), *ehansi* (on the floor). (The teacher corrected the learners when they say, *yindlo*). Teacher: *Ahi yindlo, hinkweru a hi nge, yindlu*. Learners: *yindlu* (it is not supposed to be *yindlo,* but *yindlu*). Teacher: Let us all say the word. Learners: (*in a choral response) Yindlu*. (*Reading of words with learners is conducted several times, while the teacher is pointing at each word*).Teacher: Good! Now, I want you to read the words by yourselves. Learners: *(reading, but stumbling*). Teacher: (teachers joins in to help learners read some read) now read again by yourselves. (Learners read words

louder and repeatedly). Teacher: Children, do you know what it means (to sleep). Learners: (in a choral response) Yes, teacher. Teacher: *Ni kombeni ku etlela leswaku swivula yini* (show me what it means to sleep). Learners: (all the learners lay on the floor). Teacher: Good – swi ng ava swi vula ku etlela emubedweni kumbe ehansi (It means to lay down on your bed or on the floor). Teacher: *Kasi murhi I ximilana lexi byariwaka kumbe ku timilele hi xoxe* (a tree is a plant that grows in the household field or in the bush). Teacher: Is there anyone who can read this word *(pointing to the word) ehansi*. *Yimisa voko* (raise up your hand). Yes, Mayimele. Learner: *ehansi.* Teacher: *A hi vuleni hinkwerhu* (Class, say the word). The whole class: (in a choral response) *ehansi!* Teacher: *ehansi swi vula yini*? (What is the meaning of the word, ehansi?). Learner: *Swi vula laha hansi hi nga tshama kona* (it is where we are sitting). Teacher: Yes! *Ehansi hi la mi nga tshama kona, ma pfumela vana?* (Yes, on the floor is where you are sitting). Teacher: (takes out flashcards with words similar to the ones written on the board) *I mani a nga taku a ta hi damarhetela rito leri ra 'ehansi' ekusuhi na leri fanaka na rona laha xitsalelweni?* (Who can come to collect the word *ehansi* and matches it with the one on the board?) Learner: (*raising up the hand*). Teacher: Tlangelani, come and show us that you know how to read. *(A learner takes the flashcard of the word 'ehansi' from the teacher and sticks it next to the similar word on the board)*. Teacher: ok, point to the word so that everyone can read. The whole class reads *ehansi*. (Another learner collects the word *etlele* and matches with the same word on the board. The teacher shows learners the letter sounds/e/, /tl/, /e/, /l/ and /a/ on pieces flash cards, and thereafter, throws the letters on the floor. She asks them to collect the pieces of the letters and assemble them next to the similar word. Learners go to the front one-by-one, collecting all the pieces from the floor and assembles them next to their matching words. The teacher guides the learners, as they are busy assembling and matching letters next to the right words. Teacher: Let us all sound this letter (she points to the letter /e/, (all the learners sound the letter, then she points to /tl/ (learners read the sound /tl/, then /e/, /l/ and /a/. Teacher: The word etlela has three phonemes *(saying the sounds louder)* /e/ /tl/ /l/ /a/ - let us say the sounds while clapping. Teacher: (*learners join in*) /e/ /tle/ /la/. Teacher: Here are the other ones, can anyone come and assemble the pieces. Learners: (no response). Teacher: Let us read the words again on the board (reading with learners louder) *etlela* (sleep), *murhi* (tree), *yindlu* (house), *ehansi* (under). Teacher: now who can assemble the pieces for us? *(One learner goes to the front but was not sure, which letter to pick - first).* Learner: vamamu, Nsovo wa hi sukumeta (Mam, Nsovo is pushing us). Teacher: Heyi! Wena Nsovo, swilo yini hi wena, ahiyi, tana u ta tshama la mahlwenei (Nsovo, what's wrong with you? Come and sit in front). Teacher: With these pieces assembled, we will have the word, *ehansi*, first pick letter /e/. Learner: (picks letter /h/). Teacher: Class, is this letter /e/? The whole class: No! Teacher: What is this letter sound? (Showing learners). Learners: /h/. Teacher: Ok, Vutomi, sit down – let us all say the spelling sound of /h/. Learners: (*in a choral response*) *ha, he, hi, ho, hu*. Teacher: Again. Learners: *ha, he, hi, ho, hu*. Teacher: Now, let us all say, *ehansi*. Learners: *ehansi*! Teacher: Again. Learners: *ehansi*. Teacher: Now, say /e/. Learners: /e/. Teacher: /h/. Learners: /h/. Teacher: /a/. Learners: /a/. Teacher: /n/. Learners: /n/. Teacher: /s/. Learners: /s/. Teacher: /i/. Learners: /i/. Teacher: Good- let us all say, /e/ /h/ /a/ /n/ /s/ /i/. Learners: /e/ /h/ /a/ /n/ /s/ /i/. Teacher: How many phonemes of the word *ehansi*? Raise up your hands, yes, Nhlamulo. Learner: 5x sounds. Teacher: Class do you agree?. The whole class: No. Teacher: Let us count the phonemes and see if Nhlamulo is right (*Clapping hands, while counting*) /e/ /h/ a/ /n/ /s/ /i/. Teacher: Who can tell us the answer now? Learner: I ka ntsevu (It is 6x). Teacher: Very good – we will stop here and continue next time, now go back to your seats.

Extract 3

Drawing activities

Teacher: Learners, it is time to conduct our handwriting activity, but today we are going to sit down and draw pictures of the story that we read today. By the way, who can tell us what the story was all about. Learner: it was about a mother and a daughter. Teacher: What were their names: Learners: Titi na Tete. Teacher: E-e, it can't be Titi and Tete, remember, today we were reading a new story, what are the names of the people in the new story? We read about Lulu and Lolo - what were the names of the people in the story? Learners: Lulu and Lolo. Teacher: Yes, we spoke about Lulu and Lolo. What were they doing in the story? Learners: (No response). Teacher: They were carrying the woods - Now we are going to draw a picture of a mother and her daughters, a soon as you get your book, you should start writing – I don't want to hear noise coming from people who have been given a task (*All the learners go back to their seats – the teacher calls the first group to come in front of the class)*

Extract 4

Group Guided Reading
The teacher calls the first group to come and sit in front of the class. Teacher: (*Talking to other groups*) Let us continue with our drawing – group one, come and sit in front – we are going to read our story on the blackboard *(teacher writing the story on the board)* You don't write what I'm writing here on the board. I will read first – and you listen. (*Teacher reading a story). E-e, Akani languta, u nga etleli tani, E-e Akani yima, u nga endli tano, languta, ku sungula*. (sit down, your sickness does not mean your brains are not working) Now, I am reading - so you must join in as I read (reading with learners) *E-e, Akani languta, u nga etleli tani, E-e Akani yima, u nga endli tano, languta, ku sungula*. Teacher: *I tano kumbe tani leyi?* (Is this *tano* or *tani*? Learners: E-e. Teacher: *A hi hlayeni hi ndlela leyi - tano* (let us read the word as *tano*) (Reading is repeated 2x) there are those who say, *nanguta*, it's not *nanguta*, but *languta*. So, now it is your turn to read, don't worry, I will guide you as you read. - let's start reading. (*Learners reading, repeatedly*). Teacher: *(Reading word by word*) *languta* (look), *etleli* (do not sleep), *nga* (can), (*sit and look at the board!*) *endli* (do't do), *sungula* (first), *languta, etleli, nga, endli*, e-e Akani languta, u nga etleli tano, e-e Akani yima, e-e Akani yima, u nga endli tano, languta ku sungula, (*Musa, if I find that you are not done as you are making noise*) Let us continue reading, now read by yourselves. Learners: E-e Akani, vona. Teacher: Is this vona? Learners: E-e, i languta. Teacher: Yi ri yini? Learners: E-e Akani languta. U… nga… endli tano. Teacher: A hi swona, i u nga etleli tano. Learners: E-e Akani, yima. Teacher: Again. Learners: E-e Akani, yima, U nga endli tano, languta ku sungula. Teacher: Let us read again. Learners: E-e Akani languta, U nga etleli – endli tano - tani. Teacher: Those who keep on saying *tani* are not looking at the board. Learners: U nga endli tano. Teacher: Listen to how others pronounce *tano* – say, *u nga endli tano, hayi tani* - some of you don't know how to say *tano* – let's try again. Learners: U nga endli tano. Teacher: (*talking to a learner*) What do you want Kudzayi? Learner: I want a pencil. Teacher: The plastic of pencils is on top of the table. Teacher: Ok, let's continue reading. Learners: Nanguta ku sungula. Teacher: *A hi vuleni, languta ku sungula.* Learners: Languta ku sungula. Teacher: Now, let's give a chance to the boys to read by themselves. All the boys: E-e Akani …u nga etle… e-e Akani languta, u nga etl…Teacher: some of you are not looking at the text, how can you read without looking at the text? (Reading of the same text continues repeatedly). Teacher: ok, we will stop here, join the other learners with drawing of the pictures of the story that we have been reading during SR.

School D literacy practices and activities

Extract 1

Phonics Activities
Teacher: Let us stop making noise! Give me a chalk. Good morning learners. We are going to learn the phonics today. Our phonics for this week are the letter sounds /c/, /a/ and /b/ - is this the case learners? So we will be identifying with the letter sound *c*. Learners: Yes, mam. Teacher: I said I do not want to see pieces of papers, ok, learners. Teacher: What do we call these letters? (*Teacher pointing at a, e, i, o, u).* Learners: They are vowels. Teacher: Again. Learners: vowels. Teacher: Now let us all read the vowels. Learners: *(the whole class reading louder*) a, e, i, o, u. Teacher: They are vowels - what do we call these letters? *(Pointing at the consonants on the board*). Learners: (*no response)*. Teacher: We said they are alphabets, so today we are going to identify the sound of which week number. Learners: Of number 3. Teacher: Our focus will be on the letter sound *c* – children, let us all say *c*. Learners: *c*. Teacher: What is the spelling sound of letter *c*? Learners: ca, ce, ci, co, cu. Teacher: Again! Learners: ca, ce, ci, co, cu Teacher: Children, we have words starting with letter sound, *c* - can anyone tell us any word starting with the letter sound *c*. Learner: *cina* (dance). Teacher: Let us all say *cina*. The whole class: *cina*! Teacher: Again. Learners: *cina*. Teacher: Another word starting with the letter sound /c/. Learner: mali (money). Teacher: No! I want us to identify words starting with the letter sound *c*. Learner: *cinci* (change). Teacher: Yes, let us all say the word *cinci* louder. Learners: *cinci*. Teacher: Can anyone identify the vowel in the word *cinci*? Raise up your hands, yes, Mpho. Learner: *i*. Teacher: Good - let us all say *i*. The whole class: *i*. Teacher: So, individual letter sounds of the word *cinci* are /c/ /i/ /n/ /c/ /i/ - let us all say the sounds. Learners: /c/ /i/ /n/ /c/ /i/. Teacher: Good - let us say the individual letter sounds of the word *cina.* Learners: /c/ /i/ /n/ /a/. Teacher: Again. Learners: /c/ /i/ /n/ /a/. Teacher: Who else can give us another word begunning with the letter sound *c*? Learner: *cuma* (lobola money). Teacher: Yes, *cuma* - how do we write the word *cuma*? Learners: /c/… /u/… /m/... (Learners are stuck with identifying the last sound of the word *cuma*. Teacher: What is the last letter sound? Learner: *a*. Teacher: *a* - very good, let us all say *cuma*. The whole class: *cuma*). Teacher: Ok, learners - tell me, what is the use of vowels? Learners: (in a choral response) vowels

help us to listen. Teacher: No! What is the use of vowels? Raise up your hands. Learner*: swi hi pfuna ku hlaya* (they help us to read). Teacher: *E-e, switwari i marito lawa ya twarisaka* (No, vowels boost the sounds of consonants). Teacher: What is my name? Learners: Norah. Teacher: Yes, Norah is my name - can we identify the letter sounds in my name. (*Teacher helps learners to identify letter sounds of her name*). Teacher and learners together: /n/ /o/ /r/ /a/ /h/. Teacher: I said vowels boost meaning to the consonants, if there are no vowels, words will be meaningless - names of people have vowels. Learners, we still need to identify more words, give us other words starting with the letter sound *c*. Learner: *coco* (money laundering). Teacher: ok, now tell me - how do we spell *coco*? (Teacher spelling coco and learners join in) /c/ /o/ /c/ /o/. Teacher: Again! Learners: (by themselves) /c/ /o/ /c/ /o/. Teacher: Ok, children, who can tell us what is the meaning of *coco*? Learner: *Kokwana* (granny). Teacher: hahahaha! E-e, we are still on identifying words starting with the letter sound /c/, don't you see that all the words on the board start with the letter sound *c*? Teacher: who can tell us another word? Learner: *celela* (bury). Teacher: Good, let us identify individual sounds of the word *celela*. Teacher together with the learners: /c/ /e/ /l/ /e/ /l/ /a/. Teacher: again, let us say the whole word. Learners: *celela*. Teacher: Let us have another word beginning with the letter sound *c*. Learner: *cema* (screem). Who can identify the vowels in the word *cema?* Learners: *(no response*). Teacher: Ok, we have the vowels *e* and *a* – let us all say the vowels. Learners: *e*, *a*. Teacher: Ok, another word, yes, give us the word. Learner: *caca* (chase). Teacher: How do we spell *caca* - who can help us? Learner: We write /c/, /we write /a/, we write /c/, and we write /a/. Teacher: Good, then it becomes *caca* - can we all read *caca*? The whole class: *caca*. Teacher: Good, you are smart learners - but there is another word that is missing, can you tell us the word that we might be missing? Learners: *cela* (dig). Teachers: Do I know the word *cela* - how do we write it? Learners: (saying *c* in English). Teacher: E-e, we are sounding letters, not naming them – learners, the word *cela* is somewhere amongst the words listed on the board, where is it? Learners: (*they could not see the same word as 'cela' on the board*). Teacher: Ok, Betty, how do we write *cela*? Learner: (*no response*). Teacher: How do we write the word *cela?* - ok let us write the word *cela* in the air (learners write c and /l/ in the air but are unable to write /e/ and /a/. Teacher: *cela*, (*demonstrates writing of the word cela in the air)* let us try again. Learners: (writing first /c/ then /e/, other still can't write /e/). Teacher: Let us sound letters of the word *cela* (Teacher joining in to help learners sound the word) /c/ /e/ /l/ /a/. Teacher: When we sound the letters of *cela,* letter sound /l/ should make the tongue to touch the soft palate. *(She continues to say the word 'cela' with the learners repeatedly)*. Hey! Nakampi, I will beat you up. Teacher: Ok, learners, /c/ is the sound that we are focusing on for this week. So other words that we have are '*cinama*' (smile), let us all show it means to *cinama*. *(All the learners smile)*. Teacher: Can you see that we have many words, another word is *cukumeta* (throw away), it is just that the word is too long, but there is something that people use to make beer, what can that be? Learners: *makanyi* (marula). Teacher: E-e, I mean what they use to make beer, starting with the letter sound /c/. Teacher: Yes, Kalambirwa. Learner: It is something that looks like sand *(the learner responded in English*). Teacher: Yes, it looks like sand, but she don't know how to tell me in Tsonga *(the teacher responded in English*) and translated in Tsonga when she says: *a nga swi koti ku ni byela hi Xitsonga*. Today, I will tell you what people use to make beer in Tsonga. It is called *comela* (barley) - can you hear me Kalambirwa? Learners do you know how people make beer? (*teacher explains how people make home-made beer to the learners so that they understand the meaning of the word 'comela'*). (*The teacher explains the meaning of all the words on the board, using examples, starting from the words, cela* (dig) *(ku cela nghoji*), *caca* (chase) *(ku caca khamba kumbe huku)*, *cina* (dance) *(ha cina loko hi tsakile*), *comela* (barley) *(ri tirhisiwa ku endla byalwa*), *cinama* (smile) *(ha cinama loko hi tsakile*), *cukumeta* (throw) *(hi cukumeta swilo loko hi nga ha swi tirihisi)*, *celela* (bury) (hi celela mufi), *cinci* (change) *(hi loko u xave swo karhi ivi ku sala cinci)*. (*Learners were laughing as the teacher explains the meaning of the words and also giving examples)*. The teacher noticed a learner who was passive as she was explaining the meaning of the words, she called the learner to find out what was wrong with her - the learner indicated that she was not well. The teacher wanted to know if the learner had breakfast. The learner said she did not eat. The teacher asked the learner to take her lunch box and sit outside where she could eat something. Teacher: Ok, let us continue - who can tell us the meaning of the word *cuma* ? Learner: I ku chumayela (is to preach). Teacher: *E-e, a hi swona* (no, that is not what it means). (The teacher explains the words 'cuma', using an example). Teacher: let me tell you – now, can you see that I am a mother, yes, it is because I am married and my married surname is Manzini, my in-laws, paid *cuma* (lobola money) so that I can become the wife of their son. Now, do you understand what the word *cuma* means? Learners: Yes, teacher. *(Interruption from one learner reporting that another learner is sleeping*). (*The teacher explained the meaning of all the words on the board, using examples)*.Teacher: Learners, all the words that we have identified today, you will have to write them in your files. It will be your homework - you will practice writing and reading the words at home. I will not erase the words so that you can be able to copy them.

Extract 2

Shared Reading activities

Teacher: We are going to read a storybook, tell me learners, what do you see in this book? *Heyi wena Tlangelani, khoma buku* (hey, Tlangelani, please hold your book). Learners, what do you see in this picture? Learners: We see a girl. Teacher: how do you know that it is a girl? Learners: Because she has big hair and she has a ponytail. Teacher: Yes, she has made a ponytail; now Vukona, come and stand here, in front of the class. Ok, do we see a person, who looks like the girl in the picture here in the classroom? Learners: Yes teacher, its Vukona. Teacher: Yes, now why do we say the person we see in the picture is a girl? Learners: It is because she has a ponytail. Teacher: ok, Vukona, you can take a seat. Teacher: Does this mean that even boys are allowed to make ponytails. Learners: No teacher. Teacher: Now what else do you see in the pictures? Learners: (in a choral response) we see a dog. Teacher: Yes, we see a dog, what else do you see? Learner: I see some clothes. Teacher: What is going on with the clothes that you see in the picture? Learner: I see some clothes that are hanged on the line. Teacher, Good, what else do you see? Yes, Musa. Learners: I see a house. Teacher: Is there a picture of a house – oh! I see it - what is written on that house? Learner: (could not read what was written in the picture of the house) (the teacher assisted the learners to read the words on the house). Teacher: They have written the words Coca-Cola, lotto… it means this is a shop. There is also a picture of a chicken - by the way what do we call the baby of a chicken? Learners: I *xikukwana* (young chick). We can say it is a chicken, which has a young chick. So far, with regard to this book, we have spoken about what we see in the pictures of the book. Now by looking on the outside cover of this book, what do you think the story of the book is all about? Learner: It is a Tsonga book. Another learner: It is an English book. Teacher: *E-e, I ya Xitsonga*, *xana yi nga va yi vulavula hi yini leswi hi nga swi kumaka la ndzeni ka buku?* (No! It is a Tsonga reader, what do you think the story in the book is all about?). Learners: *ku hlaya* (it's about reading). Another learner: I xitory (it is a story). Teacher: I understand that this book speaks about a girl. Let us open the book. On top, it says, *ndza swi tiva* (I know), (she reads the title with the learners, repeatedly). Teacher: What do you know? Learner: I know about chatting. Teacher: She says she knows about chatting. Tsakani, what do you know about chatting? Learner: I know about gossip. Teacher: Do you gossip, Tsakani? Another learner: I know about listening. Teacher: Ok, but the girl in the story says, she knows, what is the name of this girl? Learners: Neo. Teacher: Good (*teacher continues reading*) *ndza swi tiva, hi mina Neo* (I know, my name is Neo). Who can tell us what is Neo is wearing? Learner: Neo is wearing a skirt and shoes. (*Learners making noise as they are trying to give answers*). Teacher: Let us stop making noise. Masana, what is the girl in the picture wearing? Learner: she is wearing school uniform. Teacher: Do you think that the girl is really wearing school uniform? Other learners: No, she is wearing her play clothes. Teacher: She is wearing a red skirt. What is the colour of the skirt? Learners: Yellow na red (in English). Teacher: We don't have yellow in Tsonga but *xitshopana* and we don't have red in Tsonga but *yaku tshuka.* What is the colour of her shoes? Learners: *I ta ntima* (they are black in colour). Teacher: Yes. She says, *ndza swi tiva*, *hi mina Neo*, then she says, *ndzi na malembe ya nkombo*. How old is Neo: Learners: she is seven years old. Teacher: *I kaya ra mina*, - where is this girl? Learners: *u le kaya* (she is at home). Teacher: whose home? Learners: *hi le kaya ka mehe* (it is my home). Teacher: who is this girl? Learners: Neo. Teacher: How old is she? Learners: she is seven years old. Teacher: where is Neo now? Learners: she is at home. Teacher: (*continues reading*) *nomboro ra kaya ra mina i 116* (my house number is 116). What is Neo's house number? Learners: It is 116. Teacher: So today, we will read up to this point. So let us all read. Open on page 1. Let us all read together. (*reading with the learners*) '*ndza swi tiva, hi mina Neo, ndza swi tiva, ndza…swi… tiva… hi…mina….* Neo. Teacher: as we read what should we be doing? Learners: we read. Teacher: No, we should be pointing to the words as we read. (*Reading together with the learners continues repeatedly)*. The teacher explains the story as they are reading together with the learners. Teacher: now, we are going to close the book so that we can answer the questions about the story. Ok, Lethabile, stand up. I want you to tell us the name of the girl in the story. Learner: (*does not know the answer*). Other learners: her name is Neo. Teacher: Ok - how old is the girl? Learners: (*in a choral response*): Neo is seven years old. Teacher: Where does Neo stay? Learners: In her house. Teacher: Neo is still seven years, she does not own a house but she stays with her parents, it is her parent's house. Ok, now, what is her house number? Learners: it is 116. Teacher: That is Neo's house number - it is where Neo stays. Teacher: what grade is Neo? Learners: she is in Grade 1. Teacher: Yes, she is in Grade 1.

Extract 3

Group Guided Reading
Let us stop making noise. Can anyone find a chair for me? Lethlabile, come, Mathyaka, come. Come Fumani, sit down. I will punish you, why do you seem surprised to the things that we are used to doing every day. (*She is talking to other learners who are not part of Group 1). I yo… vana va nga*, *I yo*. Hey, when Ms Khosa leaves, I will deal with you. Please sleep on your tables there. *Vana vanga!* (My children!). Learners: *Mha* (Yes, mom). Teacher: *mi dyile vuswa* (did you eat food?). Learners: Yes. Teacher: What did you eat? Learners: We ate rats. Teacher: do you really eat rats? Learners: Yes, mom. Teacher: *vana va nga… I yo vana va nga*. Learners: *I yo mhana hina*. Teacher: *a-ha, mehe hi mehe mhana koho a ni ri*? *N'wina hi n'wina vana va kona ani ri*? Look we are going to read and we are going to read in a group of seven. Teacher: (*talking to other groups*) I don't want you to sleep, you should be doing something - tell me, what do you see in this book? Learner: I see a dog. Another learner: I see a girl. Teacher: What else do you see? Learner: I see a wheel. Teacher: he says he sees a wheel, can we all see the wheel? Learners: Yes. Teacher: What else do you see, Katlego? Learner: I see a young chick. Teacher: Now who can tell us what this story is all about. Yes, Nsovo. Learner: It about a house. Teacher: Nsovo says it is the story of the house, who else can tell us what this story is about? Learner: It is about a girl. Teacher: Yes, is about a girl, who appears on the outside cover of the book. What is the colour of our reading book? Learners: White (responded in English). Teacher: We don't have white in Tsonga but *ku basa.* What is another colour that you see? Learner: I see green. Teacher: We don't have green in Tsonga but *rihlaza*. So who can tell us what this book is all about? Learner: It is about a girl. Teacher: Now, let us read: (reading) *Ndza swi tiva, hi mina Neo, ndzi na malembe ya kombo, I kaya ra mina*. Can you see Neo's house? *(Reading is repeating again*). What is the name of the girl? How old is she? Where does she stay? Who does she stay with? What is her house's number? *(Learners answered some questions*). So now, you are going to read again. *(Reading repeats*). Teacher: According to your understanding, what grade is Neo? Learners: Neo is in Grade 1. Now, you are going to continue reading at home. I will give you this book so that you can go and read at home from pages 1 to 4. Now you can go back to your seats.

School E literacy practices and activities

Extract 1

Phonics activities
Teacher: *vana va nga* (my children). Learners: *Mha*! (Mom). Teacher*: a hi languteni hala handle, ku njhani hi maxelo?* (Let us look outside, how is the weather?) Learners: *Ka hisa* (It is hot). Teacher: *swilo hlanganana a ni ri? Ka hisa, kuna mapapa. Mara lexi xi nga tala ku tala yini namunthla?* (Today it hot, it is cloudy, but which one dominates?). Learner: *mapapa* (the clouds). Teacher: *ku tale mapapa – I mani a nga ta ya hi cincela a hi yisela eka mapapa? Hi cincele Mixo, u hi yisela eka mapapa* (yes, it is cloudy, who can change the pointer to a cloudy condition on the wall?). *(A leaner goes to change the pointer to the direction of the cloudy weather condition*). *Se namunthla I wa vungani?* (What is today's date?). Learners: *I wa vunharhu* (Today is Wednesday). Teacher: *E-e, I wa vungani?* (No-no! you're saying what's today's date?). Learners: *I wa vumbirhi* (It's Tuesday). Teacher: *Ina, I wa vumbirhi namunthla* (Yes, it's Tuesday). *Tolo a ku ri wa vungani*? (What was yesterday's date?). Learners: *a ku ri musumbhuluko* (It was Monday). Teacher: *I mani a nga yaku a ya hi yisela eka wa vumbhirhi?* (Who can change the pointer to the direction of Tuesday?). *Hatlisa phela. Cinca u yisa eka wa vumbirhi. Se namunthla i ra vungani?* (Hurry up. Change to the direction of Tuesday. So what is today' date?). Learners: *I siku ra vukhumenharhu* (Today is the 13th). Teacher: Good. *Seni namunthla hi ya dyondza mpfumawulo lowunthswa wa vhiki leri.* (We are going to learn a new sound). *Empfumawulo wa vhiki leri hi lowu* (The sound that we are going to learn for this week is this one). *(Teacher pointing at the flash card on the wall)*. Please raise up your hands and tell us the sound of this letter. Kasayira! Learner: *I mpfumawulo wa* /t/. (It is the letter sound /t/). Teacher: Yes, let us all say the sound louder. Learners: /t/. Teacher: With this sound - learners, we have our vowels, which we use on a daily basis, which are….? Learners: a, e, i, o, u. Teacher: When we write the letter sound t+a, how is it going to sound? Learners: /t/. Teacher: it can't be /t/ but 'ta'. Say 'ta' all of you, learners. Learners: 'ta'. Teacher*: se hi teka /e/ hi yi hlanaganisa na 't', yi ta va mani*? (When we add /e/ to /t/, how will it sound? Learners: it will sound like 'te'. Teacher: So, when we add 'i', how are we going to sound it? Learners: it will sound like, 'ti'. Teacher: So now let us add 'o'. Learners: 'to'. Teacher: So, lastly, let us add 'u'. Learners: 'tu'. Teacher: now, we can be able to make words by using the sounds that we identified. Who can give us a word, which starts with the letter sound /t/? Any word. Yes, raise up your hands. Learner: *Tatana* (Daddy). Can anyone give us another word? Learner: *buti* (brother). Teacher: Good, the word also has the sound /t/. Another one. Learner: *tima* (switch off). Another

one. Learner: *tiya* (strong). So - Between these words, there are some that I have written, who can read the word that I have on this word card? Learner: *tatana*. Teacher: Good, it's *tatana*. Let us clap hands. So learners, the word *tatana* is also on the board, the word we identified before. So, there is another word, here is the word (*shows the flash card with the word*). Who can read this word? Learner: /i/. Teacher: No! My girl, who can help her? Yes. Learner: *mati* (water). Teacher: *aha - i mati* (yes, it's water). (*All the learners repeat the word louder*). Teacher: who can read this word again? Learner: /b/. Teacher: E-e, we don't have letter sound /b/ on the board, which sound do we have on the board, children? Learners: /t/. Teacher: Yes, so who can read the word that I have on the flash card: Learner: *tolo* (yesterday). Teacher: Good, there is another word, who can identify the word for us? Learner: *titimela* (cold). Teacher: Yes, it says, *titimela*. Clap hands. Teacher: So now, we are going to clap hands when we identify the sounds of all the letters in each word on the board. So now, let us say the word, *tatana*. Learners: /ta/ta/na/ (*while clapping hands, 3x*). How many times did we clap hands for the word, *tatana*? Learners: 3x. Teacher: So now, let us say the word, mati, while clapping hands. Let us say the sounds. Learners: /ma/ti/ (clapping 2x). So, let us say the sound of the word, *tolo* (yesterday), while clapping. Learners: /to/lo/, (clapping 2x). Teacher: So now, let us say *titimela* (cold). Learners: /ti/ti/me/la/ (clapping 4x). Teacher: So now, there are words that we are going to match with the words on the board. Before we match the words on the board, we must first read them. Is there anyone who can read this word for us? (Showing the word card to all the learners). Let us start with the letter sound. Learner: /t/. Teacher: Now, let us read this word. Yes, raise up your hands. Learner: *tirha* (work). Teacher: No! Who can help him? Learner: *tona* (them). Teacher: Good, let us clap hands. Now, can anyone read the second one? Learner: *tatana*. Teacher: Let us clap hands. There is the third word - can anyone read for us? Learner: *tuva* (dove). Teacher: Good, let us clap hands. The last word - can anyone read this word for us? Learner: *cika*. Teacher: No! There is no '*cika*' in these words and neither have we heard of *cika*. Can anyone help her? Learner: *teka* (take). Teacher: Good, let us clap hands. So now, we have a simple sentence for this week. Listen to the sentence as I read louder. The sentence says, *muti wa tatana* (dad's home), *(learners read after the teacher*). So, we are going to use the letter sounds and words of the 9th week. Did you see the words and letter sounds of the 9th week? Learners: Yes, mam. Who can write the word *tatana* on the board? Yes, go and write *tatana* (learner goes to the board and writes the word, *tatana*). The teacher corrects the writing of letter 'a', telling learners that they should avoid writing the letter sound 'a' as if they a writing the number 9. So, now, my children. Learners: Yes, mom. Teacher: we need to come and sit here in front of the class.

Extract 2

Shared Reading activities

Teacher: So, now, my children. Learners: Yes, mom. Teacher: We need to come and sit here in front of the class. Teacher: Because our mat is not going to cover all of us, as we are many, we will not use it. My children, what do you see in this picture? Learners: We see a fish, some say, we see a chicken. Teacher: Ok, the name of the book that we are going to read together is called, *Mavala* (spots). Let us all read the title of the book. Learners: *Mavala*. Teacher: The title of the books is called, '*Mavala*', and it is written by John Lockyer. The pictures are drawn by Jim Storey and the book is published by Sunshine books. Teacher: So now we are going to open the book and see what is inside the book. Children, what do you see in this book? Learners: A tree. Teacher: Not necessarily a tree, but a plant. Again, what else do you see? Raise up your hands. Learner: I see an insect. Teacher: Now, what else do you see - there at the back, give us an answer? Learner: I see a butterfly. Teacher: And then what else do you see? Learner: I see a flower. Teacher: It is a leaf, where there is an insect. Teacher: Come sit the other side so that you can be able to see. So now what do you see here. Raise up your hands. Learner: I see a dog. Teacher: Yes, here is a dog; do you see the dog, class? Learners: Yes. Teacher: What else do you see? Learner: I see a lion. Teacher: that is not a lion, who can tell us the type of this animal? Leaners: (silent). Teacher: It is a Leopard. What do you see? Learners: A Leopard. Teacher: Yes, that is a Leopard. So now, let us repeat saying what we see in the pictures. Learners: We see a fish, we see an insect, we see an insect. Teacher: Don't repeat the same thing, if you said it, don't repeat. What is this? Learner: It is a medicine. Teacher: E-e, it is a bottle, what about this? Learner: Is a chicken. Teacher: It's not a chicken, it only looks like a chicken. Now, let us look here, I want the learners at the back, Thabiso, what do you see? Learner: I see a person. Teacher: What is the person doing? Learner: The person is sleeping. Teacher: Yes, Thabiso sees a person who is sleeping. What else do you see? Learners: We see a radio. Teacher: *aha*! We see a radio next to his bed - let us sit down, instead of standing, because when you are siting, it looks ok. Now, who can read this word? (*The teacher uses the flashcard to shows the word to the learners*). Learner: I '*mbuyana*'. Teacher: E-e, we are not used to this word, it has the sound /mby/. We have not learned the sound /mby/, but what is the first sound of the word *mbyana*? Learner: /m/. Let us all repeat the sound, /mby/ louder. Learners: /mby/. We all know a dog – a dog is a domestic animal – we normally keep it at home to scare the thieves. There is another word, which we are not used to reading its

sound. Can anyone try to read this word? (*Pointing to the word on the text*). Learner: *Yingwe* (Leopard). Teacher: Good, what is the first sound of this word? Learners: /y/. Teacher: who can read this word? *(Pointing to the word*) Learners: *(no response).* Teacher: The word is *phaphatana* (butterfly). Say the word louder, all of you. Learners: *Phaphatana*. Teacher: What is the first sound of the word *phaphatana*? Learners: /p/. Teacher: Again. Learners: /p/. Teacher: What is a butterfly? Learners: (no response). Teacher: a butterfly is an insect, it has bright coloured wings and is also harmless - so, now who can read this word, we are not familiar with the word, but can anyone read the word for us? Learners: *(silent).* Teacher: I *nhlampfi* (fish). Let us all say the word. Can anyone identify the first sound of letter, *nhlampfi*? Learners (silent). Teacher: I /nhl/. Let us all say /nhl/. We are going to come across these words as we read the story. So, now we are going to read, you will follow as I read. Let us start: (*reading) Mavala, Mavala*. Teacher: Say it the same way I read. Ku na mavala eka xifufunhunhu. Teacher: *Lani loko hi hlaya, eku heteleleni ka xivulwa hi vona ku vekiwe doto* (When we read, at the end of the sentence there is a dot). *Kambe, doto leyi nkoka wa yona I yini*? (What is the use of putting a dot at the end of the sentence?). Learners: *I vito* (It because it's a name). Teacher: *E-e, i hiko* (No, it's a full-stop). *(The teacher continues reading*) Ku na mavala eka xifufunhunhu. Learners: *(joining in*) *Kuna mavala eka xifufunhunhu.* Teacher: *kuna mavala eka phaphatana* (*learners follow though reading louder*). *Ku na mavala eka mbyana. Ku na mavala eka yingwe. Ku na mavala eka yimbho*. Ok, what are we reading about in this story? Learners: we were reading about '*yimbho*'. Teacher: No! Has what we have been reading changed? What do you see on this dog? Learners: We see the spots. Teacher: So now, what were we reading about in this story? Learners: *I mavala*. Teacher: Good. Do you see the spots in this book? Learners: Yes. Teacher: Do people have spots? Learners: No mam. Teacher: People do have spots, when we have pimples or when there was a wound, when that wound is healed, it leaves a spot. Look, there are spots on different animals and people. (*The teacher show learners different animals*). Teacher: *(showing pictures*) we said there are spots on… (*Showing learners pictures of animals*). Learners: dogs, leopard, butterfly, giraffe, fish, people (*they identified all the animals in the pictures*). Naledi, can you tell us what today's story is all about? Learner: *Mavala*. Teacher: So now, we all know the spots. You will not forget heh…learners. Learners: Yes, mam. Teacher: Ok, let us go back to our seats.

Extract 3

Group Guided Reading

Teacher: So now we are going to conduct GGR - Group 1 please raise up your hands (*the teacher takes a list and calls the learners of group 1 by their names*), Group 2, yes, raise up your hands (*the teacher gives all the learners reading books according to their group number, from Group 1 to Group 5)*) – those who have one book, please share – we don't have enough books. Group 1, go and sit in front on the floor - the rest of you, please read the storybooks that you have in your desks do not make noise, let us respect our guest. Teacher: (*talking to group 1)* Let us open on page 4 - there are words that we need to know – we are going to read this words in the story. Here is the first word (*the teacher showing learners the word on the flashcard*). Teacher *(reading) A hi vuleni, Mukapu* (let us all say, soft porridge). Learners: *Mukapu*. Teacher: Good, emukapu swi *vula yini vana va mehe?* (Who can tell us the meaning of the word, *mukapu*?) Learners: *Mukhapu*. Teacher: E-e! *emukapu I vuswa lebyo ka byi nga tiyangi* (it is a soft porridge). Teacher: Who else can read this word? (*showing the word*) Learner: *Xibava* (sour). Teacher: good, what is the meaning of *xibaha*? Learners: *I murhi wa ku bava* (sour medicine). Teacher: Here is another word – who can read this word? Learners: (no response). Teacher: You may not know this word, it is a new word, but we will read the word in the story – so this is how we red the word *(reading*) *endzeni* (inside). Teacher: Say, *endzen*i, louder. Learners: *Endzeni*. Teacher: *endzeni swi nga vula endzeni ka xan'wanchumu* (meaning, inside of something). Another new word that we will come across as we read the story is called, *vabya* (sick) - say the word all of you. Learners: *Vabya*. Teacher: *Ma swi tiva ku vabya*? (Do you know what it means to be sick?) Learners: Yes, mam. Teacher: *Heyi! Ma rhasa mani*. (Hey! you're making noise) - *Loko munhu a vabya hi loko a nga pfukangi kahle* (when a person is sick, it is because that person is not well). So now, we are going to read. Let us open on page 4. *(start reading*) *Akani wa vabya, endzeni ka yena ka vava, kokwana u n'wi nwisa murhi wa xibava, u wu chela emukapini, heyi! heyi! Kokwana murhi lowu wa bava.* Teacher: *xana ku humelele yini hi Akani*? (What happened to Akani?) Learners: *Akani wa vabya* (Akani is sick). Teacher: *xana Akani u twa yini*? (What's wrong with Akani?) Learners: *u twa endzeni* (he has a stomach-ache). Teacher: *kokwana u n'wi nyika murhi wa yini*? (Which medicine does granny give to Akani?). Learners: *U n'wi nyika wa xibava* (he was given a sour medicine). Teacher: *U wu chele kwini?* (Where did she pour the medicine?). Learners: *emukapini* (in the soft porridge). Teacher: *Va nga va va n'wi yisile eka dokodela*? (Was he taken to the doctor?). Learner: *hawa* (No). Teacher: *A va n'wi yisangi aniri?* (he was not taken to the doctor, right?) - *Akani va n'wi ongele kwala kaya a ni ri?* (He was attended at home, right?). Teacher: ok, it is enough for today – collect the books and put them back to the reading corner.

APPENDIX M: SCHOOL PROFILE FORM

The schooling context

- Name of school…….
- School Emis number…….
- Area where the school is situated……..
- Government school Yes/No
- Grades……
- LoLT……..
- FAL……
- How many classes of Grade 1? .....
- How many learners per Grade 1 class?

  ……
- Average enrolment of the

  school……..
- How many teachers? ……..
- HODs……..
- Deputy Principal…….
- Principal……..
- SGB Yes/No

APPENDIX N: TEACHERS' AND CAS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Teacher interview schedule

Section A: Biographical Data

1. Name (confidential) :
2. Gender :
3. Age :
4. Home language :
5. How long have you taught Grade 1? :
6. Highest level of qualification :
7. Subjects of specialisation :
8. Name of school :

SECTION B: Teacher's perspectives on the development of learners' Tsonga HL reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in the Grade 1 classroom.

THE LEVEL OF PRINT RICH CLASSROOM

1. CAPS wants you to create print rich environment in your classroom, what do you understand by this?

2. Is it important to do this and why?

3. If we look at your classroom, is it a print rich environment?

4. Do feel proud of the way your classroom looks? What makes you feel proud specifically?

5. Do you think your classroom is an exciting place for the children to come to every day?

6. How often do you change the posters and information on the wall?

7. Why have you arranged the desks in this way?

8. Do you think that group seating in the classroom is a good idea? What makes you say so?

9. What informs you to arrange learners' seating in groups?

10. Do you rearrange the learners' seating every term? Why?

11. Do you have a book corner?

12. What do you think is the importance of having a book corner in the classroom?

13. How do you encourage children to visit the classroom book corner?

BASELINE ASSESSMENT

1. How do you conduct baseline assessment?

2. How often do you assess learners?

3. What do you think it is important to do baseline assessment?

4. Did you conduct baseline assessment? (Need to show evidence of assessment)

PHONICS

1. How do you teach phonics/letter sounds in the Grade 1 classroom?

2. How long do you spend teaching phonics in the classroom on a daily basis?

3. What do you think is important to teach phonics instruction?

4. How do you assist children who have trouble mastering letters and sounds?

5. How do you track your learners' progress in mastering letters and sounds?

PHONEMIC AWARENESS

1. How do you teach phonemic awareness in the Grade 1 classroom?

2. Why is it important for learners to master phonemic awareness?

3. In grade 1 some children will be reading and spelling already, whereas others may know only a few letters and have no reading skill, how do you determine their level of phonological awareness?

4. How do you assist learners who seem to be struggling with a particular subskill, such as blending and segmenting phonemes?

5. How long does it takes you to teach children PA?

VOCABULARY

1. How do you teach vocabulary to the Grade 1 learners?

2. Why do you think is important to teach vocabulary in the Grade 1 classroom?

3. How many words do you introduce for each lesson?

4. How do you help your students learn words indirectly?

ORAL READING FLUENCY

1. How do you teach ORF to Grade 1 learners?

2. Why do you think it is important for the learners to be taught ORF?

3. Do you promote voluntary reading in the Grade 1 classroom? Why?

4. How do you help learners whose fluency is far behind their peers?

READING COMPREHENSION

1. How do you teach reading comprehension to Grade 1 learners?

2. Why do you think it is important to teach reading comprehension to Grade 1 learners?

3. How do you familiarise your learners with different comprehension strategies?

4. Why do you think it is important for your learners to become familiar with comprehension strategies?

READING ACTIVITIES

SHARED READING

1. How do you conduct SR activities with Grade 1 learners?

2. What do you think is the importance of SR in the Grade 1 classroom?

3. Shared Reading happens 3 times per week, what do you do on the first day of SR, the second day and the third day?

4. How long do you conduct SR each day?

5. Is the allocated time (45 minutes) adequate for you to conduct all the shared reading activities?

6. Where do learners normally sit during SR activities?

GROUP GUIDED READING

1. How do you conduct GGR in the Grade 1 classroom?

2. What do you think is the importance of GGR in the Grade 1 classroom?

3. Where do you do GGR in the classroom?

4. How long do you conduct GGR on a daily basis?

5. Where do children sit during GGR activities?

6. How do you engage other learners when you are busy with GGR activities?

7. How many groups do you have in your classroom?

8. How do you put learners into groups?

9. What are the names of the groups?

10. Who gives them the names? Why?

11. Do you change learners from one group to another? Why?

12. How often do you see each group?

13. Do you do the same activities or use the same books with each group? Why?

14. What do you do during GGR with the learners?

15. What guides you to make your guided reading groups?

PAIRED READING

1. How do you conduct PR in the Grade 1 classroom?

2. What do you think it is important to conduct PR in the Grade 1 classroom?

3. What do you do to make sure that students implement PR effectively?

4. Where do learners sit during PR activities?

READ ALOUD

1. How do you conduct RA with Grade 1 learners?

2. Why do you think it is important to conduct RA in the classroom?

3. How often do you conduct RA in the classroom?

4. Where do learners sit during RA in the classroom?

INDEPENDENT READING

1. How do you conduct independent reading in the Grade 1 classroom?

2. What do you think independent reading is important?

3. How do you establish a robust independent reading program in the Grade 1 classroom?

4. How much independent time do you think is appropriate for the Grade 1 learners?

5. How do you help your learners to gain confidence about picking the right books themselves?

6. How do you assess learners' independent reading?

7. How do you tell that the student is ready for a harder text?

CAs interview schedule

Section A: Biographical Data

1. Name (confidential) :
2. Gender :
3. Age :
4. Home language :
5. How long have you been advising at FP? :
6. Highest level of qualification :
7. Subjects of specialisation :
8. Name of district :

SECTION B: CAs' perspectives about supporting schools and teachers in developing learners' reading (and to a lesser extent, writing) in Tsonga in the FP.

1. How well do you think FP teachers are doing to get children to read well in Tsonga HL?

2. How often do you conduct school visits?

3. When conducting school visits, do you ask teachers for their planning files?

4. Do you have a provincial template to help teachers with planning?

5. What advice do you give teachers in terms of managing their daily or weekly planning?

6. What advice do you give FP teachers about creating print rich classroom?

7. What advice do you give teachers in terms of conducting baseline assessment?

8. What do you do to quality assure that teachers have conducted baseline assessment?

9. What advice do you give FP teachers in terms of teaching phonics in the Grade 1 classroom?

10. What advice do you give FP teachers with regard to teaching phonemic awareness in the Grade 1 classroom?

11. What advice do you give FP teachers in terms of teaching vocabulary in the Grade 1 classroom?

12. What advice do you give teachers in terms of teaching ORF in the Grade 1 classroom?

13. What advice do you give FP teachers in terms of teaching reading comprehension in the Grade 1 classroom?

14. What advice do you give FP teachers in terms of conducting Shared Reading in the Grade 1 classroom?

15. What advice do you give teachers in terms of conducting Group Guided Reading in the Grade 1 classroom?

16. What advice do you give teachers in terms of managing groups of classes that are overpopulated in the foundation phase?

17. What advice to you give teachers in terms of conducting Read Alouds in the Grade 1 classroom?

18. What advice do you give FP teachers in terms of conducting Paired/Independent Reading in the Grade 1 classroom?

19. What advice do you give FP teachers in terms of teaching learners to be able to self-regulate in the Grade 1 classroom?

20. Have the district/cluster workshops in connection with the teaching of reading been arranged for the FP teachers?

21. How do you monitor to what extend teachers understand and follow these methods?