

SUPPORT FOR GRADE 9 LEARNERS WITH READING
DIFFICULTIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF LERIBE
DISTRICT IN LESOTHO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

By

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2023

DECLARATION

DECLARATION

I declare that the information presented in this thesis entitled: Support for Grade 9 Learners with Reading Difficulties in Secondary Schools of Leribe District in Lesotho is my work that has not been presented for any award anywhere else. This thesis contains nothing of prior published material written by another person except where it is acknowledged with reference.

Signature  Date 29/03/2023

DEDICATION

- I dedicate this work to God the Almighty, who gave me strength to complete it despite overwhelming challenges that I encountered.
- I dedicate this to my beloved elderly parents, ‘Mamotolo Elizabeth and Moramang Abiel Mohleleng that God has kept to witness this achievement and to my niece Pinky and Noma for their undoubted support and love.
- I also dedicate this to all my friends and sisters especially Stephen, Ntebo (Sr. Ernestina Motjolo pane) and Sr. Vitalina Sekota for their outstanding support that carried me through.

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ABSTRACT

Supporting Grade 9 learners who have reading difficulties in secondary school is important for the inclusion and academic success of these learners. This support requires teachers to employ a variety of learner-centred teaching and support strategies to create a school and classroom environment that welcomes and allows for the cognitive or emotional, social and academic stability of a variety of learners. Support for learners in the lower grades of primary school and higher grades of higher education has been investigated before, but little is known about support for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary school. As a result, this study aimed to narrow this knowledge gap by exploring support for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools of Leribe District in Lesotho. Qualitative research data were collected from four secondary schools through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 12 participants, made up of 4 classroom teachers, 4 Heads of Departments (HoDs) and 4 principals, scheduled classroom observations of Grade 9 classes, field notes and document analysis. Thematic approach was used to analyse the collected data. The findings of the study point to a variety of academic and social-emotional support strategies that teachers can use to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties. In addition, the use of innovative strategies such as technology-adaptive devices and reading interventions such as spelling bee to enhance vocabulary, spelling and retention of learned concepts were found to be critical to improve reading skills for Grade 9 learners in secondary schools of Leribe District in Lesotho. The study presents recommendations for further research, the ministry of education, policy makers and initial teacher education.

Keywords: teachers; support; reading difficulties; secondary schools; Lesotho

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS	–	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CRPD	–	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DBE	–	Department of Education
ECCD	–	Early Child Care and Development
EFA	–	Education for All
ESL	–	English as a Second Language
EFL	–	English as a Foreign Language
EDSEC	–	Education and Training Sector Policy
EU	–	European Union
FORI	–	Fluency Oriented Reading Instruction
HIV	–	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HoD	–	Head of Department
IQ	–	Intelligence Quotient
LNFOOD	–	Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled
LSEN	–	Learners with Special Educational Needs
MoET	–	Ministry of Education and Training
MRD	–	Mixed Reading Difficulty
NAEP	–	National Assessment of Education Progress
NCDC	–	National Curriculum Development Centre
NCLD	–	National Centre for Learning Disabilities
OECD	–	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	–	Programme for International Student Assessment
SACMEQ	–	Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SDGs	–	Sustainable Development Goals
SRCD	–	Specific Reading Comprehension Difficulty
SSC	–	Secondary School Certificate
SWRD	–	Specific Word Reading Difficulty
TQI-SEP	–	Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Program
UN	–	United Nations
UNESCO	–	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	–	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNDP	–	United Nations Development Programme
WEF	–	World Education Forum
ZPD	–	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Reading is very crucial for learning not only of English as the language but generally for academic performance of secondary school students (Karanja, 2015: xii). However, most of learners in junior or intermediate phase for various parts of the world cannot read for comprehension (Minoza & Montero, 2019; Lopres, 2020:1; Pernito- Amor, 2018:2). Through reading process, people get information to improve knowledge and the knowledge can be improved only when the reader understands and is able to interpret the texts. According to Munawaoh (2021), reading is the dominant activity in understanding the context of any texts which need to be read by learners. While Westerveld, Armstrong and Barton (2020) exert that the ultimate aim of reading is reading for comprehension, which means the ability to gain meaning from the text.

Many researchers suggest different strategies which are used in helping learners to improve their reading comprehension. Shea and Ceprano (2017:56) declare that reading for comprehension requires attention to aspects of micro and macro processes, and all levels of Blooms revised taxonomy, which need acquisition of facts to work with – as gist for engaging in deeper levels of meaning making. Lumadi, in his study executed at Acornhoek in Mpumalanga South Africa, observed that strategies including group work, giving learners extra reading work, dictation and giving learners more remedial work helped to enhance reading skills for Grade 6 learners struggling to read (Lumadi, 2016:96). Also, the findings of the study carried out in India exhibit that the GraphoLearn – a computer-assisted reading tool was introduced to Grade 3

poor readers, and its effectiveness in enhancing reading skills for such learners was noticed (Patel, Torppa, Aro & Richardson, 2018:10).

Lesotho, like other countries, has legal guidelines in improving inclusive education. For instance, Education for All (EFA), which was administered through Free Primary Education policy whose main aims were to make fundamental education reachable to all pupils, to make it equitable so as to cast off inequalities and to make sure that each Mosotho child completes the primary circle of education and to make certain that education is inexpensive to the bulk of Basotho (Morojele, 2012:40). Furthermore, recent inclusive education policy stipulates that to ensure the successful inclusion of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN), availability of capable and devoted educators are geared up with needful competencies that may permit them to efficiently execute their mandate (MoET, 2018). The availability of stated legal guidelines are put forth to ensure inclusion of all learners despite their special educational needs such as reading difficulties.

Irrespective of the policies in place, some learners seem to be excluded owing to unaccommodating curriculum and assessment. MoET (2018) points out that despite the introduction of a comprehensive curriculum in 2012, LSEN still faces many challenges as the curriculum does not meet individual educational needs in terms of pedagogy, teaching materials and assessment strategies. These include learners experiencing reading difficulties. Again, huge classes (large number of learners in a class), financial and human resource deficits in schools handicap the quality of education given to learners challenged by reading (Dreyer, 2017).

Despite the strategies that have proven to be working in different countries and the policies that have been introduced, teachers still struggle to support Grade 9 learners who experience reading difficulties. This problem is exacerbated by lack of teacher training (Jalea, 2019), lack of teaching and learning resources (Teodoro, 2020;

Cornelissen, 2019; Nortje, 2017:51). Moreover, inadequate teachers in schools against large classes is a problem a lot more intense than formerly recognized (Garcia & Weiss, 2019:3). In addition, constant adjustments in the education curriculum as well as learners having little motivation to learn from communities and families (Nortje, 2017:51) also contribute highly in making it difficult for teachers to support Grade 9 poor readers.

This problem (reading difficulties) seems to be worrisome to teachers in education. As a result, this study sought to explore teachers' understanding for support of learners with reading difficulties, strategies which teachers may use to support poor readers and also to unfold the improvement of those strategies to assist poor readers. For instance some previous researchers such as Nyabanyaba (2015) and Van Staden (2016:23) in their studies indicated that there are several implications that apply to ESL pedagogical contexts in Lesotho; however, quality education can be improved through open and flexible approaches. Moreover, I forecast that understanding support for learners and the strategies which could be used, will generate a wealth of knowledge that would allow all education stakeholders including the researchers, policy makers, government and the country as a whole to understand better and help in the improvement of stumbling blocks for teachers, therefore, enhancing academic performance for poor readers. I am hopeful that the findings from this study will make contributions in helping to improve reading ability for learners in the secondary schools in Lesotho.

1.1 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

For most people dwelling in the current modern world mainly in this era of COVID-19 pandemic, reading is a regular undertaking that is ignored, yet the most critical ability that learners accumulate at school which shapes the foundation for all further learning. It turned out to be a motive of subject globally that in 2017 UNESCO investigated the extent of literacy internationally. The findings display that more than 617 million children and teens are not reaching minimal skill ability degrees in reading.

This new record threatens the development towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Various international outcomes rely upon SDG4, which requires inclusive and equitable fine training and promotes the possibility of lifelong learning for all. Particularly, target 4.1 needs that entire children complete basic training of enough quality to ensure that they have got applicable and powerful learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2017:1). However, the UNESCO 2018 research shows a change and improvement in reading for 15 year olds, though the improvement is coupled with the socio-economically advantaged students. The improvement does not mean the problem has been eradicated but it implies the need for enhanced strategies to come to the consistent and permanent solution to the reading problems (UNESCO, 2018:9).

In the sub-Saharan countries which include South Africa and Lesotho among others, there is improvement in literacy; however, the learner performance, if measured, would be below the expectation in regard to curriculum (Shea & Spencer, 2017). In regard to Lesotho, progress in literacy is slow and the level of English for learners admitted at the National University of Lesotho is also low owing to different factors but mostly reading difficulties (Johnson, 2015; Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2015:1161). As is the case with South Africa where a plethora of research and interventions put into place in the lower levels – foundation and intermediate phase, learners in the senior phase are excluded. The same applies to Lesotho where interventions are focused on lower grades (primary) ignoring lower or junior secondary (Van Staden, 2016). The assumption is that learners at this level are able to read. However, the reality is different.

As a teacher who has been in the education field for more than nine years teaching English across junior secondary and senior secondary (secondary and high school), I have anecdotally seen learners struggling to read. Also, my fellow colleagues teaching learners with difficulties in reading have been trying to apply different strategies to support such learners. I have also witnessed the same problem which leads to learners' dropping out of school owing to demotivation and being labelled as having disabilities by some teachers when they fail to help them. Van Staden (2016) affirms that learners'

problems are further exacerbated by teachers' restricted pedagogical knowledge of English and exposure to its utilisation in communities.

Society also experience the phenomenon of learners dropping out of school or who remain stagnant owing to reading comprehension difficulties and they roam the streets abusing drugs during school days. On the contrary, poverty and lack of parents/guardian support fuel the problem by not providing necessities to improve understanding and learning of English; as a result, such children experience psychological problems especially stress as such, they fail to fully focus in their education (Koehly, Persky, Shaw, Bonham & Marcum, 2019). This study sought to enlighten English teachers on the strategies they can use to improve reading comprehension ability for Grade 9 learners in the Lesotho secondary schools because Grade 9 class determines whether a learner has a capacity to handle content that leads to the terminal class which is Grade 11 and number of learners who drop out of school will be reduced if learners who experience reading difficulties are supported to read for comprehension.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is crucial for learners to comprehend English texts as they are read because that is core to reading. Reading ability is a vehicle that drives the necessary information home to feed knowledge and to improve learners' performance through education progress and in all other spheres of life. As Nation (2017) points out that reading ability enhances all other skills – listening, speaking and writing; it promotes good performance as well. Reading for comprehension also ensures progress and widens choices in various professions for learners.

Although reading is an essential skill that learners need for academic and personal success, a recently identified number of Grade 9 learners in Lesotho secondary schools experience reading problems which comes with the recently introduced curriculum.

They are unable to interpret English texts, they lack reading fluency and they read without understanding which reflects on their failure to answer comprehension questions appropriately. These problems result in learners who become reluctant to read in classes and avoid doing work that requires them to read. These problems vary with individuals. Poor readers lack reading fluency, leading to poor text comprehension which have negative impact on learners' reading ability (Hall & Barnes, 2017). So, this study aimed to shed light on strategies that English teachers could use to improve reading comprehension ability among Grade 9 learners in the Lesotho secondary school grade 9 learners.

Unless these learners with reading difficulties are supported to improve reading skills, they will continue to struggle with reading throughout their learning. Also, if they do not succeed with reading, this will limit their possibilities to find decent and paying jobs (Almutairi, 2018). Numerous researchers have emphasized the importance of teaching and equipping learners with reading strategies in their early years. Therefore, supporting learners to become successful readers heavily depends on the experience, knowledge and effectiveness of the classroom teacher. However, the government through the Ministry of Education and Training introduced Inclusive Education Policy of 2018 to address the needs of especially learners with learning difficulties. Its implementation is very slow hence the persisting problem of learners with reading difficulties. There is a little research conducted in Lesotho regarding the difficulties encountered by learners in reading; therefore, there is a need for further research in this issue focused on other grades especially the terminal one-grade 11 in order to find the reason behind high rate of low performance.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3.1 THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

How do teachers support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools of Leribe District in Lesotho?

1.3.1.1 SUB RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do teachers understand support for learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools of Leribe District in Lesotho?
2. Which strategies do teachers use to support learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools of Leribe District in Lesotho?
3. How can teachers' strategies to support learners with reading difficulties be improved?

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

AIM

To explore how teachers support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools for Leribe District in Lesotho.

OBJECTIVES

- To describe teachers' understanding of support for learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools.
- To explain strategies that teachers use to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools.
- To suggest more strategies that teachers can use to support Grade 9 learners in

secondary schools for Leribe District in Lesotho.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, constructivism theory is adopted as a theory of knowledge and learning (Huang, 2016). The primary premise of constructivist theory is that people construct their personal knowledge via experience. Constructivism has its roots within side the cognitive theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, and embraces numerous elements of each. From Piaget, we have vivid learning, planning, assimilation and adaptation, etc. From Vygotsky we get social constructivism, work organization, apprenticeships, etc. Constructivism embraces a top- down learning strategy. This means that, as opposed to coaching all of the information that causes a primary concept, learners find out the primary concept after which derive the information (Aljohani, 2017). McLeod (2019) affirms that constructivism as a method to learning postulates that learners actively establish and make their personal knowledge and that fact is decided through reviews of the learner (McLeod, 2019). Constructivism indicates that individual learners establish their knowledge and understanding via experiencing scenarios and considering those scenarios.

Ardiansyah and Ujihanti (2018) assert that constructivist concept is a flexible venture of which the context impacts learning. Therefore, learning is located within side the context where it occurs. Knowledge is built through a learner via his/her reviews, and previous knowledge of understanding is of exceptional importance. Gul (2016) argue as follows:

The scholars and philosophers such as Dewey (1916), Piaget (1973), and Vygotsky (1978) interpreted the identical idea from their one-of-a-kind angles, experiences, minds, and worlds. Constructivism is within the thoughts of knower wherein they assemble a reality, or interpret it, counting on their experiences, and the way they cope with how they are constructed. Experience is likewise crucial in constructivism. In that regard, knowledge is the lifestyle itself, and it is far the learners' experiences, not something available impartial

from the learner. Therefore, coaching and learning techniques have to be associated with the actual realistic world. Further, even the classrooms are designed and shaped in a manner in which now no longer most effectively the teacher talks, however, the learners take part actively via sharing of thoughts and experiences, and alternate know-how interactively.

This theory assisted to explore the study as it emphasizes that people build their knowledge and understanding via experiencing and reflecting on their experiences. Not only that but also it views learners as energetic and curious beings who are motivated to solve problems, expand knowledge and contribute to the improvement of the learning networks with diverse people (school or learning community) to which they belong (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018). The researcher will be searching on the learners' heritage as consistent with the records captured through the school documents, and other different applicable files in regard to learners. McLeod (2019) stresses the significance of contextual impact in learning and previous information in building knowledge. The researcher will examine different environments and elements linked to the learners with reading problems.

The contextual heritage of the learner will decide if there may be learning taking place within family environments, and if there are experiences which are contributing to a learner being capable of reading previous to schooling. Also, it will determine if there is an appropriate environment that enables a learner to read, and if it supplies a few experiences used to advance reading. If a learner grows up within the family in which reading is supported and reading materials are supplied regularly, the learner grows to be a robust reader. The contrary turns to actual for the learner who does not see adults read or revels in problems for reading without enjoyment. Furthermore, Ardiansyah and Ujihanti (2018) opine that learners enjoy the considerate attention and support of different people who offer professional expertise and guidance which steadily internalized to permit self-regulation. Exposure to reading materials at home cultivates tremendous reading culture and mind-set for youngsters while they are introduced to prints and phonics. Consequently, having these facts about learners as a teacher will

offer a base for learner support.

This theory is applicable to this study due to the fact that constructivists view reading as a vigorous and constructive meaning making procedure that entails the interplay between a reader and a text. The meaning making procedure becomes powerful owing to the readers' self traits and their function in the meaning making procedure (Boyd & Chapel, 2019). The readers are self-sufficient people who integrate the schema and new information from text to provide meaning via the procedure of energetic selection, creation, refinement and interpretation of meaning. Constructivists explain further that a reader is engaged in a complicated thinking procedure, recognizing, arranging and analysing information.

Ubuntu, whose philosophy reveals that a person's humanity cannot be separated from that of those around him, also engaged in this research. Mahaye (2018) affirms that it is the individual existence of the self and the simultaneous existence for the other. A person becomes fully human to the extent that she/he is included in relationships with others. In this regard, learners experiencing reading difficulties in schools are not isolated individuals but part of the school community which is bounded by Ubuntu. Therefore, such learners are supported not only by teachers but also by other learners. He further opines that collectivism, associated with harmony and cooperation, means working for the benefit of the whole, rather than that of the changing individual. Applying Ubuntu's core values, such as humanity, caring, sharing, respect and compassion creates a school foundation for the advancement of all learners, irrespective of their learning difficulties. That, on the other hand, develops and nurtures a community of support to those in need.

According to Chinhanu and Adebayo (2020), the wisdom of Ubuntu lies in the recognition that a healthy learning environment cannot be established unless the human dignity of all members of that learning community is safeguarded.

Nevertheless, this philosophy does not try to create a homogenous culture, but a human culture that promotes human values. This theory postulates that the teachers look at whether they support and empower learners equally in order to improve them. This means that if learners are treated well, they are likely to perform better. Practicing Ubuntu unblocks the capacity of human culture in which teachers and learners alike express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and an interest in mutual learning, building and maintaining learning communities with communities.

Ubuntu is a pillar that holds inclusion of learners with learning difficulties as it is against discrimination of any sort. It also aligns with global legislations which advocate for quality education and rights of all learners. Ubuntu as well embraces collaboration of all stakeholders in the education of children. According to Letseka (2011) cited in Lefa (2015:5), when it comes to education, Ubuntu means strong community and school partnerships, where all stakeholders including teachers, learners, school leaders, parents, communities and government are involved in shaping and implementing learning programs to support all learners.

Ubuntu concept is relevant in this study in that for learners to learn effectively and for the values elaborated by Ubuntu to excel, they need harmony in the environment. However, learners use their cognitive ability to understand, interpret and make meaning through experiences as constructivists claim; they also need an appropriate environment as a support system. As such, Ubuntu provides strong support from all stakeholders to ensure understanding through the use of its core values.

In conclusion, Ubuntu as an African philosophy, is strongly supported by the Sesotho phrase “Thuto ke pitsa e maoto a mararo”, literally meaning ‘education is a three-legged pot’, and that means education becomes successful through the input of communities, parents and teachers. If one or two legs of the pot break, it spills off food to be cooked; hence education needs full support and involvement of the entire community, which on the other hand, reveals Ubuntu values. The two theories in which

this study is underpinned are intertwined and through their principles and values makes it easy and enable teachers with other stakeholders to support learners with learning difficulties such as reading within school environment even outside school. This is discussed in details in chapter 2, section 2.5.1 and corresponded with the findings of the study, which is discussed in chapter 5, section 5.3.

1.6 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading difficulties among young people is among the pressing issues currently internationally. A number of illiteracy is much of an emphasis globally. In the research carried by UNESCO (2020), the results show that 773 million adults and young people globally lack basic literacy skills. Also, 617 million children and adolescents do not have a minimum proficiency levels in reading. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessed over 10 million students in 2018 from which China represented by its four metropolitans outperformed all 78 countries participated followed by Singapore. According to World Bank (2020), Philippines ranked last among all participated countries in reading. The failure to perform to expectation was influenced by several factors which among others include lack of emotional support from parents, positive attitudes of learners towards school and learning specifically associated with low reading performance, low resources in disadvantaged schools and high levels of bullying apart from reading difficulties learners experience.

America's Policy Report of 2019 claims that America is in a reading crisis. It points out that two-thirds of American fourth graders do poorly on National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). The crisis is composed of societal segments for which despite the efforts taken to close performance gap, the results show that the percentage of White fourth graders scoring proficient or higher in literacy is probably double that of Hispanics, and 2.5 times higher than Blacks, 47% for Whites, 23% for Hispanics and 20% for Blacks. This reveals the truth that because Americans' expectations are

that students beyond fifth grade have mastered the mechanics of how to read; it does not mean they have done so. For Netherlands, in PIRLS, a proportion of 10% pupils can be considered as low performing readers while in PISA, this proportion reaches 14%. These students can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information or straight forward inferences, but they are unable to deal with longer or complex texts and cannot interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text (ELINET, 2016).

According to Young, Lagrone and McCauleg (2020:2), teachers need access to a plethora of options to support young readers who find the process difficult. The strategy- Read Like Me was introduced and is made up of other strategies such as reading aloud, Read to Impress which is a practice-based method then read aloud again. This strategy worked best accompanied by instruction and struggling readers' performance was improved.

ELINET (2016) emphasises that not only children from culturally disadvantaged families are at risk in their literacy development but also those with very low birth weight and severe prematurity, factors associated with developmental disabilities including reading and writing disabilities need support. Not only strategies are used to support learners with reading difficulties, but also other ways are established in Netherlands. In-class support with additional staff such as reading specialists, teaching assistants or other adults working with a teacher in the classroom, to out-of-class support where educational psychologists and counsellors offer guidance and support for students with reading difficulties.

The promotion of literacy in Africa as a continent face challenges at many levels. Education poses numerous complex challenges in many Sub-Saharan African countries such as inadequate number of employed teachers and the high child-to-teacher ratios in early grades. Such challenges that extend to secondary urban African schools' cripple reading performance. Classes of 70 and more children to one teacher

make it difficult for those teachers to offer appropriate support to all students.

In Nigeria, reading declines as an activity among teenagers with reading problems. Reading problems are not only factors influencing a decline in reading but also poor English language background and preliminary knowledge, lack of motivation in studying and lack of adult readers as models (Abu-Ubaida, Amina, Aishatu & Abubakar, 2017). They assert that reading is indeed indispensable to secondary school, therefore governments, teachers and parents have major role to play in ensuring that students acquire good reading skills.

In the Lesotho context, illiteracy is still high in children owing to several factors such as poverty, child-headed families where parents have died due to HIV. Even though enrolments in schools are high at the lower levels, there is also a high rate of drop outs in the senior secondary despite the introduction of EFA. That is owing to the stated factors, and including learning problems encountered by children (Morojele, 2012). The research conducted by Van Staden in 2016 revealed that Grade 5 learners struggle to read because they lack reading influence from families, societies and even at school. That is due to the fact that English language is taught and spoken scarcely in schools. Thus, learners lack support in regard to learning of English from homes. This is seen in Lesotho secondary schools where Grade 9 learners are unable to interpret English texts, lack of fluency in reading, reluctance in class reading activities which result in failure to answer questions appropriately.

In the African countries, Ubuntu principles should be taught in schools as the cornerstone for inclusive education and the major basis for learners' support system in their learning problems. It paves the way for the implementation of constructivists' principles. McLeod (2019) points out that for learners to understand texts when reading, they need to connect prior knowledge with the new one in their context to make sense of what they read. Their school, family and society environment contribute a big deal for learners to make meaning as they read. The friendly school community is, therefore, needed to enable learners to learn.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Creswell and Plano (2007) cited in Lelissa (2018) define a research design as the ‘tactics for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies.’ It is the general plan for connecting the conceptual research issues with the pertinent empirical research. Therefore, the research design sets the process on the desired data, the techniques to be carried out to gather and examine this data, and the way all of that is going to reply the research questions (Lelissa, 2018). The research design is essential as it makes it viable the easy cruising of the diverse research processes, thereby advent research as professional as possible, yielding most data with a minimal expenditure of effort, time and money (Akhtar, 2016).

A case study was chosen to address this study research questions. A case study permits a researcher to discover and to create a firm, contextual, intensity knowledge, multifaceted information of unique and complex problems in actual existence situations. Also, the ways in which the world is understood from individual’s subjective experience (Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017). Creswell (2014 & 2016) contends that a researcher discovers a couple of bounded system over time via distinctive and in-depth information series regarding a couple of sources of data including interviews, observations, audio-visual materials, and files and reports.

Interpretive paradigm was employed in conducting this study. The main effort of this paradigm is to apprehend the subjective world of human experiences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). The assumption of the researchers engaging on this paradigm is that subjective experiences of people are real and therefore should be taken seriously (Creswell, 2016). Therefore, the researchers understand the subjects’ experiences by interacting with them and what they say be of the priority (Chen, Shek & Bu, 2011; Dean, 2018:3). Interpretive paradigm places emphasis on the understanding of individuals and interpretation of the world around them. Researchers engaging on this

paradigm seek to understand support for individuals of their information to unfold the reality rather than rely on numbers or statistics (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:33).

1.8.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In this study, qualitative approach is used. This approach is mostly concerned with comprehension of the phenomena that is social from the perspective of the participants (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017). Again, it refers to a range of data collection and analysis techniques that use observation and semi-structured, open-ended interviews (Gopaldas, 2016). According to Salva (2017:6), qualitative research is the systematic procedure of gathering data on what people say and do, and building it in their natural environment to find out and reveal in the world as they see. Levitt, Frijters, Wolf, et al., (2017) affirm that this approach is inductive in nature, and researchers generally explore meaning and insights in a given situation. For this study purpose, the researcher found out how learners with reading difficulties are supported in the secondary schools.

This research technique was appropriate as data were collected in the natural environment as words (Young, 2017: 10). For this study, the researcher will visit schools to get information as a result of the natural setting. This is to make the settings as cushy in order not to adjust the experiences and get as plenty information as possible from teachers. It involves collecting and analysing non-digital data such as text, video or audio, words to understand concepts, opinions and experiences (Creswell, 2016); hence observations and interviews are some of the tools which will be used to collect data. The participants will be interviewed to explore their views and experiences in regard to the subject of research, including the strategies they use in support for poor readers by observing and interacting with them in their natural environment. The information will be gathered from four schools involved in this research.

1.8.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

According to McCombes (2019), population is the whole group that the researcher draws conclusion about whereas sampling is the method by which a researcher systematically picks a quite smaller quantity of representative objects or people to observe from a pre-described population according to the research objectives (Sharma, 2017: 749). Furthermore, the whole system of sampling is executed in a single step with each subject independently of the other contributors of the population. Ravitch (2016: 126) contends that sampling is a choice which the researcher makes in terms of the vicinity and from individuals the information will be gathered from. However, the simple random sampling approach will be engaged on this research. In this method, every member of the population has an identical chance of being selected as a subject.

Simple random sampling not like other surveying techniques, is easy and unbiased to gather responses from participants who will be observed and interviewed so as to get sufficient data needed concerning strategies used to support poor readers in secondary schools and how those strategies may be enhanced (Taherdoost, 2016:21). Four schools were chosen from which three Grade 9 teachers will be randomly selected and made up of 4 classroom teachers, 4 HoDs and 4 principals to a total number of 12 participants. Among the three teachers chosen per school, one had to be the principal. This was crucial because principals are anchors of support for teachers; therefore, they can give appropriate information as to how poor readers are given support. Another member selected will be the head of department (HoD) as the immediate support for teachers and likewise, rich data can be given to the researcher while the last member will be an experienced and qualified English teacher teaching junior or lower secondary grades because a classroom teacher has the capacity to identify learners' problems and provide assistance.

1.8.3 DATA GENERATION TOOLS

These tools are the reality locating devices. They are the equipment for data gathering and amongst others, they include interviews, observations and documents. Significantly, the researcher should make certain that the device selected is legitimate and dependable because the validity and reliability of any research project relies upon to a large extent on the appropriateness of devices used. Whatever process one uses to gather information should be severely tested to check the volume to which it is probable to present the researcher with anticipated results (Annum, 2017:1). For this study, the strategies that will be used are as follows.

1.8.3.1 Interviews

Interview entails asking questions and getting responses from individuals in a study (Kabir, 2016:211). According to Buriro, Awan and Lanjwani, (2017:2), interviews are exceptional for describing, interpreting, conceptualizing and gaining in-intensity insight into particular concepts hence a researcher is based on observation, interaction and interpretation so as to come to a conclusion. The researcher used face-to-face interview to discover teachers' understanding in regard to the support that should be given to the poor readers for them to improve in reading. Face-to-face interviews are effective because distinctive questions can be asked and further probing be executed to offer rich data (Kabir, 2016:213), also non-verbal data can be gathered via observation while complex and unknown problems can be explored. Additionally, face-to-face interviews bring about higher response rate.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the most appropriate tool which permits extra open-ended questions (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017), which will be phrased and asked in English, then be voice recorded. Participants were also allowed to reply in Sesotho as another authentic and official language in Lesotho, and then later be translated to

English. Individual interviews for the selected teachers were also be used to make them disclose more personal views and feelings freely (Kruger, Rodges, Long & Lowy, 2019) in regard to poor readers. This is affirmed by Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley and McKenna (2017) that individual's interviews are very effective since with them there is personal sensitive disclosure. The researcher will request for participants' permission to record the interviews to avoid misinterpretation and transcribe them later.

1.8.3.2 Observations

Observation is a systematic data collection technique from which researchers use all of their senses to observe people in a natural setting or naturally happening situations (Kabir, 2016:240). By using observation strategy, researchers are capable of acquiring first-hand information about the objects, and eventful happenings (Annum, 2017:3). Observation of teachers in the classroom will be carried out with the purpose to interrogate the effectiveness of strategies they use to support poor readers. Canals (2017:396) opines that classroom observations are one of the most extensively used techniques for research in language education.

Observation, consistent with Annum (2017:3), is one of the critical techniques for acquiring comprehensive data mainly when a composite of both oral and visual data become crucial to the researcher. A researcher needs an audio-visual recorder for an entire collection of such comprehensive record. Therefore, the researcher sought permission from participants to video record them to lessen the barest minimal possibility of distorting facts and records (Ciesielska, Bostrom & Ohlander, 2018:33). Furthermore, Moore and Llompart (2017:406) display that in observations, video recording is extra vital because a researcher may not only be inquisitive about oral language, but also in multimodal elements of interactions. The significance of components including body position, gaze, facial expression, etc., for comprehending interaction is being taken more seriously in lots of streams of qualitative research, and

also crucial to being capable of absolutely answer the research questions asked.

1.8.3.3 Documentary analysis

Document data collecting approach will focus on all sorts of written verbal exchange to supply the researcher with greater data on the background of the concept that is being discussed. This will consist of published and unpublished files including reports, articles, performance ratings, minutes of the meetings, etc. The unpublished documents are primary source while published ones are secondary source. Documentation as information gathering approach uses written or visual data affirmed (Cardno, Rosales-Anderson & McDonald, 2017:147). In this research, the researcher used files which include learner guide plans, teacher intervention files and Language departmental meetings minutes as the sources of data. The stated documents will offer data in regard to teachers' understanding of learners' reading problems and what they did to assist learners in this regard. According to Evaluation Briefs (2018), document analysis approach provides researchers with a rich and first-hand data.

1.8.3.3 FIELD NOTES

The researcher took notes to make sure that all individual participants' responses are captured which resulted in effective information gathering. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017:383) assert that field notes are a record of activities observed and casual discussions from the field that are taken at two stages. The first stage carries the reality or direct description of what is seen and heard that may be audio recorded. The second stage entails observers jotting down their thoughts about the activities and interviews. The motive of this stage is to offer a context for the facts observed on the surface stage and to feature what the researcher thinks the facts mean. The motive of the participant observation is not solely to look at what goes on but to experience what it is like to be part of the group as well. Field notes are essential part of qualitative research because

they resource the researcher in gathering and remembering information from observational sessions. The information that will be covered in this study will be, among others, how are classroom settings, who are there, students' participation in reading lessons, how lengthy are sessions what kind of materials are used. Also, the strategies used by distinct participants and how efficiently they were used to support the learning process (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018:2557).

1.9 DATA ANALYSIS AND TECHNIQUES

Medelyan (2020) describes qualitative information analysis as the procedure of inspecting and decoding data to understand what they represent. It is more concerned with the meaning of specific occasion and the analysed data come from interviews, direct observations and written documents (Watkins, 2017:3). A qualitative researcher constructs interpretive narrative from collected data and captures the complexity of the scenario under study. When analysing data, step one would be establishing the different data collection sources the researcher has used (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020:96). All the prepared notes in this situation are from interviews, observations, documents and field notes regarding the study. They were accompanied by description of data, from which the researcher sought to explain different components of the study. According to Ngulube (2015:8), that consists of teachers' understanding about the support for learners with reading problems, how such learners are supported to enhance their reading ability, viewpoints of participants and if there is a chance to enhance strategies which teachers use in teaching reading to poor readers.

Lester, et al. (2020:98) identify the very last step of analysis procedure as interpretation, comprising explanations of the findings and setting styles into analytic framework. Data analysis entails taking data collected and placing it back collectively into a shape that permits extraction of information to answer the research questions. Themes are styles throughout data units which are vital to the phenomenon description and are associated with a particular research question. To pick out applicable themes, the recorded data will first be transcribed after which analysed (Belloto, 2018). Themes

derived from the research questions guiding this study will be used to examine data and different themes will be diagnosed and coded (Kristiansen, 2020).

There will be engagement of thematic analysis to analyse accumulated data from interviews, observations, field notes and documents. Medelyan (2020) explains thematic analysis as the form of qualitative data analysis that reveals themes in textual content by analysing the meaning of words and sentence structure while Belloto (2018) complements it as the study of documents and artefacts for conversation which might be texts of various formats, video or audios. It permits researchers to perceive fundamental themes in the location of interest by decreasing the material to a set of themes or categories. Data which will be transcribed will consequently be organized into categories that will be coded to determine themes that informed the main research question of the study. The actual engagement of thematic technique to analyse data is discussed in details in chapter 3.

1.10 DEFINITION OF KEYWORDS

In this section, the researcher define the keywords used in this study and those are; teacher, learner support, reading difficulties, secondary schools and Lesotho.

1.10.1 Teacher

Teacher is defined as a central figure that his hands determines the likelihood of a school's success or failure in achieving its learning and teaching goals. It is also the person who can understand the situation of the class and of learners while attending the lesson (Putri, Andriningrum, Rofiah and Gunawan, 2019:5). This study is concerned about the teacher's efforts in helping Grade 9 learners who experience reading difficulties.

1.10.2 Learner support

Learner support is an important part of teaching and focuses on what teachers can do to help learners beyond their formal deliverables (Malia, 2023:7). The essence of this study focused on what teachers do to assist Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties

to improve their reading skills.

1.10.3 Reading difficulty

Reading difficulty is a lower-than-expected reading success rates related to individual age and learning potential and variability in learner's cultural, linguistic and educational experiences (Akyol and Boyaci-Altinay, 2019:1269). In this study, Grade 9 learners experience reading difficulties and they need teachers' support to improve reading.

1.10.4 Secondary schools

According to Kools, etal, cited in Palime (2020:11), school is an organization of learning where learners learn in support of its objectives to successful implementation of its curriculum, hence secondary school is a level between primary and tertiary where teen are prepared for tertiary education. Grade 9 learners are supported in secondary school.

1.10.5 Lesotho

Lesotho is a high altitude landlocked mountainous country with Sesotho and English as official languages (MoET 2012 cited in Palime, 2020:11). This study is conducted in Lesotho.

1.11 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of self-assurance of the data, interpretation and techniques used to make certain the quality of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability components. Mareek (2014:80) opines that credibility contributes to perception within the trustworthiness of the findings via a number of continual observations, triangulation and extended engagements. It is likewise addressed via member test when the participants are requested to check data gathered by the interviewer and the researchers' interpretation of interview data.

Pozzbon, Rodriguez and Petrini (2014:305) posit that qualitative research must be reliable and dependable in that it can mirror earlier work. In those cases, data categories need to be internally consistent; consequently, the need to explain categories with properties that can be used for future tests of replicability. In this research, transferability was used as thick description to expose that findings can be used to other settings, instances and situations. To set up conformability of the findings a trailed audit which indicates step by step of data analysis is carried out to offer purpose for the conclusions reached. Hence, the participants' responses are portrayed. Engaging a couple of techniques of data series including interview, observation and document analysis, typically result in trustworthiness.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important for researchers to consider the fundamentals of ethical research involving human participation. The fact that most research involves human participants; therefore, it is highly important that human research ethics approval be obtained before the commencement of data gathering from participants (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). The level of attention on ethical conduct – the actions that are personal, professional and during research activity should both be increased and broadened in response to society's expectation of greater accountability (Zegwaard, Campbell & Pretti, 2017). Therefore, the ethical issues in this research include protecting participants from any harm by avoiding using self-identifying statements and information to keep confidentiality and anonymity. The participants will be informed about all the steps to be taken in this research because they are more important than the study; so, they should always be respected. The participants will be notified that their participation is voluntary, and they can call it quits anytime they feel like. Moreover, upon the completion of the study, the data collection material will be destroyed. The ethical clearance will be used produced when securing permission to conduct a research at the Ministry of Education in Leribe district and also the

university has to verify that the researcher was allowed to do the research.

1.13 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study is classified into five chapters. Chapter one comprised an introduction and background of the study, statement of the problem, rational of the study, purpose of the study, research questions and study objectives discussion. In chapter two, literature review is discussed. It looks into how learners with learning difficulties are excluded in the ordinary classrooms, what teachers do to show their understanding for the support of learners with reading problems and the strategies teachers use to support poor readers. Chapter three describes the methodology which is made up of research design, method and tools of data generation, sampling procedure, collection of data, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Chapter four presents data presentation and analysis. The presentation and analysis are done in consideration to themes preconceived in the research questions. Chapter five is made up of findings discussion, conclusion and recommendations, list of references and appendices.

1.13 TIME FRAME

Academic year 2021 – concentrate on completing research proposal. Academic year 2022 – focus on completing chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Academic year 2023 – focus on completing chapter 5 and submit for examination.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Most of Grade 9 learners in Lesotho secondary schools do not perform well academically, especially in subjects that require more reading. Hence, a small number of them progress to Grade 10, where they are being prepared to face Grade 11 final examinations. This, therefore, shows how reading is crucial to the academic success of learners and it enhances literacy levels, social skills; personal wellbeing even provides a sense of purpose (Mphahlele, 2018:1). Successful learners at school are those who make efforts to master reading skills because many subjects taught and assignments given need reading comprehension (Mohammed & Ofori, 2018:271). Reading difficulties encountered by learners reveals academic challenges and it is one of the sources of poor performance for learners at school (Mphahlele, 2018:2). Furthermore, Grade 9 level is a determining factor for learners as it clearly shows whether a learner progresses to higher level of education or out to strive in life which is limited to doing only certain jobs owing to lack of reading skills (Partanen & Siegel, 2014:665), or for learners portraying destructive behaviours if they do not get support which can change state of reading difficulties faced by Grade 9 learners.

2.2 LESOTHO EDUCATION SYSTEM

The system of education in Lesotho is undergoing a reform brought forth with integrated curriculum that introduces grades and phase out standards or forms. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) of 2009 was established for various reasons including individualized and social development education, challenges posed by pandemics such as HIV, poverty increase, lack of employment in

the country for which school life is integrated with learners' everyday life (MoET, 2009:12).

Currently, Education System in Lesotho is made up of basic education which includes pre-primary level (ECCD) including reception class 0-6 years, primary level from Grades 1 to 7, secondary level from Grades 8 to 11, and then tertiary level (MoET 2009 cited in Selepe, 2016:4). Grade 9 level comes only after seven years of primary and 1 at secondary level and the expectation is that Grade 9 learners are able to read with comprehension; since reading correctly with the use of language and choice of words begins at reception class (5-6 years) of pre- primary (MoET, 2011:18). Then from Grades 1-3, reading is taught through native languages while from Grades 4-7 reading is taught through English language as a subject and as a medium of instruction from Grade 4 to tertiary level (MoET, 2019:1).

According to the researcher's experience, some Grade 9 learners struggle with reading despite the years they spend learning to read and reading to learn. The problem could be due to diverse factors including poverty which unable parents and schools to provide learners with proper reading materials as per age and grade level; huge classes that make it difficult for teachers to reach an individual learner with support; curriculum that does not cater for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) and teachers' lack of knowledge for learners with different learning disabilities.

This study, therefore, strived to shift teachers' focus to the need for support of Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties from primary level learners as research shows that most support is given to learners at lower levels. Grade 9 levels are an indicator whether learners can improve in reading abilities; hence improved performance with the support of teachers or they need further support even in the next levels. They are a mirror for teachers to predict performance for Grade 11 end of year examinations and entry to tertiary level. As a result, it seems important for teachers to provide support for Grade 9 learners who struggle to read.

2.3 READING DIFFICULTIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Reading difficulties experienced by learners at secondary schools emanate from failing to learn to read appropriately at lower grades levels specifically between kindergarten and Grade 4 (Partanen & Siegel, 2014:669). However, reading is a crucial skill not only for learning English as a language but also for other subjects because most of them are taught in English. That means learners should be able to efficiently learn English as a language which includes all skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. People acquire information in the process of reading to improve knowledge, and knowledge can only be improved when readers understand and can interpret the text (Mphahlele, 2018:2; Hedgcock & Ffris, 2018:15). According to Munawaoh (2021), reading is the basic activity for understanding the context of any text that a learner needs to read. While Westerveld, Armstrong and Barton (2020) believe that the ultimate purpose of reading is to read for understanding. This means being able to derive meaning from the text. Akyol and Boyaci-Altinay (2019:1269) point out that effective reading must include principles of fluency, strategy, continuity of motivation and meaning-making.

Some researchers argue that reading skills should be acquired at lower grades which means at foundation phase, and interventions be provided or else, if a learner enters higher grades exhibiting difficulty with foundational competencies, leads to persistent reading difficulties and is less likely to graduate from high school (Rasinski & Young, 2017:146-147). On the contrary, Agyei (2019:15) attests those learners with processing issues – can be seen in difficulties with spelling and writing persist despite the blow. Nevertheless, these learners' reading ability may be improved though it continues to be characterized by a slower reading.

2.3.1 READING DIFFICULTIES

In the situation where a learner fails to master reading, then there is a problem. Akyol and Boyaci-Altinay (2019:1269) define reading difficulty as lower than expected reading success in relation to the individual's age and learning potential and the variability of the learner's cultural, linguistic and educational experience. Akyol &

Kayabasi-Ketenoglu (2018) emphasize that learners with reading difficulties cannot employ support strategies when they cannot comprehend texts, and they also read aimlessly without using cues.

According to Agyei (2019:15), learners with reading problems depict difficulties with reading skills such as single word reading, pronunciation of words or letters, and comprehension. These are contingencies based on age, cognitive ability, level, intervention and teaching. It appears difficult to define reading difficulties due to its diverse characteristics (Saltana, 2016:1). On the contrary, higher-level reading – secondary level and advance reading involves topic and word knowledge, reasoning and building mental models on what is read. For older readers, they monitor content by checking whether they understand the reading content, and finally evaluate the reading content comprehensively (Boaky 2017 in Gumede & Boakye, 2020:75).

Secondary school education is a crucial stage of transition of career for learners which needs much attention in helping learners to read appropriately (Mahana, Mishra and Dash, 2019:4). Subbiah and Singh (2019) point out that at secondary stage, generally learners lack appropriate reading strategies in English. According to Manu, Torppa, Eklund, et al. (2020:753), in addition to phonological awareness, pre-reading skills in kindergarten are strong predictors of reading comprehension in Grade 9. Regardless of level, secondary school learners' abilities in decoding, word learning, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and motivation can be achieved in Grade 9 with teacher support (Durrington Research School, 2018).

Decoding seems to be fundamental to understanding, but other components like vocabulary and fluency are also vital. Some secondary school level learners may have difficulty decoding multiple words, which may make it difficult for these learners to make sense of the whole sentence or construct a meaningful sentence (Fesi & Mncube, 2021:1). On the contrary, Susanto (2017:158) indicates that vocabulary is an important part of a foreign language acquisition and plays an important role in forming a complete spoken and written discourse. This describes the importance of vocabulary

in language skills, but mainly in reading, as it completes reading for its ultimate goal of comprehension.

Kusumawati and Widiati (2017) concur that vocabulary plays an important role in the achievement of comprehension in reading and place it at the center. Therefore, learners at higher level should be able to understand words usage in texts to comprehend the whole text since they are no longer learning to read but reading to learn. Almutairi (2018:22) submits that mastery word decoding enables successful readers to easily and rapidly understand letter blocks, prefixes, suffixes and original words. Therefore, the reader's ability to decode words quickly frees up more memory capacity in their brains for reading comprehension. Learners with reading difficulties, on the other hand, spend more time and energy figuring out the meaning of each word in a text, which causes the brain to lose the processing power it needs to make sense of the text. The importance of vocabulary learning to enhance comprehension of the texts is in line with the findings of the current study when it posits that vocabulary is the core for learning to read, write, speak and understanding texts and

communications in English; hence, the need for spelling bee strategy of support in learning vocabulary.

Reading fluency also plays an important role in helping learners understand texts. Reading fluency is the speed of reading individual words, the speed of correct reading of words, the speed of reading connected texts and the speed of expressive reading (Paige, 2020: 1; Bogozzi, Tarchi, Vagnoli, Valente & Pinto, 2017:2). Fluent readers can read with ease and accuracy, with appropriate emphasis and intonation. They can automatically recognize words; so, they can focus on understanding text instead of decoding words, pay attention to punctuation, stress and intonation, no backtracking or repetition, no syllabification or unnecessary pauses, pay attention to units of meaning, just like speaking, so reading like speaking is important for meaning building, which can be difficult for learners with reading difficulties (Akyol & Boyaci-Altinay, 2019:1270).

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, Secondary Education Syllabus volume one of 2002 cited in Karanja (2015:19) posits that the ability to read fluently is vital in school and in life, such that good reading skills can improve grades in all subjects.

Slow readers take more time to complete tasks than good readers, which can lead to frustration, task avoidance behaviours and dropping out of school. This demonstrates the importance of reading fluency in adolescents (Bogozzi, et al, 2017:7).

Spear-Swerling (2015) classifies reading difficulties into those that are common among English language learners and those related to disabilities such as those typical of dyslexic learners. She explains these reading difficulties as common patterns or profiles of poor reading involving Specific Word Reading Difficulty (SWRD), which includes word decoding and fluency owing to inaccurate decoding as well as poor spelling; Specific Reading Comprehension Difficulty (SRCDD) involves poor reading comprehension, vocabulary, summarizing or citing textual evidence; and Mixed Reading Difficulty (MRD) which has deficits of both SWRD and SRCDD. She believes that learners experience the same problems even after primary school because screening and interventions at primary school cannot prevent all reading problems, and therefore reading interventions should be offered at secondary school to support such learners.

As per above information, research shows that reading difficulties among learners in the elementary or secondary level is a crisis both at national and international levels. Learners who experience reading difficulties are affected negatively; their general performance is low compared to their peers and that result in to depression, destructive behaviours and lastly, learners' high rate of drop outs. In some parts of the world, learners are competent in English reading which is seen in PISA and OECD tests given to adolescent learners and therefore, their systems of education are considered well organized worldwide. These call for teachers' high support for learners who experience reading difficulties with the use of appropriate individualized instruction and strategies which can help improve learners' reading skills.

2.3.1 LEARNING DISABILITIES VERSUS LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Sinfield (2021) describes learning disability as a different way the brain is wired that makes the reception and processing of information look different than for learners who do not experience a learning disability. She goes on to claim that learning disabilities can make reading, writing, spelling and math difficult; hence, the term is an umbrella term for a range of specific learning difficulties. Learners with learning disabilities are often above average in intelligence; however, there is a discrepancy between their potential and achievement. Nevertheless, with the appropriate support and interventions, they are able to close that gap and show their abilities (Anuradha, 2021). MyLife Care (2018) argues that even though learning disabilities and learning difficulties seem to be used interchangeably, there are significant differences between the two in that, learning disabilities impact an individual's health, physical condition, IQ and life skills, whereas learning difficulties create barriers to specific forms of learning, and this form of learning does not affect an individual's overall IQ.

Anuradha (2021) draws parallels between the two terms, both refer to situations where a learner is unable to achieve academic performance expected for their age and level, and both involve some external or internal factors that challenge the learner's learning abilities. In other words, learning difficulties are conditions where factors apart from learning disabilities or learning differences hinder learners' capacity to achieve the same academic level as their peers. That is why the international policies, legislations and conventions do not separate the two but use learning disabilities as an umbrella term.

2.3.2 POLICIES, CONVENTIONS AND LEGISLATIONS THAT SUPPORT LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The world today talks inclusion of learners with disabilities in the education settings and many countries – under developed, developing and developed work to meet the needs of learners with learning difficulties such as reading difficulties, hence the term 'Inclusive Education.' Inclusive Education is understood and implemented differently

depending on each country's economy. Samal (2021) defines Inclusive Education as a new approach towards educating children with disabilities and learning difficulties with the "normal" ones under the same roof. This implies non-discriminatory schools and classrooms where all learners with or without any disability enjoy teaching and learning together in the classroom or at the community level with appropriate support of teachers and the stakeholders involved in education.

Longfellow (2021) provides a more detailed definition from the Inclusive Education Policy implemented in 2018 by Queensland in Australia that Inclusive Education means that all learners are accessible and fully engaged with peers of the same age, where teaching and learning strategies are adjusted to the individual needs of learners, encompasses all aspects of school life, and are supported by culture, policies, programs and practices.

The principles of Inclusive Education were adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education, Opportunity and Quality (Salamanca Statement and Framework, Spain, 1994) and were restarted at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000). United Nations Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities further supports the idea of inclusion, declaring participation and equality for all (Samal, 2021; Longfellow, 2021; Du Plessis, 2013:79; Wood & Bates, 2020:255; Kramer, Moller & Zimmermann, 2021:432).

As research suggests that inclusive education principle emanated in 1994 by Salamanca Statement, inclusion of learners with disabilities and learning difficulties was advocated for and supported back in 1948 by Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 26 number 1, that everyone has the right to education, which should be free and compulsory, at least in the primary and basic level. This means that learners should acquire basic skills that will further benefit them in their studies and in life and that education should accommodate everyone without any discrimination. This, therefore, has laid a foundation for Inclusive Education. Furthermore, number 2 of article 26 in the same document stipulates that education should be directed towards the full development of the human personality promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations. This opposes the exclusion of learners with learning difficulties from learning with their peers for academic and social support, including

other benefits of Inclusive Education (Samal, 2021).

Article 24, number 2 of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 1993 points out that states shall ensure that persons with disabilities should not be excluded from general education and children with disabilities should not be excluded from free primary and compulsory primary or secondary education on the grounds of disability; access to inclusive, quality, free primary and secondary education on the basis that they should receive the support they need within the general education system to promote effective education.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education 1994 reaffirms the right to education of every individual as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and renew the pledge of the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All ensuring rights for all regardless of individual differences. Moreover, it endorses several United Nations declarations, culminating in the 1993 United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which urges states to ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the education system (UNESCO, 1994).

The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in special educational needs declares that every child has a fundamental right to education and must have the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning and that children with special educational needs must have access to regular schools that provide education in a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting such need (UNESCO, 1994).

According to UNESCO (2020), the statement is fundamental because it lays a foundation and calls for governments globally to develop policies in support for learners with learning difficulties – reading difficulties included, ensuring that schools are fully inclusive through the support of UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and World Bank and equalization of opportunities for learners with learning disabilities (Ainscow, Slee & Best, 2019:671).

In the light of the foregoing information, the researcher assumes that different

countries' Inclusive Education Policy, Language Policy and others related to making it easy for learners with learning difficulties to learn with their peers emanates from different conventions on the Human Rights and Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including Salamanca Statement which made a great move globally through the assistance of UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, World Bank and other organizations. They all support inclusion of learners with learning difficulties which includes those with reading difficulties.

Some countries have improved education for these learners through the proper implementation of Inclusive Education, training of teachers and supporting ordinary schools that have included learners with learning difficulties, while other countries are integrating learners in the name of inclusion. This happens mainly in the low-economy countries such as Lesotho where even curriculum has no sign of inclusiveness. Therefore, learners with learning difficulties will have to suit the education system instead of educational system made to be accommodating for these learners. Some countries had started long time ago to include learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties.

In Bangladesh, language policy has made English to enjoy a special status as a global language. In the education system, over 30 million students learn English as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 in the different streams of pre-tertiary education and it is one of the largest English learning populations in the world. However, the status of English language education varies significantly across the various sectors of education. In secular education, it has the same status as the national language in the school curriculum and occupies almost 19% of the curricular space. Like Bangla, English is taught in class on a daily basis, but English teaching and learning outcomes must not be compared to those in English medium schools where English is the dominant language and Bangla is on the back burner (Hamid & Jahan, 2015). In regard to inclusion of learners with learning disabilities, the National Education Policy 2010 is one of the official documents towards Inclusive Education from which in its foreword, the Minister of Education stressed that ensuring quality education for all children is a fundamental issue (Malak, Ara Begum, et al., 2013:5).

Bangladesh had signed for major declarations of Inclusive Education and over 20

years, it has approved policies and legislations in favor of Inclusive Education. However, the implementation is at an early stage. Bangladesh has committed to address Inclusive Education within the existing education system and has agreed with the declaration of Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). The Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2008), which all call for the rights of all children into education through the same system. In accordance with the policy initiatives, Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Program (TQI-SEP) has been in practice (UNICEF, 2021:6-8; Malak, et al., 2013:2-3).

According to CIDA 2012 cited in Malak, et al., (2013:11), there has been a positive impact of TQI-SEP program on learners' general performance in Secondary School Certificate (SSC) from 52.5% at the start of the project to 67.4% in 2009, 82.1% in 2011 and 86.7% in 2012. Malak and Tasnuba, (2018) on their abstract point out that TQI-SEP has been developed for Inclusive Education in secondary level where teachers have been trained on different aspects of Inclusive Education, including pedagogical knowledge, curriculum flexibility, and disability and diverse learning needs under TQI-SEP since its adoption. However, research shows that teachers' pessimistic views are one of the major stumbling blocks to Inclusive Education in secondary education in Bangladesh. One may assume that the positive change claimed by Malak, et al. 2013 has reached stagnation due to some challenges, including this one brought forth by teachers.

The 2019 study carried out in India on reading problems among secondary school learners in English found that Grade 9 learners were still in the early stages of reading development. Having studied English for five years until Grade 9, they cannot reach the reading stage of Grade 9, and most learners have the reading abilities of Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners (Mahana, Mishra, & Dash, 2019:16). The study conducted in India by Mohammad and Hasbi on reading difficulties in English as a second language in Grade 5, has shown that learners with reading difficulties especially at the primary level, had no specific language impairment, but they had varying levels of language

exposure, resulting in poor accuracy, comprehension and reading rates. Also, these learners' learning deficit was further aggravated by their shyness of reading passages in English language in front of their peers and teachers which made them not realize the mistakes such as omissions, substitutions and mispronunciation that affected their comprehension and accuracy levels (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021:430-431).

Hunt (2021:594) asserts that the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Development Strategy underscores the importance of a broad basic education network which supports the right of every learner to attend a mainstream school close to them. Basic education and its inclusiveness ensure that all learners can succeed in learning through sufficient and timely support. General support is the first response to a learner's support needs, and therefore, guidance and support are part of the everyday activities of the school.

Each learner is supported in his/her own school through different flexible arrangements according to National Core Curriculum. Assessment of learners to provide suitable support and commonly used support measures are remedial instruction, part-time special needs education, individual learning plans and individualized syllabi (Klemencic, 2017; Team Leverage Education, 2022). In this regard, learners with learning difficulties, especially reading difficulties, are able to close the gap and perform at par with their peers.

Finland participated in PISA 2012 for 15-year-olds and the performance in reading was well above EU. However, a limited proportion of pupils 11% can be considered as low-performing readers. These learners can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or more complex texts, and to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. For PISA, Finland is a highly performing education system: 15-year-olds performed much better than EU countries on average, leading the country among the top countries in the ranking (Garbe, Lafontaine, Shiel, Sulkunen & Valtin, 2016:6). In PISA 2018, for reading literacy, 15-year-olds in Finland score higher points compared to points in OECD countries. The contributing factors include small class size of 15-year-olds, large number of healthy learners compared to other countries and the lowest bullying in schools.

According to Colagrossi (2018), Finland is a country rich in knowledge and educational reforms, has initiated many novel and simple changes over the years that have revolutionized their education system. They rank above the United States and are catching up with East Asian countries. Finland leads by common sense practice and the pursuit of equality rather than excellence in the overall teaching environment. There are no standardised tests in Finland, only national entrance exams, which learners take voluntarily at the end of high school. All children across Finland are graded on an individual basis, and the scoring system is developed by their teachers, while tracking overall progress is done by the Ministry of Education, which samples groups from different schools.

There is no need to hold teachers accountable because the demands on teachers are so high that there is usually no justification for a strict grading system for teachers. Finland has no competition; only cooperation. The Finnish education system is not worried about an artificial or arbitrary merit-based system. There is no list of top performing schools or teachers – this is not a competitive environment, instead collaboration is the norm. Furthermore, Finnish children only need nine years of compulsory education. Their children begin school at seven, because before that, they are given freedom in the developing childhood years. They have many different practices which improve their education beyond limits (Strauss, 2019; Colagrossi, 2018; Team Leverage Education, 2022).

Research shows that internationally, developed and high economy countries have no problems with the implementation of Inclusive Education as seen in countries such as Finland. Learners with reading difficulties get all the support they need on a daily basis to perform at the same standard with their peers. In African countries, this is still a process and some countries are advanced while others are at early stage, maybe because these countries face diverse challenges including political instabilities and corruption that handicap such countries economy to mention few; as a result, enhancing education systems generally become challenging.

According to Zwane and Malale (2018:1-2), like other countries, Swaziland has signed several international conventions and legislations to support Inclusive Education. These policies bind Swaziland to provide Inclusive Education in schools. Included are

those who experience learning barriers such as reading difficulties. This country has its own policies and legislations developed towards implementation of Inclusive Education in the mainstream schools. The extent to which the government of Swaziland has adopted international Inclusive Education policies attests to and affirms the commitment of the Ministry of Education and Training to the provision of quality education for all learners in the country (Eswatini Ministry of Education and Training, 2019:2). The Education and Training Sector Policy (EDSEC) that was developed in 2011 and updated in 2018 aims to provide Eswatini learners with opportunities for relevant quality education at all levels, taking into account all issues of availability, quality and special needs (Shongwe, 2021). The provision of an equitable and Inclusive Education and training system where all learners have access to free and compulsory basic education and high-quality senior secondary education, followed by the opportunity to continue lifelong education and training (Eswatini Ministry of Education and Training, 2019:2). It further claims that the EDSEC focuses on meeting the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups while benefiting all learners. It defines Inclusive Education and training as the recognition that all children and young people can learn and need support to do so. It focuses on minimizing barriers to learning related to behavior, attitudes, teaching methods, curriculum and environment and maximizing engagement of all learners at all levels. It highlights the assurance that schools' leaders, teachers, support staff and other stakeholders will provide support to learners experiencing learning disabilities such as reading problems through support teams. UNESCO (2021) points out that four new inclusive secondary schools were built in different regions of Eswatini to support Inclusive Education, where all learners, regardless of any challenges they face, are placed in age- appropriate mainstream classes that are accepted in their own communities to receive high-quality instruction, interventions and support that enable them to succeed in the core curriculum.

In Botswana, reading remains an essential skill in education and its performance is considered a serious concern for all stakeholders. Therefore, Botswana government continuously invests much in reading as one of the key areas that support both teaching and learning. Moreover, to remove barriers to learning, the Botswana government launched an Inclusive Education Policy 2011, underscoring the importance of other areas; catering for learners with diverse learning needs, including those with reading

difficulties (Molosiwa, Mukhopadhyay, Tsayang & Malatsi, 2018:15-16). Botswana is no exception; other countries reform their education system in accordance with international conventions and policies (Mrstik, 2017:1; Mangope, Kuyini & Major, 2020).

Before the 2011 Inclusive Education Policy, inclusion was defined and considered for visible disabilities such as physical, hearing and visual impairments, rather than invisible disabilities including learning difficulties such as reading, writing, numeracy and behavioral problems. Learners with learning difficulties attended ordinary schools where they received no support (Mrstik, 2017:31). Currently, Botswana's Inclusive Education Policy, updated in 2014, requires learners with learning disabilities such as mild to moderate intellectual disability and reading difficulties to be engaged in the inclusive system with support, while learners with other types of disabilities receive education in special units attached to schools (Ministry of Education Botswana, 2014; Abosi & Otukile-Mongwaketse, 2017 cited in Mrstik, 2017:34).

In Kenya, English remained the dominant language after it had gained its independence in 1963 (UNICEF, 2016:36). Nyatuka (2014) cited in UNICEF (2016:36) points out that Kenya's National Language Policy calls for the language of the catchment area to be used as the medium of instruction for Grades 1 – 3, despite the fact that English is widely used as the medium of instruction even in Grade 1 classroom. According to Mose (2017:215), native languages are used as languages of instruction up to Grade 3. English takes over as the language of instruction from Grade 4 to tertiary. However, less than 50% of learners score an average of 50% in both ends of primary and secondary school examinations owing to poor English among other skills (Kenya National Examinations Council, 2015 cited in Mose, 2017:216).

Kenya is among the African countries that have made remarkable advances in the pursuit for Inclusive Education. The government has embraced and supported the practice of Inclusive Education by including various international agreements in its laws (Njoka et al., cited in Ileri, King'endo, Wangila & Thurania 2020:30; Anyango, 2017:19). Anyango further shows that the Kenya's policy framework recommends that all secondary schools adopt, design and implement programs in Inclusive Education. UNESCO (2015) in Ileri et al. (2020:30) argues that Inclusive Education does not only

affect the principles and the nature of education provided for learners with disabilities, but also requires a cross-examination of broader educational goals, the purpose of the schools, the nature of the curriculum, methods of assessment, and schools' accommodations into diversity. The way in which regular schools respond to learners with disability can be a measure of quality education for all learners.

According to Schuelka and Engsig (2019:449), the implementation of Inclusive Education can only be predicted when all relevant elements of the policies governing the implementation process are in place. This is because policy implementation functions within the school structure where policy objectives are put into practice. Successful implementation of Inclusive Education policies requires school transformation and instructional changes to enable learners to be educated in mainstream schools (Ireru et al., 2020:149).

Inclusive schools must have flexibility and diversity at their core. This should be clearly seen in school structure, the content of the curriculum, attitudes and beliefs of staff, parents and learners. The goal should be to give each learner a relevant education with the best opportunities for development. Parents and learners as stakeholders in education, can make important contributions in shaping and achieving Inclusive Education (Eunice, Nyangia & Orodho, 2015:39). Eunice, et al., maintain that Inclusive Education in a developing country like Kenya cannot flourish overnight but over time. They suggest that special schools could be useful resource centers for inclusive schools by providing equipment and helping to develop teachers' technical skills. They go on to claim that there are challenges with negative attitudes and behaviours displayed by teachers and parents when it comes to the learning skills of learners with disabilities. Teaching learners with learning difficulties in mainstream classrooms take specialists and a number of other resources to support learners' needs, which in particular need funding, which the Kenyan government lacks (Anyango, 2017:15).

In the light of the foregoing information, the researcher believes that Learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties are included in the secondary mainstream classrooms in Kenya despite the challenges. Hence, Ireru et al., (2020) rightly said that Inclusive Education is the reality that cannot be achieved overnight

but over time since it needs funding, which is a major problem in most developing countries.

The researcher's observation is that Lesotho is not an exception from other African countries that have signed for international legislations and conventions, and enacted its own policies to make Inclusive Education a reality although the progress is too slow. Education for All (EFA) policy was implemented through Free Primary Education towards Inclusive Education attainment after World Education Forum (WEF) that was held in Senegal, which outlined the goals to be achieved the latest in 2015, which will be impossible to reach unless all learners access free primary education (Ralejoe, 2016:42). Moreover, he maintains that the implementation of Inclusive Education needs cultural factors that can influence and facilitate it. For instance, the extended family practice in Lesotho has led parents to feel that the presence of teachers with learners who experience learning disabilities helps foster a sense of community responsibility among learners. It is, therefore, easier to convince parents to accept to take their children to mainstream classrooms due to the high level of trust.

Lesotho's first Inclusive Education policy was formulated in 2019 and whose one of the goals is to ensure that all LSEN participate in the Lesotho schools' system, enabling them to function and live independently in society and make a positive contribution to socio-economic development (MoET, 2018:6). The researcher believes that learners with disabilities, visible or invisible are included in the primary and secondary schools in Lesotho.

The actual practice is to attain the policy goal, which is the implementation of the policy is in process. According to the researcher's observation, there is much needed including materials, human resource, infrastructure, and funding; therefore, full inclusion of learners with disabilities and learning difficulties is still in progress. UNICEF – LNFOD (2021) affirms that national awareness of Inclusive Education was raised through public rallies, and teachers were trained in workshops held in some districts on strategies to use in inclusive classrooms. These efforts help to deepen the understanding of Inclusive Education and involve some stakeholders in the implementation of Inclusive Education.

Nevertheless, an integrated curriculum of 2012 poses challenges for learners with learning disabilities including those with reading difficulties because it does not cater for individual educational needs in terms of pedagogy, instructional materials and assessment strategies. The researcher observes that the assessment excludes learners with learning difficulties including reading, writing and numeracy. For instance, method of assessment is one for pencil and paper across the board. That hinders the achievement of the stated goal and this shows contradiction for not all learners can write. One would think that different methods would be put in place in order to attain this goal.

Secondary English language syllabus of 2019 was designed to equip learners with the competencies and skills to communicate clearly, relevantly and accurately using Standard English and to apply key skills that will provide opportunities to scan, filter and analyse different forms of information to name a few (NCDC, 2019:2). These are taught through reading and writing and among the learners taught are those who fail to interact with the text in order to comprehend it. The given strategies to be engaged in teaching learners to understand explicit and implicit meanings are those suitable for learners who master reading. For example, learners should be taught note taking skills and for a learner to master note taking should be able to interpret the text for comprehension which becomes difficult for learners who experience reading difficulties. Nevertheless, this syllabus does not cater for reading instruction because the teaching of reading is done at primary level with the assumption that learners who proceed to secondary are able to read with understanding.

Education Sector Plan 2016 – 2026 stipulates that SACMEQ III data of 2011 shows that for lower Basic Education which covers Grades 1 to 7, the performance in language is poor compared to that of other SACMEQ countries that take the same test and the constraints to the improvement of the performance are various including poverty, curriculum and lack of teaching resources (MoET, 2016:23). The same stumbling blocks pointed out seems to be the contributing factors for learners with reading difficulties in the secondary level as they have progressed to secondary having failed to master English language – which includes reading skills.

MoET (2016: 49) indicates that secondary education covers Grades 8 to 11 but schools

offer different curricula, and the other outstanding feature is huge variation in the educational facilities available at different schools – a factor that many schools underperform. The plan aims to ensure quality education for Basotho children by focusing on resource allocation patterns and expedite the correction of any disparities, which will improve the performance of learners including learners with Special Educational Needs especially those with reading difficulties. Lekhetho (2021:874) concurs with MoET that huge disparity in facilities between secondary schools lead to unequal educational opportunities and outcomes. Thus, teachers struggle to support learners in the inclusive schools with fewer facilities and such learners continue to experience poor performance. This is in light with the fact that most subjects are taught in English which learners struggle to understand.

Performance wise, learners with learning difficulties continuously perform poorly where support is limited and schools are overloaded with challenges. This is common in the low economy countries (Hayes, 2017). Among the challenges that hinder learners' progress which teachers are unable to avoid in the inclusive classrooms is class size. In the case where learners are many in the class, teachers are unable to reach and help them all accordingly, especially because individuals experiencing difficulties need more time of support from teachers (Bailey, 2018). This is the situation in secondary inclusive classrooms in Lesotho not ignoring other challenges which are already mentioned; hence, academic poor performance. Bailey (2018) suggests that it is time to lower class size in inclusive classrooms to close the achievement gap, enable teachers to assist each learner and focus more on reading instruction strategies, and ending stigma surrounding disabilities. Small size classes allow learners to socialize better and open up with their disabilities. I agree with Bailey (2018) that considering low teacher pupil ratio is a good start in the right direction for implementation of Inclusive Education and the findings of this study revealed that teachers are battling with large classes, which is a bad augur for Inclusive Education as discussed in chapter 3, section 4.4.2.

2.4 MANIFESTATIONS OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Learning difficulties in adolescent learners at the secondary level are not easily detected by teachers, parents or caregivers, unless exposed through different behaviours that can be disruptive (Herrington, 2012:1). At this level, learners value peer friendships and their sense of belonging with their peers at school. Then, when they are unable to socialize freely with their peers due to learning difficulties, learning difficulties can sometimes lead to other difficulties, including emotional and behavioral disturbances (Newport Academy, 2017).

In other cases, learners can purposely engage in certain behaviours to cover up a problem they have in class. For instance, a Grade 9 learner aged 16 who reads at a fourth – grade level may appear bored in class or debunk classes even skipping school. They may avoid reading aloud in class or totally refuse to read if not make it a joke. These learners are commonly scolded or punished harder for their behavior, if they are not identified as having learning difficulties and get support they need. Sometimes, some of these learners may become discouraged because they have been struggling over a long time. In reality, it is their difficulties that they receive the most attention and feedback on rather than their strengths, and a lack of positive feedback owing to repeated academic failure can negatively impact learners’ motivation, desire to improve, social functioning and emotional well-being (Reader, 2020; Haddad, 2020).

Warning signs of learning difficulties include anxiety or depression, blaming teachers for bad grades, bullying peers, physical ailments like headaches or stomach pains, avoidance of assignments even class work activities, skipping classes, dropping out of school, and substance abuse. Most of the signs are common in boys than girls, and frequently boys are likely to portray disruptive behaviours (Malboeuf-Hurtubise, Lacourse, Taylor, Joussemet & Amor, 2016:474; Haddad, 2020; Newport Academy, 2017).

There is a saying that can be applied to people with learning disabilities, that is ‘if you have met one person with a learning disability, you have met one person with a learning disability.’ This sentiment highlights that learning disabilities can show up differently in every learner. This calls for a high level of effort and support required

for the learner to achieve at the same level as their peers (Reader, 2020).

2.4.1 SELF-ESTEEM

Minev, Petrova, Mineva, Petkova and Stebkova (2018:114) define self-esteem as an overall assessment of individual's worth, expressed in positive or negative attitudes towards them. They opine that it has two elements – self-knowledge and self-awareness, including an individual's perception of their strengths and weaknesses, abilities, attitudes and values. It is a fundamental human need, part of the life process, integral to normal and healthy self-development and vital for survival.

For secondary school learners, school is their most often task, and academic success is the primary means of accomplishing other developmental tasks. The developmental tasks to be accomplished in the course of school completion are the identity formation, the fulfilment of autonomy, the development of intimacy with peers, the healthy expression of sexuality, and the redemption of relational situations (Musetti, Eboli, Cavallini & Corsano, 2019:166). Therefore, social acceptance is crucial to the lifestyle of learners at this level. However, this is more difficult to achieve if the learner has learning difficulties.

Learners with learning disabilities lament being excluded, ridiculed and classified as dumb, simple-minded and slow learners by their counterparts. Moreover, learners with learning disabilities are regularly stigmatized and associated with failure, which lowers their self-esteem. Educational issues that learners with learning disabilities may reveal in can be a source of frustration, mainly in the areas of reading. Most learners with learning disabilities battle with social approval among their counterparts and are bullied by their classmates (Pandy, 2012:2; Minev, et al., 2018:116; Musetti, et al., 2019:165).

Secondary school learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties suffer numerous educational disappointments, bullying, depression and suicidal behaviours which may further reduce their self-esteem (Aro, Eklund, Eloranta, et al., 2018:72). Unlike their peers without learning disabilities, they develop negative self-

perceptions. Studies have shown that there is a link between depressive tendencies, low self-esteem, mood or behavioral disturbances, anxiety and suicidal behavior in people with learning disabilities (Pandy, 2012:5; New Focus Academy, 2022; Caqueo-Urizar, Mena-Chamorro, Antencio-Quevedo, Flores & Urzua, 2021:2).

Musetti et al. (2019:165) argue that because learning disabilities are neurologically based clinical conditions, teachers face many problems as there are no viable ways to treat these conditions or improve educational learning. Therefore, each learner with a learning disability needs to find suitable learning tracks to gain basic skills. However, learners at this stage need a high level of support from teachers, peers and parents or family care takers.

That is because self-confidence and self-esteem lead to succeed in life, which greatly affects their lives and is a vital stage in building self-esteem in the long run (New Focus Academy, 2022). As a result, secondary school learners with learning disabilities need teachers in collaboration with other learners without learning disabilities (such as reading difficulties), parents and/or family care takers to teach them about the complexity of the brain and how it is wired differently for each individual but persistently working collaboratively with all those who provide support can improve performance to the same level as that of peers. Prevent comparisons that learners, teachers, parents and the community may make to help everyone to understand their own struggles. They need to focus on their strengths rather than negative academic feedback; find role models who have succeeded through the same struggles and provide strong support with relevant materials and teaching strategies (Moksnes & Reidunsdatter, 2019:62).

2.4.2 BULLYING

Bullying is defined as a negative physical, verbal, or relational behavior that is hostile, causes distress to the victim, is recurring and involves a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. This definition highlights key elements that differentiate bullying from other forms of peer-to-peer aggression, such as fighting, where the imbalances

of power range from playful acts based on friendly youths as well. It may take multiple forms varying from physical confrontations, teasing and humiliations to more indirect forms of victimization such as spreading rumors or exclusion from peer group and social marginalization of the victim (Tsitsika, Barlou, Andrie, et al., 2014:1; Falla, Sanchez, & Casas, 2021:2).

Common assault and violence in secondary schools is a pervasive and continuous phenomenon that has long attracted the interest of teachers and policymakers around the world. Research shows that boys are most likely to be bullies, or victims of bullying in direct forms, both in physical verbal and overall, while girls are more likely to be involved in indirect forms of bullying (Tsitsika et al., 2014:1; Falla et al., 2021:3). Learners with disabilities in Inclusive Education settings may be involved in bullying incidents at higher rates than their peers without disabilities because they are perceived as deviant from the norm group (Berchiatti, Ferrer, Galiana, Badenes- Ribera & Longobardi, 2021:516).

Research has shown that learners with learning difficulties have problems with social skills. Compared with their classmates, they have lower levels of prosocial behavior, are less accepted and have fewer or no friends. Furthermore, they showed lower friendship quality, higher levels of conflict, more relationship repair problems, and less stable relationships (Berchiatti et al., 2021:517). Additionally, learners with learning difficulties have problems with closeness and conflict with teachers, are more dependent and dissatisfied with their teacher relationships than their classmates without learning difficulties.

Relationships with peers and teachers are widely recognized as protective factors against bullying. Building relationships with peers is central to the learners' development, providing them with the social competences required to master societal challenges; hence, educational issues too (Lotti, Thornberg, Longobardi & Jungert, 2019:61; Marengo, Settanni, Prino, Parada & Longobardi, 2019:2). Bullying can be thought of as a group process involving not only the bully and the victim, but the entire peer group which plays a fundamental role in facilitating or deterring incidents of bullying among learners. Social status among peers is what prevents bullying at school setting.

Conflicting teacher-learner relationships represent a risk factor for active bullying behavior or victimization and can lead to escalation of learner disruption and coercion (Lotti et al., 2019:61; Marengo et al., 2019:2). On the contrary, a warm and close teacher-learner relationship is a protective factor against bullying. This requires teachers to support learners with learning difficulties so that they are not bullies or bullied by their peers (Berchiatti et al., 2019:518).

2.4.3 SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Learning disabilities are hidden and sometimes it may not be easy to identify individuals with learning disabilities in secondary school and beyond, making it difficult for individuals to even recognize their disability (Herrington, 2012:1). The number of individuals with disabilities has increased owing to the impact of social and environmental factors, which affect individuals differently, especially if they do not get treatment and assistance. Learners with learning disabilities are prone to substance abuse as a result of their social and environmental conditions (e.g., low socioeconomic status, peer pressure, desire to be accepted by others or even rejection of peers, and reduced enrolment and participation rates); lower than those without learning disabilities. These learners with learning difficulties may experience decreased participation in school, socializing with others and even reading activities can be difficult for them. Some of the substances they use include tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and cocaine (Chapman & Wu, 2012).

Learning disabilities can affect many areas of a learner's life, such as school, friendships and family leading to the abuse of substance. If a learner with reading difficulty is forced to read aloud in a class of excellent readers, and they make fun of such a learner, he/she will never want to read aloud and thus lower self-esteem and may feel frustrated and isolated, which can result into substance abuse (Harrington, 2012:7). Mokwena and Setshego (2021:2) affirm that in schooling, substance abuse is strongly associated with poor academic performance, which regularly results to school dropout.

Research by Mokwena and Setshego conducted among high school learners in rural education areas in the Free State Province of South Africa showed that both boys and girls engage in substance abuse commonly including alcohol consumption, cigarette and dagga smoking being the most common substances used owing to different factors including poor academic performance, serious relationship problems with parents and friends, and being bullied. Sedibe and Hendricks, (2020:26) in their findings, claim that adolescent learners who abuse drugs underperform academically and these are the adolescent learners who have problems with their school work because they cannot read and write in class; therefore, they take drugs to feel better about themselves.

The South African Department of Basic Education in collaboration with the Department of Health enacted policies and several interventions to support learners who abuse substances. Those include the Regulation for Safety Measures at Public Schools which proclaimed schools' substance-free zones of 2001, The Policy framework of Drug Abuse by Learners which was initiated in 2002, National Guidelines for the Management and Prevention of Drug Use and Abuse and Integrated School Health Policy in 2012. The health and drug prevention programs for learners who are addicts are to promote positive behavior patterns in the learners (Mamabolo, 2020:2; Nzama & Ajani, 2021:222 – 223). Nzama and Ajani (2021:237) suggest that teachers should be provided with professional development activities to support substance abuse learners as facilitators of moral regeneration and behavioral management, and those addicted to drugs should not be stigmatized but be supported by teachers.

2.4.4 DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

The Virgin Islands Department of Education 2015 cited in Lockhart (2019:8) defines public secondary school dropout rate as the percentage of learners in Grade 7 through 12 in public schools who did not graduate by the end of 12th grade for any number of reasons. According to Ravipati (2017), one in five learners have learning problems or brain-based challenges in reading, writing, listening comprehension and social skills. In a new report, National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) examines why

learners facing these problems are likely to drop out of school in large numbers. The NCLD found that despite the prevalence of learners with learning disabilities, only a minority of learners are formally identified as having a disability in secondary school. As a result, many secondary schools lack specific policies and other supports to help these learners achieve academic success and career readiness (Butrymowicz, 2017).

Substance abuse is a factor that causes learners with learning disabilities to drop out of school, performing poorly academically, coupled with engaging in conflict with teachers or other members of the schools community. If teachers may berate learners for their laziness and abuse of substance in front of other learners, it creates conflict between these learners and teachers themselves and their peers. This conflict leads to negative attitude of the learners towards the school and the end result is dropping out of school (Hunter, 2021 cited in Nzama & Ajani, 2021:233).

In the United States Virgin Islands (USVI), learners with learning difficulties face many challenges that hinder them from obtaining a high school diploma because they have a more difficult time than their counterparts without difficulties. Despite intervention programs aimed at reducing dropouts, USVI still has higher dropout rates for learners with learning disabilities than mainland high schools. Learners with disabilities grapple with myriad challenges that prevent them from transitioning from 9th to 12th grade and earning their high school diploma (Lockhart, 2019:1).

Iachini, et al. (2016:210) observe that the transition from middle school to high school is a critical stage in a learner's academic experience, they note that learners who are derailed by failing courses early in high school are much less likely to graduate. In contrast, McKee and Caldarella (2016:518) assert that by ninth grade, learners who continue to be academically challenged are 75% more likely to leave school prematurely. They report that ninth grade is the most crucial grade in the area of dropout prevention.

The challenges that 8th grade learners encounter when transitioning to 9th grade are unforeseen fears and concerns that put them at risk as they demonstrate lower academic achievement, grade retention, decreased attendance and early withdrawal from school. Multiple factors contribute to ninth grade dropout rate that surpasses dropout rates of other grades (Lockhart, 2019:15).

Kennedy (2017) examined patterns of high school dropout rate and their correlation with why learners' dropout, identifying factors that predict potential dropouts. The first pattern he found displayed poor academic performance, manifested in low grades and test scores, failing core courses or not being promoted. The second pattern is lack of engagement, with a focus on truancy, discipline, and alienation from peers and teachers. Consequently, Johnson, Willis, Oprescu, and Gray (2017:575) and Kennedy (2017:10) buttress that the most important time to predict completion of a 12th grade obtaining diploma is between middle and high school. Dropouts, however, manifest long before high school starts.

Lockhart (2019:76) examined students with learning disabilities experiences that lead to their dropout before completing Grade 12, found out that learners with learning disabilities highly dropout at grade 9 for a variety of reasons, including poor academic performance owing to math deficits, and reading and writing difficulties that negatively impact their lives. They experience higher unemployment, poor health, depend on welfare and government assistance, or are arrested for survival-related crimes (Kennedy, 2017:11). Lockhart (2019) recommends reviewing and redesigning interventions that are effective and support active learning outcomes with learning disabilities. Teachers and administrators should provide these learners with more teacher- learner-centred programmes, increase school awareness of family support, and address peer teasing and peer pressure associated with inappropriate learner behaviour, substance abuse and lack of motivation.

2.4.5 CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS

Learning disabilities are the most common type of disability in special education. Currently, more learners are identified as having a specific learning disability than any other type of disability. For most children with learning disabilities (LDs), reading is a major area of difficulty. Furthermore, people with reading difficulties often have difficulties with spelling and decoding skills, which usually stem from speech processing deficits. They may also have problems recognizing words they have already learned and have difficulty with understanding texts inclusive (Abu-Hamour,

2014:98). He maintains that, in terms of gender differences among learners with learning disabilities, boys are generally more likely than girls to be identified for special education services, and 2 to 6 more boys with learning disabilities are found than girls. However, challenging behaviours are present in most learners with learning disabilities, regardless of gender.

According to Hallahan, Kauffman and Pullen (2009) in Abu-Hamour (2014:99) and Amstad and Muller (2020:1), research shows that a high proportion of learners with learning disabilities in schools exhibits challenging behaviours identified as attention problems and hyperactivity, aggressive or disruptive behaviour, self-harming behaviour, stereotyping and comfort and ability in social situations may lead to frustration and disruptive behaviour patterns in learners with learning disabilities. These behavioral deficits often lead to interruption and interference of the learning of other learners in the classroom. Many learners with learning disabilities develop poor self-concepts, resulting in low self-esteem due to repeated academic failure and preoccupation with low academic achievement.

Learners with learning disabilities exhibit more problem behaviours. In some parts of England, 40% of children and young people (6-19 years) with learning disabilities exhibit challenging behaviour, including aggression, disruptive and self-harming behaviours. Problem behaviours exhibited by learners with learning disabilities at school and at home can affect and cause stress for different people (Amstad & Muller, 2020:2).

Stafford (2018) suggests that teachers can address challenging behaviours by consistently using a whole-school approach. For instance, there is a daily report card that learners take around and take home to facilitate communication among learners themselves, family members and teachers since whatever is communicated is written on the card. However, what is written is not important, what is important is that there is communication that can correct some behaviour, such as self-harm and aggressive behaviours. Moreover, teachers should work tirelessly to build and improve positive relationships with learners who portray challenging behaviours. This makes it possible for teachers to correct such behaviours without threatening and driving learners far from them which creates stress that leads to depression for such learners.

It is very critical for teachers to consider the fact that most learners with learning disabilities are experiencing challenging behaviours and disadvantaged environment. By understanding the powerful role of environmental factors in the classroom, teachers can enhance the educational success of each learner and create effective settings for learning. Strengthening learners' sense of self-esteem and emotional well-being is an additional course; if anything, learners' sense of belonging, safety and self-confidence provide the scaffolding that supports the foundations that strengthen learning, motivation and self-discipline. Teachers must provide social and emotional interventions alongside academic education. Therefore, a sustainable school environment must be capable of meeting the social, emotional and academic needs of all learners (Abu-Hamour, 2014:106). This augur well with the findings of the current study when it postulates that systems of support assist to stabilize issues that are disturbing for learners in regard to their academic, social and emotional well-being, which school setting must provide. I agree with both this study findings and research that teachers must be equipped through trainings and frequent workshops to support learners with reading difficulties to avoid different, unacceptable and disruptive behaviours portrayed by learners when proper support is not provided.

In the light of the forgoing information, teachers seem to be anchors of learners' academic and social success in providing all the support that learners with learning disabilities need for their success. In contrast, teachers can also be the influence of learners' total downfall in the situation where they are not knowledgeable with various learning disabilities and how they manifest. Teachers who lack appropriate knowledge to identify learners with different learning disabilities can cause a life time damage in such learners' lives; hence, an urgent need for mainstream teachers training and equipping them with strategies to work with these learners to provide necessary support.

2.4.6 STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT READING DIFFICULTIES

Reading for Grade 9 learners is not only necessary for their English class and comprehension through reading, but also boosts their academic performance.

Furthermore, reading appears to be a backbone of further study, professional achievement and life outside of school. Research shows that effective reading instruction occurs primarily at the lower levels, perhaps from Grades 1 to 4, and after these grades, learners no longer learn to read, but learn by reading as it is assumed that learners have mastered the reading skills.

Research reveals that not all learners acquire lower-level skills. Some learners progress to higher grades with gaps in their comprehensive reading skills. The gaps are in basic skills such as word reading, vocabulary, reading fluency and comprehension strategies, which affect their comprehension of texts (Schwartz, 2022). He further argues that the struggles of word reading and comprehension are interactive. For older learners who skip many words because they cannot decode them, it will be harder for them to understand the text, apply comprehension strategies and storing powerful new information. These learners need instructional support to help them develop skills they miss when reading.

The difficult-to-read problem creates some challenges for learners, such as shame. Learners who are out of sync with their peers feel ashamed and as thus try to hide their lagging reading skills. They may hide this challenge in verbal attachment, which can lead to depression; attack teachers or their colleagues; avoid class or drop out of school entirely, or even try to distract attention by displaying disruptive behavior, such as being a class clown or acting out (Will, 2022). These also call on teachers to provide support for these learners, maximize their positive feelings, minimize their negative emotions, and creating a culture where learners feel comfortable talking about their emotions surrounding reading, and even taking risks in reading without worrying about being laughed at.

Garner (1987) cited in Solak (2014:78) defines reading strategy as an action or set of actions taken to construct meaning. Readers may face comprehension challenges when reading a text, and they use strategies to get rid of these difficulties. According to research, teachers use many reading strategies to help learners who experience reading difficulties to read worldwide. They have a wide range and are used to improve reading skills of young learners in the lower grades with the perception that at higher grades, they will not experience difficulties. This is why locally there is little research focused

on the strategies used to help learners at secondary schools. Moswane (2019:85) suggests that teachers should use different strategies to enhance learners' reading abilities, and she encourages reading aloud, reading extensively and peer reading because they involve not only word learning but also other components of reading skills.

2.4.7 READING ALOUD

According to Okello (2021), teachers should read aloud to their learners, no matter what grade they are teaching – second grade, middle school, undergraduate and graduate students because the act of reading aloud enlivens the text and creates its own magic. Hence, Harvey and Goudvis (2007 cited in Moswane, 2019: 68) affirm that reading aloud is key to effective teaching in all grades. Reading aloud improves comprehension, vocabulary and fluency (Massaro, 2017 cited in Okello, 2021). It enables teachers to follow the example of experts in reading texts fluently; thus, it frees learners from having to decode, and instead allows them to focus on comprehension, acquiring new vocabulary and phonemic awareness (Gold & Gibson, 2022).

Fluent readers might get confused about what they are reading, or miss an important detail, and then come back to particularly beautiful, sad or funny sentences, perhaps even underlining or commenting on them. Sometimes they stop to look up stray words they do not understand or stop to think about what they just read to make a connection or think about what is next, which can be difficult for struggling readers (Gonser, 2021). Unless they can listen on a higher level of language than reading, so reading aloud can make complex ideas more accessible and expose learners to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech (Gold & Gibson, 2022).

Gold and Gibson (2022) point out that reading aloud shows the relationship between the printed word and its meaning – the learner understands that the print tells a story or conveys a message – and invites the listener into a dialogue with the author. It also gives learners with decontextualized language experience – requiring learners to understand ideas outside of the classroom and in the here and now (Okello, 2021).

Moreover, it exposes less able readers to the same rich and engaging texts that fluent readers read themselves, and induces them to become better readers (Gold & Gibson, 2022).

Teachers who engage in reading aloud do not only support reading growth through holistic literacy exposure, but also shape reading enjoyment and broaden learners' exposure to different types and levels of text. Learners whose first language is not English can benefit from reading aloud exercises, especially if the reader is eloquent and able to express the language appropriately (Moswane, 2019:67). As research has shown the importance of reading aloud, teachers can employ reading aloud strategy to support learners with reading difficulties in Grade 9 since it does not even have a preference of grade level or age provided it is used appropriately.

2.4.8 EXTENSIVE READING

Fitzgerald (2018) and Thanh and Vien (2021:23) define extensive reading as a method of second language teaching and learning that helps learners to access a wide variety of books and other materials within their linguistic proficiency. Successful extensive reading means that learners read very light-hearted books and texts of their choice for pleasure, thereby increasing their reading speed below their English level (Nur Hidayat & Surabaya, 2019:16). To ensure that learners can read quickly and fluently, 150 – 200 words per minute, reading must be accessible and easy (Fitzgerald, 2018). Like reading strategies, reading researchers recognize extensive reading as an effective means of encouraging language development and acquisition including enhancing background knowledge. Particularly, extensive reading successfully improved reading comprehension, vocabulary and reading fluency (Shih, Chern & Reynolds, 2018:132; Nur Hidayat & Surabaya, 2019:16).

It is wise, according to Shih, et al, (2018:133), to combine extensive reading with one or more instructional methods that better address the complex needs of learners in the classroom. Doing so allows learners to achieve a greater balance between meaning-centred input, language-centred learning and fluency development. Takase (2019); Fitzgerald (2018) assert that it is generally observed that extensive reading has a potent

effect on English learning. It motivates learners by reducing disinclination to English and inspiring confidence. It also helps develop overall language skills. Therefore, learners have been shown to increase reading speed, reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar.

Reader choice is by far the most important factor in successful extensive reading. It takes more than a few graded books to see its effects. Completing 50 – 100 readers per learner means reading widely, and to do these teachers need to target their interests and reading levels for the start. Moreover, learners should choose their own reading materials, and teachers merely supervise. Learners need to be able to understand 80-90 percent of the text without the need to use dictionaries or translate into their native language (Donaghy, 2016; Takase, 2019). Grade 9 learners may benefit immensely if teachers encourage them to read extensively but first be done in class for them read independently. Preferably, 10-15 minutes before end of the lesson in every English class, starting with simple and interesting books and texts may stimulate struggling readers' desire to read. Then assignments may be given on the specific texts from which learners share what they have read within the same time allocated for reading. This can make learners read autonomously at the end.

2.4.9 PEER OR PARTNER READING

Reading with a partner is a fun and effective strategy for promoting the development of reading fluency. It is designed to increase the amount of time learners spend reading aloud in class while giving many struggling readers the support they need to successfully read the texts. It is best to start the process after the learners have gained some familiarity with the text (Isnaini, 2019:23; Lee & Szczerbinski, 2021). Lexia (2017) claims that pair reading also known as partner reading allows teachers to pair learners who take turns reading a text. They may be paired as both learners experience reading difficulties, or another should be the good reader to support the struggling one. The latter is the most efficient pairing and is the one used globally.

Partner reading encourages both partners to read for the sake of helping each other. A

pair of learners alternately read the text aloud, and then act as listeners. The listener asks probing questions to check whether the reader comprehends the text. Letting stronger readers read first benefits the struggling readers because they hear difficult words before they read them aloud. This form of peer supervision and questioning can improve reading fluency. Fluency- Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI) – when learners read the same text multiple times over the course of a week, reading it as a class, in pairs, and individually significantly improve word pronunciation and reading comprehension for different learners (Minero, 2019; Isnaini, 2019:24; Almutairi, 2018:53).

Partner reading can be effective in allowing learners to benefit from practice reading relevant texts and ensuring that learners spend a significant amount of time reading aloud or with a partner. Furthermore, partner reading supports the development of automatic word reading by providing learners with the opportunity to read the text repeatedly. Learners are corrected and supported by a partner during the reading process; they are able to practice texts they cannot read independently yet. Furthermore, it fosters learner collaboration and enables readers to support each other through peer–assisted learning. During partner reading, the learner

supervises the reading of the partner in a very warm and friendly manner (Almutairi, 2018: 54; Isnaini, 2019:25; Lee & Szczerbinski, 2021).

Partners work together on a variety of texts and books, building their reading confidence, improving concentration, engaging socially in a positive way, and increasing their motivation to read. It improves fluency, reading speed and word attack skills, and helps learners monitor their comprehension. Similarly, partner reading also promotes the gradual release of responsibility, allowing learners to get rid of complete dependence on teachers, or even partners, and to read independently without the intervention of anyone (Lexia, 2017; Almutairi, 2018:54; Isnaini, 2019: 25).

The discussed reading strategies are the commonly used globally with the significant contribution to the improvement of reading skills for learners struggling to read despite age or grade level. They are used by teachers to support such learners with reading difficulties, highly recognizing their human dignity as much as they are children. Even good readers benefit in the use of these strategies socially as their self-esteem,

confidence and interaction skills are boosted when they offer help to those who struggle to read. They also help teachers avoid the situations where learners who struggle to read can feel ashamed and isolated instead of feeling supported; they rather hate themselves and others which may result into dropping out of school.

As learners construct their own knowledge, they collaborate with each other and the teacher harmoniously, where each learner feels accepted despite the learning difficulty. These strategies allow a teacher to show kindness to learners who struggle to read and highly consider building positive attitude towards learning. Teachers are bound to instill Ubuntu values as strategies encourage collaboration in the classroom and in the school environment, which extends to the learner's communities where they read together.

For Italians, many adolescents continue failing to succeed in reading skills necessary to cope with the demands of secondary schools, succeed in higher educational or compete for meaningful jobs in the workplace. Therefore, at-risk secondary school learners require comprehensive interventions to meet literacy needs and keep them in school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Boudah's (2018) study on the use of Xtreme Reading Classes for adolescent secondary school learners with and without learning disabilities for a year, found out that after learners participated in Xtreme Reading Classes performed better on tasks that required vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension measured by the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and reading fluency tasks measured by the Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency (TOSCRF). The results of this study showed that learners closed the gap between expected reading achievement and actual reading performance. That was not a small achievement for any low-performing secondary learner (Boudah, 2018:203).

Paired Reading was administered in Irish schools as a program to enhance reading skills of learners with reading difficulties and the results were positive. Lee and Szczerbinski (2021:608) show that generally, paired reading offers an uncomplicated, enjoyable way to assist learners. It keeps learners from getting confused, worried or frustrated with reading. It is evidenced by learners' overall satisfaction with the Paired Reading program. Nugent (2017:22) also claims that the excellent partner reading

impact from primary Grade 4 learners to secondary is sufficient to double the standard rate of progress. Furthermore, Reciprocal Reading Intervention is used to support learners who experience reading difficulties in Irish primary and secondary schools. It uses cooperative learning structures and its results have shown improved reading skills for learners with reading difficulties particularly in secondary schools for young learners of about 19 years old (Cockerill, O’Keeffe, Thurston & Taylor, 2021:19).

The efficacy of Reading Intervention for Adolescents (RIA) in the United States of America (USA) was evaluated across multiple studies in the middle and high schools (Vaughn, Roberts, et al., 2015). RIA consists of two instructional phases: Phase 1 emphasizes word learning, fluency, vocabulary, and understanding the sentences and paragraphs while Phase 2 extends Phase 1 instruction and emphasizes vocabulary and comprehension in content area texts (Vaughn, Matinez, Williams, et al., 2018:8). In the first semester of year 1 Phase 1 was administered and Phase 2 was implemented in the second semester of year 1 and through year 2 in this current study. Vaughn, Roberts, Schnakenberg, et al, (2015) used REWARDS Intermediate and REWARDS Secondary as part of multiple reading interventions for learners who experience reading difficulties in secondary school, and learners who participated in these interventions made significant improvements in word attack, spelling and passage comprehension. In conclusion, the Extensive Reading Intervention-RIA, greatly improved the reading ability of learners with reading difficulties in both phases, focusing on word study, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Vaughn, et al, 2018:26).

Learners in the Algerian secondary school classes were not thought to be interested in reading comprehension, but only in answering questions about texts. New perspectives and challenges at higher levels require a new direction that focuses on the foundations of any comprehension of texts. To achieve this goal, learners need to be taught and shown how to do it. A competence-based approach is recommended by Kouti and its application needs a thorough understanding on the part of teachers since it can bring about a positive change as it is a child friendly strategy (Kouti, 2021:336). In Egypt, learners with reading difficulties especially comprehension difficulties do not use strategies related to English as a Foreign Language (EFL); therefore, more explicit

strategies are integrated into classroom instruction with the support of teachers. However, teachers should be aware of psychological processes that support learners' attempts to comprehend texts; they should help them, especially learners with reading difficulties to actively participate in the reading process. Improving learners' awareness of their reading comprehension process is the most important first step in becoming the strategic, thoughtful learners (Habok & Magyar, 2019:14). According to Altin and Saracologlu (2018:11), reading comprehension instruction should be enhanced by the use of local materials that improve vocabulary knowledge and positive attitude towards English. The instruction used in Grade 7 could be used in secondary inclusive classroom.

The effective use of interactive reading strategies engages learners, thereby improving fluency and meaningful description of literary texts. This study, conducted in Kenya public secondary schools in Kisumu County, demonstrated that interactive reading strategies had a positive impact on reading skill achievement among secondary school learners. Therefore, there was a significant relationship between interactive reading strategies and learners' achievement in reading skills. He recommended that teachers should consistently involve learners in interactive reading for them to concurrently recognize words with comprehension of a text (Kulo, 2019:11).

In the Lesotho context, the researcher observes that as it was mentioned earlier that teachers are able to identify learners with reading difficulties in Grade 9. Not only in Grade 9, but recently across all grades throughout secondary and high school, most learners struggle to comprehend what they read. The researcher as English teacher has observed that teachers at this level do not teach reading even to close the gap by instructing learners on the skills, they lack but just follow the curriculum, which sideline those learners who struggle with reading while good readers' benefit. Hence, they regard those who do not cope to be lazy and do not work hard enough. As a result, there is a large number of learners who drop out of school, who hide their reading lag behind being school clowns or show ill behaviours and mostly who do not perform well at the end of high school examinations.

There is vast research with diverse reading strategies and interventions at lower grade levels for young learners. The assumption is that the adolescents must be good readers

because they should have been discovered and supported earlier. In the USA, middle schools for sixth graders teachers use strategies such as interactive read-aloud; comprehension strategies including making connections, asking questions visualizing, inferring and synthesizing through shared or paired reading and vocabulary enrichment (Bolos, 2012).

For South Africa, a large study was also conducted at the intermediate foundation stage. Research conducted on Grade 2 learners showed that higher-order thinking skills are achieved after employing explicit comprehension reading strategies and creating a safe learning environment (Schmidt, Condy, & Tiba, 2021:278). Additionally, the findings from research conducted during the foundational phase of reading skills for third grade learners showed that the guided reading approach helped learners to strengthen phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension and fluency during group activities (Makumbila & Rowland, 2016:5).

Research conducted in the lower primary grades of a public primary school in Kocheke sub-county, Uganda, revealed that teachers used whole language, phonics and balanced methods to teaching reading. Their impact has been positive, though teachers need to be trained to use other strategies and parents encouraged to support young readers (Kulwenza, 2021: xvii).

Few of the studies show that research in the lower primary grades is highly developed in terms of early corrective and intervention strategies in preparation for the higher grades. However, there is little research focused in Grade 9, though it is important for learners at this stage to be highly supported to retain them in school up to completion. As a result, this is the gap that this study intends to fill.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Kivunja (2018:46), theoretical framework is a structure summarizing the principles and theories that a researcher develops from formally tested and published knowledge that a researcher consolidates to assist him/her with a theoretical

background or for his /her data analysis and interpretation contains implications to lay the foundation for his/her research data. Thus, choosing a concept is primarily based totally on how it explains the connections within and between variables (Moswane, 2019: 15).

A theoretical framework encompasses the perspective of a leader within the researcher's area of study on the researcher's research questions, the problem he/she plans to investigate, and can even include how the problem will be solved, including how to interpret the findings in the researcher's data (Kivunja, 2018:46). What the leaders say allows the researcher to expand an informed and professional lens via which he/she examines his/her data, conducts data analysis, interprets findings, discusses them, and even makes recommendations and conclusions. Latham (2017) and Ravitch and Carl (2016) affirm that the complete method has to agree with the variables, together with their relationship and context.

2.5.1 CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE AND UBUNTU APPROACH

This study was theoretically encored on constructivist framework and Ubuntu principles of humanness that view language learning as seeking to investigate the support provided by various stakeholders for Grade 9 learners in secondary schools. The teaching and learning of reading is viewed as a social and collaborative practice in view of the foregoing. The teaching and learning of reading as a social practice should be understood against the backdrop that the meaning of words that we use, our actions and behaviours are socially constructed and personally interpreted (Dyers & Foncha, 2012 cited in Moswane, 2019: 16).

2.5.2.1 SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVISM THEORY

Social constructivism is a learning theory propounded by Vygotsky in 1968. The theory states that language and culture are the frameworks within which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality. He believes that language and

culture both play a vital role in the development of human intelligence and human perception of the world. This means that learning concepts are communicated through language, interpreted and understood through experience and interaction in a cultural environment. Since it takes a group of people to possess language and culture to construct cognitive structures, knowledge is not only socially constructed but co-constructed. The connection here is that constructivists see knowledge as something that learners construct themselves based on experiences gleaned from their environment, whereas social constructivists see knowledge as what students do in collaboration with other learners, teachers and peers. Socio constructivism is a type of cognitive constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning under the guidance of a tutor or in partnership with other learners (Akpan, Igwe, Mpamah & Okoro, 2020:50).

In socio constructivism, children's understandings are formed not only through adaptive encounters with the physical world, but also through human interaction with a world that is not only physical and understood through language. It again recognizes the social aspect of learning and the use of dialogue, interaction with others and application of knowledge as an important aspect of learning and a means to achieve learning objectives (Mohamad & Romli, 2021:485; Bozkurt, 2017:212).

This research is organized around the Vygotsky's theory, which views learning as an active process of constructing knowledge. Its content is that learners acquire skills while operating in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of Vygotsky (Jubran: 2016: 313). Vinney (2019) defines the ZPD as a gap between what learners already know and what they might know with support and assistance. Cherry (2021) asserts that ZPD refers to the range of abilities that a person can accomplish with the guidance and support of experts, but not independently. Learning in this range occurs when learners are engaged in tasks that they find difficult to perform independently, forcing them to seek support from teachers and peers, or even anyone who can assist with their performance (Jubran, 2016: 313). In other words, Vygotsky's theory provides a rather important place for the interaction of learners with teachers and peers. As Vygotsky recommends, this interaction is vital for skill development and allows learners to give

feedback on each other's work. Teachers engage with learners and help them progress to their potential level during the interactions and they play authoritative role supporting learners to reach their potential performance levels. In doing so, they use scaffolding strategies and give learners opportunities in collaborative learning (Cherry, 2021).

The reading teaching theory of social constructivism begins with providing reading purpose. Teachers then assist learners enter into a dialogue with the text and create meaning for them by simulating a reading exercise through think-aloud skills. Teachers then release learners from teacher scaffolding to learners scaffolding, assisting them to become more effective users and creators of texts. During peer work, teachers move in groups to support their progress towards their potential performance levels. Finally, each learner works independently as an active participant in the other text (Jubran, 2016:312).

According to Naafan (2018:24), rather than lecturing and emphasizing reflective instruction, constructivists argue that teachers should organize reading lessons in a way that enables learners to participate actively while providing support and guidance. Hence, the relevance of this theory to this study.

It gives a foundation strategy for teachers to apply when supporting learners with reading difficulties and that language is learned through collaboration and guidance.

2.5.2.2 UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY

Ubuntu is a philosophy that originated in Sub-Saharan Africa, inhabited by the Bantu people. It is a collection of knowledge, values, and practices that Black Africans believe make people more human (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019:33) while these nuances of knowledge, values, and practices vary across ethnic groups, and they all point to one aspect that an authentic individual human being is part of a larger, more important relationship, community, society, environment and spiritual world; as such, Ubuntu is a Black African worldview from which they derive relational, community, societal, environmental and spiritual knowledge, values and practices (Mugumbate, Mupedziswa, Twikirize, Mthethwa, Desta & Oyinlola, 2023:3).

Mbiti 1969 cited in Mugumbate, Mupedziswa, et al, (2023:2) defines Ubuntu as what happens to individuals also happens to the whole groups, and what happens to the whole groups, communities or countries happens to the individuals. People, countries, environments and spirits are intricately linked. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' Ubuntu maxims conveys values, principles and practices of different ethnic groups including, *motho ke motho ka batho* (Sotho and Tswana languages) and *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Zulu and Ndebele languages) to mention just the few.

According to Ngubane (2021), Ubuntu philosophy is based on humanistic values and principles of solidarity, kindness, cooperation, respect and compassion. So, the Ubuntu philosophy means that teachers focus on what they do to assist and empower learners for their improvement. This means learners' reading skills may improve if they are treated well and viewed in the same way. Therefore, both teachers and peers support learners with reading difficulties in the healthy and harmonious learning setting to help them improve their reading skills. Ngubane and Gumede (2020: 3-4) acknowledge that learners' reading skills can improve in the classroom where applied and encouraged Ubuntu principles and values of cooperation, kindness and resource sharing takes place. Learners learn challenging practices based on mutual understanding in an environment where learners engage in active learning that promotes collaboration, peer support, respect for diverse reflection, group effort and interaction as pillars for effective development.

The Ubuntu philosophy is pinned on humanity and human values. It originates from Bantu languages as mentioned earlier and is based on humanity nature, humanness or being human (Odari, 2020:60). Ubuntu as a philosophy is based on general life values and principles of responsibility, equality, love, helpfulness, community, caring, reliability, sharing and selflessness. It emphasizes that people's motivations develop in the context of establishing reciprocal relationships with others through support and connection. It focuses on the inclusion of each individual in the community, their responsibility to others, and the well-being of the environment to ensure their own success (Mayaka & Truell, 2021:3). In an inclusive classroom environment, learners without learning difficulty and teachers become anchors of support for learners with

reading difficulties, and they cooperate at all costs to avoid disrespectful behaviours that can exacerbate an already-existing problem.

According to Ngubane and Makua (2018:5), Ubuntu is guided by the principles of solidarity based on love and mutual respect; coexistence which is the ability to live in harmony with others, and compassion which is the human ability to understand the struggles of others and lend a helping hand. In this regard, pedagogically speaking, Ubuntu is a humanized approach to teaching that engages learners in the learning process (Blackwood, 2018:30). Ukpokodu (2016:155) asserts that teachers who consider Ubuntu approach create a learning environment that affirms, validates and treats learners as dignified people, regardless of their learning difficulties such as reading difficulties. He further believes that central to Ubuntu approach is the belief that all learners, irrespective of their learning difficulties, can excel in their learning as long as their humanity is highly considered in their teaching and learning.

In this study, Ubuntu concepts are relevant for learners to learn effectively to improve their reading skills. They need harmonized environment for the values articulated by Ubuntu to grow. However, as constructivists claim, learners use their cognitive abilities to understand, interpret and give meaning through experiences; they need appropriate environment and harmonious interpersonal relationships as a support system too. As such, Ubuntu provides great support from all stakeholders to ensure learning through the use of its core values.

Learners with reading difficulties can progress through reading by the support of teachers and peers in a welcoming and appreciative classroom where they are not discriminated against. This is the wisdom of Ubuntu, that a healthy learning environment cannot be established unless the human dignity of all members in the learning community is assured (Chinhanu & Adebayo, 2020). This study is, therefore, not only underpinned on constructivist theory but also on the Ubuntu principles and values, which provide a suitable background and playground for constructivist theory.

2.5.3.3 SCAFFOLDING

Scaffolding is all other fundamental concepts of constructivism. It is a powerful aid that increasingly enables learners to perform better with the help of others around them, working hard with parents, friends, teachers and resources, including texts and dictionaries. It is important to note that there may be collaboration and negotiation between teachers and learners in a scaffolding approach. In this case, the teacher becomes the facilitator who guides the learner until learning occurs (Moswane, 2019:23).

Scaffolding provides support to make progress; therefore, scaffolding does not refer to the support provided by teacher as an expert to the learner, but the mutual support of the learners as experts (Kong, 2021:42). The support is provided to learners who are trying to learn a new skill, with support tapering off until learners have fully mastered the new skill, same as removing scaffolding from a building when construction is complete, teacher support is removed once the skill has been acquired (Vinney, 2019).

According to Moswane (2019:24), the high level of support first provided by teachers via learners challenging beyond their current capabilities is scaffolding. For learners to complete tasks, teachers need to provide support measures that make it possible for learners to perform at new levels. Learners may get bored and lose motivation if the task given is not challenging enough or too difficult. However, without adequate support, learners may feel frustrated and abandon a given task. Thus, scaffolding enables learners to make giant leaps in learning, which in turn assists them become proficient at the tasks they are working on (Kong, 2021:44). In other words, teachers who teach learners who struggle to read should provide support to such learners until they have learned to read despite the level at which they are and their age, while simultaneously observing that such learners do not get bored or demotivated to keep them going. Ubuntu approach seems to be suitable since it allows support not only from the teacher but also other stakeholders such as peers, parents and societies in which learners live.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduces the problems of Grade 9 learners in reading and the Lesotho education system where Grade 9 levels determine the learner's further studying or be prepared to face the world. The chapter explores reading difficulties in secondary schools where the explanations bring in the learning disabilities and difficulties differences and similarities. Then the international, national and local policies, conventions and legislations that support learning difficulties are explored. The chapter discusses the manifestations of the learning difficulties especially reading in secondary schools that include poor self-esteem, substance abuse, dropping out of school and challenging behaviours that destruct classes and propels the difficulties further. Strategies to support reading difficulties are discussed and those strategies that are used in different countries globally, which bring out the gap that this study had intended to narrow. Lastly, theoretical frameworks from which the study is underpinned are outlined.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research methodology which is made up of the methodological approach, research design and research paradigm used in this study to explore support for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties are described. The identification of the research participants, methods of data collection and instruments together with a theoretical framework for data analysis influenced by the research approach and design are discussed in detail. Different ethical issues which must be observed and steps taken to professionally conduct the research are outlined as well.

Research methodology as described by Igwenagu (2016:5) and Mphahlele (2018:80) is a set of systematic techniques used in research which simply means a guide to research and how to conduct it. It describes and analysis methods throwing more light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their pre-suppositions and consequences, and relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge. Mishra and Alok (2017:1) explain research methodology as the approach in which research troubles are solved thoroughly and the science of studying how research is conducted systematically. Research methodology is advantageous in the sense that it provides tools for carrying out research; develops a critical and scientific attitude, disciplined thinking to observations; enriches the research process and provides a chance for in-depth study and understanding of the subject. It further inculcates the ability to evaluate and use research results with reasonable confidence and in decision making as well as inculcates the ability to learn to read and think critically (Igwenagu, 2016:5).

3.2 RESEARCH SITE

Research site is a place where the research is conducted. Four secondary schools located in Leribe district were selected based on differences in geographical state, ownership, learner enrollment and academic performance.

SCHOOL A

This school is located in the lowland of Leribe district and in the south of Hlotse town where the researcher works. It is closer to the main road from Hlotse to Botha Bothe district and can be reached within 30minutes drive. It is a church school with acceptable infrastructure. It is a small school because it has around two hundred plus learners (boys and girls) from Grade 8 to 11 and 14 teachers including the principal. The external results for the school are below average. It has large classrooms with a single stream of 33 Grade 9 learners, in which 2 to 3 learners share a desk.

SCHOOL B

It is found around 5kilometers west from Hlotse town and in the urban area, not too far from the main road to Katse dam, which can be 5minutes walk from the main road. This is a private school with beautiful and big buildings. Its infrastructure is eye catching. The buildings are well arranged with paved tracks within the school. However, Grade 9 class looked not vast because it accommodated 30 learners who shared the desks. It is a medium school with around three hundred plus learners (boys and girls) from Grade 8 to 11 and 18 teachers including the principal. Lately, the final results for the school are on average compared to previous years when they were good.

SCHOOL C

This school is located at the north of Hlotse town, not too far from Maputsoe. It can be 30minutes drive from Hlotse and a distance from the main road from Hlotse to Maseru. It maybe 10minutes walk from the main road. It is a Roman Catholic Church

school owned by nuns but run by a lay person. It has well-arranged buildings with paved tracks around the school. The buildings include computer labs, science lab and library. The cleanliness within the school is outstanding. This is a large school with seven hundred only girls' learners and 32 teachers with the principal. There are several streams in each grade and 4 of grade 9 with 45 learners. There is no sharing of desks in grade 9. The school is known for its outstanding performance that is competitive within the country.

SCHOOL D

It is found at the western outskirts of Hlotse town, not too far from the main road to Katse dam. It is about 15minutes walk from the main road due to its rough topography. It is built below Qoqolosing cliff on a sloppy ground within Khanyane village; however, the buildings look attractive the way they are arranged, although some roofing look old and rusty. It is a small community school with good infrastructure. There is a modern built boardroom thatched with grass and the unique one among the four schools. Learners' enrollment is less than three hundred with one grade 9 stream of 45 learners occupying one class and sharing desks. Teachers are 13 including the principal. The school performance is below average.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research paradigm, according to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:26), is derived from a Greek meaning pattern. This is revealed by definitions provided by many academics. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51) assert that a paradigm is a basic belief system and theoretical framework with assumptions about ontology, epistemology and methodology. It is the researchers' way of understanding the reality of the world and studying it. Its elements are to understand and articulate beliefs about the nature of reality, what can be known about it and how people go about attaining this knowledge (Mphahlele, 2018:81). Creswell (2014:38) generalizes a paradigm as the set of beliefs that guides action and therefore, philosophical worldview.

It was indicated in chapter 1 (section 9) that the interpretive paradigm was found suitable for this study. According to Kamal (2019:1389), this paradigm is alternatively known as a naturalistic and constructivist paradigm. In this study, interpretivism and constructivism would mean the same thing. The main endeavor of this paradigm is to apprehend the subjective world of human experiences and puts more emphasis on comprehending the individual and how they interpret the world around them; hence, theory follows research and not precede it so that it is formed on the generated data by the act of research (Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017: 26 & 33).

To reiterate, a paradigm is essentially connected to ontology, epistemology and methodology. Kamal further posits that these perspectives reflect that ontological assumptions that generate epistemological assumptions that have methodological implications for the choice of specific data collection techniques. Therefore, the epistemological explanation is limited by the ontological explanation of the research; therefore, the methodological explanation is further obliged by the epistemological and ontological explanation of the research (Matta, 2021:3).

Dammak (2017:5) points out that Interpretivists believes that reality is multi-layered and complex and that people are creative and actively construct their social reality. They note further that the social world should be studied in the natural world, through the eyes of the participants, without the researcher's intervention. Ugwu, Ekere and Onoh (2021:120) claim that Interpretivists hold a realist, anti-foundationalism ontology with the view that reality differs from one person to another. An Interpretivism researcher believes in multiple realities and that reality is socially constructed. This is contrary to positivists who believe that it is possible to observe everything that happens and understand it as such without any mediation or interference by social actors (Don - Solomon & Eke, 2018:2).

Ugwu, et al (2021: 121) further posit that the ontology of interpretivism assumes that knowledge can be gained or generated from the point of view of the individual who is directly involved (Don-Solomon & Eke, 2018:2). On the other hand, positivists claim to be able to examine by absolute observation. They generalize and predict causes and effects rather than understanding and interpreting the meanings in human behavior as

Interpretivists do (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:55).

Epistemologically, Interpretivists adhere to a subjectivist view in that subjective meanings and subjective interpretations have great importance. According to Crotty (1998) cited in Dammak (2017:5), object cannot be adequately described without the subject, and the subject cannot be adequately described without the object.

Therefore, the relationship between the knower and the subject to be known is not of detachment, but rather of involvement – interaction.

According to interpretivism, the world is constructed through the interaction of individuals. The natural and social worlds are not distinct and researchers are part of that social reality and are not detached from the subjects they are studying (Ugwu, et al, 2021:120). Nguyen (2019:6) and Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:33) affirm that interpretive epistemology assumes that the researcher makes meaning of the data through their thinking informed by their interactions with the participants.

Methodologically, interpretive researchers use different methodologies including case study, phenomenology and ethnography; hence the choice of case study for this study. Interpretivism methodology aims at exploring and understanding phenomena inductively (Nguyen, 2019:10; Rehman & Eke, 2016:56). Interpretivists believe that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing activities being investigated. As a result, interpretive researchers start with individuals and try to understand their interpretations of the world surrounding them. For interpretivism, it is the involvement that enables researchers to have a thick description of the situation under study (Usman & Bulut, 2021:2).

This study relies on an interpretive paradigm because teachers offer support to learners who experience reading difficulties through interactions with such learners in their relaxed, non-discriminative natural setting. As a result, learners participate in their learning while teachers offer support and create a conducive environment that allows sharing and support among peers. This corroborates well with theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, namely, social constructivism and Ubuntu. The researcher believes that the experiences of the current study participants may be constructed into

knowledge through interpretations. Even though interactions with multiple participants in this is crucial in understanding the support for learners with reading difficulties, the researcher's personal views and discernments also play a part. Creswell (2014:38) asserts that researchers recognize that their background shapes their interpretations, and they position themselves in their research to acknowledge how their interpretations emerge from their personal, cultural and historical experiences. Kamal (2019:1389) affirms that how the researcher perceives the world and the way she views how knowledge is constructed are echoed within the Interpretivists paradigm.

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

Research approach and research method are concepts that are often used interchangeably (Mphahlele, 2018:83). In this study, research approach has been used. According to Myers (2013 cited in Mphahlele 2018:83), a research approach is defined as a strategy of inquiry that moves from the underlying hypotheses to research design and data collection. Daniel (2016:91) defines the research approach as a plan and procedure that consists of the steps from paradigm to the detailed methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation, which is therefore based on the nature of the research problem being, addressed (Chetty, 2016). Consequently, the decisions that guide the way the research was conducted regarding the topic and the main objective of the study is given as the definition of the research approach.

The most suitable research approach used in this study is the qualitative research approach. Creswell (2014:32) defines qualitative research as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; data typically collected in the participants' setting, data analysis inductively built from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Mohajan, 2018:1). In the same vein, Chetty (2016) concurs with Creswell that qualitative approach puts more emphasis on the methods used to generate data.

The qualitative research approach is naturally inductive and the researcher generally explores meanings and insights in a given situation. It refers to a range of data collection and analysis techniques that use purposive sampling and semi-structured, open-ended interviews even observations (Gopaldas, 2016; Levitt, Motusky, Wertz, Morrow & Ponterotto, 2017).

It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that makes the world visible. It is multi-method in focus, including an interpretive–naturalistic approach to its subject matter. It collects and works with non-numerical data that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help researchers to understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places (Mohajan, 2018:2). It investigates local knowledge and understanding of a given program, people's experiences, meanings and relationships, social processes, and contextual factors that marginalize a group of people. It focuses on words rather than numbers and it observes the world in its natural setting, interpreting situations to understand the meanings that people make from day- to-day life (Ahmed & Liyas, 2017:10).

According to Mohajan (2018:7), methodological choices are important to consider when preparing a qualitative research study. These depend on which cases are selected, how the information is collected and how the data analysis is chosen. The qualitative research data are descriptive, in the form of interview notes, observation records, and documents; and data are analysed inductively. Furthermore, Winters (2020:5) and Ahmed and Lilyas (2017:9) affirm that the qualitative approach is not only guided by theory but also by data; therefore, theories are drawn up in the field as well not only in the library.

The qualitative approach like other approaches has its strengths and weaknesses. It emphasizes more on explaining why people think and behave in certain ways and less emphasis is on counting the numbers of people who think or behave in certain ways. It is powerful in simplifying and managing data without destroying complexity and context (Winters, 2020:5). Qualitative approach has rich and detailed information about affected populations; it allows people to open up and provide new evidence that was not even initially considered; it allows researchers to access data on difficult issues such as domestic violence; and the data collection requires a limited number of

respondents, which can be carried out with limited resources (Creswell, 2014:36).

However, Mohajan (2018:19) points out that it has weaknesses including difficulty in the scientifically proof data collection process; hence, results in data are not objectively verifiable; a collection of data can be time- consuming and costly because of the time needed for data collection, analysis and interpretation are lengthy. However, owing to the subjective nature of its data and its origin in single contexts, it is difficult to apply conventional standards of reliability and validity.

The qualitative approach was chosen for this study for it is narrative and provides a better understanding of a research problem while integrating the findings at several points in the study. Also, it allows the researcher to evaluate the issue of concern in depth and detail since it does not need a large sample size (Mohajan, 2018:20). Again, same as other research approaches, the qualitative approach has a variety of designs which provide specific direction for procedures in research (Mphahlele, 2018:84).

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Creswell (2009:23) defines research design as a plan or proposal for conducting research, involving the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific methods. According to Creswell, to reiterate in planning the study, the researchers need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, the strategies of inquiry that is related to this worldview and the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice. Thakur (2021:53) concurs that research design refers to the overall strategies one chooses to coherently and logically integrate the different components of one's research, therefore, ensuring that one effectively addresses his/her research questions; it forms the blueprint for data collection, measurement and analysis for which research questions determine the type of design one should use, not the other way around.

Wright, O'Brien, Nimmon and Mylopoulos (2016:97-98) assert that research design is the totality of strategy used to carry out research that explains a concise and orderly plan to intercept established research questions through data collection, interpretation,

analysis, and discussion. The methodologies and approaches assimilated in the design of a research study are dependent on the viewpoint of the researchers over their beliefs like knowledge (epistemology) and reality (ontology) frequently molded by the areas of discipline to which an individual researcher belongs.

The design of a study explains whether the study is descriptive, experimental, semi-experimental and sub-type such as descriptive-longitudinal case study, exploratory case study or experimental design and if applicable, methods of data collection and analysis plan (Creswell 2014 cited in Thakur, 2021:53). Thakur further claims that research design ensures that the alibi obtained makes it possible for the researcher to effectively address logically and unambiguously the research problem. It serves as a sequence of a lantern to keep the progress of research in the right direction. It is important and therefore needed to ensure the best, structured and organized plan of the undertaken research. It magnifies the efficiency of the researcher's implementation plan. Thus, it is essential as it makes research possible (Wright, et al, 2016: 103).

The research design of this study is an exploratory case study. Gerring (2007) cited in Hill (2017:34) defines a case study as an in-depth study of a single case whose purpose is to generalize within a larger collection of cases for the same general type. Hill further opines that it consists of a comprehensive investigation to provide contextual analysis. The exploratory case study is naturally qualitative and often called interpretive research for its flexible and open-ended nature (George, 2021).

A case study focuses on qualitative data using strategies such as observations and interviews, and tends to analyse primary and secondary sources including official records, minutes and newspapers (McCombes, 2019). It is a suitable design for a researcher who wants to have concrete, contextual and in-depth knowledge specifically about real-world issues. It enables the researcher to tour the major characteristics, meanings and implications of the case. The case strategy is sociologically rooted and specifically valuable in fields that are practice-oriented such as management, psychology and education to mention a few, and case studies may generate hypotheses, rather than be used to test them (Mohajan, 2018:11). According to Brandon (2018), case studies provide facts to study since the researcher looks at real-time generated data. It helps researchers to change their opinions into

information verifiable as facts because of the proven path of positive or negative development (Yin, 2017:18). The qualitative data collected from participants were used to explore teachers' experiences when supporting learners with reading difficulties in Grade 9 in secondary schools of Leribe District in Lesotho.

3.6 POPULATION

According to Mphahlele (2018:85), there is an agreement among social scientists that the population may comprise individuals, elements, or units. Shukla (2020:2) defines a population as a set of general units possessing variable characteristics being studied and for which the research findings can be generalized.

Nevertheless, Durrheim and Painter (2010) cited in Mphahlele (2018:85) define a population as a wide-ranging supply from which elements for sampling are taken and findings are generalized. Likewise, Thacker (2020:1) asserts that a population is a complete collection of people with specific characteristics, not limited to geographic location but also to demographic, clinical and temporal. Hence, a group of participants in total makes an analysis unit from which specific conclusions are made by the researcher (Mphahlele, 2018:85).

In this study, the population consists of English Language Grade 9 teachers, Heads of Language Departments and principals in the secondary schools of Leribe District, since the researcher's goal is to explore their experiences in supporting Grade 9 learners who experience reading difficulties. The population is too big for feasibility's sake; as a result, the need for sampling.

3.7 SAMPLING

A sample is the subset of the population which means participants that the researcher can access easily to avoid time and costs which can be incurred by the researcher (Thacker, 2020:1). Therefore, an individual member of a target population is an

element and when some elements from the target population are selected to participate in the study that is a sample (Datta, 2018:1). Sampling is, therefore, the process of making a representative selection of a population of interest so that the results can be fairly summarized generally (Mphahlele, 2017:86). In the same vein, Sharma (2017:749) concurs that sampling is a device engaged by the researcher to orderly choose a smaller number which represents individuals from the target population to act as data sources for observation or experimentation depending on the objectives of the study. Sampling is needed because researchers cannot test every individual in the population. Then sample works as the representation of the entire population which is convenient in terms of costs and time (Sharma, 2017:749).

Sampling is of two types which are probability and non-probability sampling techniques. In probability sampling, every element of the population has a well-established probability of being part of the sample (Taherdoost, 2016:20). Such methods include random or representative sampling and these sampling techniques decrease the opportunity for systematic errors and reduce the occurrence of sampling biases. These techniques are much more accurate (Sharma, 2017:749). However, these methods demand more effort, they are time-consuming and expensive as well (Datta, 2018:2).

For non-probability sampling techniques, every member of the population does not have the same opportunity to participate in the investigations because sample selection is based on the subjective judgement of the researcher. Non-probability techniques are less time-consuming and inexpensive, and allow an easy way of collecting data (McCombes, 2019). On the contrary, the techniques are susceptible to experiencing systematic errors and sampling biases (Datta, 2018:2).

For this study, a probability simple random sampling technique with replacement was employed. Taherdoost (2016:21) defines simple random sampling as a strategy in which each case in the population has the same opportunity of being included in the sample. In this strategy, researchers choose individuals randomly because they have the same characteristics. Sharma (2017:750) concurs that in simple random sampling, the entire sampling process is done in one step, every subject is chosen independently

of other members of the population, and statistical inferences are then made to obtain a specific small sample.

In this sampling technique, each member has the same chance of being chosen and it is a straight and simple technique of probability sampling techniques because it engages one random selection with little knowledge of the population. It also has high validity internally and externally as well since it uses randomization (Thomas, 2020; Horton, 2020). However, it is time-consuming and costly.

Simple random sampling has two different ways to be used to carry it out and those are lottery/envelope and random number table ways. In the Lottery method, special numbers are assigned to each member or population element, for instance, in a population of 15 members numbered from 1 to 15 and kept in a box then choose randomly the sample needed of 4 members. Conversely, in a random number table, numbers are given on a table then the needed sample is chosen randomly from the table (Bhardwaj, 2019:159; Casteel & Bridier, 2021:347). They further maintain that simple random sampling consists of simple random sampling with replacement and without replacement. From this with replacement, the researcher selects the "n" number out of "N" elements one by one in a way that at every selection stage, each element sample has the same opportunity of being chosen, thus, $1/N$.

The sample of this study comprises 12 teachers who have different responsibilities from four secondary schools in the Leribe District and 3 from each school – a classroom teacher, head of department and a principal, especially within the researcher's reach due to time and cost constraints. Simple random sampling was used to select schools from which data were collected from participants in such schools. The sample is made up of four Grade 9 English Language teachers which principals in collaboration with Heads of Language Departments (HODs) chose for the researcher. These are subject teachers and immediate supporters for learners with reading difficulties. From these participants, rich and in-depth information was obtained regarding the issue under study since they have a close observation of the successful strategies, they use in supporting these learners. The other four HODs are study participants from which likewise the powerful information was obtained because they see to it that learners with reading difficulties are supported through programs

they implemented and lastly, four of the principals who are generally anchor of support for teachers and learners as well.

Moreover, it was found essential to include four principals from the chosen four schools as supervisors of the schools because their supervision is evaluated particularly on the attainment of the main goals of education, entailing good results by all learners among others, they must see to it that the teaching and learning process take place and programs are offered to support learners who need them to achieve the major aim of education. This is a general improvement of the school and its dignity (Sunaengsih, Anggarani, Amalia, Nurfatmala & Naelin, 2019:80).

3.8 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Kabir (2016:202) defines data collection as the procedure of collecting and computing information about variables in a defined and systematic manner, enabling one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate results. Ajayi (2017:2) affirms that before information can be presented and interpreted, it has to be collected and sorted. Similarly, Mphahlele (2018:88) concurs that data collection is the procedure of procuring information and opinions from sample participants using unlike data collection tools.

Aquinis, Hill and Bailey (2019:680) highlight that the data collection stage of qualitative research includes many choices like a specific type of research paradigm which for this study is positivist/ constructivism, research approach – qualitative, research design – case study and the sampling technique which is simple random sampling. Data for this study were collected from both primary sources which were observations and interviews and secondary sources that were minutes for languages departmental meetings and learners' comprehension scripts.

3.9 DATA GENERATION TOOLS

The current study adopted qualitative approach and informed by a case study design collected non-numerical data but a naturally descriptive one through the use of interviews, observations and document analysis. Therefore, the collected data are verbal and intended to capture emotions, feelings and, or subjective experiences or perceptions regarding a certain issue under study (Kabir, 2016:202; Kakilla, 2021:1). Kabir further opines that a qualitative researcher must record data gathered in an accurate, orderly and thorough way such as field notes, voice recordings, photographs and other means suitable still observing research ethical principles. In this study, semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis were engaged.

3.9.1 INTERVIEWS

The interview is a conversation that takes place between an interviewer and interviewee which can be either face-to-face, telephonic or video (Oltmann, 2016:8). Mphahlele (2018:94) describes interviews as open communication between people, which offers a chance for the interviewer to know and understand how interviewees think and feel and to allow the interviewee to elaborate on the issue of focus (Alamri, 2019:65). It is characterised by giving in-depth information because, in the face-to-face, the interviewer does not only record the conversation but also body language, facial expressions even other reactions that enable the interviewer to easily conclude (Kabir, 2016:205). Whyte (2021:57) argues that a free bystander setting provides a non-threatening but comfortable environment that allows participants to open up and honestly give their personal experiences.

George (2022) defines semi-structured interviews as a naturally qualitative, exploratory data collection technique that depends on questions asked within the predetermined thematic framework, though questions are not orderly or phrasing set. Semi-structured interview layout enables the researcher to add or drop a part or a

whole of a question that was pre-planned. This type of interview is made up of different key questions which help in defining explored areas in the research (Alamri, 2019:65). Stofer (2019:1) asserts that semi-structured interviews are flexible to allow the interviewer to follow the same order of questions for all interviewees or change the order as well as adding or omitting some questions or in parts.

The researcher designed the semi-structured guiding questions which address the objectives of the study and are based on the participants' experiences which are supplemented by probing questions and follow-ups depending on the interviewee's responses (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:2).

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather first-hand information from the participants that are experienced in supporting Grade 9 learners who experience reading difficulties. This technique of data collection is flexible in that the researcher was able to probe the responses while at the same time watching the facial expressions, body language, laughter, emotional responses and many more (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:2).

The researcher has designed the semi-structured guiding questions which she administered to 12 participants made of Grade 9 English teachers, HoD and principals in each of the four schools. With the help of the concerned participants from each of the four schools, a quiet but comfortable place to carry on with one-on-one interviews was determined. The place free from noise and people around helps both interviewer and interviewee to concentrate and influences the relaxed and open interactions where the interviewee would feel free to express themselves. More importantly, the researcher made the participants aware that whatever was discussed would not be shared with anyone except the supervisor and or the university concerned people only to verify that the interviews were indeed conducted. Also, upon the request for signing the return slips showing that the participants have given consent, they were assured that their names will not be used in the study but pseudonyms instead. Again, the researcher made the participants aware that they could withdraw from participating at any stage of the research.

The researcher created a rapport with the participants by cracking jokes occasionally,

making them feel comfortable with the researcher for them to answer questions sincerely. The researcher requested permission to record the interviews with the purpose of trustworthiness of transcriptions and continue to guarantee that the voice records are solely for the study and they will be kept safely where they are opened with the password until they could be destroyed according to the University's ethics. The VFD tablet was used to voice record the participants. Participants were also told to feel free to use Sesotho as an official language in Lesotho. However, guiding questions are in English and each interview took about 30 minutes. The experiences gathered from interviews were analysed and discussed in the next chapters.

3.9.2 OBSERVATIONS

Editorial (2018:1) defines observation as a crucial research method involving the collection of data through the use of one's senses, particularly looking and listening in an orderly and meaningful way. Ekka (2021:17) concurs that observation is a method of collecting data mainly in qualitative research, by observing the behaviour, events or recording physical features in a natural environment. Therefore, data collected from observations are real as collected when events are taking place. However, people observed that they may behave differently knowing that they are being observed.

Busetto, et al. (2020:3) opine that observations are especially useful to have an in-depth into a particular setting and real behavior. Qualitative observations are naturally participant or non-participant where in participant; the researcher becomes the part of the observed setting while in non-participant; the observer is not part of the setting; thus, the observer is not part of the interactions but just an observer to avoid influencing the interactions. Furthermore, in non-participants, the observer tries to comprehend the world, relationships and interactions taking place in a certain community of interest (Ciesielska, Bostrom & Ohlander, 2018:40).

Observations are useful in that collection of data takes place where and when an activity is in process and it does not depend on whether people are willing or they are capable of providing the information (Ekka, 2021:18). Additionally, during the

observation, the observer may take notes on everything or particular parts predetermined of what happens. These field notes may be transcribed after the observations.

Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay and Gray (2017:1061) affirm that observation lets the researchers see what people do not do what they claim to do. They further claim that observing people in their natural setting can disclose more information than is related to personal recollections, awareness, choice of reports, or decisions compared to other self-report data collection techniques. However, observation needs special preparation by the researcher and 'immunity' to different ethical and emotional conditions which may come up in the process (Dzwigol & Barosz, 2020:143).

The researcher designed an observation schedule which addresses the objectives of the study and was administered in the observation of Grade 9 classes in the teaching of reading in four schools chosen. The non- participant observation was used in which a researcher was not participating in the class but just observing how the classes were set to allow a teacher to engage each learner. But learners could see each other for assistance and unity building, teaching strategies used by teachers to accommodate different levels of learners, how learners participate in class and whether a teacher can support those with reading difficulties, and availability of reading materials for different levels of learners' capacity. Data collected through observations do not need any input from the participants (Mphahlele, 2018:93), rather the researcher observes the process by looking for different behaviours shown by different learners, and listening to what happens such as laughter, how learners correct each other and how the teacher interferes to assist as Ubuntu philosophy suggests. The notes were taken by the researcher to be transcribed. Observations lasted for 40 minutes in all schools; however, in one school the lesson lasted for an hour.

3.9.3 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Documentation is a systematic process of reviewing documents that can be used to provide context, generate questions, complement other types of research data, and

corroborate other sources (Dalglish, Khalid & McMahon, 2020:1425). Furthermore, various types of documents analysed include newspaper articles, books, academic journal articles, and institutional reports (Morgan, 2021:64). He further maintains that document is a general term for a variety of materials such as photographs, films and videos. Similarly, text documents and visual materials may be used as the source of qualitative research instruments for data collection.

Rapley (2018) cited in Morgan (2021:65) asserts that in using documents as a source of data, the researcher finds data already available without any actions by the researchers; however, they become active to discover, collect and decision-making regarding materials to be analysed and those to be ignored. Thus, using data from documents is similar to using observations and interviews data because they reflect the beliefs of people similarly to observations and interviews. Similarly, Cardno (2018:632) concurs that in documents words, language or text is analysed. Therefore, it is the same as analysing interviews and observations as alluded by Morgan.

Document data are usually used with other data types for triangulation to enhance the study's trustworthiness. So, triangulation determines the consistency of findings of a study and the development of deep comprehension of the investigated topic. This way, document analysis is used to supplement other data collection methods. Data collected from written documents are stable and cannot be affected as could be in observations and interviews (Dalglish, et al., 2020: 1425; Cardno, 2018:626; Morgan, 2021:67)

The chosen documents for this study are Language Departmental minutes because they reflect teachers' experiences regarding the support, they offer to Grade 9 learners, strategies used to cab the situation, and learners' reading comprehension scripts. After all, they reveal whether learners understand what they read as they answer questions and also the improvement pending the teachers' support. In this regard, document analysis complements both interviews and observations. A researcher got the documents through the help of participants, particularly the principals because they have authority to allow duplication of such documents.

3.9.4 FIELD NOTES

The researcher took notes to ensure that all individual participants' responses are captured which result in effective information gathering. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017:383) aver that field notes are a record of activities observed and casual discussions from the field that are taken at two stages. The first stage carries the reality or direct description of what is seen and heard that may be audio-recorded. The second stage entails observers jotting down their thoughts about activities and interviews. The motive of this stage is to offer conditions for the actuality perceived on the surface and to feature what the researcher thinks about the meaning of facts. The motive of participant observation is not solely to look at what goes on, but to experience what it is like to be part of the group as well (Adhikari, 2018:98).

Ciesielska, et al. (2018:41) claim that field notes are essential part of qualitative research, that they resource the researcher in gathering and remembering information from observational sessions. Also, field notes gave context and insights to boost the comprehension of what teachers thought about and how they experienced support for learners with reading difficulties (Ghirotto, De Panfilis & Di Leo, 2020:3). The information covered in this study, among others, is how are classroom settings, who are there, students' participation in reading lessons, how lengthy are sessions, what kind of materials are used. Also, the strategies used by distinct participants and how efficiently they were used to support the learning process (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018:2557).

In this study, the notes were taken during the observations to give more specific and clear information later. The researcher jotted notes and expanded them later after the observations. Jotted notes helped the researcher to easily remember the observation process. Recording the interviews was done for the purpose of transcribing the information before it is analysed.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS AND TECHNIQUES

Ngulube (2015:1) points out that qualitative data analysis involves transforming raw data by searching for, evaluating, identifying, coding, mapping, exploring and describing patterns, trends, themes and categories in the raw data to interpret them and provide their underlying meaning. The researcher's critical role in data analysis is to identify and communicate themes (Silverman 2017 cited in Mattimoe, Hayden, Murphy & Ballantine, 2021:3).

Thematic analysis is the approach used to analyse data in this study. It is a technique for analysing qualitative data that encompass searching across data set to identify, analyse and report patterns that were repeated. It comprises interpretation when selecting codes and constructing themes. Thematic analysis technique is outstanding by being flexible to be used with wide range of theoretical frameworks, and be applied to a wide range of study questions, designs and sample sizes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020:3). Furthermore, Roller (2019:6) asserts that qualitative analysis point is not to deconstruct the data into codes but to define the research questions from perspective of participants and derive the underlying themes that connect the perspectives and give weight to the researcher's interpretations and implications related to the research questions investigated.

According to Mattomoe, et al (2021:3), qualitative data can be analysed in two ways, namely, manual and technological. The manual process includes printing of transcripts, making photocopies, marking up, coding line-by-line, margins coding, cut-and-paste, sorting, reorganizing, hanging files and arranging color-coded sticky notes on large display boards (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings & Eyto, 2018:10). The description of manual process of data analysis is comprehensive, involving notes writing on the texts analysed using highlighters to show potential patterns, or using 'post-it' notes for identification of data segments (Mattomoe, et al 2021:4), as codes are identified, grouping data extracts and collating in individual codes. The generation of sub-themes and overall themes included experimentation with combinations of codes until all data extractions had been coded against them.

This is the recursive process that encompasses re-reading, coding and recoding till all data has been incorporated in sub-themes and overarching themes. In this regard, the researcher's interaction with data is essential and involves a sequence of physical activities around arranging and re-arranging data and post-it notes, come after mapping on large display boards. This process inspires a slower and more relevant interaction with the data and great freedom in constant comparisons, trial arrangements, perspectives of observation, reflection and development of interpretive insights (Maher, et al, 2018:11). However, the manual approach process of analysing many pages of raw data is an intimidating task (Mattomoe, et al, 2021:4; Kiger & Varpio, 2020:1).

The use of technological approach is the alternative to manual approach to aid qualitative data analysis. This approach provides the ability to import, organize and explore data from different sources such as text, audio, video, images, spreadsheets, online surveys, social and web content. The computer programs including Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing (NUD*IST), NVivo and ATLAS.ti can be used as merely tools made to help analysis. However, it remains the responsibility of the researcher to ask the questions, interpret the data, and decide what to code (Mattomoe, et al, 2021:11).

The researcher in this study that employed interpretivism engages the manual approach using thematic method because it allows her to keep a closeness to the data collected and simplify recognition of themes in a fundamental manner and avoids completing themes too early during analysis (Mattomoe, et al., 2021:20). Also, thematic analysis is powerful and appropriate to use in seeking to comprehend experiences, thoughts and or behaviours across a set of data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020:3).

The researcher followed the thematic steps developed originally by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke as stated by Caulfield (2019). The first step involved transcribing the audios, reading the text for initial notes and looking through data generally to get familiar with it. This is familiarization. Coding follows from which the researcher highlights phrases or sentences and come up with codes that describe their content. Then from the codes, the researcher identified patterns within them, and start coming up with themes. The themes were reviewed to ensure their accuracy and usefulness.

Furthermore, the reviewed themes were defined and named; therefore, formulating what is meant by each theme and figure out how it helps the researcher comprehend the data, and come up with concise, easily understandable theme name (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:4-10).

The purpose for analysing collected data was to meet the aims and objectives of the study. Data analysis in qualitative research encompasses breaking down of data into chunks, categorization of the segments, identification of connections and patterns, and interpreting them (Mezmir, 2020:15). In his abstract, Ravindran (2019) defines data analysis as a way of bringing out meanings from the data collected which people attach to their responses and actions related to the issue under investigation. Data analysis is also defined as a six-step process that assists to make meaning of texts and images (Creswell, 2014:235). The process comprises putting together and arranging the data, touring and coding the data, outlining findings and setting up themes, constituting and announcing the findings, interpreting the meaning of the findings and corroborating the exactness of the findings.

3.10.1 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Analysis and interpretation of data in this study were done through thematic approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) cited in Nepal (2021:58), thematic analysis is widely used to identify, analyse and report on patterns or themes in data, it is flexible and useful in providing a detailed, unique account of a theme or group of themes (Byrne, 2021:1392; Braun & Clarke, 2012). Byrne (2021) further argues that thematic analysis is appropriate in studies that use range of theoretical frameworks, while also suitable with diverse research paradigms comprising the constructivist paradigm as used in this study to inspect how the meaning of issues such as support for learners with reading difficulties in this case, is generated.

In social science qualitative research, psychology, sports, nursing and exercise research, thematic analysis has been regarded the most widely used method of data

analysis (Swain, 2018:3; Braun & Clarke, 2017:297; XU & Zammit, 2020:1). However, Xu and Zammit (2020:2) argue that there is scarcity of definition directing the education field. Thematic analysis can also be used with large or small chunk of data from case study with 1-2 participants or even more (Braun & Clarke, 2017:298), as in the case of this study where not so small or too large number of participants participated.

A comprehensible and systematic way for generating codes and themes in qualitative data is provided by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2017 cited in Nepal, 2021:59). Braun and Clarke (2017:297) define codes as the smallest components of analysis that record interesting pieces of the data applicable to the research questions and they are the building blocks of the themes. According to Belotto (2018:2624) and Xu and Zammit (2020:2), codes are units of meaning, which can be in the form of words or sentences with the same meaning. In turn, these codes become foundation blocks for recognizing patterns of meanings in the data resulting to themes generation. Braun and Clarke (2006:10) cited in Nepal (2021:59) and Braun and Clarke (2006:82) cited in Friese, Soratto and Pires (2018:8) assert that a theme seizes major things about the data relating to the research question and representing some degree of molded meaning within the dataset.

Thematic analysis of data comprises deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive method requires analysing from the general to the specific, which is, starting from the theory, deriving hypotheses from it, testing the hypotheses, and revising the theory. In contrast, inductive entails analysing from specific to general as when themes are generated from the data collected (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018:5-6). Park, Bahrudin and Han (2020:5) assert that deductive approach is more appropriate for positivism research and is suitable in testing hypothesis since quantitative data is large and measurable whereas inductive involves qualitative data which is text written and verbal responses.

Inductive approach to thematic analysis undertaken in this study was inductive in that it was data-driven and involved a bottom-up coding process of data without a predetermined coding framework (Nepal, 2021:59). The choice of inductive approach to thematic analysis corroborates with constructivist paradigm which is adopted in this

study since Park, et al (2020:4) opine that constructivism is more appropriate for constructing new theories or models and making them real than justifying theories like in deductive approach.

Semantic and latent levels can be followed in thematic analysis. Identification of themes in this study has been done at latent level because it is interpretive and constructionism based, thus, following constructionist paradigm, rather than semantic level which does not accommodate anything beyond the participant's response (Woods, 2017; Friese, et al, 2018:9). Friese, et al., (2018:9) affirm that in semantic level of analysis, data are coded at "face value" therefore, not at the deeper meaning but superficially. This means that analysts do not look for anything beyond what is said or written, and the potential level goes beyond the semantic content of the data. It begins by examining the underlying meanings, assumptions and conceptualizations that inform the semantic content of the data, the development of the themes involve interpretive work, and the results are not merely described but already theorized. As mentioned in the aforementioned section, this study followed the six steps of thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) and the steps are described in detail in the section that follows.

3.10.1.1 Familiarization with and transcription of the data

Qualitative data that encompass thematic analysis suggest the written data; therefore, the verbal one as in this study should be transcribed (Nepal, 2021:60). There are different programs or software such as ATLAS.ti that helps to transcribe audio files to text. However, the researcher transcribed each audio file of the interviews to get the sense of the data in this study. Reading and reading repeatedly through transcripts assisted the researcher to familiarize herself with the data and slowly thinking of dividing the data. Moreover, the researcher highlighted the parts that she found a possibility for them to meet the objectives while at the same time making sense of the initial codes.

3.10.1.2 Generating initial codes

The researcher, thereafter, started to identify portions in the data that could be separated in groups for initial codes generation. Codes, as defined earlier, represent meaningful features in data that are useful in the analysis process. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019) cited in Nepal (2021:61), coding is the process of dividing, tapering down and labelling the data inductively. Although researchers such as Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that coding can be inductive and deductive depending on whether codes are data or theory driven, in this study, an inductive approach was used to generate codes.

In this process of generating initial codes, appropriate extracts from set of data were reproduced separately. Creswell and Creswell (2018:269) suggest that this process involves bracketing chunks of data, categorizing and naming small portions of data to several codes which should be summarized to themes. They further posit that themes are generated by grouping codes to come up with broad themes which should be at least five to seven for a study, not more, which is the case in this study where there are only four themes.

3.10.1.2 Generating themes

Coding for all data from interviews was done, compilation of initial codes was done and categorized into groups for identification of themes depending on potential themes identified earlier. More importantly, grouping initially identified codes together made it possible to identify patterns from data set in relation to the potential theme like availability for support which was consolidated and revised as systems of support relating to the aim of this study. At this stage, related initial potential themes are combined to form broad themes in order to reduce number of themes which will reflect the collected data (Byrne, 2021:1404).

3.10.1.3 Reviewing themes

According to Byrne (2021:1405), this process is classified into two stages: reviewing the relationships between data items and codes from which themes and sub-themes were identified. The researcher has gone through the process once at the same time for both stages. The generated themes were reviewed and codes listed thoroughly in relation to the aim and objectives of the study to verify their representation to the set of data. The themes were again reviewed against data extracts which were used for generation of initial codes even to the whole set of data as opined by Byrne (2021:1405).

The transcripts, field notes and notes taken as documents were analysed and continually visited again to ensure that nothing important was left out. This revisiting of collected data has not only been helpful with codes and generated themes verification aligned to data, but also with the deeper understanding of data at latent level to derive even hidden meaningful information. At this stage, some themes were not so meaningful that they were left out while others were renamed during the process when meaning was developed through re-reading.

3.11 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Mphahlele (2018:99), credibility and trustworthiness are important elements of qualitative research. Trustworthiness of a study alludes to the standard of belief in data, interpretation, and techniques used to make certain the quality of a study (Connelly, 2016:435). Amankwaa (2016) points out that in every study, researchers should develop the necessary protocols and procedures to make the study worthy of the reader's consideration. Nowell, et al, (2017:3) concur that researchers may convince themselves and readers that the findings of their research worth attention through trustworthiness. Also, trustworthiness criteria are realistic choices for researchers anxious about the suitability and functionality of their research for a diversity of stakeholders.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) cited in Connelly (2016:435) outlined the trustworthiness criteria that includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to resemble the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability (Nowell, et al, 2017:3). However not all of the procedures are used in each study. In order to meet trustworthiness criteria, procedures are well known, even for those with epistemological and ontological differences, as they rely on methodological arguments and techniques. For compatibility's sake, the researcher used multiple data sources – individual interviews, observation checklist and documents to collect data as a means to ensure trustworthiness.

3.12 CREDIBILITY

Credibility of a study is set on when readers are challenged by the experience they can recognize. It is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research, focusing on truth-value aspects (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). There are a number of methods that can be used to address credibility issues including long-term engagement, continuous observation, data collection triangulation, and researcher triangulation among other ventures (Nowell, et al, 2017:3; Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). To ensure credibility in this study, the researcher collected data using multiple sources that engaged different levels of people and places, long time spent with participants during interviews and observations gave the researcher enough time to be familiar with setting and context, build trust and test for misinformation. Thematic analysis of data also ensures the credibility of the study through the steps the researcher has engaged in as confirmed by Korstjens and Moser (2018:122) that codes development, the ideas and the main classification assist to inspect characteristics of the data. The researcher continually read and reread the data, analysed them, hypothesized about them and amended the ideas accordingly. They captured and relabelled codes, ideas and main classification. Researchers pored over data until final theory provided expected depth of insight.

3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations in research are set of conventions that steer research designs and practices in a study. When collecting data from people, researchers should always cohere to a particular code of conduct for data collection from human beings (Bhandari, 2021; Akaranga & Makau, 2016:1). Fleming (2018:210) opines that research design choices require not only participant suitability selection and systematic data collection procedures, but also acceptance and adherence to ethical standards, which include protection of participants from harm, voluntary and informed participation, right to privacy, and researcher's integrity and honesty.

For this study, to make certain that ethical demands are met, a series of steps was followed – ethical clearance application was made to UNISA Research Ethics Committee and approval letter was subsequently given. The researcher requested for permission from District Education Manager to collect data in the Leribe Secondary Schools, also from the school principals, then the participants which all granted permission.

Before any data collection activity, the researcher introduced herself through a covering letter and even emphasizing that the participation is voluntary. The introduction was done to help the researcher gain support and trust from the participants. The letter stated that participants were free to withdraw from participating at any level and were not forced to sign consent letters as Creswell (2014) cited in Mphahlele (2018:103) points out that typical set of elements that concedes human rights protection are contained in the consent form; therefore, participants could easily exercise their rights.

The researcher ensured that participants' privacy was respected and anonymity too was ensured by using code names like School A, teacher A, Principal A and HOD A as participants were promised that pseudo names would be used. There was no interest of any sort to the choice of schools selected for data collection.

3.14 CONCLUSION

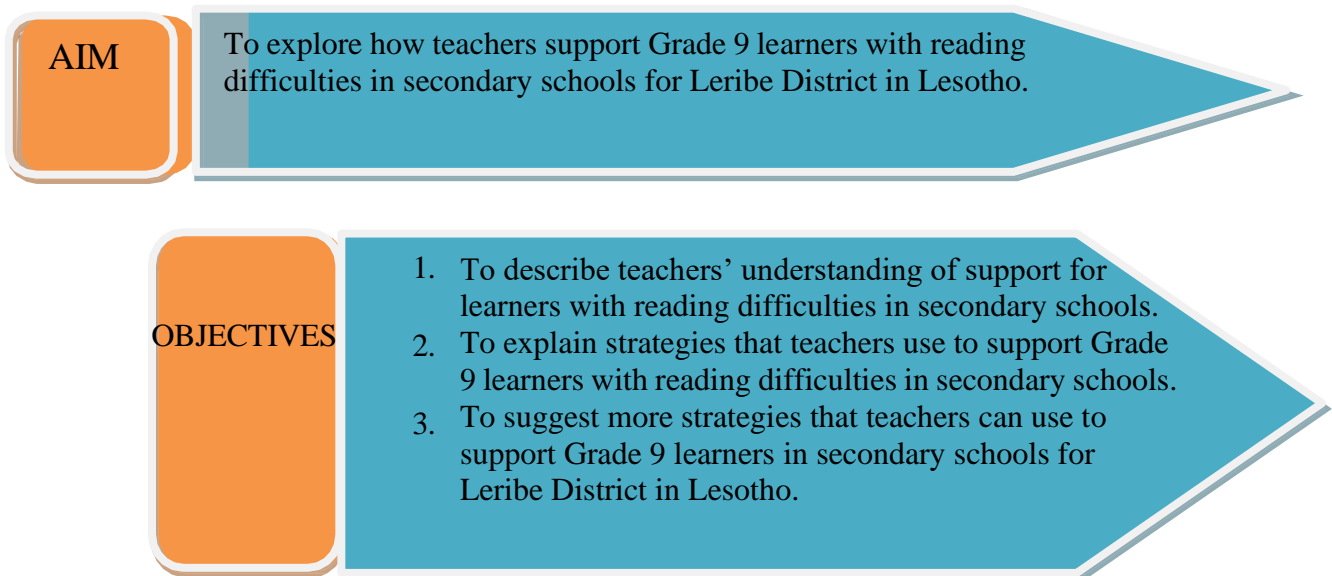
In this chapter, description of the conduct for the study is described focusing on the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sampling, data collection procedure and qualitative data generation tools such as interviews, observations, field notes and document, thematic data analysis that include the steps followed in analysing data thematically and techniques used and suitable to answer the research questions. Also, the research sites are described to allow the readers to locate the study and understand its description. In addition, the credibility and trustworthiness of the study was shown followed by how ethical considerations were observed and applied.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the current study, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic technique of data analysis was used to analyse the findings of this study. The data were first coded then the themes and sub-themes were developed following Braun and Clarke's steps of thematic analysis (Nepal, 2021:58). The chapter gives the analytic process and starts with demographic presentation of participants, followed by the presentation and interpretation of findings. The findings are presented following the aims and objectives of the study as shown on Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Aim and objectives of the study



4.2 PRESENTATION OF PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

In this study, the participants were categorized into responsibilities they have at schools as classroom teachers (English language), heads of language departments and principals, their age and qualifications they hold. These qualities of the participants generally have an impact on how teachers support learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools. Details are highlighted on the following sections.

The data were collected during the interviews as to how many years they have in the teaching profession at secondary level and in the leadership posts as head of departments and principals. Their age, responsibilities and qualifications determine their experience in teaching hence their familiarity in supporting learners with learning difficulties especially reading difficulties (see Table 4.1).

According to their age, there is one youngest teacher who holds only diploma certificate in teaching and who has lesser experience than others. There are 6 teachers from 30 to 36 years who hold bachelor's degree in education which indicates that their level of education puts them in a better position to understand the support learners need to better their education. Also, one already assumes the HoD position which shows that she has some years in teaching. While from 44 to 58 years are the mature ones with great experience in teaching; therefore, they understand how to support learners with learning difficulties. There were 12 participants, from which four were classroom teachers, four heads of language departments and four principals from four schools. They were coded as follows: Teachers were coded as TA, TB, TC and TD; HODs were coded as, HOD A, HOD B, HOD C and HOD D; and principals were coded as PA, PB, PC and PD as Table 4.1 shows.

Table 4.1: Participants' demographic information

Participants	Age	Gender	Schools	Responsibilities	Highest Qualification	Teaching subjects	Grade levels
TA	30	Male	School A	Classroom teacher	B.Ed.	English & Literature in English	Grade 9
TB	36	Female	School B	Classroom teacher	B.Ed.	English & Sesotho	Grade 9
TC	28	Male	School C	Classroom teacher	Diploma in Sec. Education	English & geography	Grade 9
TD	34	Male	School D	Classroom teacher	B.Ed.	English & Sesotho	Grade 9
HOD A	44	Female	School A	Head of Department	B.Ed.	English & Geography	Grade 8
HOD B	36	Female	School B	Head of Department	B.Ed.	English & Literature in English	Grade 10
HOD C	54	Male	School C	Head of Department	PGDE	English & Religious studies	Grade 9
HOD D	58	Female	School D	Head of Department	B.Ed.	English & Sesotho	Grade 9
PA	56	Female	School A	Principal	B.Ed.	English & Literature in English	Grade 8
PB	54	Female	School B	Principal	MSC Agric	Agric & Life skills	Grade 9
PC	44	Male	School C	Principal	BSC	Chemistry & Physics	Grade 10
PD	55	Female	School D	Principal	B.Ed.	English & Geography	Grade 10

4.3 FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

The inductive approach has been adopted to analyse the data as it has been mentioned earlier. All the themes were inductively categorized and grouped into the following

four themes:

4.3.1 THEME 1: SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

This theme was guided by the main aim of the study which is to explore how teachers support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools for Leribe District in Lesotho. It is crucial for learners who experience reading difficulties to be supported all round not focusing only on the academic support. Hence the sub-themes that emerged from this theme were academic, social and emotional support as shown on Figure 4.2.

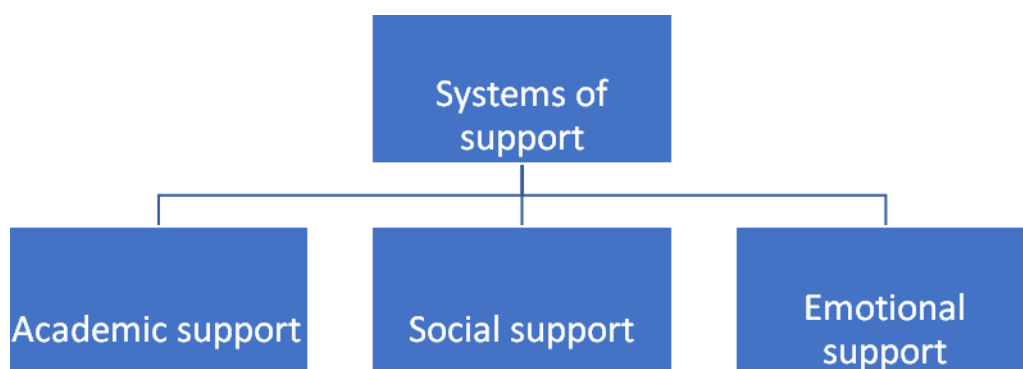


Figure 4.2: Systems of support

4.3.1.1 Academic support

Learners need to be supported for them to be able to perform to the expected standards set by individual schools and also the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Learners with learning difficulties such as reading difficulties can achieve same as those without challenges through the support of the school communities including teachers, other learners and support staff (Ferlazzo, 2021).

Participants acknowledge that learners with reading difficulties like other learners challenged differently can thrive academically through the help of all stakeholders including parents, peers, DBE, Department of Health through professional counsellors

and communities surrounding such learners. Learners can be supported through the use of different methods such as peer learning, participative learning, remedial lessons, use of contextual texts, technology even just creating a welcoming classroom as has been pointed out by **TA** that:

What comes first is to help learners feel welcomed and loved as they are respected human beings. Then I vary the ways that I use to help these learners in my class. For instance, I choose relevant texts to their lives, even allow them to choose what to read and give them a chance to read frequently. Sometimes I use and encourage them to use text-to-speech software on their phones or search for stories they like, accompanied by pictures normally. How I plan my lessons caters for variety of learners I have in my class.

TD mentioned that:

I use peer teaching because I have realized that it helps also these learners who are not challenged to learn even more when they try as much to help their peers. I also allow the struggling ones to choose those whom they can work with freely at any time they need as it extends even to home assignments.

In contrast, **HOD D** supported the notion that:

to help learners with reading difficulties to cope with their work. Among others, they do remedial classes for individual or group of learners accompanied by motivations that uplift learners and fuel their interest in learning.

Same way, **TB** asserts that:

To help these learners, I group learners into small number of members and they read for each other, ask each other questions to provoke understanding and even use words they encountered while reading in sentences. Then discussions as the whole class to ensure all groups understanding of what they read. Sometimes the texts differ while other times I give the same text.

HOD C said:

Teachers use different methods that accommodate even learners with reading difficulties with the use of suitable materials that will allow them to feel part of the

lesson. The use of reading progress diary is kept by learners through the help of teachers so that they feel motivated to continue learning to build their reading skills.

It, therefore, became evident in this study that academic support plays a major role in supporting Grade 9 learners to read. However, as much as it is important for learners to be supported academically, the study revealed that it is not enough. Learners should be helped to deal with relationships with teachers, other learners and even home community that includes parents, siblings and neighbours. As a result, learners should also be supported socially for them to achieve academically.

4.3.1.2 Social support

Social support is based on learners' relationships with peers, teachers, families and the communities in which they live. If the social aspect of learners' life is not taken care of, focusing on reading becomes difficult for them. Lack of focus on reading usually makes learners to achieve less than their potential and their grade expectation. **HOD B** asserted that:

Learners should be supported in all spheres of their life most importantly; their social aspect should be considered as they face many social challenges that hinder learning. For instance, a learner who struggles with parents' divorce is likely to experience reading problems because his/her mind is not in the class but on the issue to the extent he/she blames him/herself. If such a learner is recognized and helped, then there will be progress.

To add on that, **HOD D** said:

Learners are social beings and at this level, they can be troubled by the fact that they need to belong and be accepted by their peers; therefore, demand a lot of things which parents do not afford. That can be their stumbling block in learning which can as well fuel the reading problem which they brought with them from primary lower-level classes. But if teachers address the issue, then such learners are able to focus

and improve their reading skills.

The information provided by the participants show that it is not helpful for teachers to focus only on imparting knowledge without caring about what surrounds a learner as a social being. It, therefore, becomes evident that social support for learners with reading difficulties in Grade 9 is crucial to give them a chance to focus on their learning. When their social aspect is not well taken care of, their emotional aspect becomes affected and that equally affects their ability to learn to read in Grade 9.

4.3.1.3 Emotional support

Learners with reading difficulties may reflect certain feelings when they discover that they do not perform to the expectation of their teachers and parents while simultaneously comparing themselves with their peers. They may regard themselves as useless and dumb then such feelings cause depression and anxiety, even lowering their self-esteem. That is why some become bullies and violent, while some may become class clowns and act as though they do not care.

Teachers should consider learner diversity at all times. Different intelligences should be catered for in classrooms so that the diversity of learners in classrooms can all be able to participate in learning and ultimately succeed. To achieve this, all stakeholders in education, including teachers, other learners and parents or guardians should be made aware of the emotional support needed by learners in Grade 9. The following was asserted by some of the participants (**HOD A**):

Teachers must be very observant and consider learners emotions. Once they portray some signs of depression such as being moody and fight others, violent to teachers and other learners, or being class clowns, teachers should act immediately to rescue such learners.

HOD D said that:

Learners who struggle in class need to be guided into self-acceptance but shown their strengths so that their self-esteem may be boosted by showing them their

capabilities as they may be capable of performing well, for instance in math or in practical subjects and be motivated to cooperate with teachers and all who may want to help them.

Then **HOD B** asserted that:

Teachers should be patient with learners who struggle to read because they may become distractive in class but that is a call for help. They should also consider cooperating with parents by showing them that such learners need to be supported by uplifting their strengths and showing them that people learn differently but at the same time, they achieve their goals if they keep trying.

Emotional support is important for learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties in Grade 9 because it keeps them going and willing to achieve but at their own pace without comparing themselves with their peers as revealed in this study. Moreover, supporting learners emotionally helps them to accept who they are which prompt them to work for achieving the set standards in learning.

4.3.4 SUMMARY FOR THEME 1

This section aimed to explore how teachers support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools. It was focused on finding out if teachers were able to support these learners in their mainstream classes. They have recognized that learners of various abilities are available in their classrooms; therefore, they offer support.

Participants believed that support for learners with reading difficulties is highly provided by teachers but also there are other stakeholders that are directly and indirectly involved in the learning of children. They realized that support given should be focused on academic, social and emotional aspects which all determine the achievement of learners with reading difficulties but for most, social and emotional support pave a way for academic performance and achievement. Furthermore, participants have mentioned that learners were supported differently with the use of

different strategies by different stakeholders. Ndinisa (2016:29) supports this by outlining such stakeholders that are involved in children’s learning as the DBE, Department of Health through psychologists, school, peers, community and parents. She continues to claim that support strategies that are used in the classrooms play a crucial role in learners’ performance and achievement (2016:31).

Participants have identified support strategies that they use and they include building good relationships between teachers and learners and also between learners themselves and creating conducive classrooms where each learner is accepted and accommodated with challenges they have, lessons preparations that accommodate variety of learners with different learning difficulties such as those with reading difficulties, using various materials that cater for different levels of learners and peer support.

4.3.2 THEME 2: READING SUPPORT PORTRAYAL

The second theme portrays teachers’ reading support for learners with reading difficulties. The theme addressed the first objective of the study which is to describe teachers’ understanding of support for learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools. Sub-themes that emerged from this theme are indicated on Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Reading support portrayals

Need identification	Learner capabilities
	Learners’ learning styles
Caregiving	Within the school setting
	Outside the school setting

4.3.4.1 Need identification

The participants' responses regarding whether learners with reading difficulties are available in their Grade 9 classes and how they identify them depicted participants' understanding of support for learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties.

4.3.4.1.1 Learner capabilities

Participants showed that they have discovered diversity of learners' capabilities which need to be considered in the teaching process. According to the participants, some grade 9 learners learn reading faster while others are slower and some need attention of teachers for them to assimilate content.

TC believed that:

Learners differ in abilities to learn, and it is for a teacher to help all learners learn despite their different abilities.

TD asserted that:

Learners who struggle to read need more attention and patience from us as teachers so that they get courage to learn to read. Also, I believe that I should make it a culture in my class for learners to accept and help learners who are slower to learn just like those who struggle to read.

PB also concurred that:

Struggling to read learners are available in our school and it is a new normal for us, which we should learn to accommodate and find ways to help such learners.

The finding revealed that learners with reading difficulties are there in Grade 9 classes at secondary schools of Leribe District. However, it became evident in this study that their teachers believe that although these learners may be struggling to read in Grade 9, they, however, have the capabilities to learn even if they differ in abilities. They, therefore, need to be catered for in classrooms, and get the support they need to learn to read.

4.3.4.1.2 Learners' learning styles

All participants confirmed that learners with reading difficulties are available in the secondary schools' mainstream classrooms, particularly in Grade 9 with remarkable numbers compared to the previous years and they learn differently from other learners. These different learning styles confirm what Howard Gardner mentioned in 1990 that each of the different learning styles needs to be supported appropriately. This calls for teachers to consider different styles each individual learner has in order to accommodate their different learning abilities. To explain that **TA** said:

All learners prefer different learning styles as individuals; so, I have to ensure that each one of them get content in the same classroom.

PD responded that:

Learners with reading difficulties are there in my school and they learn differently as individuals; as a result, they need to be accommodated and helped to learn as individuals using different styles. They only need to feel free in the class.

This finding reveals that Grade 9 teachers should be able to identify learners who need attention and plan lessons with the purpose to cater for different learning styles to engage the diversity of learners, especially Grade 9 learners who struggle to read.

4.3.4.1.3 Care giving

Participants in their responses mentioned care giving as another support needed by Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties need to be catered for in the school setting and outside the school setting. Furthermore, participants mentioned that various stakeholders have to play their part in the support for learners with reading difficulties for expected outcomes. It became evident in this study that in order to give the full support needed by these learners, stakeholders such as the DBE, Department of Health through psychologists and counsellors, parents, community, peers and the school should play their part since Inclusive Education cannot be successful if the other party fails to act. To explicitly explain what they meant, participants indicated that Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties should be supported within the school setting and outside the school setting.

4.3.4.1.4 Within the school setting support

In the school setting environment, all stakeholders have an intake in supporting learners with reading difficulties despite their various duties. Participants mentioned that the school environment has to be welcoming for these Grade 9 learners to feel safe, accepted for who they are without feeling judged or discriminated because they are unable to read. This involves everyone within the school community. Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties should feel at ease within their peers who should be taught to respect each other's dignity. According to the participants, the support given to Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties should not be based on or determined by what other learners get as support because any individual learner needs the appropriate and different form of support. Hence **TA** in her response said,

School is a home to learners, and they should be taught to value, respect, help with compassion and protect each other despite their differences. However, I think most important thing is for learners to learn from us teachers. Meaning that they should see us acting out what we teach them.

TC concurred with others that:

...the support each learner needs should not determine another learners' support in the school environment because this is where they should all feel free, safe and get help as per need. Everybody within the school community should avoid making these learners feel embarrassed or even reminded of their difficulty unless they feel comfortable to chat about it.

4.3.4.1.5 Outside school setting support

Outside school setting support refers to the support offered by parents, community through NGOs and clubs, even home peers. Taking care of learners with reading difficulties' is not limited to classroom activities only but also to their social and emotional aspects which contribute much to their stable minds that allow them to focus on school activities as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The outside school setting is usually more relaxed to the learner because a learner does not have to think either of passing, failing or, even scoring lower marks than other peers. Findings of this study revealed that such form of support is available in various communities of Leribe District to assist Grade 9 learners who struggle to read. **TB** responded by saying that:

There are NGOs that are interested in offering weekends and holidays sessions for learners who struggle in different subjects, and I think in collaboration with parents, we should source such for our learners who struggle to read so that the impact of what we do at school is enhanced even outside school.

All the same, **TD** stated that:

Learners need to be supported even in their families by parents and siblings by just showing interest on their school work and to encourage them to do more through engaging them to reading for pleasure.

It, therefore, became evident from the participants that support for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties does not have to be confined to the school setting only but should stretch even outside the school premises to the wider communities where

learners live and also in their homes. This type of support will ensure that Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties get the support wherever they are and ultimately benefit from such support.

4.3.3 SUMMARY FOR THEME 2

The objective of this theme was to describe teachers' understanding of support for learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools for Leribe District in Lesotho. Inclusion of learners with learning difficulties such as reading difficulties in the mainstream classes challenged teachers to carry their duties differently and that requires understanding of important qualities of Inclusive Education such as all learners learning in the same classroom despite their learning disabilities.

Support for learners who specifically need it provokes teachers' understanding of support. Participants, therefore, indicated that there is a need for identification of learner capabilities and styles of learning to give them proper support. Furthermore, the study discovered that care giving as support to Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties with the purpose for such learners to perform and achieve the set standards is crucial. The study revealed that such support can be given within the school setting as the natural environment for learners and outside the school which does not necessarily mean at a different setting but at the more familiar setting.

Moreover, participants stipulated that support should not be equal for all learners but should be given to learners according to what each learner needs to achieve the expected reading standards, at their own pace and not as comparative to their peers. This finding revealed that this type of support should not be confined to only teachers within the school setting, but also to other stakeholders outside the school environment.

4.3.4 THEME 3: INNOVATIVE SUPPORT STRATEGIES

The third theme outlines the innovative support strategies that teachers use to teach and support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties. The theme emanated from the second objective of the study which was to explain strategies that teachers use to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools. The sub-themes that emerged from the themes are outlined on Figure 4.3.

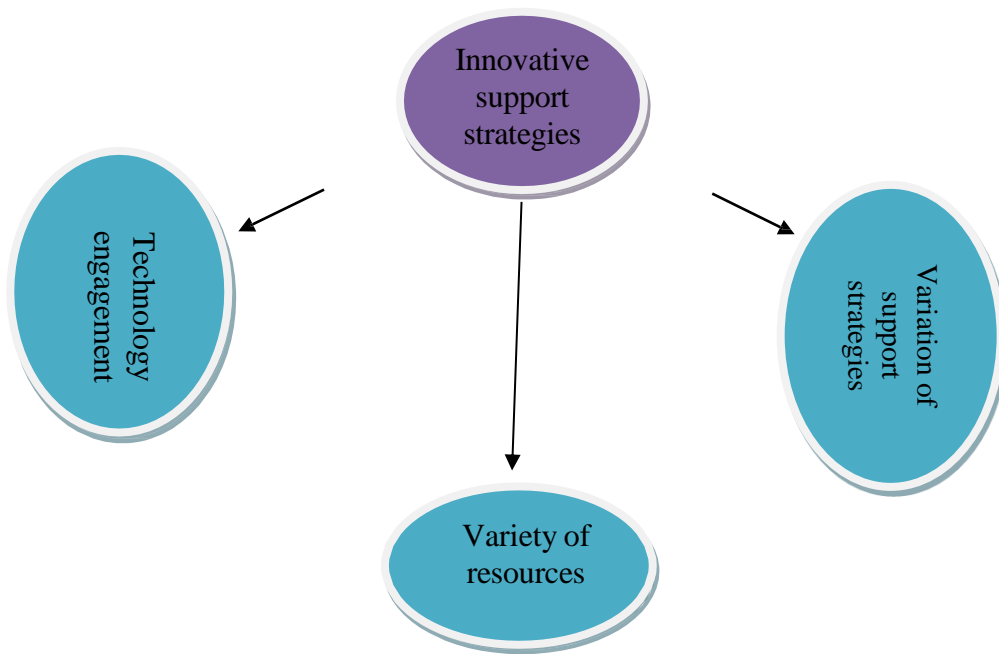


Figure 4.3: Innovative support strategies

4.3.5 INNOVATIVE SUPPORT STRATEGIES

In the mainstream classrooms where learners vary in the styles of learning and abilities to acquire skills, teachers engage innovative support strategies to specifically help learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties. Participants reported in this study that for the success of improvement in learning for learners with reading difficulties, teachers should be observant and flexible to vary methods during instructions when the need arises to accommodate these learners and they came up with different ways to be used as explained in this next section.

4.3.5.1 Variation of support strategies

It is crucial for teachers who teach in inclusive mainstream classroom to vary methods of teaching and support (Engelbrecht & Green, 2018 cited in Madiba, 2021:34). Participants suggested that attention should be on learners who need help more than others to ensure that they cope with the instruction through the use of pair reading, peer reading, and individual support, group reading and reading in class. Furthermore, participants indicated that teachers should vary methods of teaching to those which can encompass diverse learners, including learners with reading difficulties. This was revealed in **TB**'s response that:

I always make it a point that I vary methods when teaching to ensure that even learners with reading difficulties have gained content while at the same time those who do not have the same challenge are occupied.

Again, **HOD C** mentioned that:

Subject teachers must be observant enough to go for priorities when teaching and engage innovative ways to help when need arises.

It, therefore, became evident in this study that effective teaching and support for learners with reading difficulties is determined by teachers' flexibility in varying strategies for support when teaching.

4.5.3.2 Variety of resources

Most of the participants mentioned that using different teaching materials of different levels engages all learners and help those who experience reading difficulties to develop at their own pace and understand while being supported by the teacher and peers without any form of labelling. In addition, participants indicated in this study that they use simplified reading material, magazines, and novels, stories of learners'

interests like sports, fashion and celebrities to provoke learners' interests. In addition, participants indicated how the use of reading materials of different levels determines the success or failure of the reading instruction for learners with reading difficulties as **TD** mentioned that:

Learners with reading difficulties need variety of reading materials of different levels because they even struggle with different reading skills. They learn better when they share the materials and help each other.

While **TA** said that:

Suitability of reading materials help learners improve their reading fluency; hence, gain understanding of the content although it is not something that happens in a day but it requires patience for both teachers and learners.

Participants' responses revealed the important part played by reading materials of various levels and nature in the learning and development of reading skills for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties.

4.5.3.4 Technology engagement

Technology use in teaching and learning process recently is of high importance and used globally (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018:34). It helps immensely in supporting learners with reading difficulties. Learners also have built interest in the use of technological gadgets such as computers, interactive boards and cell phones although they use them not for subjects learning but they have much interest. Teachers have discovered that it is useful to use applications and different software such as text –to – speech, voice recognition, and literacy specific software to help learners to improve their reading skills. **HOD A** reveals that:

Our learners are knowledgeable in using technology because they have interest, and we can help them improve their reading and writing skills. We have started giving assignments that require learners to engage with the use of technology even though it is not that much since it is over clouded by many challenges.

PB supported the issue that:

Learners recently use technology a lot but not to learn; so, it is useful for teachers to use it as a mode of support for learner who experience reading difficulties through software and applications that can help them boost their reading skills especially because they enjoy using it. However, for schools to supply internet and computers [it] is still a challenge.

Technology use as a way of supporting learners with reading difficulties is helpful even more because learners know how to use it, and they even enjoy its use. It was evident, therefore, in this study that although was regarded as necessary and that it could be of great benefit to Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties, its actual application was not effective.

4.5.4 SUMMARY FOR THEME 3

The principal target of the objective in this component was to explain the strategies that teachers use to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties. The study revealed that it is crucial for teachers to use various ways including technology to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties. Technology recently is used globally in education as an anchor of support for learners who encounter learning disabilities such as reading difficulties to enhance their skills, and on the other hand, learners have much interest in using technology. It also became evident in this study that teachers should also engage a variety of reading materials that express learners' local issues and interest so that learners can have an interest of engaging with the material while reading for pleasure.

4.5.4 THEME 4: READING INTERVENTIONS

The last theme outlines the interventions that teachers use to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools of Leribe District. This theme addresses the last objective of the study which was more strategies teachers can use to support Grade 9 learners in secondary schools for Leribe District in Lesotho. The sub-themes emanated from the theme are shown on Figure 4.4.



Figure 4.4: Reading Interventions

Most participants in this study felt a need for the implementation of reading interventions in secondary schools. They indicated that they have guiding steps of how to apply reading interventions and how to track the reading progress of Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties as outlined on the next section. Participants stipulated that reading interventions can be more effective if Grade 9 teachers who teach reading could adopt them in their classrooms to support learners with reading difficulties.

4.5.4.1 Adaptive technology

Adaptive technology is used specifically to help learners with certain specific learning disabilities (Balme, 2015:5). Participants recommended the use of specific technology that can assist learners with reading difficulties because there is no time at their level to do trial and error. The study revealed that some participants have researched about

these learners since they were worried and felt like they were not able to support such learners' justice but only making them to progress to the next levels while they were still experiencing reading difficulties. As a result, participants further indicated that the education department should supply schools with teaching materials needed such as the relevant devices to engage technology. This was clear on **TA**'s response that:

I know of few technological apps and software that can improve our learners reading skills even though I am not sure if we can afford some of them but some need to be downloaded into the computers or phones then use. Few of those I came across are reading pens, literacy specific software, text-to-speech which in build in our phones. I think I am going to try some of these for next year.

While **TB** supported the idea that:

I have not used any specific technology, but I think I have to try. Not only me but also other English teachers have to engage technology in our teaching to improve our learners' reading skills. We should prepare well for next year, but limited time is going to restrict us. It is worth trying, I think.

Therefore, it became evident that participants suggested for the specific technology to support learners with reading difficulties in Grade 9 to be provided and used. They indicated that the government through education department should provide schools with the gadgets to realize this objective.

4.5.4.2 Spelling bee

This was found to be another strategy that can be used to improve reading skills for learners who encounter reading difficulties in Grade 9. Participants mentioned that spelling bee is used worldwide since Television channels and You Tube show its competitions and was proved to be effective. As a result, participants stated the need to engage learners into this program to improve their vocabulary hence understanding how words can be used. **PC** disclosed that:

We have planned to introduce spelling bee for our learners since it improves

vocabulary. I think it is suitable for all learners though our initial plan was to engage only those who struggle to read.

In support for spelling bee, **HOD A** said:

I have watched the spelling bee competitions on You Tube and felt in love with it and we have already planned to introduce our learners from Grade 8 to 10 into this program for next year.

TC: mentioned that:

We tried the spelling bee in 2020 beginning but it was not effective due to COVID 19 and we never continued the program. I think we have to start next year to engage our learners since it improves vocabulary, and it makes learners want to read.

It was, therefore, revealed in this study that spelling bee is another effective strategy of support that Grade 9 teachers could use to support learners with reading difficulties.

4.5.6 SUMMARY FOR THEME 4

The objective of this part was to suggest more strategies that teachers can use to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools for Leribe District in Lesotho. Reading interventions to improve the reading skills for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties have been highlighted. Furthermore, participants mentioned the need for learners to acquire the necessary reading skills for their smooth transition to tertiary or life outside school setting. Participants indicated that effective intervention strategies they suggested in this study are therefore needed to teach Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties. However, despite the intervention strategies suggested by participants, barriers that made it difficult for teachers to apply such strategies were also revealed in this study as indicated in the next section.

4.6 BARRIERS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS WITH READING DIFFICULTIES

As much as teachers have stated that they support learners with reading difficulties, they have also highlighted the challenges that hinder full support for these learners. Learners with reading difficulties are available in the secondary schools and teachers support them as it has been stated earlier. The problem remains that teachers face challenges as they support these learners, and it is uncertain that those learners can all be assisted as expected and progress be seen. The outstanding challenges which teachers identified were lack of in-service training for teachers, large classes and lack of resources.

4.6.1 LACK OF IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Grade 9 teachers who teach reading at secondary level are not trained to teach at basic level but at the level where they have basic skills. For such teachers to have a large number of learners who lack basic skills it is a problem because they do not know where to start, and it leads them to get frustrations which may lead to ignorance and labelling learners as lazy bones. This problem may, on the other hand, exacerbates the learners' problem instead of rescuing them. It is the responsibility of the DBE to provide in-service training for secondary schools' teachers to be able to handle learners who experience learning disabilities such as reading difficulties.

Teachers feel that the support they give to their learners is not satisfactory. Their own efforts for trying to find ways to help are not enough because the outcomes are still bad. There is a still high rate of learners who become bullies, who resort to suicide, and drop out of school to join gangsters then become criminals. With all these, it shows that education has failed to achieve its purpose as was said by **TC** that:

I am trying my best to support these learners because I am here to bring change in their life, but I become depressed if I do not see the progress I expect and I blame

myself for that; however, I also blame Department of [Basic] Education because it fails to support us in dealing with learners that are challenged differently. At least, the department should offer frequent workshops if in-service trainings are a problem.

The same view was expressed by **TA** that:

I could do much better if regular trainings regarding the issue of learners with different learning disabilities since we have them in the mainstream classrooms but even workshops are not given to support us for the sake of our learners.

Teachers need support as well from DBE for them to carry their duty satisfactorily.

4.6.2 LARGE CLASSES

This idea of teaching learners who experience learning disabilities together with their peers in the mainstream is good but it must go with changing of some policies to achieve the target. Teachers have revealed that teacher pupil ratio is still high in the secondary mainstream classes owing to a number of learners progressing from primary level. They are propelled by the curriculum itself that discourages the retaining of learners. Teachers believe that maybe teacher pupil ratio should be low to allow teachers to help individuals who need special attention and also secondary curriculum should allow teaching of basic skills at this level. **TD** mentioned that:

I am trying to support learners with reading difficulties in my class but I feel like I am not doing enough for all. Recently, I have quite a number of learners who really struggle to read and write. If I was dealing with just few, it would be better for me and them as well. I also feel disturbed when I can't help all my learners to achieve. It discourages me and learners too.

Inclusion of learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties needs to be handled with care lest it causes damage as teachers foresee it.

4.5.3 LACK OF RESOURCES

It is true that teachers have related how they support learners with reading difficulties but they have also stated the challenge they face regarding variety of materials needed. Moreover, they have shown that in some schools there are no libraries and where they are available; still, they are dysfunctional such that they too struggle to get variety of books, magazines and newspapers. On one other hand, principals understand their role to supply materials for support of these learners but too they are unable due to financial crisis in the schools. Other resources such as human resource and technological resources are too expensive to be afforded by schools as they depend only on little fees which are not paid fully by poor and without jobs parents. It becomes a problem to fully support learners with lack of materials needed. This was also mentioned by **PB** that:

One of my roles in supporting these learners is to provide relevant and adequate materials needed by teachers; however, it is not easy to do with little school fees and without the support of the Ministry of Education.

TC asserted to this that:

It is somehow difficult to support them fully since parents can't afford to buy additional reading materials while at the same time schools can't afford such materials due to lack of funds.

PC said:

It would be easier to support these learners if we have technological gadgets and unlimited internet in our school, but that is far from happening due to lack of financial muscle. If the Ministry of Education was valuing education of these children, it would provide materials for learning and employ support staff.

Lack of resources perpetuate the problem of learners with reading difficulties further because the strategies alone could not help enough according to Grade 9 teachers.

4.7 OBSERVATIONS ANALYSIS

Observations were done in four schools and four subject teachers were observed in their classes for how they support learners with reading difficulties. The observation schedule was used to observe different aspects of how support for reading for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties was conducted in classes (see Appendix H). The major parts analysed were classroom setting, teaching and support strategies, learner participation and reading materials.

4.7.1 CLASSROOM SETTING

In all schools, the classroom setting was in rows where two and three learners shared a desk. This type of arrangement did not help teachers to support learners with reading difficulties that much. The setting helped and worsened the hiding game for learners with reading difficulties as they could not be easily identified and supported. However, at some schools, the setting changed with the strategy that was used. For instance, when the teacher engaged learners in group reading, they set in circles to allow the reader's voice to reach each learner in the group and for listeners to look directly to the reader without any blockage. Again, for pair reading two learners focus on the reading and listening, therefore, desks arrangement has no impact.

4.7.2 TEACHING AND SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Teachers have demonstrated the practice of using different teaching methods and they were applying support strategies as they taught to encourage participation of all learners. Teachers in three schools engaged learners in pairing and grouping competitions with reading and vocabulary learning while at one school, it was just an individual learner reading class. The learners were grouped according to their age for the reading competitions. This meant that there was a mix of those who are capable

and less capable of reading, but the readers were learners who struggle to read. The competitions were planned prior to the lesson and the participants were given texts to read and had practiced with the group mates. Learners in this case were highly supported through the use of congratulatory and encouraging remarks when teachers praised their efforts. It was, therefore, revealed in this study that teachers do support learners with reading difficulties in their classes.

4.7.3 READING MATERIALS

The reading materials used in classes was of the same level and paragraphs picked from learners' text books. However, in some schools they used newspapers from their library. This was evident that teachers lacked the reading materials that cater for different levels of learners' reading skills. For most of the schools, English textbooks were part of learners' package without any additional reading materials.

It was evident, therefore, in this study that although teachers use different support strategies in classes, common sitting arrangement in classes and lack of varied teaching materials did not help improve support for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties.

4.8 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Minutes for departmental meetings and learners' tests scripts were scrutinized to check if there had been a time where learners with reading difficulties were discussed. Generally, in most schools, learners with reading difficulties were discussed. The documents were also analysed to check if there have been plans for the strategies and reading programs that have to be implemented including the evaluation of the plans. The documents in three schools revealed that some strategies and reading programs were suggested while in one school there was no plan. The documents were also analysed to check whether learners understood the texts for reading comprehension which could be seen through the readability and correctness of the answers specifically

on inference questions respectively. The documents showed that learners did not understand the questions because they failed to answer them correctly. The minutes used were of the beginning of the year and the beginning of the second session for they should portray planning and progress of the targeted learners. For most schools, the minutes revealed that the plans were done at the beginning of the year but at the beginning of the second session, nothing was done. The scripts analysed were for particular learners in the first quarter and for second quarter and there was a little improvement in the second quarter compared to the first one. The next section outlines details of the findings of the documents that were analysed.

4.8.1 LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTAL MINUTES

The study revealed that schools' meetings were held a week before the opening of schools for 2022 on different days. The issue of learners with reading difficulties was generally discussed referring to the 2021 number of such learners in classes. Teachers suggested the effective use of different strategies in teaching and emphasizing the need for teachers to work on their attitudes towards such learners which may influence improvement or worsen the results. The attitudes mentioned in the meeting include negative remarks; embarrassing learners and being impatient with these learners as such drive learners to portray worse behaviours.

Teachers encouraged each other to accommodate all learners in their classes and build positive values even for learners to display within the schools' environment. Teachers in some schools suggested the use of programs like spelling bee to enhance learners' vocabulary. The issue of limited time was raised as a constraint to effectively helping these learners. However, teachers showed their concern to help learners with reading and writing difficulties.

Moreover, the researcher managed to get minutes for the evaluation of the plan from three schools. Teachers realized that there had been no remarkable improvement for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties owing to time factor that was coupled by sports which took place after school time when teachers had planned to use the same

time to support reading. Teachers included class reading competitions and games to back up their initial plan on strategies of teaching.

4.8.2 LEARNERS' TESTS SCRIPTS

Learners' tests scripts for reading comprehension were analysed based on readability and expression of answers and correctness of these answers as they show how much learners understood the text passages especially focusing on summary writing, inference and contextual questions. Test scripts were also analysed to see the impact of the support provided by teachers seen on the ways in which learners answer questions.

4.8.2.1 Readability in the summary writing

Readability here refers to how coherent is the paragraph. Learners were expected to use the points they have picked from the text passage of about six paragraphs long to write prose summary. The expectation was for learners to use their own words to summarize the passage. Learners' scripts were analysed to identify coherence of the summary which was what could be done by someone who understood the passage. Generally, learners who had reading difficulties had a problem of being illogical with grammar and spelling mistakes. Learners were unable to produce a clear and understandable paragraph. These were coupled by unclear handwriting which was a normal indicator for a person who did not know what to write. Again, their scores on this particular section were outstandingly low. However, half of learners' scripts used in the first quarter had shown a little improvement on logic part because they could give points in order with the use of linking devices while others were still not able to do so. Examples extracted from some scripts that were analysed are presented on the next section.

Script A

Many years ago, pirates could make a living when they taking hostage a good public figure to be demanded ransom. Captured a certain, persuaded his captors to their increase.

Script B

Many years ago, pirates could make a living when they sold children as slaves so that they demand a lot of money. Also, they would capture public figures to get too much money for them to release.

Script A reflected no improvement while script B showed improvement although it did not match the efforts for the support that was given.

4.8.2.2 Correctness of the answers

How answers are phrased reflect how much a person understands what he/she has read. The focus was on inference questions because they needed a learner to express his/her understanding in relation to the passage read. On top of failing to understand the text, Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties could not interpret the question correctly; hence, the wrongly expressed answer. This indicated the problem for learners with reading difficulties to understand the passage and to get what the question needed. Extracts from some learners are presented next.

Question: Explain fully how the winner of the kite-fighting competition was decided.

Script C: answer

The tournament was undeniably the highlight of the cold reason.

Script D: answer

He used to build his own kite from bamboo, glue and paper.

These examples given reflected that learners did not understand the passage and they could not make sense of the question and that was the reason they answered the question irrelevantly. It, therefore, became evident in this study that despite teachers' plans for support of Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties, there was a little improvement for learners with reading difficulties due to the little time available to implement the plans to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the aims and objectives of the study as the base for the findings. It gives the data analysis process followed by the presentation of the participants' demographic information, then the presentation and interpretation of the findings as: teachers' support for available Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools together with the barriers to support these learners. How participants showed their understanding of support for learners with reading difficulties has been presented, strategies they use in teaching and supporting Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties outlines and more strategies they can use to support these Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in an effective way highlighted in this chapter. Furthermore, the chapter also outlined how observations revealed lack of resources as the major barrier for teachers to effectively support learners with reading difficulties while the documents analysed disclosed less impact on the support teachers offered to Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties. The chapter concluded with the presentation of extracts of learners' work.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION WITH ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four presented the analysis of data and interpretation of the study findings. The chapter gave analytic process of data coding and development of themes and sub-themes. It began with the demographic presentation of participants that showed participants' teaching experience, qualifications they hold and leadership experience for HoD and principals. Pseudo names given to the three categories of participants were, TA to TD, HoD A to HoD D and PA to PD respectively, and were used throughout the study, and then the interpretation of themes and sub-themes evolved from data analysis. Chapter 5 showed the discussion with analysis of the findings presented in the previous chapter based on the aim and objectives of the study. Exploring how teachers support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools for Leribe District in Lesotho was the purpose of the study. In this chapter, literature that either supports or refutes the findings of the study was used. Conclusion and recommendations followed.

5.2 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

Themes and sub-themes showed in the Table 5.1 guided the discussion of the findings.

Table 5.1: Themes and Sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Systems of support	Academic support Social support Emotional support
Reading Support portrayals	Need identification Learner capabilities Learners' styles of learning
	Caregiving Within the school setting
	Outside the school setting
Innovative support strategies	Variation of support strategies Variety of resources Technology engagement

Reading Interventions	Adaptive technology Spelling bee Barriers to support learners with reading difficulties Lack of in-service training Large classes Lack of resources
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5.2.1 SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Teachers believed that learners with reading difficulties need all round support that does not only involve teachers but all other stakeholders that have a share in education. Hence, Samal (2021) asserts that learners learn better at school and even in their communities with proper support given by teachers and other stakeholders involved in education. Participants revealed that systems of support help to stabilize disturbing issues in the life of learners with reading difficulties regarding their academic, social and emotional well-being which the school environment should provide. This was in line with Abu-Hamour (2014:106) who claimed that school environment must be able to meet social, emotional and academic needs of all learners.

5.2.1.1 Academic support

The study findings revealed that learners with reading difficulties are negatively affected by this disability more than their counterparts who do not experience any learning disability. That is in line with Aktan (2020:150) when he mentioned that learning difficulties such as reading problems negatively impact learners with learning difficulties' academic achievement, even their daily reading activities, but if they get support from their teachers, classmates and non-academic staff especially at secondary level where they read in order to learn, they can manage to perform to the expected standards and same as their colleagues who do not experience the same challenge. This was supported by European Agency (2021) which argued that learners can succeed in learning through enough and timely support that is provided as everyday activities package. Also, Musetti et al (2019:165) concur that learners experiencing reading difficulties need a high level of support from teachers, peers and parents or family caretakers. All learners' academic success relies heavily on their ability to read with understanding because not only English language requires reading skills, but also other subjects since they have instructions to be followed. Hence, Mohammed and Ofori (2018:271) point out that successful learners are those who strive to master reading skills because many subjects and given home works need reading comprehension.

The study showed that learners with reading difficulties can perform well academically through the use of different learner friendly methods of teaching and making the classroom a welcoming place where learners feel free to learn together with their peers without learning disabilities regardless of their inabilities. In support of this, Moswane (2019:85) suggests that teachers should use variety of methods to improve reading abilities of learners. Constructivists' theory further supports these by encouraging the use of scaffolding strategies that give learners chance to participate in learning (Cherry, 2021). Again, the idea aligned with what Ngubane and Gumede (2020:3-4) mentioned that learners' reading skills could improve in the classroom where Ubuntu principles and values of cooperation, kindness and sharing of resources were applied

and encouraged.

5.2.1.2 Social support

The study revealed that teachers should offer social support to learners because they are social beings that may battle with social issues such as relationships with peers, teachers and families and a sense of belonging. Learners with reading difficulties encounter social challenges that affect their performance academically. These sentiments were supported by Lotti et al (2019:2) who affirmed that building relationships with the counterparts is core to the development of learners, giving them social competences to deal with societal challenges and educational problems.

It came out again from the study that learners with reading difficulties experience many challenges if they do not get support focusing on social aspect of their life. This was in line with Berchiatti et al (2021:517) as he said that learners with reading difficulties compared with their peers have low prosodic behaviour levels, are less accepted, show low friendship quality and more problems with relationships repair. This means that they are highly exposed to less academic performance if they do not get appropriate social support because constructivists' theory viewed reading as not only a cognitive process but also a social one (Moswane, 2019:23). Furthermore, Ngubane and Makua (2018:5) and Blackwood (2018:30) mentioned that Ubuntu was a humanized approach to teaching that engaged learners in the learning process guided by principles of sodality based on love and mutual respect, coexistence and compassion.

5.2.1.3 Emotional support

Teachers discovered that learners with reading difficulties are likely to portray different emotions when they compare their persistent low performance with that of

their peers. They regard themselves useless and such feelings cause anxiety and depression, which may sometimes lead to low self-esteem and disruptive behaviours. This was in line with Newport Academy (2017) which stated that when learners with reading difficulties realized that the difficulty they encounter becomes a barrier to their learning and socializing freely with peers, which leads to other difficulties such as emotional disturbances. In this case, teachers must consider helping learners understand people diversity in learning and help build such learners' confidence and self-esteem, and even willingness to keep trying. Haddad (2020) asserts that teachers should give learners positive feedback to uplift their motivation, desire to improve, social functioning, and emotional well-being. Therefore, learners with reading difficulties need to be motivated by being showed their strengths and what they can do best to fuel their interest to keep improving their reading skills for better academic achievement.

5.2.1.4 Reading support portrayals

Teachers' understanding for reading support for learners with reading difficulties is manifested through learner identification. Teachers had realized that support could be given to existing learners and therefore, a need to identify them. This is supported by Al Otaiba and Petscher (2020:329) who mentioned that the initial step towards supporting learners who experience various learning disabilities such as reading difficulties is based on identification of such learners to administer appropriate interventions. Teachers portrayed their understanding of support for learners with learning disabilities by following certain rules and procedures in identifying such learners as said by Fletcher and Miciak (2019:1) that it was not just a legal routine to identify learners with learning disabilities but a question of fairness for access to support for those learners. Again, Teachers understood that learners differ in capabilities and how they absorb content also differ.

5.2.1.4 Learner capabilities

The study revealed that learners with reading difficulties are available in Grade 9 classrooms at secondary schools of Leribe District and teachers must cater for their different reading abilities portrayed during reading instructions and support them accordingly. This idea is in line with what Bazen, van den Boer, de Jong and de Bree (2020:362) said that different reading abilities include word-level reading difficulties, word spelling and reading fluency that were seen at early stages, were continuous to secondary level and determine support strategies to be employed by teachers.

5.2.1.5 Learners' learning styles

The findings in this study revealed that Grade 9 teachers should be able to identify learners who need their attention and plan lessons with the purpose to cater for different learning styles to engage the diversity of learners in Grade 9. There is no need for teachers to separate learners depending on their learning styles but consider them in the same classroom by employing different styles suitable for diverse learners. This notion is supported by Alsobhi and Alyoubi (2020) that not everyone learns in the same way. Even people considered to have similar standard of abilities exhibit different learning styles and that does not need different setting but to employ styles of teaching and learning. McLeod (2017) suggests learning styles according to Kolb (1984) which teachers may adopt and those include auditory style of presenting vocal information to learners; reading and writing style that involves information dissemination by focusing on the written texts, worksheets, presentations and text-heavy material.

Ramberg and Watkins (2020:89) point out that for learners with learning disabilities to succeed, all aspects relating to inputs to the education system must be provided to gain expected outcome and such inputs include resources and finances, teacher education and teacher development, qualification level of teachers, legislation and

curriculum. Therefore, governments should finance schools, train and develop teachers to teach in the inclusive classrooms and provide resources to achieve the goal of education.

5.2.1.6 Caregiving

According to participants in this study, caregiving is another name for support of Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools that extends to outside the school. Not only teachers should support learners with learning disabilities but also other various stakeholders involved in education of children. Participants in this study understood caregiving as showing support for learners with reading difficulties to improve their motivation because they feel loved and appreciated since all people around them were able to feel for them and were willing to support them. Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim (2020) in support for the notion mentioned that caring is motivation and reflect a concern about another person's feelings and needs and provide them with a feeling that they are cared for and loved; therefore, improve their social and academic achievement. The findings in study revealed that support should be given both within school setting and outside school setting by different stakeholders.

5.2.1.6 Within the school setting support

The participants in this study stated that the school environment should be welcoming for Grade 9 learners to feel safe, accepted for who they are without feeling discriminated. In the same vein, Ramberg, Laftman, Almquist and Modin, (2019:57) concur that involving learners and a safe environment seems to be crucial components in making a caring environment. Not only teachers should care and provide support for learners within the school setting but care involves also non-teaching staff and learners who do not experience reading difficulties.

Furthermore, participants denoted that Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties should happily and freely participate in the school various activities with peers and teachers who observe respect for individual dignity. This idea is supported by Ubuntu principle that emphasizes that people's motivation develops in the context of establishing reciprocal relationships with others through support and connection (Mayaka & Truell 2021:3).

Again, Naafan (2018:24) posits that constructivists argue that activities prepared by teachers should allow learners to participate actively while providing support and guidance. These improve Grade 9 learners' self-esteem and motivation to make efforts to achieve better. This is in line with Ramberg, et al, (2019: 56) who argue that teachers who care for learners can positively impact their learning outcomes, motivation, and social and moral development. While Noddings (2003) cited in Ramberg et al, (2019) pointed out that building care relationships with learners is important for teachers, not only because it is a corner stone for supporting them improve their learning and general developmental process but also as something worth doing.

5.2.1.7 Outside school setting support

According to participants in this study, support for learners with reading difficulties should not be confined to the school setting only, but it should spread to the wider communities where learners live and in their homes. This meant that parents and guardians should offer support to grade learners with reading difficulties while they are not at school to ensure that their reading skills were improved. The support given at communities and homes highly depend on the level of education for both community and family members; the availability of resources that could be used to help these learners which is determined by economy of individual families. Those learners from well-off families could be easily helped than those who are from humble families and the instances brought by COVID-19 laid concrete examples. This was reported by Cattan, Farquharson, Krutikova, Phimister and Sevilla (2020:4) who said that during COVID-19 lockdowns, children from humble families were spending less time on

home learning with fewer resources and little guidance from parents and or guardians; and the activities they are doing are less likely to benefit their educational attainment.

5.2.1.8 Innovative support strategies

The findings in this study disclosed that in the inclusive classroom where learners vary in the styles of learning and abilities to acquire skills, teachers should employ innovative support strategies to specifically support learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties. In support of this sentiment, Widyasari, Teguh, Reza, Achmad and Rusmiati (2021) in their abstract alluded that teachers in inclusive classroom have to design effective instructional strategies that can meet all learners' needs with various uniqueness.

Participants asserts that for the success of improvement in learning for learners with reading difficulties, teachers should be observant and flexible to vary instructional methods to accommodate these learners as indicated by Magnusson, Roe and Blikstad-Balas (2018:189) in support for these sentiments that teachers should engage different integrated strategy instructional models such as reciprocal teaching, transactional strategies instruction, collaborative strategic reading and content-oriented reading instruction to improve learners' reading comprehension skills. Participants suggested different ways to be used to support learners with reading difficulties in enhancing their learning.

5.2.1.9 Variation of support strategies

Participants in this study suggested that teachers should concentrate more on the learners who need more help than others; therefore, using variety of methods meet the requirement of teaching in the inclusive classroom to support learners who most need it. This is supported by Madiba (2021:34) who stated that it was important for teachers teaching in the inclusive mainstream classroom to vary methods of teaching and

support. With the use of different instructional and support methods such as scaffolding, learners with reading difficulties may improve their reading skills and achieve their goals same as their peers without the difficulty in reading. This sentiment was supported by Taber (2017:13) who mentioned that teachers could use scaffolding method of teaching and support by structuring specific learning goal and bridging the task demand in the learners' current level and where it allows learners to be more successful. Again, Kong (2021) asserts that scaffolding is an important approach that constructivism embraces to help learners improve reading skills.

Participants further indicated the need for teachers to use different teaching strategies that encompass diverse learners to ensure that they cope with the instruction and improve their reading skills. This idea was supported by Moswane (2019:85) who suggests that teachers should engage different strategies to enhance learners' reading abilities and she encouraged the use of loud class reading, individual support reading, peer and pair reading. It was evident in this study that effective teaching and support for learners with reading difficulties depends highly on teachers' flexibility in using different strategies for support when teaching.

5.2.1.10 Variety of resources

It transpired from the study that teachers should use different teaching materials of different levels to engage all Grade 9 learners and assist those who experience reading difficulties to develop at their own pace while being supported by teacher and peers without any form of labelling. This is in line with Coakley-Fields (2018:16) who mentioned that learners who help each other to interact with different levelled reading materials formally and informally as allies enhance their competency with reading skills and strategies. While on the other hand, teachers should be well equipped to manage class and time, be informed about content of the curriculum and its assessment.

Evans, Gable and Habib (2021) highlight that teachers who emphasize effectiveness better understand the importance of frequently administering and interpreting

curriculum-based assessments for learners experiencing learning problems such as reading. In addition, many teachers utilize instructional procedures such as precise praise, error-free discrimination and many other techniques. Additionally, it is recognized that curricula and teaching methods need to reflect the needs of diverse learners in the classroom. This should be seen through classroom practice where learners have reading materials that reflect learning needs, such as prompting learner answers, presenting material at an appropriate level of interest and difficulty, and system of classroom management suitable to promote appropriate learner behavior as encouraged by Ubuntu principles and values.

Ngubane and Gumede (2020:3-4) allude that in the classroom where Ubuntu principles and values of cooperation, kindness and resource sharing were applied and encouraged, learners learning need such as reading skills were improved. In the inclusive classroom where teachers adopt Ubuntu values and principles teachers use simplified reading materials and those that provoke learners' interest in reading, they even share such materials to support each other in improving reading skills for especially learners who struggle to read. Therefore, reading materials of various levels and nature appeared to be important in the development of reading skills for Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties.

5.2.1.11 Technology engagement

In this study, it was revealed that teachers should use technology in the inclusive classroom to help learners with learning difficulties to enhance their motivation in learning because technology is highly recognized in classrooms globally. The sentiment is supported by Francis (2017) in his abstract when he points out that learners feel motivated via the use of technology in the classroom either for pedagogical purpose or accommodations as needed to better support learners experiencing learning difficulties.

The study further showed that it is useful for teachers to engage applications and

software such as text-to- speech, voice recognition and literacy specific software to assist learners to improve their reading skills. This is supported by Olszewski and Crompton (2020) who alluded that there is a need for increased use of wide variety digital applications and to support learning opportunities for learners especially with learning difficulties. Although the engagement of technology was found to be useful, it was not effectively used in Grade 9 classes of Leribe secondary schools.

5.2.1.12 Reading interventions

The findings in this study disclosed the need for teachers to implement reading interventions at secondary schools for Grade 9 learners because the interventions have guiding steps of how to apply the reading interventions and how to track the reading progress of learners with reading difficulties. Teachers teaching in Grade 9 classes should adopt reading interventions in their classroom to support learners with reading difficulties and to enhance their reading skills. These sentiments were supported by Nordstrom, Nilsson, Gustafson and Svensson (2018:799) who claim that many learners could improve their reading by typically using reading interventions. Furthermore, this is in line with Tohara, Shuhidan, Bahry and Nordin (2021:3352) who assert that implementation of reading interventions to address various challenges of learners help teachers to assess on content and plan strategically to ensure that learners are able to read, select, interpret and evaluate information. Again, Pozas, Letzel and Schneider (2020:218) gave an example of Differentiated Instruction (DI) as a toolbox of instructional practices that enable teachers to correctly cater for learners' specific learning requirements and ensure successful learning for all learners in diverse and inclusive classroom. They further pointed out that DI practices is classified into six categories and this concurred with the idea that interventions are made up of logical steps that enable teachers to follow the implementation process and track the progress.

5.2.1.12 Adaptive technology

The participants in this study recommended the use of specific technology that can assist Grade 9 learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties, because there is no time at their level to do trial and error. This sentiment is supported by Balme (2015:5) who mentioned that adaptive technology is used specifically to help learners with certain specific learning disabilities such as reading, writing and math deficits. Adaptive technology is a type of learning where learners are given technological resources and customized activities to address their unique learning needs and the technology is tailored to meet individual specific learning difficulties (Standen, Brown, Taheri, et al., 2020:1751).

The participants further suggested that specific technology should be provided by the government of Lesotho through Ministry of Education and Training and used by teachers and learners to support Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties. This is because most learners cannot afford to buy the gargets to help implement the use of technology. The adaptive technology help to improve learners' unique learning need such as reading and writing, and math. In regard to this sentiment, Nordstrom, et al, (2018:799) mentioned that technology has potential to facilitate reading or replace it entirely. Edyburn (2007) cited in Nordstrom, et al, (2018:799) suggested that technology should replace traditional remedies with the use of assistive technologies and a call to ask the needed question of remediation versus compensation following persistent reading failure. He continued to highlight two reasons for considering technology use as being unable to meet performance expectations would take away time from future learning chances and there is overwhelming evidence that traditional instruction and remediation efforts have failed to enable the individuals to perform at a satisfactory level. Nordstrom, et al. (2018) continued to argue that technical progress in regard to quality and availability of applications and software provided in new technologies such as tablets, including voice feedback and highlighted spoken text could benefit learners with reading difficulties.

5.2.1.13 Spelling bee

Spelling bee is a game strategy for teaching vocabulary, and it is not limited to a certain grade level but throughout tertiary. Learners can be engaged in this game to enhance their spelling capacity and empower memory to retain vocabulary (Kamali, Aliwutun & Duyo, 2022:317; Silaban, 2021:66). The findings of this study disclosed that teachers should consider engaging Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties to spelling bee to improve their vocabulary. This is the teaching game that quenches the interest of learners to learn better while playing because they remember easily through fun learning. This idea is supported by Kamali, et al., (2022: 317) who argued that Spelling Bee game is a technique used in motivating learners in learning English vocabulary and the game takes out the monotony of the traditional vocabulary teaching.

Participants in this study further pointed out that spelling bee is an effective strategy of support that Grade 9 teachers could use to support learners with reading difficulties to improve their vocabulary. Vocabulary is the core for learning to read, write, speak and understand the texts and communications in English. In the same vein, Silaban (2021:66); and Ilham and Humaira (2020:23) concur that vocabulary knowledge is a central tool for second language learners because its limitation impedes communication success. Teaching and learning to read seemed difficult but the use of game activated learning because the classroom environment is relaxed, free and non-judgmental; therefore, allow easy learning while on the other hand support is provided by teachers and peers without reading difficulties as encouraged by constructivism and Ubuntu theories.

5.2.2 BARRIERS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS WITH READING DIFFICULTIES

This study revealed that teachers who teach Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties

had tried to support these learners. However, there are some hiccups that hinder full support for learners with learning disabilities like reading difficulties. Teachers identified few outstanding challenges they face which made it difficult for them to successfully support learners with learning difficulties and those are lack of in-service training, large classes and lack of resources. This aligned with BdrSubba, Yangzom, Dorji, et al. (2018) who assert that teachers are facing challenges of including learners with various learning disabilities throughout their schooling system and they have identified barriers such as lack of specialized teachers, inadequate resources and facilities and lack of holistic inclusion though learners were accepted by their peers. Again, Adewumi and Mosito (2019) found out that teachers experienced different challenges in accommodating learners with varied learning disabilities and those included parental involvement, heavy workloads, inadequate training for teachers and lack of resources although there are good practices including giving remedial work, use of teaching aids and giving individual work.

5.2.2.1 Lack of in-service training

This study disclosed that teachers need support from various stakeholders for them to adequately support learners with learning disabilities in their classrooms. The feeling erupted from the experiences that teachers encountered in their inclusive classrooms where learners lack basic reading skills and they were not trained to teach basic reading skills, let alone screening and teaching learners with learning disabilities. Learners who are unable to read frustrate teachers that they showed bad attitude towards such learners. They may ignore and label learners as lazy and these attitudes exacerbate learners' problems instead. Richards and Rodgers (2014) cited in Adewumi and Mosito (2019:15-16) supported the views that the vacancy and supply of enough support and resources determine the attitudes of teachers. Insufficient support and resources lead to negative attitudes of teachers.

Participants felt that the support they offer learners with learning disabilities especially reading difficulties is not satisfactory because their efforts do not bring change to the

performance of learners since they are not experts in the field of special education. Adewumi and Mosito (2019:17) corroborated this by asserting that teachers encounter challenges to include LSEN owing to lack of adequate training for teachers. Saloviita and Consegna (2019) also concurred to the view that in order to enhance quality of inclusion for learners with diverse learning disabilities, there is a need for more in-service training for teachers, smaller class size and having therapists in the classroom. Moreover, participants believed that in the inclusive classroom where teachers are not trained to handle learners with diverse learning disabilities like reading difficulties, education has failed to achieve its goal. Therefore, learners who could not achieve academically turn to show disruptive behaviours such as becoming bullies, resort to suicide, abuse drugs and drop out of school to join gangsters that perpetuate crime in the country. There is an urgent need for teachers to be trained to teach diverse learners in the classroom. However, teachers managed to have extra classes on Saturdays and still give learners individual reading work and engage spelling bee though it is not that effective due to their overwhelming workloads.

5.2.2.2 Large classes

Inclusion of learners with different disabilities in the classroom where they are taught with their peers without disability is good provided the policies also change for the target to be achieved. The study has revealed that teachers still face overcrowded classes that disable them to focus on individual learners who have certain special needs in the secondary mainstream classes owing to curriculum restrictions to retain learners. The same view was held by Adewumi and Mosito (2019:12) who claim that overcrowded classrooms and heavy workloads for teachers are challenges to teaching and learning all over the world. These challenges create stressful working conditions for teachers; hence teaching strategies and other class activities are affected; therefore, lack of success for learners with learning disabilities such as reading difficulties. The end result for learners who are unable to perform satisfactorily is mentioned already earlier, which highly contribute to poverty in the country hence the damage that

could be caused by careless handling of inclusion for learners with diverse learning difficulties. There is something good that teachers do despite their large classes; they give learners reading activities in small groups, they pair learners for reading in class and also for home reading they go for peer reading. They again use technology though is very scarce due to learners' economic problems.

5.2.2.3 Lack of resources

The findings revealed that teachers have shown lack of resources such as human, variety of books, magazines and newspapers and the facilities like libraries are not available for other schools while it is the same for those that have because they are dysfunctional owing to lack of finances to pay staff. Thus, teachers depend only on classroom textbooks which are of the same level of difficulty with few texts that interest learners and there are not enough materials to teach learners with reading difficulties. Adewumi and Mosito (2019:15) found out that there were no special teaching and learning materials for learners with special educational needs in ordinary schools but the same materials were used by all learners.

On the other hand, principals understood their role to provide resources for the support of learners with reading difficulties although they too were faced with lack of money in schools due to standardized fees and for the fact that even that little money parents have to pay seemed a long-time struggle. The study participants revealed that parents too are facing poverty owing to scarcity of jobs because of the impact of COVID 19 pandemic and consequences of climate change in the country. Government had to provide schools with teaching and learning materials following the integrated curriculum but that has never happened. According to Grade 9 teachers, lack of and inadequate resources perpetuate the problem of learners with reading difficulties further because strategies and teachers' efforts to provide few materials are not enough to change the situation for the better.

5.3 ALIGNMENT OF THEORIES AND STUDY FINDINGS

5.3.1 CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY AND STUDY FINDINGS

Constructivist theory stipulated in Chapter 2 section 2 that teaching and learning of reading is a social practice in the sense that words, actions and behaviours are socially constructed while personally interpreted (Moswane, 2019:16). Thus, an individual learner constructs his/her knowledge socially and that means other people around a learner contribute to the learners' acquisition of new information. Shah (2019:6) concurs that Vygotsky believed that culture and social interactions are crucial elements in shaping knowledge. The social aspect of knowledge construction involves other people around the learner who influence learning either in a negative or positive way. Hence, the findings in this study revealed that learners need systems of support to stabilize disturbing issues for learners with reading difficulties in regard to their academic, social and emotional well-being. These can be achieved in a democratic constructivist classroom where activities are learner centred and interactive, and learners are empowered by teachers as facilitators and other learners (Umida, Diloru & Umar, 2020:135).

The findings of the study disclosed that learners' academic performance is improved when learners are stable emotionally and are able to relate well with people surrounding them in the class. Therefore, they should feel comfortable to give out their views around their peers and teachers. This was supported by Barnett (2019:2) who claims that guidance and support of teachers and other learners make it easier to learn harder tasks, and feeling comfortable to express ideas contributes to learners' critical thinking. It is, therefore, evident that a constructivist teacher makes the classroom environment supportive to learners with reading difficulties through the strong and sustained systems of support. Again, Braun (2018) asserts that construction of knowledge depends on the learner's subjective interpretation of their active experiences and through interactions with others. As a result, learning is both cognitive and social; therefore, a need for learners to be stable socially and emotionally to

achieve academically.

Teachers must be able to consider diverse learners with their different learning styles and accommodate them with their activities and the support strategies they use. A constructivist teacher should cater for all learners despite their differences. Akpan and Beard (2016:393) assert that constructivist teachers should understand that knowledge is constructed by individuals differently while it is a product of human mind and that all learners need various teaching strategies that arouse interest and curiosity to learn.

Learners of various disabilities including reading difficulties should be supported at school by teachers who act as facilitators for learning as well as peers without disabilities through interactions and working together. Hence, Akpan and Beard (2016:394) claim that building knowledge in social contexts with the use of methods that influence learner-to-learner interactions and collaboration, and learners' centered strategies are beneficial for learners including those with special learning needs. Moreover, the sustainability of learning should continue even outside the school premises because learning is a social activity and the support can be given by adults such as parents at homes and at community level to unify community support for the sake of learners' better educational achievement. Mbatha (2018:17) concurs that it is essential for parents to help ensure that their children did their homework and provide support they need while on the other hand improvement of supportive collaboration in the community plays a vital role in learners' educational achievements.

In an inclusive classroom, learners vary in the styles of learning and abilities to acquire skills and these need teachers to use variety of teaching and support strategies to accommodate all learners. Participants in this study stated that teachers should be observant to include variety of learners in teaching by using different methods of teaching and support such as scaffolding which Kong (2021) referred to as the important method that is embraced by constructivism to enhance learning. Spadafora and Downes (2020:1) assert that scaffolding is a teaching method where learners who struggle to learn need assistance for those who are able and knowledgeable to think at higher level and complete certain tasks on their own. Moreover, the best strategies of scaffolding are through the use of appropriate information and transforming

understanding for learners (Spadafora & Downes, 2020:2); hence, the use of different resources of different levels and technological devices accompanied by variety of strategies to enhance reading for learners who struggle to read.

5.3.2 UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY AND STUDY FINDINGS

The findings from this study revolve around helping learners with reading difficulties to improve their reading skills through systems of support offered by those surrounding these learners, reading support portrayals and using innovative support strategies. More importantly, systems of support made up of academic, social and emotional support should be anchored on Ubuntu humanistic values and principles of kindness, solidarity, cooperation, respect and compassion (Ngubane & Makua, 2021:2). The support that teachers, learners and other staff whether in the class or outside should be informed by Ubuntu values and principles stated by Ngubane and Makua.

According to the researchers' experience, academic improvement is brought forth in a situation where learners work together harmoniously to help each other, where the relationships between teachers and learners are grounded on human recognition and respect, and also through cooperative interactions that are influenced by kindness and compassion. School environment is a unifying setting for teachers, learners and other staff members, and the important factor should be solidarity with the understanding to improve and achieve academically. Teachers are able to implement different strategies of teaching and support in the classroom where learners are able to share resources and skills for the betterment of all learners. It would be difficult for teachers to adopt strategies such as grouping learners and arranging them in a way that allows free and open discussions if not because of the implemented values of Ubuntu which are core in the school setting. Moreover, teachers should also encourage and foster Ubuntu values in the school setting for learners to cooperate without any kind of discrimination to improve all learners, which must spread in the communities to influence solidarity among Africans.

It becomes evident in this study, therefore, that Ubuntu philosophy act as a base for constructivist theory because in a classroom where Ubuntu values and principles are practiced, learning becomes better for all learners; hence improvement academically. Teachers become learning facilitators while they allow learners to engage in warm interactions and collaborate well to gain knowledge. Ubuntu principles and values of respect for human dignity, kindness and compassion pave a way for easy construction of knowledge within an accommodative free of judgmental environment by individual learner through the assistance and support of teachers. Both theories align well with the findings of this study as shown above.

5.4 OBSERVATIONS

Findings from observations regarded classroom setting that should have much influence on the improvement of learners' reading abilities. Taylor and Vlastos (2009) cited in Kinahan (2017:24) concur that the physical environment and design of the classroom act as a silent curriculum because it can support and improve learner learning same as the explicit curriculum. The findings disclosed that seating arrangement which was in rows and columns rather worsen the hiding game for learners with reading difficulties as they could not be easily identified and given the needed support because they mostly hide at the back of the classroom behind others. In the same vein, Reynolds (2016:3) concurs that learners with certain common characteristics tend to occupy specific parts of the classroom and even when they are given group activities, they cannot choose to work with those who seem knowledgeable, rather they cluster together choosing the back seats. He further argues that learners who want to be involved in the teaching and learning process tend to sit to the front.

According to the researchers' experience, raw-column seating arrangement perpetuate passiveness in class especially for learners with learning difficulties because they hide at the back of the class where the teachers' eyes rarely reach, especially in an overcrowded class. The researcher tried horseshoe seating arrangement where learners

were able to see each other freely and increase participation. Tee (2019:8) asserts that when learners are seated in the horseshoe configuration, they have much freedom to interact comparative to row and cluster seating arrangements. However, it works well with lesser number of learners in the classroom.

On the other hand, the row seating arrangement became flexible as it changed with engaged strategy such as grouping learners in small numbers where learners would be seating in circles that scatter around that class foster collaboration between learners. The view was supported by Tee (2019:6-7) who claimed that cluster seating arrangement unlike row arrangement that need learners to face a teacher. This cluster seating arrangement allows learners to face each other during the instruction to emphasize collaborative learning. In the same vein, Kinahan (2017:24) supports the sentiment that it is noted that while the physical arrangement ties into teaching strategies, the specific academic implications depend on the goals and objectives set by the teacher. With different strategies, teachers moved from one group or pair to the other to propel participation and collaboration of all learners. According to Tee's findings in his study investigating the most effective type of classroom seating arrangement, cluster seating was found to be the most effective one to improve learners' reading achievement in English.

Regarding teaching and support strategies, teachers used a variety of reading instruction strategies of support such as engaging learners in reading and vocabulary competitions within same grade and within same grades but different streams. The strategy showed how much learners without reading difficulties support the learners with reading difficulties as postulated by both constructivists and Ubuntu principles and values, that new concepts are learned through the help and support of other people around the learner in accommodative, less discriminative and loving environment. In regard to reading materials, they were found to be of the same level without extra special material to help learners with reading difficulties. However, teachers would provide the little they could.

5.4 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS FOR MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS AND

LEARNERS' SCRIPTS

The study disclosed that in the departmental meetings held at different times of the year, teachers suggested the application of different methods of teaching and strategies to help improve learners' reading skills. They also emphasized the need to work on their negative attitudes towards learners with reading difficulties. It appeared that teachers turn to label learners and concentrate much on their weakness instead of encouraging and praising their strengths. According to the researcher's experience, this is common among secondary schools' teachers especially who are not trained to deal with learners who experience diverse learning disabilities that they label learners as lazy even before they investigate learners' problems.

Teachers had realized that they have learners who could not read although they did not know that, thus reading difficulties. They, therefore, suggested the use of spelling bee program to support those learners to improve their vocabulary and spelling. However, there was a challenge of time to implement all that was planned.

In the evaluation meetings, teachers showed that there was a little improvement on the learners' reading abilities despite their efforts to support these learners. This is proved by the stated challenges including time to persistently implement the proposed strategies of support. Moreover, learners' scripts showed that learners have not improved on reading skills because their writing lacked coherence and cohesion, fraught with poor grammatical errors including spelling mistakes. These revealed that learners were just answering questions without understanding the passage they had read, and then they wrote what was unreadable. With the researchers' experience, learners who lack text comprehension just answer questions for the sake of answering because they cannot even interpret what they have written.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Having analysed findings of the study, the study concludes that grade 9 teachers are somehow making strides to support learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools of Leribe District in Lesotho. This became evident when the collected data outlined how grade 9 teachers identify learners with reading difficulties and provide support needed to bring improvement. However, the type of support provided by teachers was found to be clouded by challenges that may worsen learners' reading difficulties instead of the challenges to be curbed in its totality.

Furthermore, the study presented challenges such as lack of in-service training, large classes, lack of resources, time to implement the suggested strategies. In addition, classroom management was also found to hinder support of learners with reading difficulties; hence less improvement in reading amongst such learners presented as a concern. As a result, the current study concludes that the insufficient teacher support given to grade 9 learners with reading difficulties is a call for concern in the country. Lack of improvement in reading leads to challenges in the academic achievement for these learners that end up dropping out of the schooling systems and filling the streets of Lesotho. This anomaly affects the economy and may lead to the increased crime rate in Lesotho. The next section presents recommendations of the study.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study presents the following recommendations:

Twelve (12) teachers that are involved in supporting Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools of Leribe District in Lesotho participated in this study as mentioned in chapter 1 and 3. Nevertheless, further research should be explored with a bigger sample size in different contexts because findings of the current study may be generalized to other settings.

Similar studies should also be conducted with other secondary schools' grades, particularly Grade 10 as the first grade towards the exit from basic education. Support for learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools is a global concern and therefore, it should be considered and documented by the policy makers.

The Ministry of Education and Training should support schools with resources, including the effective trainings that enhance teachers' support for grade 9 learners with reading difficulties.

At district level, inspectors should frequently visit schools to offer teacher and learner support so that teachers could feel confident to support learners with reading difficulties.

Lastly, institutions of higher learning should also support Grade 9 teachers by ensuring that programs for initial teacher education include various strategies of how grade 9 teachers should support learners with reading difficulties. These institutions may succeed in this endeavour by engaging high school teachers when they design their reading support programs for pre-service teachers.

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APPENDIX A: PROOF OF REGISTRATION



6236

A I R M A I L
 MOHLELENG M M REV
 MOUNT ROYAL HIGH SCHOOL
 P. O. BOX 641
 HLOTSE
 LERIBE 300
 LESOTHO

STUDENT NUMBER : 13881876
 ENQUIRIES TEL : 0861670411
 FAX : (012)429-4150
 eMAIL : mand@unisa.ac.za
 2023-02-03

Dear Student

I hereby confirm that you have been registered for the current academic year as follows:

Proposed Qualification: MED (INCLUSIVE EDUCATION) (98443)

CODE	PAPER	S NAME OF STUDY UNIT	NQF crdts	LANG.	PROVISIONAL EXAMINATION	
					EXAM.DATE	CENTRE(PLACE)
Study units registered without formal exams:						
@ DFIED95		MED - Inclusive Education	**	E		
DFIED95		MED - Inclusive Education	**	E		
@ Exam transferred from previous academic year						

You are referred to the "MyRegistration" brochure regarding fees that are forfeited on cancellation of any study units.

- * Your attention is drawn to University rules and regulations (www.unisa.ac.za/register). Please note the new requirements for reregistration and the number of credits per year which state that students registered for the first time from 2013, must complete 36 NQF credits in the first year of study, and thereafter must complete 48 NQF credits per year. Students registered for the MBA, MBL and DBL degrees must visit the SBL's E5Online for study material and other important information.
- Readmission rules for Honours: Note that in terms of the Unisa Admission Policy academic activity must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the University during each year of study. If you fail to meet this requirement in the first year of study, you will be admitted to another year of study. After a second year of not demonstrating academic activity to the satisfaction of the University, you will not be re-admitted, except with the express approval of the Executive Dean of the College in which you are registered. Note too, that this study programme must be completed within three years. Non-compliance will result in your academic exclusion, and you will therefore not be allowed to re-register for a qualification at the same level on the National Qualifications Framework in the same College for a period of five years after such exclusion, after which you will have to re-apply for admission to any such qualification.
- Readmission rules for MEd: Note that in terms of the Unisa Admission Policy, a candidate must complete a Master's qualification within three years. Under exceptional circumstances and on recommendation of the Executive Dean, a candidate may be allowed an extra (fourth) year to complete the qualification. For a Doctoral degree, a candidate must complete the study programme within six years. Under exceptional circumstances, and on recommendation by the Executive Dean, a candidate may be allowed an extra (seventh) year to complete the qualification.
- * Your study material is available on www.my.unisa.ac.za, as no printed matter will be made available for the research proposal module. Study material can be accessed on the Unisa website. You must register on MyUnisa (<https://my.unisa.ac.za/portal/>) for this purpose. You are also reminded to activate your mylife email address since all electronic correspondence will be sent to this email address.

BALANCE ON STUDY ACCOUNT: 0.00

Yours faithfully,

Prof M S Mthata
 Registrar

0108 0 00 0



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**APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH
(DISTRICT EDUCATION MANAGER)**

Mount Royal High School P O Box 641

LERIBE 300

15 June 2022

The District Education Manager Leribe 300

Dear Sir

**RE: REQUEST FOR A PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN LERIBE
DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

I, Marianna Mookho Mohleleng, am doing research under the supervision of Dr. Hlabathi HR Thobejane- Maapola (University of South Africa) towards a Master of Inclusive Education Degree at the University of South Africa. The study is entitled: **Support for Grade 9 Learners with Reading Difficulties in Secondary Schools of Leribe District in Lesotho.**

The goal of the study is to explore how teachers support grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools for Leribe district in Lesotho, with the aim to describe teachers' understanding of support for learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools, explain strategies that teachers use to support grade 9 learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools and suggest more strategies that can be used to support grade 9 learners in secondary schools for Leribe district in Lesotho. Your office is responsible

for schools' activities regulation hence the request.

I will use interviews and observations to collect data from secondary schools in the Hlotse area. A total number of 12 secondary school teachers will participate in the study. I therefore request your permission to carry out a research study in Leribe district. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts resulting from the research participants involved in this study.

The participation of secondary schools' teachers is strictly voluntary. They are free to withdraw from the current study at any stage if they feel like not continuing. The selected participants will complete a consent form if they agree to take part. Anonymity will be maintained and information given by respondents will be managed with strict care and confidentiality.

The participants of present study will not get any reimbursement or any incentives for participating. However, reporting teacher's understanding of support for learners with reading difficulties in secondary schools, strategies they use to support grade 9 learners and more strategies which could be used to support grade 9 learners in secondary schools for Leribe district can go a long way in ensuring that every child has a right to learn and access education including those with reading difficulties.

The feedback procedure will entail the publication of the dissertation as per University of South Africa (UNISA) regulations.

Yours Faithfully

Marianna Mookho Mohleleng Researcher

My contact details are +266 58678986/68068995

Email: 13881876@mylife.unisa.ac.za/mohlelengm@gmail.com

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH (SCHOOL PRINCIPALS)

Mount Royal High School P O Box 641

Leribe 300

17 July 2022

The principal

Dear Sir/Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

I am presently engaged in research towards my M.Ed. (Masters in Inclusive Education) at the University of South Africa (UNISA), supervised by Dr Maapola-Thobejane, Hlabathi HR. My research title is: **Support for Grade 9 Learners with Reading Difficulties in Secondary Schools of Leribe District in Lesotho.**

I humbly request your permission to conduct research in your school which

will be done through interviews and classroom observations. Both interviews and observations will be done by the researcher and they will not cause any disturbance to the normal running of the school; since, interviews will be conducted after school or at any time convenient while observations do not involve criticism of any sort. The interviews involve only one English teacher teaching English in Grade 9, the HOD and the Principal taking only fifteen minutes at most, whereas the observation concerns just Grade 9 class and will take only thirty minutes at most. The confidentiality of the participants and schools involved will be respected.

The approval letter from DEM Leribe is attached and yours for granted permission is requested. Thanking you in advance for your cooperation and assistance.

Yours Faithfully

Marianna Mookho Mohleleng

Researcher

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CURRENT STUDY (RETURN SLIP)

I, _____ (participant's name), confirm that the person asking for my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

The researcher explained to me and I understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and, or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's name and surname: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS



Interview Questions for teachers who teach English Language in Grade 9

Place of interview: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

1. Are there learners with reading difficulties in your class?
2. What is your understanding of inclusion of learners with reading difficulties?
3. What do you do to challenge learners in your class to master reading skills?
4. Which factors block learners from mastering reading as expected at this level?
5. What do you do to support learners who struggle to read in your class?
6. Which strategies do you engage when you teach reading?
7. Which ones work best for your learners who struggle to read?
8. How do you engage technology in your teaching of reading at this level?
9. Is there any possibility of improving those strategies that you are already using?
10. Do you have anything else that you would like to share with me regarding learners who experience reading difficulties in your class?

Thank you.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS



Place of interview: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

1. Are there learners who experience reading difficulties at your school especially in grade 9?
2. How were they identified?
3. Do you have a committee that has been assigned to assist such learners at your school?
4. If yes, are their roles of supporting Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties clearly defined?
5. How do you follow up improvement of such learners as they are being supported?
6. What is your specific role in supporting learners who struggle to read?
7. Do you have any reading programs for these learners in your school?
8. If not, do you think you can try to offer few as a way of supporting them?
9. Apart from how you help Grade 9 learners with reading difficulties, are there any new ways you have planned to employ in supporting these learners?
10. Do you have anything else that you would like to share with me regarding Grade 9 learners who struggle to read?

Thank you.

**APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HEAD OF LANGUAGE
DEPARTMENT (HOD)**



Place of interview: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

1. How do you identify learners who struggle with reading in grade 9?
2. Who takes a decision as to which learners need assistance?
3. What support strategies do you have for such learners as a school?
4. Who takes a decision for those learners to be helped?
5. Do you have any monitoring tool to track the improvement of grade 9 learners with reading difficulties as they get help?
6. Which resources do you have to help learners who struggle with reading?
7. How do you think learners who struggle to read should be supported?
8. Are there any plans for this academic year to improve on strategies that have been used to help struggling readers?
9. If not, what do you think can be done to improve on those strategies or maybe new one to replace those you have been using?
10. Do you have anything else that you can share with me regarding learners who experience reading difficulties in your class?

Thank you.

APPENDIX H: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE



- Classroom setting
- Teaching strategies – variety of teaching methods to accommodate different levels of learners
- Learners' participation
- Reading material level – the materials used are of various levels of capacity for learners
- Reading resources - do learners easily access the materials

APPENDIX I: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

EDITING AND PROOFREADING CERTIFICATE

7542 Galangal Street

Lotus Gardens

Pretoria

0008

26 February 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certificate serves to confirm that I have language edited Mookho Marianna Mohleleng's dissertation entitled, **"SUPPORT FOR GRADE 9 LEARNERS WITH READING DIFFICULTIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF LERIBE DISTRICT IN LESOTHO."**

I found the work easy and intriguing to read. Much of my editing basically dealt with obstructionist technical aspects of language, which could have otherwise compromised smooth reading as well as the sense of the information being conveyed. I hope that the work will be found to be of an acceptable standard. I am a member of Professional Editors' Guild.

Hereunder are my contact details:



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EDITORS
Guild

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APPENDIX J: SIMILARITY INDEX

SUPPORT FOR GRADE 9 LEARNERS WITH READING DIFFICULTIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR LERIBE DISTRICT IN LESOTHO

ORIGINALITY REPORT



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