Educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness skills to English First Additional Language Learners in Grade R


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# DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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**Declaration:**

I proclaim and concede that the dissertation, which I submit for Master in Curriculum Studies focusing on ECD at the University of South Africa, is my work and has not previously been submitted by me for a Master degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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# ETHICS STATEMENT

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of South Africa's Code of Ethics for researchers and the policy guidelines for responsible research.

_KBarnes_

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I, Kufakunesu Zano, hereby certify that I have revised the language of the dissertation "Educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness to English First Additional Language Learners in Grade R", written by Kirstin Daly.

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# ABSTRACT

This study conducted explored the educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness skills to English First Additional Language learners in Grade R and the importance of these skills in laying the foundation for future reading. The participants in this study were Grade R educators, principals, and student educators from two schools in Mpumalanga Emalahleni. Grade R learners were observed during lesson presentations on phonological awareness. A qualitative research approach was used together with a case study design. In total nine participants took part in the research study. Data were collected using observation, one-to-one interviews, and field notes. The findings that came into view from the study were that educators have an understanding of phonological awareness skills, and they included the teaching of phonological awareness skills across the curriculum. The emphasis was placed on building the learners' English vocabulary and hearing of sounds and syllables. The educators used a diversity of resources, including the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement documents as a guideline. The conclusion drawn was that teaching phonological awareness skills cannot be conducted in a void but can be realised through kinesthetic awareness as children learn through active participation. If phonological awareness skills are not taught in Grade R, the learners' abilities will be compromised, especially when they move to higher grades. As educators, it is important to understand children's development and growth continuum irrespective of their age. Phonological awareness skills can be seen as a 'staircase to success' laying a good foundation for the learners' education.

**Keywords:**

Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, English First Additional Language Learners, Foundation Phase, Grade R Learners, Phonological Awareness.

## IQOQA

Lolu cwaningo lucwaninge lwaphinde lwahlola ulwazi lothisha lokufundisa amakhono okuqwashisa ngemisindo kubafundi boLimi LwesiNgisi LokuQala LokweNgeza eBangeni R kanye nokubaluleka kwala makhono ekubekeni isisekelo sokufunda esikhathini esizayo. Ababebambe iqhaza kulolu cwaningo ngothisha bakwaGrade R, othishanhloko, nothisha abasafunda  basezikoleni ezimbili zaseMpumalanga Emalahleni. Abafundi beBanga R babhekwe ngesikhathi kwethulwa izifundo zokuqwashisa ngemisindo. Indlela yocwaningo yekhwalithethivu yenziwe kusetshenziswa indlela yocwaningo lwesigameko. Babe yisishiyagalolunye sebebonke abantu ababe yingxenye yalolu cwaningo. Ulwazi lwaqoqwa kusetshenziswa ukubuka, inhlolokhono yomuntu ngamunye, namanothi asenkundleni. Okutholakele okwavela kulolu cwaningo ukuthi othisha bayawaqonda amakhono okwazi ngemisindo, futhi bahlanganisa ukufundiswa kwamakhono okwazi ngemisindo kanye nohlelo lokufunda.Kwagcizelelwa ukwakha ulwazimagama lwesiNgisi lwabafundi kanye nokuzwa imisindo namalunga noma nezakhi zawo. Othisha basebenzise izinsiza ezahlukene, okuhlanganisa nemibhalo yeSitatimende Senqubomgomo Yohlelo Lwezifundo Nokuhlola njengomhlahlandlela.


Isiphetho ekufinyelelwe  kuso kwaba ukuthi ukufundisa amakhono okwazi ifonoloji angeke kuqhutshwe kungenalutho kodwa kungafezeka ngokuqwashisa ngezinzwa njengoba izingane zifunda ngokubamba iqhaza ezintweni ezibonakalayo. Uma amakhono okwazi ifonoloji engafundiswa eBangeni R, amakhono abafundi azoba sengozini, ikakhulukazi lapho bedlulela emabangeni aphezulu. Njengabafundisi, kubalulekile ukuqonda ukuthuthuka nokukhula kwezingane ngaphandle kokubheka iminyaka yazo. Amakhono okwazi imisindo angabonakala 'njengezitebhisi eziya empumelelweni' ebeka isisekelo esihle semfundo yabafundi.

# KAKARETŠONYAKIŠIŠO

Thuto ye e dirile dinyakišišo ebile e utollotše maitemogelo a barutabana a go ruta temogo ya mabokgoni a fonolotši go English Lelemetlaleletšo La Pele go barutwana ba Mphato wa R le bohlokwa bja mabokgoni a go ala motheo go baleng lebakeng le le tlago. Bakgathatema mo dinyakišišong tše e be e le barutabana ba Mphato wa R, dihlogo tša dikolo le baithutelaborutiši go tšwa dikolong tše pedi Emalahleni, Mpumalanga. Barutwana ba Mphato wa R ba lekodišitšwe nakong ya go ruta temogo ya fonolotši. Dinyakišišo tša mokgwa wa khwalitheitifi di dirilwe ka tšhomišo ya tlhamo ya nyakišišotiišetšo. Datha e kgobokeditšwe ka go šomiša tekodišišo, dipotšišotherišano tša botee go botee le dinoutsenyakišišong. Dipoelo tšeo di hwetšagalago ka go dinyakišišo ke gore barutabana ba kwešiša mabokgoni a temogo ya fonolotši, ebile ba tsentšhitše go rutwa ga mabokgoni a temogo ya fonolotši kharikhulamong ka moka. Kgatelelo e beilwe go tšwetšeng pele ga tlotlontšu, go kwewa ga medumo le dinoko tša English tša barutwana. Barutabana ba dirišitše didirišwa tše di fapafapanego, go akaretšwa ditokomane tša *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* bjalo ka tlhahli. Sephetho se se tšerwego ke gore go ruta mabokgoni a temogo ya fonolotši go ka se dirwe sekgobeng efela go ka lemogwa ka temogo ya kinesthetiki ka ge bana ba ithuta ka go kgathatema ka mafolofolo. Ge mabokgoni a temogo ya fonolotši a sa rutwe ka go Mphato wa R, bokgoni bja barutwana bo tla bewa kotsing, kudu ge ba eya mephatong ya godimo. Bjalo ka barutabana, go bohlokwa go kwešiša tšwelopele le kgolo ya bana go sa kgathalege mengwaga ya bona. Mabokgoni a temogo a fonolotši a ka bonwa bjalo ka 'bonamelelo go katlego' go aleng motheo wo o mobotse go thuto ya barutwana.

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CAPS:      Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements

CEA:       Career Excel Academy

Covid-19:  Coronavirus

DBE:       Department of Basic Education

ECD:       Early Childhood Development

EFAL:      English First Additional language

HOD:       Head of Department

LLP:       Language and Literacy Profiles

LOLT:      Language of Learning and Teaching

NCS:       National Curriculum Statement

PA:        Phonological awareness

PIRLS:     Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

# CHAPTER ONE: EXPLORATION OF THE RESEARCH

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Learning to read is a fundamental skill that all children need if they are to be successful in any academic subject. Woolfolk's (2010:56) description of reading is mentioned as an important keystone in education. Reading skills, therefore, assist in laying the foundation for learning as a whole. Learners need to be competent in reading, to understand and grasp ideas in order to make progress from grade to grade.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assesses reading comprehension. Assessment of Reading is conducted to observe and keep track of trends regarding learners' literacy capabilities at five-year intervals. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study states that assessments offer the opportunity to monitor progress in reading comprehension within and across languages and in the provinces themselves (Howie, Combrinck, Tshele, Roux, McLeod Palane & Mokoena, 2017). Prior studies show that South Africa is more than four years behind other performing countries (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, McLeod & Palane, 2017**).** Approximately, 49% of South African Grade 5 learners do not reach the expected international benchmark, and these learners do not have basic reading skills by the end of the Grade 5 year. The ability to read is crucial for all learners. Celeste Combrinck, acting director at the Career Excel Academy (CEA) suggests that the possible root cause stems from the two transitions in the fourth year of schooling (Department of University Relations, 2017). Learners are expected to transition from learning to read to reading to learn, and learners are anticipated to understand the language of learning well enough to study textbooks. Learners who have been taught in an African language in Grade 3 transition and begin learning in English in Grade 4. This situation is almost certain to harm Grade 4 reading literacy (Department of University Relations News, 2017). English First Additional language (EFAL) is explained and described as the English language by non-native speakers who are in an English-speaking environment. The divide between the isiZulu, Afrikaans and English learners tells us that African language learners need more emphasis and more guidance with basic reading skills.

Educators should have a simple understanding of the elements of reading and have the required capabilities to deal with the diverse needs of EFAL learners.

When educators understand the fundamental value and essence of reading instruction and how to implement and teach key principals of reading, they will be more prepared to promote the effective reading development of learners (Shanker & Cockrum, 2009:1). Educators who understand the components of reading have the skills needed to deal with challenges and are mindful of the diverse needs which can help promote reading development. Janks (2014:10-11) mentions that the possibility of South African teachers having limited and inadequate pedagogic knowledge is high. The difficulties that arise in learning and teaching, literacy and identity issues call for a specific research approach.

This study intends to examine the role of phonological awareness (PA) skills in the Reception Year (Grade R) as a foundation for teaching and learning of reading, in this instance, in EFAL. I observed lessons that focus on phonological awareness skills and the steps taken and have reviewed their link with reading development. I researched what teachers know about phonological awareness skills and how they present activities that can promote awareness and support further research. To achieve good outcomes and interpret the curriculum, educators should have a profound understanding, as well as pedagogic content knowledge of the curriculum, especially in South Africa. (Nel, Krog, Mohangi, Muller & Stephens, 2016).

## 1.2    BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In South Africa, many young students transition from Grade R to Grade 1 as they begin their scholastic journey in formal education (Department of Basic Education, 2012). Reading is an essential skill for all educational subjects (Jennings, Schudt-Caldwell & Lerner, 2010). Without the skills required to read, academic performance is limited. To be successful in society, children must learn to read so that later they can read to earn an income (Jennings, Schudt-Caldwell & Lerner, 2010). Research revealed that only 9% of the South African population have English as their home language (Howie, Van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman, 2012). IsiZulu is undoubtedly the most spoken language

in South Africa. According to the Language Education Policy in 1997, children should have access to a global language such as English, but they also have the right to be educated in their mother tongue. It is, however, important to note that making home language education for Grades 1 to 6 counters the presiding perspective amongst educators and parents that learning English is the solution to a more promising opportunity and the sooner children are taught in English, the better (DBE, 2006). Learners of EFAL, in the framework of this study, are learners whose first language is other than English but are registered in English home language schools. Laying a foundation for future learning to read commences early when learners attend preschool and the Grade R year. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is the South African government's most recent plan of action for turning preceding low literacy language results around and includes improving the literacy skills of listening, speaking, reading and phonics, writing and handwriting (DBE, 2011).

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement document focuses on three areas in Early Childhood Development (ECD). These three areas are Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. CAPS centres language learning in Grade R, encouraging and including play-based learning and a combination of settings that encourage emergent literacy through incidental learning rather than formal learning (DBE, 2011). The timeframe for learning a language in the Foundation Phase is determined by the language context and environment of the school. Schools have the option of whether to allocate more or less time to the home or first additional language depending on the learners' needs. The minimum time for a home language is 10 hours. CAPS Grades 1-3, English First Additional Language alludes to the fact that the children come to school knowing their home language. They can express themselves easily and already know many words in their home language. Learning to read in Grade 1 builds on this foundation of spoken language, and it is easier to communicate and read in their home language. When Grade R learners learn an additional language, they need to build a solid foundation in order to gain success. In my study, children are not allowed to develop their home languages because their schools offer English as their home language.

Children need to hear lots of straightforward, spoken English and know the contextual relationship of what is being said. Learners need to establish speaking skills in the English language to acquaint themselves with the sound system.

In South Africa, many children begin using English as the language of learning and teaching in Grade 4, therefore, they must culminate a high level of ability in English skills by the end of Grade 3. According to CAPS, learners' progress in literacy must be more advanced and should quicken in Grades 2 and 3. As stated in CAPS on home language, the First Additional Language (CAPS) favours and encourages skills in their home language, such as guided reading that is introduced in the home language (CAPS) in Grade 1 and a First additional language in Grade 2. The development and building of a strong literacy foundation in the home language and building onto the First additional language is referred to as ''Additive Bilingualism''.As children mature, and the Language of learning and teaching is English as the Additional Language in Grade 4, a significant amount of time must be devoted to learning English in the Foundation Phase. If learners are accepted into an English home language school, it is imperative to develop their familiarity with the English language early in Grade R, and not wait like the EFAL students who only begin to use English as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in the Intermediate Phase, Grade 4.

In the context of phonological awareness skills in English, (Justin, 2001) found that there are certain skills South African learners are lacking in. Firstly, learners cannot translate oral language into print. If they cannot hear the individual phonemes which are significant to written language, this written language will not have a clear meaning. Secondly, learners with low phonological awareness struggle to remember which letter represents which sound, and this can lead them to misread words. Thirdly, a fallout in understanding and development of phonological awareness skills can indirectly affect reading comprehension, which is the goal of reading instruction (Justin, 2001). If a child reads words incorrectly in a passage, he or she may miss the central principles and concepts being communicated. It is necessary to detect shortfalls in phonological awareness skills timeously so that learners do not fail to keep up with the pace expected of them.

If a learner falls behind, it requires intervention to bring him or her up to suitable and sufficient levels of reading accuracy and reading fluency.

Schuele and Boudreau (2008) state that past evaluations of the effectiveness of phonological awareness instruction to learners and intervention have provided unquestionable evidence that phonological awareness can be improved through instruction and guidance given to the learners.During the Grade R year, it is important that constructive planning takes place, offering ample opportunities for listening and speaking in English. This is usually scheduled for the morning lessons. This entails educators engaging in conversational activities, for example, the news of the day, other interesting topical discussions, weather, special events and talking about pictures. Verbal expression using 'show and tell' allows learners to engage and express themselves more. These skills, listening and speaking, are encouraged and can assist the learners with deciphering sounds in words thus improving their decoding skills (DBE, 2011:13) In this study, I observed the teaching of phonological awareness and evaluated the extent to which it can assist learners as a building block towards reading.

## 1.3 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) tests revealed that 78% of Grade 4 pupils in South Africa fell below the lowest level on the scale, meaning that they cannot understand what they are reading. Concepts such as pronunciation, accuracy and fluency are key principals in reading, but they have no value without comprehension and understanding of what is being read (Rule, 2017). Drawing from my experiences as a practitioner, I found out that Grade R is a particularly important year for laying the foundations for future reading in the Grade 1 – 3 phase. I taught phonological awareness skills to Grade R classes in 2017, 2018 and 2019. I previously taught Grade 1 Literacy lessons for five years before teaching Grade R. I noted that learners benefit from the teaching strategies involving phonological awareness skills. A child that can manipulate sounds and words or play with sounds and words has an essential set of skills that allow them to learn how to read. Word awareness, syllable awareness and onset-rime awareness are all beneficial, and I have seen the positive impact these skills make when

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teaching my learners. However, learners in my classes consisted of English home language learners. My study is on EFAL learners in English home language classrooms.

Teaching phonological awareness skills to EFAL learners may not always prove to be easy. Learners may need even more assistance. Educators need to be aware of how to teach language learning skills and should know how to ensure learners maintain understanding, eventually being able to read in English, understand phonics and comprehend the written English language. Novice educators possibly do not give attention to phonological awareness, as this might not have been taught in their programmes, or they may lack experience and are unaware of the importance of phonological awareness skills as foundational to reading.

My knowledge of literacy and finding out how other educators teach literacy and develop phonological awareness amongst their learners has always been of interest to me. Therefore, I feel the educators who deal with Early Childhood Education (ECD), Grade R or Foundation Phase learners must should have acquired  phonological awareness skills.

Phonological awareness is an important set of skills preschoolers and primary school learners need to develop. Children need to develop and recognise syllables, rhymes, sounds at the start/end of words and sounds within words (Victoria State of Government DBE, 2021). The understanding and awareness that phonemes can be blended and segmented within a word is an abstract skill not easily achieved (Orago, 2015). The significance of phonological awareness has been explored and examined and has been demonstrated as very important for skilful reading by leading researchers such as Liberman, Shank and Liberman (1998). Being taught phonological awareness skills is beneficial to learners to develop the skills such as blending sounds and segmenting skills for later reading and spelling. It is now widely acknowledged that the prime cause of a reading disability for a greater number of children lies on phonological skills such as phoneme segmentation, verbal memory and name retrieval (Justin, 2001).

According to Spaull (McBride, 2019), there are three explanations for why South African learners have so many challenges. The first is that Foundation Phase educators do not

know how to teach reading according to a planned method and system. Secondly, the very poor schools in South Africa are extremely text-poor. Thirdly, there is wasted learning time during the school day. McBride (2019) stated that it becomes more complex when viewed through the language lens: a reality to note that children are rapidly pushed into learning a new language (English), which is a significant factor contributing to their low academic success and achievement. The negative effects of early illiteracy cascade to adversely affect the development of cognitive skills and development in education (McBride, 2019). The focal point should be on early mediation to impede reading problems at a later stage and age. With a great deal of systematic intervention, measurable progress in phonological reading skills can be achieved throughout the Foundation Phase years and preschool years, even with readers that have severe reading problems (Lovett, Frjtters & Steinbach, 2000; Justin, 2001). By engaging with learners' educators have opportunities to informally assess the learners' levels of literacy development. They can also reflect on their success with literacy practice of teaching and theoretical concepts (Nel, Krog, Mohangi, Muller & Stephens, 2016).

Phonemically explicit approaches should include key and specific instruction to assist learners with their understanding of phonological awareness, and phonetic decoding skills to real words and should allow for many opportunities to read a connected text for fluency and meaning (Torgesen, 2000). The capacity to comprehend and the "precision of meaning" in a young learner's vocabulary development and early lexical semantic memory (Kaiser, Roberts & McLeod, 2011:154) form an integral foundation for literacy acquisition. Language development is very important and should include elements and concept teachings such as letter knowledge, rhyme knowledge, basic concept understanding such as size, numbers and position, receptive vocabulary, parallel sentence production, elision, word relationships, phonics, sound categorisation, sight word recognition, listening and understanding comprehension of what they read to eventually build on reading skills (Meier & Lemmer, 2015).

Language learning should not take place in isolation. It is, therefore, important for every educator to include meaningful content, together with second language instruction strategies, in their planning for teaching EFAL learners. In this study, I include the concepts that are important for learning and teaching phonological awareness.

## 1.4     PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the context and background given above, the main research question was formulated as follows: How do teachers teach phonological awareness skills to English First Additional Learners in Grade R? The problem is that learners are not subjected to or exposed to enough hearing, sounding and development of literacy skills that can help them once they are in the Foundation Phase.

Numerous learners are subject to the risk of achieving sufficient reading competency in Grade 1 because they do not have the necessary literacy skills. There is also an existing challenge in the South African education system due to learners varying abilities in Emergent Literacy Grade 1. The learners all come from different backgrounds with different knowledge and skills (Du Plessis, 2016). The purpose is, therefore, to find out how learners in Grade R can be assisted before they enter Grade 1 to ensure that they are ready to read.

This study highlights the importance of phonological awareness skills to us as educators. It is beneficial to share ideas on how these skills add value to the language-learning process of children. EFAL learners can benefit so much if they receive guidance, teaching and daily exposure. There are gaps when teaching EFAL learners in English home language schools. In my experience, educators often focus on assessments and the completion of the assessments, and they use worksheet after worksheet rather than verbal and auditory activities. Educators do not realise that fundamental skills such as vocabulary building, sound awareness, understanding of comprehension and oral activities are needed before moving to more complex activities and assessments. These skills need to be firmly developed to lay a foundation for learning to read.

This study will show the importance of teaching phonological awareness skills to Grade R learners who are EFAL learners. It will also add value to teaching phonological awareness and capacitate educators who are interested in addressing the ''gap'' that many learners experience at the ages of 5 and 6 years being unable to decode written words.

## 1.5    PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Spaull states (2017), in his overview of reading levels in South Africa, that the country is effectively unique among upper-middle-income countries in that 58% of South African children do not learn to read for meaning in the first three (3) years of their schooling career. While there are many reasons for this reading dilemma, he states that the primary concern is the fact that Foundation Phase teachers have never been educated on how to teach reading and lack the knowledge required. With other researchers, he developed the Funda Wande project – meaning, "Teaching Reading for Meaning". This project aims to develop a high-quality free, open-access platform for all educators in the country. Spaull (2017) further claims that the lack of ability and understanding to read properly means that "many learners never get a firm grasp on the first entry-level of the academic ladder and fall further and further behind". Phatudi (2014) alludes to the above by saying that in many South African township and rural schools, educators attempting to introduce English are hindered because of their lack of skill and expertise in the language. As a result, literacy "cracks" grow into canyons.

Spaull (2017) makes the point that print is everywhere, and that one, therefore, needs the skill of reading to interpret what is written. Of course, reading is essential for participation in formal education. If learners lack proficiency in reading skills early on, progress in schooling is restricted. It is unfortunate that, nationally representative surveys from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) portray that more than half (56%) of South African children, by the end of Grade 4, have not learnt to read fluently and with comprehension and meaning in any language (Spaull, 2017). One of the main causes behind this is that educators have never been given worthwhile, relevant learning opportunities to obtain this specialised knowledge - neither in their initial teacher training nor in-service training. Very often educators do not know what the various components of reading are (phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and motivation) and that all these components fit entirely together to form a ''whole''. There is also little formal teaching of vocabulary, spelling, writing or phonics and no understanding of how to develop the most significant skill, that is, the comprehension skill (Spaull, 2017).

The purpose of the The purpose of the study is therefore to explore the teaching of phonological awareness skills to English First Additional Language Learners in Grade R. The illiteracy levels reported in South Africa portray a need for more input and awareness to be assigned to literacy development. Preparing Grade R learners for Grade 1 needs attention in terms of building the necessary skills to enable improved and enhanced learning. The results from the study are key to how phonological awareness is taught, and the strengths and weaknesses identified can inform the teaching of the skill as a foundation for formal reading. This research could potentially enhance the academic awareness regarding phonological awareness of EFAL learners in a South African context and enhance the knowledge of all everyone involved in the study.

## 1.6    RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 1.6.1    Primary Research Question

How do teachers teach phonological awareness skills to English First Additional Language learners in Grade R?

### 1.6.2    Secondary Research Questions

To fully explore the primary research question, the following secondary questions were asked:

(1)     What are the educators' understandings of phonological awareness skills?
(2)     Which resources are used to teach phonological awareness skills?
(3)     Which challenges are experienced when teaching phonological awareness?
(4)     Which models or guidelines of teaching phonological awareness are used in teaching English First Additional Language learners?
(5)     Which documents guide educators in teaching phonological awareness skills?

### 1.6.3    Research Objectives

The main purpose of the study is to establish how phonological awareness is taught in Grade R to English First Additional Language learners.

The objectives of the study are to:

(1)    Establish the educators' understanding of phonological awareness skills.

(2)    Explore which resources are used when teaching phonological awareness skills.

(3)    To discuss the challenges the participants experience when teaching phonological awareness skills.

(4)    To establish the models or guidelines educators use to teach phonological awareness skills.

(5)    To establish the documents that guide educators when teaching phonological awareness skills.


### 1.7    DEFINITIONS OF MAIN CONCEPTS

### 1.7.1    Literacy

Literacy appears to be a term that is easily understood, however, it is rather complex and dynamic and is defined in a profusion of ways (UNESCO, 2006:147). The most familiar comprehension of literacy mentioned is that it is a set of tangible skills, especially with regards to the cognitive skills of reading and writing (UNESCO, 2006:149). The Centre for Literacy, Quebec Canada (2008) adds that "Literacy is a vital, foundational skill which is consequential for learning through life and must be valued as a human right". In this study literacy refers to the ability to read and write proficiently, along with phonological awareness which involves the understanding of sound structure of language when learners start learning how to read.


### 1.7.2    Literacy Skills

Early literacy skills predominantly include knowledge about the alphabetic, initial reading, reading with imagination and spelling; these key skills are connected with the ability to

show what will happen in a learner's reading success (Oullete & Senechal, 2008:899-913). A broader definition is having the ability to read and write at a standard which is both beneficial to the individual learner's needs and to society's clarifications (Wallace, 2009:166). In this study, literacy skills encompass a broad range of abilities related to reading, writing, listening and speaking.

### 1.7.3 Reading

Reading is a combination of achieving outcomes, automation and accurate decoding which allows a learner to form insight and apprehension of what is being read to them (Leppanen, Aunola, Niemi & Nurmi, 2008:548). In this study reading refers to the process of recognising and understanding written text. It encompasses various aspects, including decoding, and translating printed letters or graphemes into sounds and word recognition.

### 1.7.4 Phonological Awareness (PA)

Phonological awareness gives focus to the awareness of attention to sounds in a language and how letters are used to manipulate and form sounds (Foorman, Schatschneider, Eaken, Fletcher, Moats & Francis, 2006:25). It is broadly defined as a consciousness of the sounds and sound formation of a particular language (Anthony, Lonnigan, Driscoll, Phillips & Burgess, 2003). According to Castles and Coltheart (2004), it is classified into three dimensions, namely phoneme awareness, onset-rime awareness and syllable awareness. It is an understanding of the different ways that oral language can be divided into smaller units or components and the ways oral language is manipulated (Justin, 2001). Easier dimensions of PA, such as syllable awareness in a word, facilitate and predict the first stages of reading acquisition. Phonological awareness is vital because it strongly supports a person's learning of how words in a language are displayed in print and are represented.

### 1.7.5 Phonology

Phonology refers to the process of how sounds of the language operate and how written words correspond with words that are spoken (Snow, 2010). For an example, when

referring to the English language, the consonant groups (clusters) 'bl' in 'black' and 'pl' in 'plant' can occur at the beginning of a word, however, they cannot be placed at the end of a word. In this study phonology refers to the branch of linguistics that deals with the sound systems of languages, including organization and patterning of speech sounds (phonemes).

### 1.7.6    Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is viewed as the ability of an individual to give attention to and also identify the separate, individual sounds that make up words (Armbruster, Lehr &Osborn, 2003). Manning and Kato (2006) describe phonemic awareness as the ability to understand that single sounds can be put together to construct words and formulate words.Learners who can segment, blend and manipulate words will have the foundational skill for learning how to read.

### 1.7.7    Phonemes

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a specific language, which distinguishes and makes a difference to the meaning of a word (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). In this study phonemes refer to speech sounds, distinctive sounds, phonemic awareness and phonological representations and understanding.

### 1.7.8    Phonics

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement refers to phonics as sounds in words and the symbols such as the alphabet, which characterise and give meaning to these sounds (DBE, 2011:15). The National Reading Panel (2000) states that phonics is the implementation of letter-sound correlations and blending skills, for example, joining the beginning of one word and the end of another word to make a new word with intent to read the written words. In this study phonics refer to an instructional approach or method used to teach reading and spelling, giving leaners the opportunity to learn grapheme-phoneme correspondence, decoding skills and encoding skills to eventually learn to read and recognize words.

### 1.7.9 English First Additional Language (EFAL)

Phatudi (2014) defines a First additional language as, "the language that is learnt formally in the classroom at school in addition to the home language", in this case, English. In this study, a first language is the native tongue or mother tongue of a learner, however, English First Additional Language is the language the learners learn in and develop comprehension, reading, writing and communication skills. In this study English First Additional language typically referes to a specific educational program or context where English is taught as a second or additional language to learners whose first language is not English.

### 1.7.10 Home Language

This is the language which is learnt in the child/children's home environment, which is most frequently spoken (DBE, 2010:3). In this study ''home language'' refers to the primary language spoken and used by individuals in their family, and community environment. Including linguistic background, cultural identity and language proficiency developing their language.

### 1.7.11 Second Language

A second Language is considered a language that is learnt after a person has learnt one's native tongue or first language. This study focuses on children whose first language is an African language and are registered in English Home language school. English to them is their second language.

### 1.7.12 Second Language Acquisition/Additional Language

Second language acquisition/additional language in South Africa is the expression used to describe any language learnt after being able to speak and attain one's mother tongue language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010:515). This study focuses on youngsters who acquire a single minority language (first language in childhood) within their household and acquire a second language when they attend formal schooling.

### 1.7.13 Language of learning and Teaching (LoLT)

This refers to the language methods and communication channels in which learning, teaching, understanding and assessments take place (DBE, 2010:3). In this study Language of learning and Teaching refers to the medium that is used in the school and classroom to facilitate teaching and learning

### 1.7.14 Strategy

A strategy is a specific planned procedure designed to assist learners to reach their goal which pertains to the acquisition of an EFAL (Gunning, 2008:275). The word strategy is used in the study to refer to planned procedures teachers used in ensuring that EFAL is acquired proficiently.

### 1.8    RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design may be viewed as a plan of action, composition and strategy for conducting research (Punch, 2004; Kumar, 2005). Creswell (2003) highlights that a qualitative research approach has numerous meanings of experiences and encounters such as social and historical information to develop a pattern or theory. A research design will draw attention to the elected subjects, data collection, data analysis and evaluations and interpretations of the research being conducted.

In this study, the research design is specific to qualitative research which is used to determine the selection of subjects and what way data are collected, analysed and interpreted (Nkosi, 2016). Lewis (2008) shares that a good qualitative research design has an intentional clear-cut purpose in which there is consistency and clarity between the research question and the methods or processes proposed, generating valid and reliable data.

### 1.8.1    Research Design

A qualitative research approach with the case study design was used. According to Creswell and Garrett (2008:46), qualitative research relies on participants' views and asks

broad, general questions to collect data in the form of words from participants. Case studies strive towards a general understanding of how research participants interact with their counterparts in each situation (Maree, 2007). They are usually descriptive and provide rich information about individuals or situations striving towards a holistic view and how participants make meaning. Case studies also have the advantage of allowing new ideas to emerge from careful and detailed observation (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2011). In a case study, the description and exploration of a case take place through detailed data-collection methods, including multiple sources of information that are rich in context. (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Research takes place in natural, real-life situations using a means of data collection that is non-invasive and harmless to the people involved. Merriam (2009:45) describes case study knowledge as reliant on the context or setting, as more circumstantial and a more developed reader interpretation. Knowledge is contextual in a case study.

Qualitative research is a more suitable design in the academic realm as participants are respected and unharmed. A qualitative researcher is regarded as a "research instrument" in the process (Niewenhuis, 2007b:79) and is disinterested in cause and effect. The researcher emphasises the experiences of individuals and can impact the results of research in several ways due to emotions and partiality. Merriam (2009:17) suggests that researchers should have certain capabilities during fieldwork, namely, asking good questions and thinking inductively, being a careful observer and considering all circumstances or variations in the environment and the participants involved.

The focus of this study is on phonological awareness teaching in Grade R classrooms, learners being EFAL in an English home language classroom. The educators' experiences, teaching methods and strategies are important in this study. My case study included two schools in the Emahlaleni district in Mpumalanga province that have only EFAL learners in English home language classrooms. A qualitative approach was utilised whereby the replies to the open-ended questions from the interviews were further examined and explored by observations.

### 1.8.2 Sample Size and Participant Selection

Purposeful homogeneous sampling was used. Creswell (2013) mentioned that this method is selected for having a shared characteristic or set of characteristics. The research sample included the Grade R educators in two schools who were interviewed and observed while teaching lessons in English home language classrooms. All the learners in the classrooms did not come from homes where English is their home language. The schools are both public schools in Emahlaleni Mpumalanga. Purposeful sampling was done, as it gave the researcher insight and allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the environment and distinct situations by selecting a sample based on criteria. The sample was not chosen randomly; it rather provided researcher with information for a chosen topic with the view that the researchercould obtain as much knowledge and information as possible.

Two different schools were chosen because they both have Grade R classes with all learners being EFAL learners. Besides, they are both in the Emalahleni district. The principals agreed to assist me with my research studies, and they both had educators who were willing to be interviewed and take part in the study.

The Foundation Phase Head of Department organised for me to spend time in the English classes when I was conducting my research. The educators had two years or more experience teaching in the grade, except for the student teacher that I interviewed. She is currently studying. There were four Grade R educators, two HODs, two Principals and one student teacher involved in my study. In total nine participants. Purposeful sampling, therefore, was used in the choice of participants. These educators were the ones who could provide me with insight into the approaches they used in the class and also how they taught phonological awareness skills lessons.

### 1.9    DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data for the study were collected by using one-on-one interviews, observations, document analysis and field notes. Using multiple methods to collect data allows for a holistic comprehensive understanding, therefore, an understanding of teaching

phonological awareness skills in Grade R EFAL learners. Strategies, plans of action and methods used are important to ensure the research study is established.

### 1.9.1 Document Analysis

The documents I used included:

- CAPS language policies and subject policies for Grade R and the Foundation Phase
- Learning Programmes for Literacy
- Annual teaching plans and lesson plans
- Daily programmes: Timetables (Noting the literacy lesson times and notational times)
- Programmes of assessment for Grade R (Reports)
- List of resources used within the classroom and for lessons

The documents were obtained from the respective schools and requested from the HODs and educators The documents from the Department of Education are readily available on their website.

### 1.9.2 One-on-one Interviews

An interview is a two-way discussion in which the interviewer (researcher) queries the participants (in this study, it is the Grade R educators, Heads of Departments, a student educator and principals) about their beliefs, perspectives and opinions on the subject under study (Maree, 2007). The results of what the participants say or note as important are documented. When conducting face-to-face interviews, the interviewee can feel relaxed and more at ease if the researcher establishes a relationship which is comfortable and trustworthy (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Speaking to participants in interview-type environments allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the views and experiences of the individual participants. The participants' facial expressions and gestures can also add value and meaning to the collected data.

The interview approach I used is semi-structured. Being the interviewer, I had questions and an interview guide prepared, which was an informal grouping of topics and questions that could be asked in different ways regarding phonological awareness. I conversed with the participants, asking them to elaborate on their teaching strategies, challenges experienced and their knowledge regarding PA, as well as the resources they used. What the participants felt was effective and most importantly, that was discussed and shared openly. The participants' views were of interest and relevance to gaining insight into phonological awareness skills.

### 1.9.3   Observation

Observations usually take the form of participant observation, where the researcher becomes fully engaged in the surroundings and setting being studied. The researcher needs to get an objective, unbiased and decisive view of what is taking place. Observation is the watching of people's behavioural reactions and patterns in specific circumstances to collect information about the phenomenon of interest (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

As the researcher, I was a non-participant observer by using an observation schedule. I compiled an observation schedule ahead of time to ensure the attention and focal point were kept on the research topic. Once these observations took place, I had casual conversations with the practitioners, and I made comprehensive notes and documented any relevant information during the conversations that took place.

The Grade R educators' lessons were observed in their classrooms. I noted the resources they used and the educator-learner interactions. My observations, times and dates were set not to inconvenience any of the participants. I took dates, times and timetables into consideration.

### 1.9.4   Field Notes

Merriam (2009:128) says that '"The recorded and written information of the observation comprises field notes, which correspond and are comparable to the interview transcripts." I took notes while observing lessons, however, I did not become involved in the lessons and activities of the participants. The filed notes allow the researcher to document

experiences while observation is taking place. I recorded activities, discussions, resources were used and reactions within the classroom environment, and this amplified the research process (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001).

## 1.10    THE PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION

The first step in data collection was to locate and gain permission to use the relevant sites (schools). In the early stages, the researcher should establish affinity, trust and correlative relations with the individuals and groups to be observed (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006). According to Creswell (2013), qualitative researchers gather data in the field at the site where participants experience the situation and point of issue or the problem under the study. A qualitative researcher is a key instrument as he/she collects the data by observing behaviour, examining documents or interviewing participants. A major distinguishing aspect of qualitative research is that it gives the researcher up close information gathered by actually talking to people in person and seeing them behaving and acting within their context. A homogeneous purposive sample is selected for having a shared characteristic or set of characteristics that draw attention to the study which may best enable the researcher to answer the research questions.

The researcher relies on his or her discernment when selecting members of a population to participate in the study. When using homogeneous sampling, data are drawn from a single or small population, and all data must remain constant for the complete period of the study. This form of sampling is used when the goal of the research is to understand and describe a particular group in depth (Elmusharaf, 2016).

To focus on the participants' perspectives, opinions and experiences with regards to phonological awareness teaching skills, numerous procedures of data collection were used throughout this research study, including observations, interviews, document analysis and field notes

### 1.10.1 Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of assembling and organising the data, which can be in the form of text as its transcripts, image data and information, as photographs for analysis, then narrowing the data down into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes and finally indicating the data in figures, tables or a discussion (Creswell, 2019).

Thematic analysis was used as it is a good research approach when trying to find out information about people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences or values from a set of qualitative data (Caulfield, 2019). Thematic analysis is often subjective and relies on the researcher's judgement, so one needs to reflect carefully on one's choices and interpretations. Inductive approaches were used thus allowing the data, details and specifics to determine the themes of the study.

### 1.10.2 Principles of quality research

(Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability)

Trustworthiness involves the degree to which a researcher can rely on and trust the research findings given (Shank, 2006). The study needs to be conducted ethically, thereby ensuring the trustworthiness of data compared to class observations and participants' interviews on teaching phonological awareness in the reception year to English first additional language learners.

Credibility refers to whether the participant's interpretations of settings or events represent the researcher's portrayal of the research report (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). To ensure the findings and interpretations of the data collected are accurate and trustworthy, a researcher should employ certain strategies. The researcher should use different data sources to enhance the authenticity of the study. Data analysis should take into account the contexts in which research is gathered and permit the participants to express their views verbally and gather data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2003). Then, the researcher triangulates the study.

## 1.11    OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

### CHAPTER ONE: Exploration of the research

This chapter gives a preface to the research that was conducted. The background information, rationale, significance and research questions supporting the study were introduced. Thereafter, a discussion on participants followed, as well as the research design and methodology, data collection methods, the process of data collection and definitions of important concepts, words and information.

### CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents the relevant body of work and existing literature, the history of reading development in a global world, the theoretical framework of phonological awareness skills, an explanation of EFAL learners and information regarding the understanding of PA in a Grade R classroom setting and a view of past historical studies that have been conducted. Then, the cornerstone and main focus of the chapter shifted to important teaching and learning skills of PA, PA and CAPS and how PA can be assessed.

### CHAPTER 3: Research design and methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology, research design, selection of participants and sites, sampling, data collection and the role of a qualitative researcher. A case study was used in two schools in Mpumalanga Province. One-on-one interviews, observations, document analysis and field notes were used to collect data. The ethical values and principles complete this chapter.

### CHAPTER 4: Data analysis and interpretation

In this chapter, data were evaluated, interpreted and analysed. Common themes and categories materialised from the data collected through interviews and observations of lessons taught. These multiple methods of data collection allowed for the triangulation of findings. Corresponding and conflicting views were presented.

**CHAPTER 5: Discussion of findings, recommendations and conclusion**

In the final chapter of the study, findings from the research were considered, presented and compared with the applicable literature present in this study. From this comparison, similarities and differences come to light which allow for the answering of the research questions. The chapter was concluded by indicating the implications, future studies and a conclusion to this particular study.

## 1.11    CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed an introduction to the research study. The next chapter will deliberate on existing literature available on phonological awareness skills of English First Additional Language learners. The collections of literature present both national and international information and views on the research topic.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW - PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS AS FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING OF READING

## 2.1    INTRODUCTION

The objective of the chapter is to share strategies gleaned from research on developing phonological awareness skills in laying a foundation for reading. Chapter one explains what is understood by reading, the rationale and significance of the study and the aim, objectives and definitions of the main concepts.

This literature review chapter draws on the historical and theoretical rationale for developing reading readiness from the global world, including reading literacy and development in South Africa on teaching phonological awareness skills. The discussion and exploration of the concept of reading from different perspectives will be used to foreground the literature review.

The literature review draws on theories by Charll and Ehri's models, as well as the Grain Size theory by Ziehler and Goswami (2005). The key point of this research is teaching phonological awareness skills to Grade R learners amongst English First Additional Language learners. The skill of being able to read lays the foundation for understanding and comprehending literacy and other subjects. Foundation Phase learners need to move towards reading for understanding and building on comprehension skills. These models and theories provide a basis for assessing development levels for predicting what learners can be expected to learn at each level/phase/stage and for differentiating the types of instruction and feedback. Reading includes being able to interpret, understand, decode, encode, sequence and comprehend written symbols and texts (Tracey & Mandel, 2006; Esmaeeli, 2012). However, none of the theories/stages/phases is rigid and can develop differently due to other factors such as social interactions and environments and not only cognitive development. Reading development commences during the early ages of a child's life and is continuous and gradual where foundational skills develop (Makaure, 2016).

The focal point of the chapter then switches to various explanations of research that plays a huge role and part in teaching and learning, especially regarding the younger age groups. An explanation of EFAL learners is given and information regarding the understanding of what phonological awareness skills is and how the skills can be taught in Grade R. Educators play a huge role in teaching and building on a learners' literacy skills at a very young age. I explored strategies shared in the CAPS document detailing the implementation of the language curriculum educators can use when teaching EFAL in a very fun and informal manner. Assessments are important, but one needs to focus on giving learners ample time to practise phonological awareness skills to form the foundation required.

## 2.2    WHAT IS READING?

Reading is all around us. Learners learn to read sign boards on the roads, signs on poles or pictures/logos on shop windows and labels in class. Reading is one of the most significant key skills that young children need to learn; it can be incidental through shared reading, guided reading, independent reading or for comprehension.  Reading is required in daily life, situations and interactions (Caddy, 2015). The beginning process of learning how to read is learning how to decode words accurately and efficiently; this then leads to the main purpose of reading which is comprehending and integrating the meaning of the text (Leppanen, Aumola, Niemi & Nurmi, 2008:548). Scott (2010:1) explains reading as a complex developmental cognitive process which requires learners to become involved and interact with print on numerous levels.

Learners go through many different stages in reading development such as reasoning memorisation skills and stages which transpire in a parallel manner with increasing cognitive ability. Reading development begins in the early stages of a child's life and is a continual and gradual process (Esmaeeli, 2012:10). The foundational skills such as oral language are a continuous and gradual process on which the development of reading partially relies. This starts to develop during infancy and reading development and is dependent on these skills that are attained (Pang, Muaka, Bernhardt & Kamil, 2003:8).

A learner needs to grasp and master concepts of the language in which reading takes place to gain competent control of the reading process (Makaure, 2016).

Reading is by all means a paramount part of a learner's education journey. It is one of the greatest achievements in the early years of a child as the skills acquired form the foundation for learning concepts and pave the way towards scholastic accomplishment (Paris, 2005:184). In South Africa, learners come from different backgrounds of socio-economic, language, racial and ability groups (DBE, 2011). Although many learners use their right to education (RSA, 1996a), most of the learners in South Africa attend schools where they learn a language other than their home language. Learners can face challenges if they are second language learners, as they may have a lack of exposure. Educators may be inexperienced, and there may not be an emphasis on English cultural barriers to learning. However, a good educator can develop strategies and methods to pursue and manage these challenges. Educators are central to developing adequate English language and literacy proficiency in learners. Print-rich classrooms and quality instruction in both the mechanics of decoding like systematic phonics and explicit vocabulary instruction are critical in overcoming inequalities that already exist when learners enter school (Schaefer & Kotze, 2019). Reading is an essential skill as people use language every day in all associations with others. It is a combination of automatic and authentic decoding which allows a person to formulate a conceptual understanding of what is being read.

The starting point of learning to read begins with learners being able to decipher words correctly and accurately, which leads to the fundamental aim of reading and comprehension regarding the meaning of the text (Leppanen, Aunola, Niemi & Nurmi, 2008:548). According to Georgiouu (2009:76), decoding forms part of being able to read a text using rules that govern how words are combined to speak and write sentences, and lingual semantic comprehension is the ability to interpret and formulate an understanding of spoken words and sentences.

Lerner (2006:11) argued that for the novice reader, word recognition and reading comprehension are vital, while in contrast, for older more experienced readers, underlying or indirect reading comprehension becomes more important.

The Department of Education (2011b) includes the five main components of reading in the curriculum for reading in the early years. These components are phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency.

The five main components need to be taught precisely and practised daily. There exists a plethora of research conducted and mentioned in the National Reading Panel (2000) that supports the five components of reading, as well as in research completed by Mehta, Foorman, Branum-Martin and Taylor (2005). They are part of a structured, balanced approach to reading where aspects from the Whole Language (Word) approach and the Phonic approach are combined to produce the best possible reading results (Snow & Juel, 2005). The Language in Education Policy (Lemmer, 2010) suggests that learners in the earlier grades (Grade 1-3) should be taught in their home language, but this is not implemented for the benefit of many South African learners. In South Africa, those who attend schools where the Language of Learning and Teaching is not their home language are referred to as EFAL learners.

EFAL learners may often struggle to understand their teachers due to their lack of English vocabulary development; they may not often hear the correct pronunciation in the environment in which they live, which makes learning to read more challenging. Being able to spell the words correctly is also challenging, especially in English. It is difficult for young learners to master a new language while also having to learn to read in the language. Learning to read becomes even more complicated when the schools make use of foreign readers with words, concepts or stories that do not relate to them. These readers include pictures and contexts that are unfamiliar to EFAL learners, thus making the language even more incomprehensible (Hugo, 2011). Good readers should include content that learners know and see or experience daily, for example, home life like washing clothes, wild animals that we have in South Africa, and friends and homes that resemble South Africa. If learners can relate to what they see and hear or read, they will certainly have more interest or curiosity in reading. Classroom surroundings and factors differ and, consequently so should reading material (Caddy, 2015). Educators should plan and aim to make reading a happy time for learners. Children who have gratification when

they learn to read will want to read more. As an educator myself, I model a love for reading so that the learners would want to read more and be like me.

To prevent reading difficulties, every learner should be exposed to high-quality reading instruction in their early stages of development and be assisted in the acquisition of all reading skills within the class environment. According to Stahl and Mokenna (2006), the more developed the child's spoken vocabulary, the more knowledge the child will bring to his or her reading experience. Reading theories and models assist when one needs to explain and illustrate the details of how reading can be taught and presented to a learner (Nkosi, 2016).

## 2.3    HISTORY OF READING DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL WORLD

Pneuman (2009) describes reading as a methodical and structured process, suggesting that reading development moves according to a hierarchy of skills. Reading development, word recognition skills, fluency, phonological processing, drawing on cognitive and linguistic domains, coding, encoding and comprehension are all important to the overall development of reading for learners. Learners are required to interact with print on many levels.

Michael Kamil's (2003) Report on Reading for the 21$^{st}$ century reviews and analyses existing research on effective literacy instruction and its impact on successful literacy programmes for students in grades 4-7. National and international tests have proven that far too many of America's children are reading at low levels (Kamil, 2003). The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) examinations showed that 25% of eighth grade learners and 26 % of 12$^{th}$ grade learners were reading at below basic levels in 2002 (Kamil, 2003), International comparisons of reading ability and performance placed American Grade 11 learners remarkably close to the bottom, behind students from the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil and other developing nations. A report titled ''The Adolescent Literacy Crisis'' reflects that more research on this subject is required, however, researchers know that reading comprehension and effective methods of teaching for all ages have assisted learners to become better readers. Kamil (2003) mentions that we do know that skills in fluency and decoding lead to better reading

comprehension; motivation and engagement are critical elements; English-language learners face additional challenges when learning to read and write in English, and that professional development for a teacher has a positive effect on student reading achievements.

## 2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS AS FOUNDATION FOR FORMAL READING

The studies by Chall (1967, 1983) and Ehri (2005, 2011) and the models of reading provide the basis for understanding reading and how reading development takes place. Chall's model of reading development is based on research approaches gleaned from the American context (Chall, 1967). Chall (1983) was among the first researchers to delve into complex and widely debated ideas on how children learn to read. The stage models are as follows:

### 2.4.1 Chall outlines hierarchical stages

#### 2.4.1.1 Pre-reading (6 months to 6 years)

Children from 6 months of age to around the pre-school/reception year age are considered to be in the pre-reading stage. During these years, children are classified as pretend and make-believe readers (Chall, 1983) during which they obtain and learn knowledge of print like naming letters of the alphabet. As they mature, children realise that words have separate parts and are broken into syllables like d-o-g but can be put together into whole words (dog). Certain words also rhyme like dog and log. At this stage, children learn how to use picture books properly, turn pages without tearing them, point to words and listen to stories read to them by adults. This stage provides an opportunity for children to develop, build and acquire the background knowledge and strategies (Chall, 1983), which eventually leads to laying the basis and foundation for reading development as they grow.

### 2.4.1.2  Initial reading stage (6 to 7 years)

Stage 1, the initial reading stage (6 years to 7 years) from grades 1-2 is the stage when children learn to identify the letters of the alphabet and link and connect letters in print (graphemes) to their sounds (phonemes) (Chall, 1983:1). The children of this age (6-7 years) depend on direct instruction to develop decoding skills and can potentially be able to read at least 600 words. Depending on the surroundings and environment, children can enter this initial stage just before the age of 6 depending on their environment.  If children are surrounded and exposed to letters and sounds often, they may be able to develop reading skills quicker, for example, theme table items that are labelled and a parent reading to their child every day. Once children develop stages 0 and 1, they will become more fluent in gaining new information and developing new vocabulary.

### 2.4.1.3  Confirmation and fluency stage (7 years to 8 years)

This stage occurs in grades 2 – 3. The focus is not to gain new information. The focus is to build on fundamental decoding skills grasped and learnt in the initial reading stage. Children start to build new vocabulary and read basic texts more fluently by practising daily, for example, daily reading homework and spelling homework. Both stages above constitute the ''learning to read stage" by focusing on understanding and mastering decoding skills and the recognition of words. At the end of this stage, children may recognise words automatically; words that have more than three letters long and sight vocabulary, for example, have, the, had, and understand the meaning in reading familiar stories.

### 2.4.1.4  Reading for learning the new stage (9 years to 13 years)

At this stage, learners progress from learning how to read and decode words to reading in order to learn, for example, learning the subject knowledge in History. The stage occurs between the ages of 9-13 years (Grades 4 – 8), and it contains two phases. Phase A includes the learners in Grades 4 to 6. Phase B includes learners in Grades 7  and 8. These age groups are based on research in American school contexts and could therefore vary in South African contexts (Makaure, 2016).

At this stage, children use their acquired reading skill abilities to enhance learning. Children rely less on direct instructions and rather read to gain information and new ideas (Chall, 1983). When they read texts like textbooks, stories and newspapers, they acquire new knowledge and syntax and react to the text through discussions by answering questions and writing as well. At first, the children have limited vocabulary, but as they progress towards Phase B, they begin to question different points of view and perspectives, and they analyse what they read in their day-to-day subjects like Mathematics, English and Creative Arts. They would also have to apply their knowledge more as they move towards Grades 7 and 8 reading for learning and future development (Canine, Silbert, Kameenui & Tarver, 2004).

Stage five (Multiple viewpoints learners from 14 – 18 years) and Stage six, Construction and Reconstruction stage (over 18 years) develop as learners mature. They can make their decisions on the content they read. These two stages are, however, irrelevant to this study.

In the pre-reading stage and initial stage, phonological awareness skills and concepts can be or are developed. These stages are imperative to my study, as it is in these stages that learners ''pretend'' to read and also hear words and sounds, with the opportunity to blend, segment, manipulate and develop PA skills. It is at this stage that parents and educators can expose the learners and teach them the skills required to move forward and develop their understanding of the English language. It is here that they develop the ''Staircase to success'', as learners can activate their prior knowledge and cognitive abilities for reading. The strongest predictors of learners being reading-ready should include interest and motivation to read, oral language and narrative skills, book and print awareness, phonemic awareness and letter knowledge.

### 2.4.2 Ehri's Model

Ehri's (2005) model of phases of learning word recognition was developed by Linnea Ehri, a professor of educational psychology in New York. The four phases of learning to read, according to Ehri, are as follows:

### 2.4.2.1 Phase 1: Pre-alphabetic Phase

Phase one takes place in children of pre-school age when they have very little knowledge and understanding of the alphabet and what it entails regarding sounds and letters. Children learn how to read using visual and contextual memorising cues (Ehri, 2011). Cues such as names of friends, restaurants, shops, labels or signs guide them. They are guided by the shape or colour of a label/picture, not the actual letter shape (Esmaeeli, 2012). They learn to recognise the names of shops or banks similarly; once they make an association with the name and colours, they can incidentally read them. Being able to link sound-letter connections and relationships to read words is not yet developed; children in this phase are still considered illiterate (Ehri, 2005). They lack knowledge of the alphabet.

### 2.4.2.2 Phase 2: Partial Alphabetic Phase

During this phase, children's knowledge and awareness of the alphabet are not fully developed. Learners make connections and read by linking only some letters and sounds in words. Children are unable to segment a word into all its integrant phonemes in this phase, for example, they can connect the first and final letter sounds in words. An example *''s'' and ''g''* to read *snug,* to help them to remember, but the middle letters and positions are not very relevant in this phase. Children progress from "visual cue reading" to "phonetic cue reading". The children begin to use phonic cues but still rely on visual cues partly, for example, a picture of a cat, with the word cat underneath it. In this phase, learners still lack automatic decoding skills.

### 2.4.2.3 Phase 3: Full Alphabetic Phase

In phase 3, children progress with their ability to decode word skills. They have a more detailed understanding of knowledge regarding letter-sound relationships in spelling rules and understandings. For example, children can recognise that the five letters *(c, r, a, s, and h)* in the word *crash* correspond to four phonemes *(c-r-a-sh)* and *(q, u, e, e and n)* in the word *queen* correspond to three phonemes *(qu – ee- n).* In this phase, they are also able to determine when letters do not correspond to any phonemes, for example, *''k'' in*

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*knight* (Esmaeeli, 2012). Children or readers can recall the correct spellings of words in the full alphabetic phase.

### 2.4.2.4 Phase 4: Consolidation Phase

At this final stage, letter-sound relations become integrated into bigger units. Children develop decoding strategies and recognise letter patterns across a variety of words, including morphemes, syllables and units such as onset and rime. These strategies become part of the learners' knowledge of spelling. Having such knowledge is beneficial for the recollection of how to read words such as understandin*g (un-der-stand-ing)* which is multisyllabic. Fewer correlations are required to memorise the word. In this phase, readers can also recognise words that share letter patterns like *hand, sand, band,* and *land.*

This phase marks the turning point in the growth and process of building sight word reading, being able to recognise a word by sight without too much effort. This ensures instinctive word recognition and therefore typically assists with reading fluency, accuracy and comprehension (Makaure, 2016).

Ehri's (1998) implications of her theory of phases of reading development for teachers are that beginners learn letters and use the skills to relate to speech sounds; they develop an awareness of phonemes, phoneme-grapheme connections, including vowels; children practise words by breaking them into sounds, and they learn to spell and make word lists. Educators can assist learners to expand morphemes, affixes and families of related words.

This model as well as Chall's stages note and give an understanding that developing reading skills is part of a process and learners move forward and develop, acquiring lower to higher reading skills and abilities. Ehri's stages denote an interactive approach that reflects a bottom-up and a top-down approach to reading (2009). Ehri's stages require prior knowledge to influence reading development such as alphabetic knowledge mentioned in the explanation of the stages. Educators in a Grade R class should assist learners to develop the knowledge to acquire the fundamental phonological awareness skills and provide the learners with opportunities to make connections, master the skills

and move forward into the Foundation Phase. This, therefore, is relevant to my study, as I focus on how educators teach EFAL learners in preparation for mastery of skills in an interactive environment. Phonological awareness tasks in the study should reflect educators' views, teaching techniques and resources with the main focus being to provide EFAL learners with the opportunity to grow and develop their phonological awareness skills.

### 2.4.3   Psycholinguistic Grain Size Theory (PGST)

The Psycholinguistic Grain Size Theory (PGST) is a model of reading development to understand steps in reading acquisition. This theory states that the grain size or size of the phonological and orthography unit (norms of spelling, word breaks) that must be learnt and used to read, has an impact on reading development. This theory requires that children learn to optimally map phonological units of a given language to the symbol system of the specific language (Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). The PGST requires that children optimally map phonological units of a language, and learners have to solve three problems that may transpire when learning to read specifically, availability, consistency and granularity of grapheme-to-phoneme mappings. The concept of the availability problem takes into consideration that learners do not have equal access to phonological units before reading. Syllables (early developing grain size) are more accessible than onsets and rhyme and in turn more accessible than phonemes (Stanovich, Cunningham & Cramer, 1984). The later developing grain size is 'phonemes' as they may be easily accessible at first and then as reading is acquired, the development improves.

Consistency reflects that there are linguistic differences in orthographic transparency. In languages, some mappings between letters and sounds correlate consistently to one phoneme.  However, in other languages, mappings are opaque. Letters or clusters of letters can be pronounced more than one way, for example, 'o' in words 'do' and 'so'. Granularity considers the 'absolute number of mappings' that need to be learnt (Goswami, 2010:36). To read highly consistent languages, the learner must acquire only a limited number of grapheme-phoneme mappings. However, as in less consistent languages, a larger number of sound-symbol mappings or ''rules'' must be acquired. According to

Ziegler and Goswami (2006), the phonological grain size used by the learners' reading depends on the consistency with which that phonology is represented in the orthography. If languages have graphemes and phonemes that are close to one-to-one and are easier to pronounce, the children can rely on small grain sizes such as phonemes. Deep orthographies are difficult to pronounce based on how they are written, as there is more of an inconsistency between the phoneme-grapheme correspondences. Therefore, the ease with which children can gain access to phonological units used in reading and the consistency of speech-to-print mappings will certainly impact how quickly they learn to read their native language (Seymour, Aro & Erskine, 2003).

When children need to read in English, including whole recognition of words such as 'once'', ''put'' and ''does'', sounding out of these words does not reflect the actual word. These words are mostly memorised by people (Murray, 2018). Children can use rhyme to identify word analogy strategies like light, night and grapheme-phoneme recording strategies such as sat and sip. It is noted in studies that reading practitioners have various opinions and have debated how and when more irregular words should be taught; they feel that it depends on the actual phonics patterns that learners have been introduced to and have learnt (Bradfield, 2017; Farrel, Osenga & Hunter, 2013). It is possible that how children solve problems of accessibility and consistency and optimal grain size used to read their native languages would play an impact on reading strategies across other languages that they learn.

### 2.4.4   Implications of the three models of reading development to this study

Both Chall's (1967;1983) and Ehri's (2005; 2011) models of reading develop thoughts and understandings of the process in which children advance from lower to higher order skills in acquiring reading development abilities using context, decoding through the use of letter-sound associations or spelling patterns, by analogy and by sight. According to Siok and Fletcher (2001), models and stages such as these two hold the view that all children progress (Chall, 1967;1983) or phases (Ehri, 2005, 2011) in a similar process when learning to read, regardless of their language (Makaure, 2016). The process and progress at each stage is reliant upon adequate development at the prior stages (Canine,

Silbert, Kameenui & Tarver, 2004). Such models have useful implications for teachers in that they can monitor and structure the progress of developing readers but can also have important ramifications for any theory of reading development. Ehri's model encourages interactive approaches to word reading. Reading processes can progress from the acquisition of small units to larger units, and prior contextual knowledge also has an impact on reading development. Ehri's model maintains that children are not confined to a stringent structure in reading development but can link and interconnect concepts from various means of knowledge in each phase.

When looking at Psycholinguistic Grain Size Theory, studies have shown that while orthographies are not ever entirely superficial, one can expect or believe that developing the skill of reading in the English language may be more demanding than learning to read in a language with a more consistent orthography (Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). Many phonological development models may assume that readers have to develop sensitivity to larger units before smaller units, but PGST assumes that sensitivity to smaller grain sizes (like phonemes) can develop in the early stages or phases, depending on the phonological syntagmatic complexity of the language and the consistency of orthography (Anthony, Lonigan, Driscoll, Phillips & Burgess, 2003; Anthony & Francis, 2005). Therefore, language relations between phonological awareness and reading are expected in relation to the grain size of the language.

Knowledge of the characteristics of each phase or theory can provide educators with a basis on which they can evaluate and teach their learners, especially regarding their understanding of the language they are learning in. Educators can first identify what the learners know and can then design lessons that are beneficial to each child's strengths and needs, building on skills they learnt when learning their home language. Educators can prepare lessons, including letter-sound awareness, rhyming and identification of syllables and building on increasing fluency, especially within the reception year and Foundation Phase. For progress to continue, educators should provide opportunities for learners to develop and grow, building on each learning phase or stage. If an educator attempts to teach letter-sound decoding to learners who lack phonemic awareness or knowledge of all letter shapes and sounds, it will most probably lead to slow and

incomplete learning. Learners that have difficulty learning to read need instruction that is thorough in covering all aspects of reading. Clues about growth can be promoted at each phase of development found in the cognitive and instructional descriptions in the two models. With practice, educators can acquire a more refined sense of each learner and how far they have progressed in their speaking, writing and reading capabilities, working towards laying the foundation for future reading skills. The eventual goal for educators should be for their students to form connections between written text and pronunciation and make meaning of what they read.

## 2.5    GRADE R LANGUAGE LEARNING

Phonological skills and the development of literacy skills in Grade R can be viewed as important in determining the stage of reading ability in a learner's mother tongue language, as well as English first additional language. While the teaching of language in Grade R is more play-based learning with directives on how to incorporate the curriculum, it allows opportunities for language learning. The introduction of English as early as possible in South African schools should be very beneficial, encouraging pronunciation of words, hearing the sounds and understanding the meaning of words at an early level. The ability to identify sounds and rhyming words and opportunities to interpret pictures, learn to hold a book correctly and engage with daily text is a wonderful way to encourage learners to read. Learning literacy and vocabulary can also be encouraged during art lessons and morning rings, music and outside on the playground as it does not only hold value in a classroom setting.

Educators can take advantage of phonological awareness skills and use them as a mode of teaching addressing semantic (meaning) and syntactic aspects and decoding words into phonemes (small sound units), syllables (segments of speech), onsets (initial sound of word) and rimes (unit following onset). Therefore, based on the findings of Lessing and de Witt (2005:242-257), an appropriate programme for early literacy and development should be developed and implemented into Grade R. Well-designed programmes should be designed to address shortcomings of learners and prevent early literacy failure and future reading programmes. Educators need to motivate learners to study and gain

knowledge of English Language skills on a home language level, as one of the main aims for teaching English first language learners in the Foundation Phase is to be able to use English as a means of instruction from Grade 4 (the first year of Intermediate Phase).

## 2.6    WHO ARE ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS (EFAL)?

Phatudi (2014:244) defines a First additional language as, "The language that is learnt formally at school in addition to learners mother tongue language". English first additional language learners can be described as learners who speak a different home language but are taught in English as the Language of Learning and Teaching at the school they attend. The language of learning and the language they are taught in, including assessments, happens in English (DBE, 2010:3). English is the most predominant language of learning in South Africa, as well as across the world. The opinion of many parents is that English is a universal language. It is also noted that English is mostly spoken within working environments within tertiary institutions and across the world, including economic growth (Caddy, 2015).

The South African Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2017) documented that the home language of only 7% of scholars in schools was English. However, 65% of learners were taught in the English language (DBE, 2010:14). The EFAL learners within this research study are not exposed to English at home continuously. Their main exposure to hearing the English language is at the schools during teaching time (Phatudi & Motilal, 2014:21). The majority of South African learners come from an African home setting and environment where English is either their second or third language. Hugo and Horn (2013:64) concur that most EFAL learners are not fully experienced and competent in conversing in English, as well as understanding what is written or said in order to achieve the required grade standards within the Foundation Phase classrooms (Caddy, 2015).

## 2.7    UNDERSTANDING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics terms are broadly used in the literature on early reading. These terms are often used synonymously which can cause uncertainty. DBE (2012:133) defines phonological awareness as the ability to focus

on the sounds of a language as distinct from its meaning. Phonemic awareness is the ability to distinguish between the separate sounds of the language. Phonics is the relationship between the sounds of a language and their spelling. Phonics instructions usually occur in the early stages of reading in English, as learners are instructed on how sounds and letters correlate with one another, and they then use this knowledge to read, spell and communicate (Tindall, 2010).

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about and work with individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken form. Being able to manipulate sounds and employ them to sound out words correctly is phonemic awareness. This is achieved when learners absorb the levels of phonemic cognition being phoneme segmentation, phoneme blending and splitting, phoneme rhyming and alliteration, phoneme comparing and contrasting and phoneme manipulation, which will then lead to building an advanced awareness of phonemic awareness. Learners can find ways to create new words (Singh, 2020). Phonological awareness takes into account the learner's ability to recognise how sound units of different sizes – phonemes, syllables, rhyming and words – function in spoken language (Gillon, 2004). Building an understanding of phonemic awareness means learning to read (Shaywitz, 2003). It is the total of recognising and blending phonemes to build words, further developing reading skills. The presence of this awareness in reading beginners is one of the parameters to assess learning difficulties in children if there are any (Shaywitz, 2003).

Phonological awareness represents an umbrella term that encompasses conceptual skills such as the ability to read and distinguish words from sentences, the ability to count the syllables in a word, how to recognise rhyming words and how to determine the onset and rhyme of a word in languages in the case of English (Konza, 2011). Phonemic awareness as a component of phonological awareness includes phoneme matching, isolation, blending, segmentation and manipulation.

## 2.8    RELATED STUDIES ON TEACHING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS

The significance of phonological awareness has been studied and proven to be important for accomplished and skilful reading by leading researchers, as stated in the works of Justin (2001). It is now widely accepted that the primary cause of reading disability for most children lies in phonological processing inefficiencies that interfere with the development of phonological awareness skills, such as phoneme segmentation, verbal memory and name retrieval (O'Shaughnessy & Swanson, 2000:1).

Sonja Brink (2016) states that "Phonological awareness has been found to correspond strongly with a child's future reading abilities as well as their spelling and writing skills''. There seems to be a growing agreement within the written works that when children do not have compelling, strong phonological awareness skills, they generally become readers with poor ability (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

Snelgar (2015) mentions the findings that advocate that the components of the first language are absorbed when a child is still in utero, as the starting point for the development of language and literacy (LLP) profiles. He states that little newborn babies who cry already bear the mark of the language their parents speak (Science Daily, 2009). This early exposure and hearing of rich language use promotes the building of vocabulary, which in turn, builds the foundation for later literacy acquisition (Fernald & Weisleder, 2011:3). Rich language and literacy skill ability helps learners to be more successful and encourages learners to participate in the school curriculum as in the Grades R and 1 class in the Foundation Phase. He also states that the profoundness, extent and accuracy of meaning in a young child's vocabulary development and building enhances the development of phonological development and lexical-semantic acquisition and forms an important foundation for literacy acquisition (Kaiser, Roberts & McLeod, 2011:154).

Snelgar (2015) also mentions the National Early Literacy Panel of 2008 which describes that conventional reading and writing skills developed at younger ages (birth – 5) have a very consistent or clear relationship with later literacy skills. Six variables represent early

literacy development. Two of the variables are relevant to include in this study as they relate to the research; they are phonological awareness and phonological memory. The other four variables are the alphabet, rapid automatic naming of letters or digits, rapid automatic naming of objects or colours and writing own name and letter names thereof. As stated by Kaiser et al. (2011:154), these are fundamental to the development of viable language and literacy profiles. Preston, Frost, Einer Mencle, Fulbright, Landi, Grigirenco, Jacobsen and Pugh (2010:2185) further the viewpoints by noting that "early language development sets the stage for the duration of proficiency in language and literacy skill abilities".

According to Troia (2004), three evident abilities play a conspicuous role in the acquisition of literacy and fundamentally impact early literacy instruction. Three processing skills were recognised by Wagner and Torgeson (1987), specifically phonological awareness, phonological memory and the retrieval of phonological representations. However, phonological awareness is the key skill which mostly influences literacy (Anthony & Francis, 2005). Learners with setbacks and hindrances in phonological processing find it difficult to execute various phonological awareness tasks because they struggle to store a sequence of sounds in their short-term memory (Carrol & Snowling, 2003).

Many past years' of study and research content shared, does reflect that phonological awareness skills and early literacy is beneficial (Brink, 2016). PA, including phonemic awareness, is firmly connected to a child's ability to learn to read effectively (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

The National Reading Panel (2000) collated studies on a meta-analysis of 52 controlled experimental studies. The panel professes that phonological awareness stands in a causal relationship to reading and spelling ability, and explicit instructions have a beneficial effect on the reading ability of normally developing children, as well as those at risk of experiencing reading difficulties.

## 2.9    TEACHING AND LEARNING: PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Language learning is important; learners develop formal knowledge of the language and usually learn at school which is a formal environment where rules are given and taught

by educators (Makoe, 2014). Makoe (2014) states that "meaningful interrelationships and understanding will lead to the acquisition of language". In an EFAL classroom environment, teachers should understand and assess what level of language has been acquired by the learners. The teachers should then attempt to continuously improve learners' language acquisition (Payne, 2001:421).

Teacher training, practices and formal development of the educators' skills are of concern (Caddy, 2015). Klapwijk (2012:201) established that many educators in EFAL learning classrooms have little knowledge of second language teaching. Constant, continued support of educators and promotion of development and training in language teaching is important to create an environment conducive to EFAL learning.

Language acts are the basic communication channels for conveying knowledge and learning from the educator to the learner (Nel & Muller, 2010:646). The educator-learner relationship needs an understanding of both parties to promote successful learning.

In South African schools, CAPS is currently used as a guideline for teaching and learning. This document prescribes certain skills which need to be taught in the respective grades. The skills include listening and speaking, reading and phonics and writing and handwriting. These skills mentioned are all integrated as components to ensure a well-balanced reading programme (DBE, 2011:18). In this study, both schools where I conducted my research are public schools that follow the CAPS document.

Direct approaches to teaching phonological awareness are teaching strategies and styles, input, information, regulation and controlled practice designed to show and model the specific language. Higher thinking levels are encouraged as well, including structured discussions, application and brainstorming. Caddy (2015) mentions a programme, Jolly phonics, which has a positive influence on English language learners' phonological awareness and their alphabetic knowledge. Jolly phonics, the use of Big books, THRASS, Letterland, Time2Read and Early Reading programmes promote the teaching of phonological awareness.

For a 4-year-old learners' activities, they should include rhyming activities in Grades R and 1. Instruction includes blending and segmenting words into onset and rhyme, which

advances to blending, segmenting and deleting phonemes. Instruction can involve puppets talking slowly, modelling word segmenting, bending words into compound words and segmenting a compound word into two words. Props with cards or pictures are used to make abstract sounds more concrete. Other activities that can help an educator teach phonological awareness skills are guess-the-word games, segmentation activities such as short poems, learners clapping hands with each word, segment names as in Ra-chel, segment short words, for example, s-u-n, change a name game like William to lliam where learners substitute beginning sounds in their names with new sounds (Reading Rockets Phonics) is a very important area of every child's learning process. In the South African CAPS curriculum, phonics teaching is important and is tied to reading. The teaching of phonics is recommended as it is part of the word recognition area of reading. The APS curriculum gives teachers and schools the freedom to choose their phonics programme. The programmes, however, must support explicit and systematic teaching throughout the school. Phonics teachings in Grade R are not formally compulsory, however, several milestones should be met, including the ability to identify words that rhyme in different well-known rhymes and songs, the ability to realise that words are made up of sounds or phonemes, identify words from an oral sentence, divide words into more than one syllable and recognise vowels and consonants orally and visually, usually at the beginning of a word (Twinkl, 2022).

Instruction in phonological awareness can be fun, engaging and age-appropriate but the picture is not as simple as it seems. When educators introduce EFAL in Grades R and 1, they require simple teaching methods to convey the ''additional language'' to the young learners. In schools where children will use their additional language, English, as the LoLT from Grade 4, a substantial amount of time must be devoted to learning English in the Foundation Phase (NCS, 2011).

## 2.10   PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND CAPS

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement is a revision of the current National Curriculum Statement (NCS). The time allocation for languages came into effect in 2012.

For language in the Foundation Phase, time is determined by the language context of the schools. Schools can choose to give relatively more or less time to the home language and first additional languages depending on the needs of their learners.

The Grade R pedagogy of language of teaching and learning is based on integration and play-based learning. Social, emotional and other forms of development such as fine and gross motor activities should present naturally in the routines and activities of programmes in Grade R daily schedules (DBE, 2012). Teachers should mediate incidental learning that promotes emergent literacy thus giving moments to educators to ask questions and assist the learners to learn further with success. Educator-guided activities for literacy learning should be offered during the morning language ring for example, theme discussions, language ring, weather updates, telling 'news', show and tell, dramatisation, rhymes, music, tapes and stories. According to the NCS Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement regarding the Foundation Phase Grades 1 -3, EFAL educators should expose the learners to a great deal of oral language in the form of stories and classroom activities. Educators are encouraged to choose stories that have a repetitive structure, which allows for vocabulary and grammar to be developed, keeping language very simple, for example, The Three Little Pigs.  Using pictures and gestures assist learners. Listening to stories read by educators, and giving learners simple instructions to follow physical and action rhymes are also beneficial. Activities in Grade R should be organised around themes that lend themselves to teaching an additional language. Teachers should look for themes that are familiar to learners and their lifestyles which are already taught to them in the home language which can afford many opportunities for teaching in context. In this way, it makes it possible to constantly practise vocabulary and language structures in meaningful contexts. The DBE (2011) mentions that the literacy concepts of reading and writing (home language) also contribute to the learner's language development in English. Reading gives learners more exposure, opening them to the learning experiences for their additional language as well. According to research, children's vocabulary development is heavily dependent on the amount of reading they do (DBE, 2011).

Certain words are mentioned in the CAPS document (2011) plus relevant activities to phonological awareness such as blends, blending, decoding, onset, phoneme, rhyme and rime. The definitions used in CAPS were used to find out the knowledge and understanding of these concepts among participants in the study.

Phonological and phonemic awareness skills included in the Grade R daily programme according to CAPS, which may assist with phonological awareness are listed below. These activities can be introduced during routines and rings (DBE, 2011). Listening and speaking and reading and writing are key to learning and understanding of a language. Learners should be exposed to environmental print from their earliest years. Signage and packaging/advertising can be used as beginning exposure (early years) for children's emergent literacy like PEP and STOP signs and name brands like Nike. Educators can label items in the classroom which support incidental reading (DBE, 2011). The introduction of shared reading in Grade R and continuation into the Foundation Phase is beneficial. Asking and answering questions should be encouraged which promotes the involvement of learners. Learning phonetics, the smallest units of sound is the first stage of learning to decode written forms of language orally, learning to separate and identify the different sounds of the language (phonemic awareness) where the learner can relate sounds to the letters and then blend letters to form words (bl, sh, ch – blue, shop, chop).

Learners should understand the words and encounter them often in print so that they recognise the words automatically.The learner then needs to recognise words in sentences for reading fluency (DBE 2011). As they understand concepts of print and sound-spelling relationships, they develop the ability to decode words. What they need in their class is to practise the application of knowledge to learning to decode texts in English. Children also need to be taught where and when sound-spelling relationships are different from their home and other additional languages. The example in the CAPS document (2011) is the 'th' sound; in English, it can represent two different sounds that are different from the sound which 'th' represents in African languages, for example, thank, that and the. The learners need to develop a strong oral foundation. Daily phonics activities should be given throughout the Foundation Phase. Sound activities can include distinguishing aurally between different sounds starting with the learners' names.

Identification of sounds that do not belong in the sequence and identification of two sounds that are the same or different can be introduced in Grade R. Learners need to be able to identify that an oral sentence is made up of words; clapping each word or syllable is a good technique and the saying of rhymes and singing of songs. Theme discussions and theme posters should be used which will introduce learners to speaking more using the language of learning. When looking at the shapes of letters and words, children can also begin to identify and recall words and see words. As they develop the ability to write, they can group words and contribute to sentences, and as they speak more, they can describe pictures and characters and retell stories in their words. If children are exposed to such activities, it would definitely contribute to the children's learning ability when it comes to the language they are taught and have to read (DBE, 2011).

DBE (2012) suggests that contact time for daily phonemic awareness/phonic activities should be 15 minutes a day. The concepts above are suggested ideas, teaching ways, resources and a guide to assist South African teachers to teach phonological awareness. The guidelines provided in CAPS on teaching phonological awareness guided my research to determine the extent they are used in class and whether teachers value them or benefit from them.

## 2.11   ASSESSMENT OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

For an effective assessment regarding early reading skills, teachers need to have a well-grounded curriculum knowledge skill that needs to be taught, as indicated by research, to be beneficial for phonological awareness and those which affect early reading acquisition (Brink, 2016; Hintze, Ryan & Stoner, 2003).

Van den Heuvel (2005) gives guidance to educators to use when assessing learners' phonological awareness skills. The educator must identify learners that have poor skills, those that need simple revision, learners needing assistance and those that are capable with regards to

Van den Heuvel (2005) also suggests that teachers implement an assessment programme intended to accurately determine early literacy skills.

Assessment design plans would assist educators to structure their instructional practices and help improve learners' development of phonological awareness and early reading skills (Hintze, Ryan & Stoner, 2003).

Assessments in a Grade R classroom (DBE, 2012) should be informal, and children should not be subjected to a 'test' situation. For this reason, assessment activities have not been included in the Grade R CAPS. Each activity used for assessment should be carefully planned so that it incorporates a range of skills. In Grade R, most of the assessments take place through observation, with the educator recording the results of the assessment using a checklist. As the Grade R year progresses, a holistic picture of each learner's capabilities is completed and recorded with the challenges and strengths achieved. This allows the challenges to be addressed and strengths to be maximised.

The teaching of phonological awareness in SA classes is for emergent literacy in the Grade R classes. Assessment will enable educators to pinpoint their Grade R learners' level of phonological awareness skills. It will be beneficial for educators to have an understanding of the children's ability to perform 'segmenting' to create a word, a child's ability to recognise words that rhyme, a child's ability to blend sounds to say a word and decode a word into individual phonemes (sounds) and their understanding of onset-rime in order to pronounce it correctly. Not only will assessment help keep track of learners' development but it will assure that any learner who needs extra support with PA can get the extra attention they need. Regarding English first additional language, educators can take the necessary steps to cater for their learners' individual needs. After teaching the PA skills, educators need to have a basic understanding of how to assist, clarify, assess and help learners reach their full potential as they move into the Foundation Phase Grades 1 – 3. Any child that displays signs of a phonological disorder will need support, and parents and educators can take the necessary steps to cater to their individual needs.

## 2.12    CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the interrelation between phonological awareness and future reading skills. The inclusion of activities, models, interactions, processes, previous studies and research obtained from my interviews, observations, document analysis and fieldnotes all form part of the essential part of the research topic. The next chapter will deliberate on research design and methodology.

# CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## 3.1    INTRODUCTION

This chapter defines and outlines the research design and methodology employed in the study. A qualitative research approach with an interpretivist and constructivist paradigm was key to this study whilst utilising interviews, observation, document analysis and fieldnotes in order to collect data.

This study was aimed at answering the following research questions:

**The Primary Research question is:**

1.    How do educators teach phonological awareness to English First Additional Language learners in Grade R?

**The Secondary Research questions are:**

1.    What are the educators' understandings of phonological awareness?
2.    Which resources are used to teach phonological awareness skills?
3.    Which challenges are experienced when teaching phonological awareness skills?
4.    Which models or guidelines of teaching phonological awareness are used in the teaching of English First Additional Language to Grade R learners?
5.    Which documents or guides do educators use in teaching phonological awareness skills?

**The research objectives of the study are to:**

1.    Establish the educators' understanding of phonological awareness skills.
2.    Explore which resources are used when teaching phonological awareness skills.
3.    To discuss the challenges the participants' experience when teaching phonological awareness skills.
4.    To establish the models or guidelines educators use to teach phonological awareness skills.

5.      To establish the documents that guide educators when teaching phonological awareness skills.

The following is the research plan and steps to guide the unfolding of the study.

**Table 3.1: Summary of the Research Strategy**

| RESEARCH DESIGN – Case Study | |
|---|---|
| Research Paradigm | Constructivism and Interpretivism |
| Research Methodology | Qualitative Research |
| **RESEARCH APPROACH** | |
| Qualititative Approach | |
| **SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS** | |
| Purposive sampling | |
| **CONTEXT OF THE STUDY** | |
| Qualitative Research using Case study Methods | |
| Teaching phonological awareness skills in the Reception Year (Grade R): To English First Additional Language learners | |
| **DATA COLLECTION** | |
| One-on-one interviews, observation, document analysis and field notes. | |
| **DATA ANALYSIS** | |
| Thematic analysis | |
| **QUALITY CRITERIA** | |
| Trustworthiness – credibility, reliability and validity, dependability, confirmability | |
| **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS** | |
| Anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent and intrusiveness | |

## 3.2    RESEARCH PARADIGM

In qualitative research, the research paradigm refers to the overarching philosophical and theoretical framework which can guide the researchers approach to understanding and also to interpreting phenomena. Constructivism emphasizes the subject nature of reality and the benefits of understanding how the individuals in the study construct meaning from

what they have experienced and also interpretations of phenomena. Interpretivism emphasis the role of interpretation and understanding in the research study. Researchers who use this paradigm try and seek understanding of the social, cultural contexts and the individuals' beliefs, values and behaviour. These paradigms serve as guiding frameworks for qualitative researchers and shape the research questions, methods and data analysis approaches and interpretations of findings (Ulz, 2023).

## 3.3    RESEARCH DESIGN

Research is a systematic process of collecting, planning and logically analysing data for a specific purpose. According to McMillian and Schumacher (2014), a research design is a framework of research which examines and describes the specifications and requirements for collecting the analysed data. This plan then moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to a more specific selection of respondents, techniques regarding data gathering to be used and the data anaylsis which needs to be completed. The selection of design is based on the researchers' premises, research skills and research practices and affects how one collects data (Maree,2014). A researcher can build a picture by gathering data, which, in this case, is qualitative research. A research paradigm serves as a tool for viewing, framing or organization of principles by which actuality is interpreted and explained (Maree,2014). In researching phonological awareness skills in an Englsih First Additional Language classroom, a qualitative approach was necessary to accumulate data through the means of observation interviews, document analysis and field notes.

My study is based on the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms that recognise that experiences, circumstances and points of view differ completely, although all are valid and pertinent. To accomplish and gain an understanding of how educators teach phonological awareness skills in Grade R (Reception Year), it was fundamental for me to interact with numerous educators from the schools I visited. I was able to gain an understanding of the processes based on educators' (participants) experiences. Due to the intuitive nature of the constructivist approach, I acknowledged that each setting and environment is unique. The schools chosen for my studies were similar due to the learners

all being English First Additional Language learners and they are in Mpumalanga Province in Nkangala District Municipality and the Local Municipal of Emalahleni.

At an interpretivist level, I was able to attain an understanding of the participants' encounters and involvement by conversing and using the observations to understand other people's views. The participants shared their knowledge, experiences and practices giving me an understanding of their teaching methods regarding phonological awareness skills. I placed value on participants' experiences, viewpoints, perspectives, approaches, deductions and ways of teaching phonological awareness skills. For that reason, one should view my study using a constructivist and interpretivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007:439).

## 3.4    RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, I describe the strategies and methods I implemented while working towards the purpose of my study. This involved studying the methods used in the required field and the theories or principles behind them to develop an approach that matched the objectives. My study was based on the educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness to English First Additional Language learners in Grade R.

The criteria used to select participants or sources, the surroundings and background in which the research was conducted and the roles played in collecting the data are all highlighted in this chapter.

Firstly, I included information regarding qualitative research, as it is the method used to conduct my study. A qualitative enquiry allows for expressive language to be used which gives a presence of a voice from the participants within the text. This research focuses on the participants and their understanding of the research topic. McMillian and Shcumacher (2001) explained the duty or role of the qualitative researcher as being able to engage in the situation and the phenomenon studied. Using a case study approach, participants were chosen for this study. The data collection methods used were interviews, observations, document analysis and fieldnotes. My role as the researcher was to do my utmost best to maintain and uphold the principles and values of

trustworthiness, credibility, dependability and confirmability, ensuring that the data collection tools were also ethical.

### 3.4.1 Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was employed to conduct this study. It was a pertinent approach, as the study focused on exploring phonological awareness skills taught to English First Additional Language learners in the Grade R year; enabling me to collect data from the participant's individual experiences. I was able to gain insight through observation of lessons presented, interviews where the participants could explain their understanding of document analysis and fieldnotes of the primary research topic and the secondary questions. This approach of study focused on subject selection, data collection and data analysis and eventually interpretation in a way that is unique to the type of study being conducted. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is based on the participants' views and perspectives by asking questions in order to collect data through words, allowing the participants to have a voice.

According to Lichtman (2010), qualitative research aims to provide an understanding of people's experiences and if the data collection technique allows for flexibility. The research approach can reveal data and information that is circumstantial and presents the data in a narrative description. In this study, the participants were interviewed in a place where they felt comfortable (real-life contexts), and the interviews and questions asked were open-ended.

During the observation of lessons, I assumed the role of a non-participant observer and did not interrupt the lesson in any way or take part in the lessons. I recorded verbal and non-verbal interactions using an observation schedule prepared beforehand. This approach allowed me to research the topic and answer the primary and secondary questions using a holistic approach focusing on the participants.

I used my field notes to ensure that I recorded and remembered all the observations and responses made by the participants throughout the interviews, in addition to the classroom observations.

I also recorded which documents and resources the participants used whilst teaching, allowing me to look at the teaching of phonological awareness skills holistically.

In this study, a case study design of two schools was used to collect data. Below follows the discussion thereof.

### 3.4.2 Case Study Design

A case study design was selected as the applicable research design. This study focused on how Grade R educators teach phonological awareness skills to EFAL learners. A case study endeavours towards a holistic understanding of how participants associate with each other and the meaning of their experiences. According to Maree (2014), researchers have used case study research methods for numerous years across many fields answering 'how' and 'why' questions. Case studies offer multi-perspectives of one or two participants within an environment of situation, but also the perspectives of other groups that are pertinent and the interrelationships between groups identified. The two schools in which I conducted my research had methods, environments and ideas where knowledge was constructed. In this study, I was able to interview and discuss the primary and secondary research questions with the Grade R educators, as well as the school principals and HODs. This opened the probability of giving a voice to the participants that were interviewed. Face-to-face interaction with the learners and participants added value so that I could record and conduct my study to answer the research questions.

According to Merriam (2009:45), case study knowledge is more specific, more contextual and more developed, as not only one method of data collection is used. The knowledge is more contextual, as it involves watching participants while interacting in their familiar surroundings, and this was done using interviews of participants and observations in the classroom. The understanding of teachers' strategies used, their resources and teaching approaches were of interest to me. I conducted one-on-one interviews with educators, observed their lessons and used fieldnotes to collect data. I was able to collate statements and the teaching strategies stated by the participants.

The two schools used in this study are government public primary schools. All of the learners were EFAL learners and the focus was on teaching strategies, an understanding

of phonological awareness skills and challenges experienced when teaching EFAL learners' PA skills.

## 3.5    PARTICIPANTS, RESEARCH SITES AND SAMPLING

### 3.5.1    Description of the research site

School A is 64 years old. It is a public primary school in Emalahleni in Nkangala District Municipality. This educational institution is in Mpumalanga province and is run as a public institute. School A is a former Afrikaans school which is currently a dual-medium school due to the extensive English demand in the area; the greater part of the learners in the school now learn via the medium of English. It has over 1000 pupils who travel from the surrounding areas to attend school. The school has both brick classrooms, as well as prefab classrooms. Each classroom can accommodate between 25 to 35 learners.

School B is a public primary school in Emalahleni. This school also falls under Nkangala District Municipality in Mpumalanga. The school offers primary school level subjects and has Grades R – 7. This educational institute is a former Afrikaans school which is currently also dual-medium. There are over 1300 pupils, and it is 92 years old. The school has brick classrooms, as well as prefab classrooms placed on the property as the schools' numbers are swelling. Each classroom can accommodate between 30 to 40 learners.

### 3.5.2    Selection of participants

Purposeful homogeneous sampling was used. I chose this sampling method as it has a shared characteristic or set of characteristics. The practitioners and learners were selected because they were involved in the teaching of Grade R. According to Creswell (2008), researchers purposefully select participants to understand the situation and phenomenon. The participants were, therefore, chosen as they were pivotal to an understanding of the phenomenon being investigated: teaching phonological awareness skills to English First Additional Language learners in the reception year. The educators chosen as participants, were fully qualified, except the student educator. They were permanently employed and registered with the South African Council of Educators. All

Grade R educators, the Foundation Phase HODs, one student educator and learners in the Grade R classrooms were chosen for the study.

At School A, I interviewed the principal, the HOD, three Grade R educators and one student educator. At School B, I interviewed the principal, the HOD and one Grade R educator. Together the number of participants sampled amounted to nine. The educators and the student educator were observed and interviewed with regards to the teaching of phonological awareness skills.

I chose to interview and work with educators that had two years of experience and above in teaching Grade R or Foundation Phase. School A had three Grade R classes and School B had one class with learners who are EFAL learners. The principals assisted with input as to which participants could be better suited to take part willingly and those that were teaching or had taught Grade R or Foundation Phase.

I conducted my study in the classes with Grade R learners where English is the First Additional Language, as the study is based on learning English as a home language and the acquisition of phonological awareness skills. The HODs are not Grade R educators, however, they are involved in planning and implementing the curriculum with the staff. With regards to the student educator at school A, she was studying teacher education and needed to conduct her practical teaching. She also assisted the educators during the day. I wanted to gain her understanding of phonological awareness skills and find out if she was aware of what teaching these skills entails by giving me insight into the curriculum that was part of her teaching degree programme registered for.

**Table 3:2: Summary of the participants' years of experience and qualifications for Schools A and B**

**SCHOOL A**

| Participant | Participant's years of experience | Where the participant qualified | Grades that participants have taught or previously taught in their years of being educators |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 A | 5 | University of Pretoria Grade R Educator | Grade 2 |
| Participant 2 A | 2 | Lyceum College Grade R Educator | Only Gr R |
| Participant 3 A | 5 | NKP Grade R Educator | Grades 1 and 2 |
| Participant 4 A | 3yrs of studies (student) | Crane Academy | Practical teaching only in Grade R |
| Participant 5 A | 36 | Goudstad Education College HOD | Grades 1 and 2 |
| Participant 6 A | 20 | Goustad Education College Principal | Grades 5, 6 and 7 |

**School B**

| Participant | Participant's years of experience | Where the participant qualified | Grades participants have taught or have previously taught in their years of being educators |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 B | 8 | Studied at NWU Grade R Educator | Grades 1 and 3 |
| Participant 2 B | 36 | Studied at NKP HOD | Grades R, 1, 2 and 3 |
| Participant 3 B | 24 | Studied at NKP Principal | Grades 6 and 7 |

## 3.6    DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study were collected using a comprehensive literature review,one-on-one interviews, observation, document analysis and fieldnotes. At School A, the principal, HOD, three educators and one student educator were participanrs. At School B, the principal, the HOD and one educator were participants. Altogether a total of 9 participants were involved in the study.

**Table 3.3: Data collection**

| Research Question | Data collection Tool | Purpose (Gr R educators, HODs and Principals) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. What are the teachers' understandings of phonological awareness? | Interviews<br>Observations | To understand and discuss what teachers understand about phonological awareness skills and how they apply those skills in their lessons. |
| 2. Which resources are used to teach phonological awareness skills? | Interview<br>Observations<br>Field Notes<br>Document analysis | To discover which resources are used in the class and how teachers use them in the classroom. |
| 3. Which challenges are experienced when teaching phonological awareness? | Interview<br>Observations<br>Field notes | To build an understanding of what the teachers experience, how they feel, and how creative they are and to understand how other actors may negatively affect the teaching of phonological awareness. |
| 4. Which documents guide the practitioners in teaching phonological awareness skills? | Interview<br>Observations<br>Field notes<br>Document analysis | List the items the teachers use, and which resources and documents guide them to teach the learners and expose them to phonological awareness skills. To view and discuss the standard required by the school and the department, for example, Timetables, CAPS and the Assessment criteria. |

### 3.6.1 Interviews

According to Maree (2014), an interview happens when two people share information back and forth in the form of a conversation. The interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data such as views, opinions, beliefs and even the behaviour of the participants. A qualitative interview's intent is to gain an understanding and view the world through the eyes of the participants. This can be a very beneficial source of information. Researchers try to obtain substantial descriptive data, which could give rise to the cumulation of knowledge and social reality. Maree (2014) says that if the participants think

the topic is important and trust the researcher, they will provide information that is rich and in normal circumstances, they would not share with others.

The semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions was conducted in the form of a discussion with the purpose of the researcher exploring the participants' views, ideas and beliefs. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in research to corroborate data emerging from other data sources and require the participant to answer predetermined questions. This allows for probing and clarification of answers (Maree, 2014). I was focused towards the participants' replies so that I could pinpoint new evident lines of enquiry related to phonological awareness teaching skills. I asked questions when clarification was required by giving specifics about the research based on primary and secondary questions. The disadvantages of using this method are that the sample size is small, and time can be limited to get to know the interviewee.

### 3.6.2   One-on-one interviews

Creating an environment of openness and trust between the researcher and the participants is very important and valuable. Interviews allow for getting to know one another better. As a researcher, I needed to remind myself why I was interviewing the participants by keeping the process conversational as opposed to a strict format of just question and answer. According to Merriam (2009), one-on-one interviews are effective data collection means as the participants' prior encounters, understandings and feelings can be extracted and understood by the researcher. I interviewed the participants as a means of data collection, and I then observed lessons in the Grade R classrooms. The total of nine (9) participants from the two schools were interviewed. Whilst interviewing the Grade R educators, a student teacher, HODs and principals in the two schools, the main focus was on acquiring insight into each participant's experiences whilst teaching such skills currently or in past years and the knowledge they had regarding phonological awareness skills. The approaches, strategies and resources regarding phonological awareness teachings were explored, particularly in teaching EFAL learners. I also discussed the challenges the participants faced, either currently or within their past years of teaching PA skills to a Grade R class. I could make a note of the participants' facial

expressions and mannerisms as an assessment tool to enhance the ability to ask follow-up questions and/or clarify something. This added value as I could ask the participants to give more input or express their experiences more thoroughly, clarifying their answers using their words (Caddy, 2015)

The interview sessions with the educators were held in the participants' classrooms in the afternoon after school. Due to the learners leaving in the afternoon, the class became calm and the atmosphere was unaffected by distractions. This also provided the opportunity for the educators to show me the resources they used in teaching PA skills to a Grade R class. The interviews were between 20-25 minutes and were calm and interesting, as both interviewer and interviewee remained courteous and open-minded throughout the interviews. The HODs' and principals' interviews were held in their offices. The advantage of using such data collection methods was that I could observe if what was communicated in the interview indicated the teaching methods stated in the CAPS document (DBE, 2011).

As the researcher, I asked the participants permission to record their answers during the data collection process. Recording interviews enables a researcher to listen and record the full interview without having to write notes the entire time. The recordings were also of value by allowing me to listen to the questioning and answering processes, listening to my interviewing/questioning strategies. After the first interview, I grew more confident and more aware of the interviewing process. Data from the interviews was transcribed and later analysed to highlight and extract common themes.

### 3.6.3    Observations

Observations take place while things are happening, which allows the researcher to be closer to the action. Before visiting each classroom, I prepared an observation schedule for me to record what I observed. The purpose of this type of research is to gather more reliable insights to capture data on what the participants do as opposed to only what they say or mentioned in their interviews (Caddy, 2015). By observing behaviour which naturally occurs over a few days and hours, the researcher aspires to obtain a broader view, as well as a rich understanding of the phenomena being studied. The nature of

observation is comprehensive in the sense that it is broad, ongoing and open to what is worthy of attention in facilitating a deeper understanding of the context in order to achieve a more complete set of data (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Other observations were noted in the field notes as they were outside the framework of the study. By collating the information that the participants brought up in the one-on-one interviews, such as an understanding of phonological awareness, the type of resources used whilst teaching phonological awareness skills to Grade R EFAL learners, the challenges experienced and any other secondary focus questions, corroboration of the findings could take place.

Observations were completed in the classroom setting, which is the real-life setting referred to as naturalistic observation (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) that was the appropriate tool for my research. Observation takes place in a controlled setting, which is constructed by the researcher, however, naturalistic observation includes real-world settings. I made sure I knew what the primary and secondary questions were and what I needed to focus on, for example, how phonological awareness skills were instructed within the classrooms and the strategies used by most of the participants. The observation schedule I drafted had a space to fill in my information under each heading for each lesson. The date, time, number of learners, subject allocation and lesson topic were on each schedule I used. I had a table of set guidelines and tools to refer to and fill in as I made the observations. The tools schedule included:

- Observing verbal interactions between the educator and learners
- The non-verbal interactions between the educator and learners
- The strengths observed that pertain to phonological awareness teaching skills
- Teaching skills that were unconducive to teaching phonological awareness skills
- Observing whether the practitioner was supportive towards the learners
- Observing whether the activities taught included phonological awareness skills
- Observing whether the practitioner modelled the correct use of sounds and phonics
- If the Grade R learners communicated in English during the routine activities
- The resources used or lack thereof
- Observing whether any learners experienced barriers to learning

- Observing whether the manner of teaching literacy skills had been affected due to COVID-19 or not, for example, less one-on-one time to practice PA skills, hearing and saying sounds

The observations transpired on 5 respective occasions during teaching time at both schools A and B. The lessons took between 30 – 45 minutes. The focal point was on what was necessary to observe by using the tools and questions mentioned above. The focus was to answer the main research question but also the secondary questions. I was not involved in the actual activities of teaching the literacy lessons.

### 3.6.4 Field Notes

Field notes formed the written account of my observations. Field notes were written whilst observing the five sessions to provide a deeper understanding of how educators teach PA skills to EFAL learners in Grade R. These were notes compiled through unprepared observations, which caught my attention as possible extra information relevant to my study. In addition, notes were made every evening after the observation sessions in the classes to keep a record. I was able to refer back to these notes when analysing the interview data which led to more compelling conclusions. Participants' experiences influence what the records show, what they believe and what is beneficial and relevant to the subject under study. I made notes of interesting lessons, strategies, words and methods the participants used. The learners' behaviour also assisted in establishing their engagement during the lessons.

### 3.7 ROLE OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER

Once approval was given by various authorities, the data-gathering process began. I was a non-participant observer. Creswell (2007:222) explains this role as, "An observer who is on site and makes notes without the researcher becoming involved in the activities of the participants''. During the observation of lessons, no physiological contact or verbal correspondence was made with any of the learners in the classrooms. This was quite challenging because the learners were inquisitive and had many questions regarding why I was in the classroom. I observed the strategies used to teach the Grade R learners, the resources used, different techniques used between the 5 lessons and any other relevant

information included on the observation schedule. Classroom sizes varied from 24 – 33, but due to COVID restrictions, certain classes were halved during the week, allowing for more space and social distancing in the classroom. Later on, during the year, data were collected when the whole class was back. The class had about 33 learners. The educators encouraged the learners to participate by putting up their hands and also asking questions if they did not understand. Learner involvement was a very positive observation in all the lessons observed.

I aimed at making each educator feel comfortable throughout the interview process and focused on establishing rapport before each interview. The educators were open to communicating and interacting with me on the research topic. I was a Foundation Phase educator in previous years, therefore, I could relate with the educators and engage in open discussions with them. However, I was aware of my feelings and ensured I was unbiased towards the educators' ways of teaching and disciplinary methods. I made every effort to be as neutral as possible and tried to have a complete idea of their experiences asking many follow-up questions to gain clarity regarding the educators' opinions during the interview process, along with the observations.

The research took place in natural surroundings, one being aware of the dynamics brought about by COVID-19. These changes could have greatly influenced the findings of the study. To familiarise myself, I remained flexible during the undertaking of observations. My visit to Schools A and B resulted in changes in the dates and days of scheduled observation sessions. Flexibility between the schools and I was managed with ease as the participants and management were very obliging and understanding. Each situation was unique, and the questions and schedules were structured accordingly. Follow-up questions were needed to ensure clarity of responses.

## 3.8    DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Document analysis is a methodical structured procedure for assessing or evaluating documents – both printed in printed form as well as in electronic form.

Statistics and data are, therefore, explored and elucidated to find significance and meaning with the intent to gain an understanding and develop knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The documents which were used and included in my research were very helpful in guiding me through my studies. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements for EFAL and English home language allowed me to get a full picture of what was expected with regards to literacy learning, reading, speaking, reading and compression of the learners' skills required. I used the literacy learning programme books to conduct research regarding phonological awareness activities and to find explanations of such skills and ideas on how to teach them. I looked at the Annual Teaching Plans, lesson plans and reports for the Grade R classes which the educator participants shared with me. I also looked at the resources in the classrooms which were used for teaching and the lessons presented. I recorded the use of these resources and took photos of some of the books, posters, words, flashcards and items which caught my attention and were of value to my study.

The documents were obtained from the relevant schools and were requested from the HODs and practitioners which I kept in a file at home and on my private laptop. The documents from the Department of Education are readily available on their website, and I listed the other information sources in my references list.

**Table 3.4: Official documents to document analysis**

| Document | Content/information sources from the document |
|---|---|
| National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12 (2012-2014) | I sourced information regarding the degree of knowledge and skills that should be attained in each grade and to gain an understanding of which attainable standards are required across all subjects. I mainly focused and referred to this document for information regarding Grade R |
| Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Foundation Phase Grades 1-3 (CAPS) 2011 English First Additional Language | I sourced information regarding, additive bilingualism, assessments, introducing First Additive Language, Listening & Speaking, Reading and Writing and an Overview of the Language skills and teaching plans |

| Department of Basic Education Grade R English Books for each Term | The Rainbow Workbooks form part of the Department of Basic Education's strategy to boost South African children's school performance. During my visit to Schools A and B, the participants used these books as part of their literacy teachings |
|---|---|
| Grade R Resource Kit (CAPS) | These resources were used in the Grade R classes<br>Grade R Posters – Theme related<br>Grade R Big Books – Storybooks containing 12 theme-linked stories<br>Grade R Lesson Plans and Assessment Activities for the year<br>Grade R Teachers Guide – Packed with practical classroom ideas<br>Simple Books used to teach Literacy and extend vocabulary |
| Daily Lesson Plans Weekly Lesson Plans | Time Allocations for subjects<br>Lesson plans and weekly plans guide educators<br>The participants had set their weekly theme, plans, activities set and focus for each day and week<br>These documents form an imperative role in the teaching of Grade R learners guiding the educators and learner activities |
| Continuous Assessments/Termly Reports | Assessment documents include Home Language, Mathematics and Life Skills concepts. These assessment results guide both the teachers and parents regarding the learner |

## 3.9    RESEARCH QUALITY PRINCIPLES

For the duration of this study, the following research quality principles were applied.

### 3.9.1    Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a necessary component for all research studies to generate results and findings which are of value to the study (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2012). Johnson and Christensen (2012) state that the usage of numerous data collection methods will give rise to data triangulation which can be advantageous and increase the trustworthiness of findings. To collect data, multiple methods can be utilised through one-on-one interviews, observations in both schools and comprehensive comparisons, whilst analysing data which in effect could increase the reliability of the results.

Data collected through the interviews and lessons observed was transcribed. Bias was diminished and the trustworthiness of findings was, therefore, enhanced and monitored throughout the research process with the assistance of my supervisor. Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are important criteria when conducting qualitative research with a focus on trustworthiness. I aimed to apply this procedure throughout the study.

### 3.9.2  Credibility

As researchers, we need to ensure that the research findings represent credible information drawn from the participants' data and the correct analysis and interpretation thereof. One needs to be confident that the research findings denote the truth (Ferreira, 2007). Ebersohn, Eloff and Ferreira (2007) recommend that a participant enquiry be carried out after the findings have been established to ensure the data collected is credible. Whilst conducting interviews, sometimes, I repeated participants' responses and clarified questions to make certain that their views were interpreted correctly. As data were analysed and conclusions drawn, I requested that participants add to their comments, and they notified it in writing as well, allowing me the ability to increase the credibility of the data.

### 3.9.3  Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which the research procedures are documented. Dependability is important as it aims to verify consistency and data should therefore provide a comprehensive description and representation of the research methods. To achieve this, I spoke clearly thus ensuring the questions were not ambiguous and that all participants understood the language. Triangulation was used as data were collected from observations, interviews, document analysis and field notes where common themes emerged and were recorded thereby increasing reliability (Maree, 2007).

### 3.9.4    Confirmability

Confirmability is the final indicator of trustworthiness that a researcher should institute. Data collection and analysis must represent that it is real and show objective truth, regardless of the researcher's opinion. Reporting the process in detail assists researchers in constantly being aware of any unfairness or bias (Ebersohn, Eloff & Ferreira, 2007). I, therefore, reflected on my feelings surrounding the topic and remained self-aware to avoid bias of any kind during the process. Notes, recordings, transcripts and recording processes all played an imperative role to assist in being as unbiased as possible.

### 3.10    UPHOLDING ETHICS AND GUIDELINES/PRINCIPLES AND RISKS DURING MY RESEARCH

The field of applied ethics seeks to certify that the welfare of all participants is protected (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2011). I, therefore, obtained permission, consent and assent. Ethics clearance for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee and the College of Education at Unisa. Permission was also obtained from Mpumalanga Department of Education; the letters of permission seeking were all in English, as this was the language in which the study was conducted. The letters of permission were sent to all participants namely, the participant educators (1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 1B, 2B, 3B) HODs, principals, parents and learners. Participants were briefed on the aim of the study and were assured of confidentiality. They were informed by myself, that they were under no obligation and could withdraw at any given time. The participants were assured that the results would be recorded as accurately as possible and reflected and recorded in this study.

The process to obtain this information was as follows, and the documents are attached as Appendixes:

- Application for the ethics clearance with the Ethics Committee in the College of Education attached as **Appendix 1** to conduct the research at the required sites
- A letter attached as **Appendix 2** accompanied the ethics application to the Department of Education

- A letter attached as **Appendix 3** was sent to the heads of the schools, requesting permission to conduct research at their schools
- A letter of consent attached as **Appendix 4** was sent to the participants, that is, the teachers/practitioners and the HODs who were observed and interviewed
- A letter of consent from the parents is attached as **Appendix 5**
- An assent letter for learners' participation as **Appendix 6**
- One-on-one interview schedules for the HODs attached as **Appendix 7**
- One-on-one interview schedule for principals as **Appendix 8**
- One-on-one interview schedule for Grade R practitioners as **Appendix 9**
- One-on-one interview schedule for student teachers as **Appendix 10**
- Observations schedule as **Appendix 11**
- Reflections addendum as **Appendix 12**

I signed the researcher's declaration to comply with the UNISA code of conduct with regards to ethics and all procedures and protocols expected of me as a researcher. Children under the age of 18 were involved, as I observed the classroom educator-learner interactions. However, they did not have direct contact with me and were uninvolved in interviews (as a non-participant observer). During my research, I maintained the utmost respect for the people involved; I made an effort to ensure no person or child was harmed or could be harmed. I treated the participants with fairness and equality during all stages of the research, and I kept the participants' names and information confidential. I tried to ensure the research was beneficial as well as the questions and observations.

The teachers were directly involved in that they were interviewed. The risks involved could have been discomfort knowing they were being observed. However, I assured them that, as participants, they were not being assessed; the actual lesson content and information taught were the most important aspects. The questions asked were non-invasive and did not cause harm or danger to them or the learners in the classroom. If questions were not understood, I used other words to explain the questions and used terminology in different ways, making the participants feel more comfortable. The teachers were observed in their familiar contexts, that is, in their classrooms and no changes to the context were expected nor enforced upon them.

Physical risks, psychological risks, social/economic risks, loss of confidentiality and legal risks can be experienced when doing research. Psychological risks could affect a researcher or the participants' emotions, anxiety levels and mental stresses. Social/economic risks could cause alterations in relationships and disadvantage the researcher or those taking part in the study having negative consequences. Loss of confidentiality is always a risk; however, the researcher signed that confidentiality would take place and no names would directly be used. Any personal data collected were coded and secured so that only the researcher could access it. Legal risks exist when the research methods are not liable in the eyes of the law. COVID-19 risks could also be noted, as the researcher had to visit the schools and was on their property as a visitor, thus both parties needed to ensure all safety protocols and procedures were followed. In my research, I considered all these risks and did my utmost to follow clear steps and guidelines.

I was unfamiliar with the participants before I conducted my research and the study did not take place at my workplace. I, therefore, had no relationship with the participants. Steps were taken to heightened impartiality to confirm that objectivity and ethical integrity of the research process and/or findings were uncompromised by self-regard or interest.

## 3.11    LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Potential limitations of the research were identified. The sample size is small as the participants comprised Grade R educators, a student educator, principals and the HODs who were observed, spoken to and interviewed. Secondly, the study was limited to only two schools and therefore had a unique setting to yield conclusions which have limitations. Thirdly, data collection in the form of interviews and asking questions could be inaccurate. The inferences of educator views, as well as the fact that educators are not exactly experts or skilled in English themselves, could also affect the findings (in this case, I made the participants feel comfortable and explained terminology in different ways).

## 3.12    POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The results from this study are key to how phonological awareness is taught, and the strengths and weaknesses identified will inform future teaching of the skill or act as a precursor to future formal reading skills. This research can potentially advance the academic knowledge base regarding phonological awareness skills of children in English medium schools who are EFAL learners in a SA context and enhance the knowledge of all stakeholders involved. The findings can benefit school educators by sensitising them to the importance of instructing learners on phonological awareness as it plays a major role in reading skills acquisition. The findings can also be helpful to underprivileged schools and teachers who are unaware of phonological awareness skills. The benefits include possible aid in planning the curriculum in the preschool years and help in planning intervention programmes for children with phonological awareness deficits. The study findings can provide valuable insights into educationists, researchers and language therapists who would want to investigate linguistic difficulties or skill development with regards to laying a foundation for learning how to read.

## 3.13    CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the research methodology and how it underpinned the study. The next chapter will deliberate on the analysis of the in-depth interviews, classroom observations, document analysis and field notes.

# CHAPTER 4

# DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three focused on the research design and methodology used for teachers' experiences of teaching phonological awareness skills in Grade R to English First Additional Language learners. In this chapter, the experiential findings of the study are presented as premised on discussions in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. The study aimed to answer the following main research question: How do educators teach phonological awareness to English First Additional learners in Grade R? The primary research question was examined by addressing the secondary questions. In presenting the findings, data collected was through in-depth interviews, classroom observation of lessons, making field notes and document analysis. Data were triangulated and not done in silos to equip and prepare the researcher to compare and corroborate data from one data collection tool to another. Nine participants were interviewed, and five lessons were observed.

After analysis of this collected data, it was coded by allocating expressions to several segments of text using Caulfield's (2019) 6-step process. It became transparent about which data would be used and what would be disregarded. Codes which were alike were placed together, leading to emerging of themes. Coding includes highlighting sections of the text – usually phrases or sentences – and coming up with shorthand labels or ''codes" to describe their content. At this stage, a researcher must be thorough by going through the transcript of every interview and highlighting what is relevant. New codes can be added as a researcher goes through the text. They should look for sequences of events, occurring behaviours and relationship structures, which link to the research questions (Caulfield, 2019). The different dimensions brought together create a fuller picture, and it became clear which data will be relevant to include and what is irrelevant regarding the main research question and secondary questions. The one-on-one interviews took place first and then the observations of lessons, as the information from the interviews could be triangulated with the observations to corroborate the findings.

**Table 4.1.** is a display profile of the participants, research sites and the participants who took part in this study, as well as their gender, years of teaching experience and qualifications. Demographic data were reviewed, followed by the main themes that emerged from the analysis of data.

Sites, gender, years of teaching experience, home language, title of participants and qualifications

**Table 4.1: Profile of the schools and participants**

| School | Educator participants/HOD/Principal | Gender | Grade Capacity | Years of teaching | Interviewed Observed | Educators Home Language | Qualifications/ Institution |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School A Emalahleni | Participant 1A (Educator) | Female | Gr R Educator | 5 | Interviewed & observed | Afrikaans | University of Pretoria BEd Foundation Phase |
| | Participant 2A (Educator) | Female | Gr R Educator | 2 | Interviewed & observed | Afrikaans | Lyceum College Diploma in Grade R |
| | Participant 3A (Educator) | Female | Gr R Educator | 5 | Interviewed & observed | Afrikaans | Normaal Kollege Pretoria 4-Year Higher Education Diploma in Junior Primary |
| | Participant 4A (Student educator) | Female | Gr R Student | Student in 3rd year of studies | Interviewed & observed | IsiZulu | Crane International Academy National N Diploma: Educare |
| | Participant 5A (HOD) | Female | HOD | 36 | Interviewed | Afrikaans | Goudstad Education College Higher Diploma in Education Foundation Phase |
| | Participant 6A (Principal) | Male | Gr 5, 6, 7 Educator | 20 | Interviewed | Afrikaans | Goudstad Education College BEd Intermediate & Senior Phase |

| School B Emala hleni | Participant 1B (Educator) | Female | Gr R Educator | 8 | Interviewed & observed | IsiZulu IsiNdebele | North West University BEd |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Participant 2B(HOD) | Female | HOD & Educator Foundation Phase | 36 | Interviewed | Afrikaans | Goudstad Education College Higher Diploma in Education Foundation Phase |
| | Participant 3B (Principal) | Female | Gr 6 & 7 Educator and principal | 24 | Interviewed | Afrikaans | Normaal Kollege Pretoria 4-Year Higher Education Diploma in Senior Primary |

## 4.2    DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

**Table 4**.**1** indicates that nine participants were interviewed. Four of the participants were Grade R educators, one HOD from each school, two school principals and one student educator. The participants will be referred to as participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 1B, 2B and 3B to enhance anonymity and confidentiality. The schools are both in Emalahleni in Nkangala District and were assigned symbols (schools A and B) to also ensure anonymity. Nine of the participants were interviewed, however, the observations were conducted in participants' 1A, 2A, 3A and 1B classrooms (4A student educator, presented her lesson in participant 1A's classroom). The HODs and principals did not present lessons; they were only interviewed. Seven participants' home languages are Afrikaans. Participant 4A's home language is isiZulu, and Participant 1B speaks both isiZulu and isiNdebele at home and English in the classroom. Only one of the participants is fairly new to teaching; she has been teaching Grade R for two years, and the student educator 4A was completing her student teaching practice. The other participants interviewed have teaching knowledge and training of 5 to 36 years, and they are all qualified teachers as indicated in **Table 4.1.** Participant 5A no longer teaches a specific grade; she fulfils the HOD job and runs the Foundation Phase. Both of the principals teach in the InterSen Phase.

## 4.3 DOCUMENTS ANALYSED

**Table 4.2: Summary of the Documents Analysed**

| Document | Purpose |
|---|---|
| National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12 (2012-2014) | This statement gives information regarding the previous curriculums but also updates it with aims to provide clear indications of what is being taught and learnt on a term-by-term basis. |
| Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Foundation Phase Grades 1-3 (CAPS) 2011 English First Additional Language | CAPS gives teachers detailed guidelines of what to teach and assess on a grade-by-grade and subject-by-subject basis.<br>It encourages the use of a balanced programme of reading skills which builds on Listening and Speaking skills, Reading and Phonics skills, and Writing and Handwriting skills. |
| Department of Basic Education Grade R English Books for each Term | The Rainbow Workbooks form part of the Department of Basic Education's strategy to boost South African children's school performance. This is a strong focus on learning in Grade R.<br>Grade R learners are given the opportunity to develop their pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-mathematics skills and outline skills they will need to get a solid educational foundation so that they find it easier to learn in Grade 1 and beyond. |
| Grade R Resource Kit (CAPS) | Grade R Posters – Theme related<br>Grade R Big Books – Storybooks containing 12 theme-linked stories<br>Grade R Lesson Plans and Assessment Activities for the year<br>Grade R Teachers Guide – Packed with practical classroom ideas<br>Simple Books used to teach Literacy and extend vocabulary |
| Daily Lesson Plans Weekly Lesson Plans | Lesson plans and weekly plans guide educators on how concepts should be taught, and how learning will be measured. They help teachers to be more effective in the classroom by providing a detailed outline to follow each class period. Effective lesson plans should include a lesson objective, requirements, lesson materials, lesson procedures, and assessment methods. After a lesson has been taught educators can also reflect on the lesson giving the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. |

| Resources or Documents and Learner's workbooks used whilst presenting lessons. | Resources include books, visual aids, activity packs, use of technology and media needed to ensure the success of lessons. The Grade R ''Rainbow'' workbooks were used at both schools A and B. Examples of other resources include ''Mini-shopper'' items and ''Dough''. |
|---|---|
| Continuous Assessments/Termly Reports | Assessment documents include Home Language, Mathematics and Life Skills concepts. Learners are assessed throughout the year and progress reports are handed out at the end of each term. These assessment results guide both the teachers and parents regarding the learner. |

## 4.4    THEMES AND CATEGORIES

The intention and function of the interviews were to obtain in-depth knowledge or data of what educators understood in terms of the teaching of phonological awareness skills in Grade R to English First Additional Language learners. The results of the interviews were verified by the available evidence from the observations. The categories were consolidated by a document analysis of the CAPS policy documents for English First Additional Language which include concepts such as phonemic awareness, phonological awareness skills, comprehension and understanding and vocabulary use, as well as characteristics of reading instruction. The additional documents that were analysed were the Daily lesson plans, Weekly lesson plans, Continuous Assessment documents, Progress Reports and Resources used. The themes, categories and educators' perspectives obtained are listed **in Table 4.3** below**.**

**Table 4.3: Themes, Categories and Teachers' Perspectives**

| Themes | Categories | Data collection method and Tools | Teachers' perspectives |
|---|---|---|---|
| Theme 1: The participants' understanding of phonological awareness | ❖ Early sound awareness exposure<br>❖ Participants' perspectives on teaching sound awareness in Grade R for future reading | Interviews<br>Field notes<br>Observation<br>Document analysis | *''Phonological awareness includes being able to identify sounds and manipulate these sounds which come together to make words. Early exposure is especially important in English classes for those that are English First Additional Language learners''.* |
| Theme 2: Approaches used to teach phonological awareness skills | ❖ Teaching letter-sound relationships across the curriculum<br>❖ Morning Ring as a place for teaching phonological awareness skills<br>❖ Resources and documents used when teaching phonological awareness.<br>❖ Use of verbal and non-verbal communication or interactions<br>Strategies used to teach verbally and non-verbally | Interviews<br>Field notes,<br>Observations<br>Document analysis | *''Start with exposing learners to letters and sounds, then, introduce words and meanings to build on every learner's phonological awareness skill ability across the curriculum''.* |

| Theme 3: Challenges with the promotion of phonological awareness skills | ❖ Vocabulary development and free play<br>❖ Parental communication and home language<br>❖ COVID-19, teaching and learning | Interviews<br>Field notes<br>Observations<br>Document analysis | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |

A discussion of the themes and categories presented in **Table 4.3** is presented below.

## 4.5  DATA PRESENTATION FROM INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS AND DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.5.1  Theme 1: Participants' understandings of phonological awareness

Under this theme, two categories emerged. I was able to identify themes through data analysis, using interview questions and answers, the observation schedule and field notes. The first theme is early sound awareness exposure, and the second one is the participants' perspectives on teaching sound awareness for future reading. It became apparent that these are pertinent aspects and they have an explicit impact on the teaching of phonological awareness skills to younger learners and laying a foundation for future reading.

The participants' understandings of phonological awareness were very imperative to my study, as it formed the main role and foundation for this study. In terms of language proficiency, researchers measure how well a person has mastered a specific language. The more proficient a learner is in literacy language skills, the more they will eventually accomplish and achieve mastery of the core fundamental skills (Caddy, 2015).

#### 4.5.1.1  Category 1: Exposure to Early Sound Awareness

*''Phonological awareness is the ability to identify sounds and manipulate these sounds which come together to make words. Early exposure is especially important in English classes for those that are English First Additional Language learners''.*

During the interviews at school A, I asked the participants about the early sound awareness skills they use in their class lessons to expose the learners and teach them to manipulate sounds. Participant 2A expressed that she uses exciting enjoyable activities such as singing, saying rhymes, listening to stories, repetition, recognition of letters and knowing the relationship between the letters and sounds. She said, *"I use phonic methods and insist learners break up words to try and hear the sounds".* Participant 6A shared that classrooms should be conducive to print, words and vocabulary development using resources such as books, rhymes and flashcards so that learners can build their language abilities. He said, *"This is especially important in the English classes for those that are English First Additional Language learners".*

At school B, participant 1B expressed that she feels, *"Phonological awareness helps to develop early literacy skills that assist learners with identification of the beginning sound, hear rhyming words and syllables in specific words. I use flashcards, letter land books, storybooks and pictures, and I try to get my learners to understand meanings first and then focus on sounds in words".* The principal of school B teaches in the Intermediate Phase, not Grade R, and her response during the interview was relevant to my study and this specific theme. She said, *"Phonological awareness is the ability to understand sounds. Having an understanding of phonological awareness skills at a younger age will assist in improving learners' vocabulary.*

While observing lessons being taught, the most prevalent and favoured strategy was an emphasis on phonics. They used flashcards, big books and theme-related stories and posters, charts, rhymes and the Grade R Rainbow books. In my observations, I noted that participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A and 1B expose the learners to early sound awareness teachings. Most of the learners in the classroom were able to engage with their educators and respond to questions and answers. Learners could still benefit from more exposure and develop further, as it was still early in the year when I conducted my studies.

### 4.5.1.2 Category 2: Participants' Perspectives on Teaching Phonological Awareness in Grade R

When discussing the importance of Grade R learning and teaching, I asked the participants if teaching basic sound awareness to Grade R learners lays the foundation for future learning. If so, what impact does it make on further reading skills and understanding of the language of learning and teaching? There is unanimity among participants that teaching these skills is important, and these skills will assist learners in the years ahead of them. The participants in Schools A and B expressed that learners will struggle to read if they are not exposed from a young age, especially learners who are English First Additional Language learners. A summary of the information mentioned in the interviews follows.

The participants recapitulated the significance of Grade R teaching, attendance of Grade R and the curriculum content. The significance of English First Additional Language learners being enrolled in English medium educational institutions from Grade R gave prominence. The participants expressed that learners gain value from attending Grade R, as they can have the opportunity to practice and speak English, which will benefit them in future development and with the correct pronunciation of words at a younger age. I focused on phonological awareness teachings, as learners are often unexposed to phonological awareness skills within their homes. In the interview, participant 3A said, *"English is the learners' second language. They, therefore, experience difficulty with the sounds and names of letters in Grade R. The learners also do not always know if they are pronouncing words incorrectly unless they are told and guided. In my experience, the learners mix up the vowel sounds "a" and "e" or the "e" and "i" which leads to misunderstandings when words are used or said".*

Participant 1A said learners must be, *''Reading ready for Grade 1 and be able to understand concepts as they move to higher grades''*. Participant 2A expressed that teaching phonological awareness to Grade R learners is a stepping stone for spelling, reading and writing. Participant 3A mentioned it is the *"basis of reading"*, without such *"foundational skills, learners may struggle in higher grades"*. Participant 1B said '*that "repetition, phonic sounds, syllable awareness and comprehension abilities"* are a true

necessity moving forward to the Foundation Phase. She noted that, *"Parents send their children to school because they want them to learn English. The more they are exposed, the more reading ready they will be".* Participant 5A expressed that *"Parents send their children to this school so that they can have a good understanding of English and phonological awareness. When looking at education holistically, learners need to know how to speak, read and write English. It is essential, as it is a universal language."*

During the lesson observations, I noted that the bulk of the learners were able to follow directions, and they took part in the lessons. The participants used phonic approaches when teaching lessons which emphasised the teaching of phonological awareness skills. Participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A and 1B noted that there are benefits of teaching Grade R learners the language of learning in the future. Techniques of teaching phonological awareness were noted in every lesson I observed namely, rhymes, theme cards, posters, poems, singing, syllable clapping and vocabulary building. The participants used the CAPS document as the basis for lesson planning, weekly planning and assessment activities. The participants did, however, add their ideas into lessons to build skills. Participant 3A used the mini-shopper items, and Participant 1B used her projector to expose the learners not only to the class resources but also to outside resources which can make lessons more interesting. The teaching of phonological awareness, therefore, was observed in every class, and the participants felt it is a core aspect to focus on to make lessons more interesting and funnier. The educators' views illustrated that the English language is a need for future education.

### 4.5.2   Theme 2: Approaches used to teach phonological awareness skills

In this study, the approaches used for teaching phonological skills to Grade R learners include teaching letter-sound relationships across the curriculum and the 'Morning Ring' as a space for teaching PA. According to the National Reading Panel (2000) and DoBE (2011; 2008), the five components of effective reading instruction are phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight words), comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. Under this theme, I also included information regarding documents that are mentioned in

**Table 4.3** and resources participants used when teaching phonological awareness and the actions of educators and learners both verbally and non-verbally.

When teaching English First Additional Language learners, Participant 1A mentioned her method of teaching, *"Start with exposing learners to letters and sounds then introduce words and meanings to build on every learner's phonological awareness skills across the curriculum"*.

The participants included interesting approaches within the classroom and used the resources to benefit the learners as much as possible. I found out more about the participants' approaches through interviews and observations. This theme and the categories within this theme gave me perspective to answer some of the research questions. Phonological awareness skills can assist learners with becoming more aware of sounds and letters; this contributes to a child's development within the Grade R surroundings and exposure to many forms of resources and teaching materials will assist them in developing. Verbal and non-verbal communication can also give meaning to the teaching content by giving those who do not understand the opportunity to learn in other ways and forms before they become a part of the Foundation Phase. In the FP, the main focus is on reading and writing skills.

### 4.5.2.1 Category 1: Teaching letter-sound relationships across the curriculum

The teaching of letter-sound relationships was unconfined to language teaching only. This teaching technique took place across the curriculum, for example, during the morning ring, when reading the bible, whilst discussing creative activities, during numeracy activities and even during toilet routines. The participants' views regarding sound awareness and its importance are summarised in **Table 4.3**. Utilising sound recognition in educating Grade R learners was a recurrent theme among all the participants interviewed. When participants were urged to discuss what they think to be the most significant and valuable element to teaching phonological awareness skills, Participant 3A stated that*, "drawing attention to letter names, letter sounds, clapping syllables and encouraging learners to use words in sentences is of utmost importance"*. Participant 1A agreed by saying that, *the sound of letters is very important, especially when teaching*

*first additional* language learners''. Participants 2A and 1B noted that once letter sounds are understood, it is a lot easier to learn how to read. There was mention of teaching learners syllables and sounds in their names by Participants 1A, 2A and 3A. This seems to be a common teaching technique participants use within their classrooms when teaching phonological awareness skills. Participant 1B used simple words such as s-u-n and asked the learners to clap the syllables and then spell them out followed by asking the learners to use the word in a sentence, *"The sun shines brightly".*

Using the phonics approach to teach phonological awareness was important to the educator participants in both schools A and B. Teachers guided learners and encouraged them throughout the lessons observed. The department books ''Rainbow Grade R'' were used at both schools. However, I only observed one lesson presented by Participant 1B when the book was used. She started with a discussion about the letter 'Ss' thus teaching the learners the two sounds namely, the capital 'S' and the lower case 's'. Participant 1B showed the learners flashcard pictures with the letter 's' being a snake, sandwich, the sea, a seal and sun. She also used words that start with ''s'' to make sentences with alliteration so that learners could hear the "s'' sound often as in Sam is a silly snake. After the lesson, learners completed the written activity in the "Rainbow Grade R" book mentioned in the document analysis **Table 4.3.** in order to practice writing the letters 'Ss' and just to reiterate the progress of the activity. Each learner also had to write their name at the bottom of the page in the block provided. Examples of documents and written activity are shown below.

**School B, Grade R English Workbook 2 which includes teaching of letters and sounds (CAPS) documents**
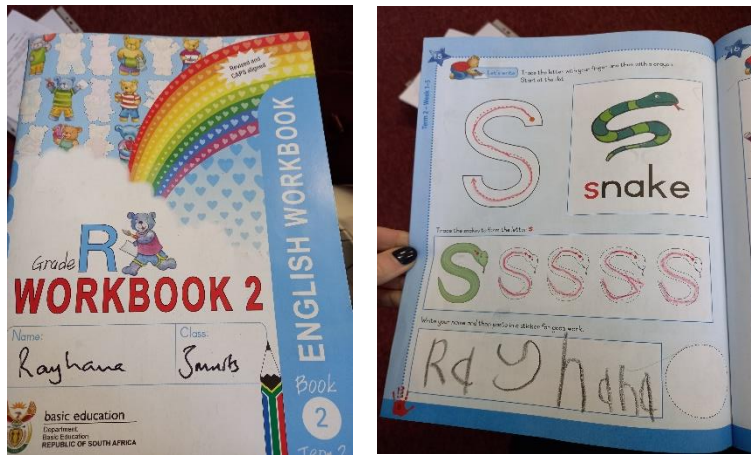
Participant 3A used "mini-shopper" items for her phonics lesson. Learners had to name the items which were weetbix, cornflakes, coco pops, apple juice, orange juice, pronutro, clover milk, spaghetti, ouma rusks, bread, rama, bovril, aromat, sunlight liquid, typex paper, magnum ice-cream, ultra mel custard and duracell batteries. Participant 3A assisted the learners when using the full names of the items as an extension to vocabulary building, for example, learners said rusks, and she named the full item namely Ouma rusks, milk namely Clover milk. Once all items were named, she asked the learners what the starting letter of each item was, and the learners then clapped the syllables with the teacher as a group. As an extension to the lesson, learners were instructed to use these words in sentences, for example, I like custard" starts with a ''Cc''. This assisted with the comprehension of words for EFAL learners and as an extension of vocabulary.

**Mini-shopper items used to teach letter-sound relationships at School A**



Other letter-sound lessons and resources used to teach across the curriculum in both schools A and B included theme flashcards, stories about the theme using story picture

charts, repetition of the stories throughout the week, the use of posters, rhymes and rhyming word charts, season charts and discussions regarding shapes. When referring to documents used, in this case, the weekly planning, I noted that letter-sound relationship discussions were also pointed out in creative activities. For example, learners had to colour in a picture of a toothpaste box, blue and red. When the educator discussed which colours had to be used, she asked the learners about the letters the words beginning with being r – red, b – blue.

**Rhyming word posters at School B used to teach letter-sound relationships**



**Theme stories used at School A - departmental resources listed in Table 4.3.1 document analysis**

After the interviews, observations and document analysis, it became evident that learners should be allowed to understand and hear letter-sound relationships as often as possible. It was a common practice amongst all the participants that bringing letter-sound awareness into all areas of the curriculum gives the learners more of an opportunity to develop their phonological awareness skills. Repetition is very important, especially for those that may not have grasped concepts after the very first lesson and a combination of approaches is fundamental to the effective teaching of EFAL learners in South African classrooms.

### 4.5.2.2  Category 2: Morning ring as a space for teaching phonological awareness skills

All the Grade R participants, namely, 1A, 2A, 3A and 1B used the ''Morning Ring'' lesson to teach phonological awareness skills. The ''Morning Ring'' lessons focus on literacy skills which included Bible stories and prayer, discussions on the days of the week, the seasons and daily weather, the calendar, counting and naming of shapes. Participants 1A, 2A, 3A and 1B started with a Bible reading and prayer, then moved to the discussion about the daily weather, and which day of the week it was and encouraged their group of learners to count from 1-20. Participants 1A and 3A discussed the shapes and asked the learners to answer the following questions. "How many sides does a square have? How many sides does a triangle have? How many sides does a rectangle have? They then also asked the learners to describe a circle. Learners were also asked to name the semi-circle, doughnut ring and a star. Participant 1B asked the learners to say the days of the week starting from Monday and the months of the year starting with January. Other 'Morning Ring'' activities included discussions around the weekly theme. The educators all had table displays with flashcards and items on them around the weekly theme.

During my observations, the weekly theme at school A was, "Caring for one's body'' and "healthy choices'' and at school B, the theme was "Occupations''. The participants also all had flashcards and posters on their walls showing verses or rhymes about the shapes and colours. On the walls, cupboards and furniture items, the Grade R educators had labelled items, lights, book corners, books, and toilets so that the children can always see visual print around the classroom. Participant 1B noted*, ''I start with pictures and explain what it represents. I then show them words that relate to the pictures, and then, I encourage learners to use these words in sentences. I also point to the words on the posters while learners are saying the words, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Once all the words have been said in the correct order, I encourage learners to give me the sounds that the words begin with say Saturday begins with ''s''. For the stronger learners to have more of a challenge, I asked if they could name the other day that begins with an ''s''.'* Extension activities are very important when exposing any learners to phonological awareness skills and language development.

**An example of a Theme table that displays flashcards and items used in classrooms at School A**



**Shape Rhyme charts encouraging a print-rich area in a classroom at School A**



During the interviews, participants all noted that the most important concept of teaching language is to allow the learners to hear words, practice saying words and give them as much opportunity to use words within the correct context. According to Participant 1B, *"An environment filled with print-rich surroundings, gives children the opportunity to see and actively engage in print-related activities".* Therefore, more than one approach or strategy to teaching EFAL learners is encouraged in Grade R classrooms at Schools A and B to develop them holistically.

### 4.5.2.3 *Category 3: Resources and documents used when teaching phonological awareness*

As mentioned in the categories above, many resources are used in the classrooms where I conducted my research. One of the resources used at School B in Participant 1B's

classroom is a laptop and projector. She showed the learners a YouTube video and a story regarding the theme "Occupations". In her words, she referred to the projector as "*a nice to have*". Participant 1B first discussed the theme, revised and reminded the learners of what she had already taught the learners the previous day. The discussion was mainly focused on the medical occupations of nurses, doctors, dentists and paramedics and how they helped the community. She then asked the learners about the jobs their parents do. The learners were very eager to give their answers. Some of the learners did not know what their parents do, others knew one of their parents' occupations but not both, and the majority of the learners did know what both their parents' occupations were. Participant 1B then told the learners that they will be watching a video about occupations on the projector. The video was a cartoon-based video that discussed occupations in general with mention of what firemen, teachers, doctors, nurses, miners, farmers and lawyers do for the community. The video was clear; the visual pictures were bold, and the English language was simple and understandable. The vocabulary on the video was also very simple, which allowed the learners to formulate a basic understanding of the occupations discussed. The learners concentrated well as the video was not very long. The use of technology was effective, and the lesson was enjoyed by the Grade R learners.

Another resource that differed from all other participants which 1B used in her classroom was the use of a playdough. She encouraged the learners to make the letters of their names using dough. She then asked the children to say the letters individually, and then say their names. This was just a side activity, while the teacher was setting up the projector for the lesson discussed in the above paragraph. The learners were calm and kept busy. If they had completed their names, they could continue making either their surname or make numbers 1 – 10 in the correct order using playdough. This activity allowed the learners to practise the letters of the alphabet in a kinesthetic manner, exploring sensory qualities. This was a tactile, fine motor activity that included the naming of the letters once completed and then numbers if time allowed. Not all learners made the numbers 1-10 as learners worked at different paces. This activity was enjoyed by the learners, and even though it was a side activity, it allowed the learners to experiment,

enhance hand-eye coordination, encourage creativity, promote a form of play and also support the learning of literacy and numeracy in the classroom.

**Photo of the dough activity completed at School B in Participant 1B's classroom**
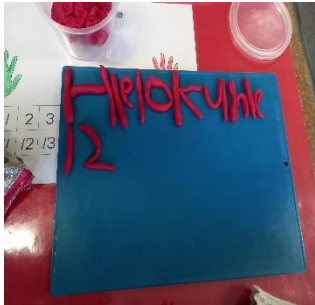


During my observations and interviews, the participants spoke about the more formal documents they use as a guide to teaching and the requirements expected of them regarding the curriculum. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Foundation Phase Grades 1-3 (CAPS 2011) English First Additional Language document is the most used one at both Schools A and B. This document gives the participants information as to what is expected of Grade R learners before they commence Grade 1. There is a breakdown of the time allocations expected on the timetable, content, concepts and requisites for the formal assessment tasks and recommended proposed activities with regards to the informal assessments. The learners were all from different backgrounds, and their first language was not English, therefore, arguably, they were mainly exposed to English during their school day, not at home. The CAPS Foundation Phase English First Additional Language document encourages educators to give the learners ample opportunity to learn comprehensible verbal English that they can understand in context. One of the main resources suggested for teaching Grade R learners is Big Books and shared reading which can support emergent literacy. The CAPS document gives educators ideas of resources they can use when teaching EFAL learners such as the use of a puppet reading of simple repetitive stories, simple songs that learners can memorise, action rhymes and poems and some formulaic language learnt as chunks. As the learners' comprehension grows, they need ample opportunities to speak the language in simple ways which will assist in laying the foundation for learning to read in the Foundation Phase

(Grade 2 and Grade 3). Listening and Speaking, Reading and Phonics, Writing and Language use are mentioned in the CAPS document (DBE, 2011).

Other documents that the participants used were daily and weekly preparations, timetables and assessment records. Daily lesson plans were revised for COVID-19 at school A as boys and girls attended school on alternating days. At School B, all learners were back at school, but the plans still included COVID-19 rules and routines, especially on arrival, during toilet routines and break time. Both schools had very similar daily lesson plans. At School B, the children received the guidelines in English every day from 7h30-8h00. Once that was completed, the 20 minutes ''Morning ring'' lessons began, which included days of the week, dates, weather, birthdays, news, and Bible readings. These activities all have a purpose and play a role in exposing the learners to the English language and assisting with vocabulary building.

The daily lesson plans stated that the activities are "Teacher guided'' and should be presented positively and enjoyably to the learners. The creative activities included one main activity and 2 or 3 supporting activities with a heading that included resources to list on the planned schedule. Examples listed as side activities were playing with educational toys, perceptual games, puzzle building and use of the reading corner. It also said that educators must give clear instructions to the learners so that they know what is expected of them. The educator must conduct continuous assessment and assist when necessary, during the school day. During gross motor activities and free play, learners play outside, giving them ample opportunity to be creative and use their initiative. Learning through play is of utmost importance, as stated in the daily lesson plan. At the end of the day, from 12h30-12h45, the educator must read a story, sing songs, say rhymes and end with a prayer. The learners at school B are allowed to hear and speak English throughout the curriculum. This is very beneficial so that learners can develop their vocabulary and broaden their knowledge of the English language, especially because the learners were EFAL learners.

The weekly lesson plans from both schools were also very similar. As I discussed School B above, I will discuss School A's weekly plan documents. The document gives a breakdown of which activities need to be conducted during the week. The document says

that the planning is conducted according to the CAPS requirements. Every day, there is time allocated to arrival and free play, a greeting, register, weather, and Bible time slot. The first activity includes discussions, themes, and language, then the toilet routine, creative activities with side activities, free play, then the toilet routine again, perceptual/mathematics/science activities, lunch and outside play, story time (12h20-12h35) and then rest time. On Fridays, the second activity (perceptual/mathematical/science) does not take place, and they rather have devotional singing time which is for Bible. The weekly planning under the heading 'English language for Grade R language lessons' includes listening and speaking, sounds, reading, handwriting and writing activities. The weekly planning under the heading 'Mathematics', includes numbers, operations, relations, patterns, functions space, forms, measurement, and data handling. Not all concepts are taught daily; when the specific theme is being taught, the Grade R educators have written or typed a write-up of what needs to be covered within the week on the document sheet. During both English and Mathematics lessons, concepts are taught that broaden the learners' knowledge of the English language, and they are allowed to practise concepts with their educators so that they can eventually understand and learn what is expected of them in order to progress to the next grade. The benefits of integrating language into all subjects are very important when teaching EFAL learners.

The assessment documents for Schools A and B were grounded on the CAPS requirements, with a focus on English (Home Language), Mathematics and Life skills. Under language, the assessment headings are Pronunciation, Listening and Speaking, Emergent Reading, and Emergent Writing. Mathematics includes numbers, operations and relationships, patterns, functions and algebra, space and shape and measurement. Life Skills includes themes, beginning knowledge and personal social well-being, Creative Arts and Physical Education. Under each main theme, some sub-themes list concepts assessed, for example, a learner can speak clearly or pronounces all letters correctly and an example of a Mathematics sub-theme is the learner's ability to comprehend the concepts of many/fewer/less than/more than/equal to. Having an understanding of the words is important when being assessed even if it is a part of Mathematics or Life Skills. The educators are then able to assess the learners holistically. Throughout all

assessments, the educators teach in English and learners are assessed according to what they know and understand in English.

The Rainbow Workbooks from the DBE form part of the educational interventions aimed at improving the learners' performance. Both Schools A and B used these workbooks, and they mentioned that there is one book for each term. They are easy-to-follow worksheets for listening, reading, and writing. The workbooks comply with the CAPS documents. These books were used weekly where learners had the opportunity to revise letters and sounds and also complete writing and writing pattern activities. The books were used after lessons were conducted as a revision exercise, for example, practise the letter "Ss" or when specific themes were taught and an activity in the workbook matched the chosen theme. The books had perceptual activity exercises such as cut-out and stick puzzles. The books were effectively used, and the participants were happy to include the content in their weekly planning.

### 4.5.2.4 Category 4: Use of verbal and non-verbal communication/interactions in teaching English First Additional Language learners in Grade R

Under this category, I have included how the participants use verbal and non-verbal communication or interactions as an approach to teaching phonological awareness skills. The learners at Schools A and B in Grade R were all EFAL learners. Their home languages are mainly African. Two of the learners at school A were Afrikaans home language speakers, and one was Portuguese. At School B, one learner was from Mozambique, and another was from the Congo. The learners, therefore, had varying levels of English knowledge. I included information on how the participants engaged with the learners. Under this category, I noted interactions and strategies of how the participants tried to break a wall brought by language differences and how they mitigated any challenges experienced when teaching the EFAL through verbal and non-verbal communication.

Verbal communication refers to the use of language to convey information. This represents more than speaking abilities and how you deliver and receive messages in both speaking and written instructions (Birt, 2022). Non-verbal communication includes gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and eye contact or the lack thereof, body language and posture (Doyle, 2020). Communication skills form the bulk of teaching as educators need to use communication to teach their learners, explain concepts, build on skills, give them techniques to use, expose them to hearing sounds and syllables and many more skills that are needed for further learning. Throughout the interviews and observations, I was able to note and observe the two forms of communication. The category that emerged is the practitioners' verbal and non-verbal communication between the learners and educators in teaching phonological awareness skills and how the two forms of communication could benefit the learners.

Throughout the interviews, I was able to initially listen to and discuss my research topic verbally with the participants. I was also able to observe their non-verbal communication whilst speaking to them which I recorded on my field notes. Curby and Brock (2013) expressed that interactions between teachers and learners include how an educator approaches and responds to forms of communication and support of the learners. The ways educators interact with children are crucial in developing how they develop over time. This, therefore, is a very important theme, and the findings were very beneficial. For EFAL bridging, any language 'gap' can assist and enable learners to relate with others, give them opportunities to share their answers and ask questions which can encourage them to take part.

### 4.5.2.5 Strategies participants used for teaching phonological awareness verbally and non-verbally

A Grade R teacher is viewed as an individual or figure who is mostly engaged in all learners' reading readiness at school, especially when the learner is an EFAL learner (Du Plessis, 2016). In the interviews, I explained to the participants that I would be observing both forms of communication (participants and learners) as non-verbal, and verbal signals

cannot be analysed separately when decoding the message because these components are linked (Kruger, 2009).

Non-verbal communication techniques are useful when teaching EFAL, as the educator can draw the learners' attention and motivate the learners by bringing more excitement to the lesson. Learners may understand more by looking at symbols and gestures rather than words. The good old saying, 'actions speak louder than words' can be of value to such learners. During my observations of non-verbal interactions in the class, I noted that Participants 1A and 3A used hand gestures and were very expressive in terms of smiling at the learners in their classroom. Participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A and 1B used eye contact with the learners, mostly when questions were asked and answered and when their names were said, as the learners could then have clarification that their teacher was looking at them. The eyes are important organs of the human body, not only for sight but for communication. Eyes are sometimes referred to as "mirrors of the soul". Through their eyes, educators and learners can communicate fear, joy and anger (Elfatihi, 2006).

Participants 1A, 3A and 1B nodded their heads at times when confirming something was correctly answered after questions had been asked or when affirming that the answer was 'Yes'. I did not observe any non-verbal interactions that were negative or forms of communication that may cause anxiety for the learners. The atmosphere in the classes was not too formal or rigid. Participants 2A and 1B walked around their classroom a lot and kept an eye out for any struggling learners offering assistance and motivation to those that lost concentration. They both made eye contact with the learners that seemingly needed to be drawn into concentrating or those that needed assistance. Participant 1A hugged a learner that was tearful, which was a positive form of non-verbal interaction.

In Participant 1Bs classroom, she did something very different from the other participants; she rang a bell if learners became restless and then she would explain why she rang it, "*Boys and girls, remember to listen. I am going to ask you questions after the YouTube video. So, you need to focus!*". Participant 1B explained that this technique helped a lot as she did not have to shout and scream to get the learner's attention. They knew that when required to focus, they should listen and learn, as it was beneficial for them. I observed that the learners put effort into focusing more.

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The theme 'video' was very interesting, and Participant 1B was able to conduct a discussion after the video was played regarding the theme. She asked questions: What can you tell me about a doctor's daily work? What kind of outfit did the Fireman have on? Describe the outfit. This extension activity was successful as the video was informative, included factual information, and a lot of pictures and movements which could also be seen as a form of non-verbal communication learning. The fact that the learners also focused and listened to the very first instruction was also positive to observe. The learners were able to benefit from the lesson, strategies and interactions to build an understanding of language and vocabulary development, which are all important concepts all Grade R learners need to be taught. All participants used something to point to their resources like a ruler to point to poster words or a stick. The learners could then follow and focus on the lesson, enhancing both visual and auditory skills development verbally and non-verbally. The significance of non-verbal gestures is that those who may not understand direct verbal instruction can rather see and understand when their teacher is pointing to something on the board. They realise the need to look at what is being pointed at and therefore follow the lesson.

The CAPS document for English Additional Language learners encourages educators to expose the learners to as much verbal language as possible, as they are generally divided into four fundamental language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. This promoted vocabulary development and awareness, which allows learners to hear the language daily, especially in a fun, learning environment. Repetition and prior knowledge can build the learners' confidence and understanding. To assist the learners with the correct pronunciation of words, the participants repeated words and allowed the learners to practise and say the words correctly. Explanations and meanings of words were highlighted, when necessary, for example, theme words and words in stories. Verbal forms of communication were used to practise sounds and sound awareness of words. In Participant 1B's lesson, the learners said the names of the occupations discussed and repeated them after the educator, for example, fireman, nurse and doctor. She said fireman, and the class repeated as a group. Participant 3A used the mini-shoppers lesson for the learners to hear and say the words and give syllables to the words.

Forms of communication between the learners and their peers were noted during free play sessions which I recorded, but the participants also mentioned forms of communication learners experience in their interviews which I recorded on my field notes. Participant 1A mentioned that children mimic their teachers' actions and words quite often when they role-play. She said, *"The children love to play teacher-teacher"*. Participant 3B said, "*The children like to role play and act like superheroes"*. During these forms of play, learners also show expressions on their faces, which involve various forms of emotions and gestures.

Whilst observing Participant 1B's lesson, two of the learners were extremely quiet as they seemed not to understand everything easily. However, the participant tried her best to involve them by asking them questions to establish if they understood what they were learning. She said, *"Learners who do not understand or can't communicate easily use their hands and point".* All Grade R participants mentioned that the children love or enjoy singing songs and saying rhymes using their bodies to react and act in order to dance and express themselves.

The importance of non-verbal and verbal communication from the learners towards their educators is very important to EFAL learners because they need to be able to take part in the lessons. They have to understand the dynamics and discipline structures in the class. They need to trust and build a relationship with their teachers and peers. They should practise speaking and the need to respond to the teacher's questions. When referring to the CAPS documents, one reads that learners' communicative verbal language will be formulaic, such as songs, rhymes and poems, and the emergent spoken language needs to be scaffolded. The learners will then progress at a different pace, and therefore educators need to tailor speaking opportunities to the level of the child. Educators need some form of feedback and understanding of what the learners are trying to express, whether be it verbal or non-verbal. Both forms of communication can help improve both the teaching practice and learning processes (Elfatihi, 2006).

CAPS policy (DBE 2011) affirms that an integrated approach will be utilised, as the "language programme is integrated into all other subjects and learning areas". Language can become a part of holistic learning in all areas of the curriculum. Therefore, language

can be taught and acquired during a specific English lesson; it can also be used as a teaching and learning tool throughout all the subject areas, such as Mathematics and Life Skills. In the course of Grade R, the focal point is on informal and spontaneous learning both verbally and non-verbally, and learners should be exposed to a language-rich, balanced and flexible daily programme during the school day (DBE, 2011b:20-21). Simple routines, forms of spoken communication and non-verbal communication and engagement with the learners can allow them to enhance their literacy skills.

### 4.5.3   Theme 3: Challenges with the promotion of phonological awareness skills

Although a variety of methods were used to build phonological awareness skills, it could not go unnoticed that all the educators were not English home language speakers. The HOD and principals were also not English language speakers, therefore, none of the participants I interviewed or observed was an English first language speaker. When reading through the transcribed interviews, it became apparent that these educators' English sentence construction and pronunciation and their vocabulary use were slightly restricted. Having a full class consisting of EFAL learners and an educator who is a second language speaker also becomes challenging. The language is not always demonstrated correctly whilst teaching, and learners may then model incorrect pronunciation of words or sentences.

However, when asking the participants about strategies they used to expose the learners to phonological awareness amidst the language challenges, they were very forthcoming. The participants understood that they would have to try different techniques within the circumstances of COVID-19 and also the fact that learners and educators are EFAL speakers. Participants at schools A and B put more emphasis on phonics, sounds and vocabulary development than they did on Creative Arts activities. In their lesson plans, both schools had added vocabulary development and extension activities to other learning areas thus integration within the curriculum via numeracy lessons – say the letters in the numbers, emphasising spelling and sounds in the colour names. Drawing the learners' attention to phonological awareness skills to lay the foundation for future reading was implemented.

During the interviews and observations, challenges arose when the participants shared their input. I included a section on my observation schedule, where I needed to note which weaknesses or teaching skills were unconducive to teaching phonological awareness skills. Three challenges emerged, which are, free play and vocabulary development, parental influences and teaching and learning during COVID-19.

### 4.5.3.1 Vocabulary Development and English pronunciation

After working through the interview and observation data, I can confirm that the participants spoke of vocabulary development quite often, noting the benefits of teaching early phonological awareness skills in Grade R, in aid of preparing them for reading in the future. However, they mentioned that teaching learners' vocabulary and phonological awareness skills can be challenging, especially with regards to building vocabulary in the classroom and the correct pronunciation of words.

When looking at the positive benefits of vocabulary development, Participant 3A mentioned that, "*phonological awareness skills help develop a better vocabulary*". Participant 1B said, "*The more words learners understand, the better it will benefit them in the future, but they need to know how to pronounce the words and understand the meanings too*". Participant 1A said that, *''pronunciation of English words is easier when learners sound them phonetically. Teaching the learners basic theme words and vocabulary which can be sounded out will assist the children and make it easier for them while they are developing their vocabulary''.*

When looking at the challenges experienced, Participant 2B stated that, '*'kids lack vocabulary, and this is a reality". They do not understand the language which becomes a problem''.* Participant 3A claimed, *''Learners only hear the language at school and develop English vocabulary at school, and now during COVID-19, the learners hear even less English as they could during alternating days*". Participant 2A highlighted, *'I myself, at times, struggle with the correct sentence construction and tenses in sentences''.* During her interview, her sentence construction was incorrect. She said, *''I learn the kids to speak and say sounds''.*

The difference in learners' and educators' accents and phonic sounds can be taught and can cause confusion. This can have an impact on a learner's reading and comprehension skills.

During the observation of lessons, in both Schools A and B, I noted and observed the educators modelling the appropriate pronunciation of words. The educators supported and helped the learners with sentence construction and corrected their oral sentences. Questioning and giving of answers were also observed. The participants encouraged a positive learning environment with opportunities to grow and build on skills.

### 4.5.3.2 Parental communication and home language

Parents play a crucial role in assisting their children to become literate. Children that get the opportunity to converse in the language of learning with and to their parents are more likely to succeed and will probably perform better. Since the learners I observed were all English First Additional language learners, they came from diverse language and cultural backgrounds. During the interviews, I asked the participants how they communicate and interact with their learners. I asked them to include both weaknesses and challenges. The participants' input and responses during the interviews gave me insight into understanding the challenges that affect communication between parents, teachers and learners and their language development or lack thereof.

I, therefore, asked the participants about their experiences with parents, the parents' involvement with the children and how this affected their language learning and communication skills. The participants' experiences with the parents were expressed as frustrating. The participants were unsettled and feared that the parents were occasionally not interested in their children's education. Organising meetings was difficult, and the parents' attendance at meetings was poor. Participant 5A mentioned that she tried to contact the parents, but it was a struggle. The parents did not take their calls. She noted, ''*We often speak to aunties and uncles, not the actual parents''*. She also found that the struggling learners and parents were the most difficult to get hold of, ''*I feel communication is one-sided.*

According to Caddy (2015), the absence of parental support is very prevalent and is a challenge that is exceedingly prevailing in schools in SA. There are numerous reasons for the absence of support within different schools, and I can imagine that every school has different concerns depending on the environment. The following reasons for the absence of support in Schools A and B were identified by Grade R educators, Participants 1A, 2A, 3A and 1B. The reasons given by the participants for parents not becoming involved are that many parents have to work most of the day and only leave work at 17h00; some work night shifts where learners do not see their parents for a long period. Also, some of the children are cared for by other family members like grannies, an older sibling or an aunt and the parents themselves cannot speak English and do not understand some forms of communication, such as letters or messages. Some learners come from poor communities and do not have appropriate resources, for example, English story books. Other parents may be absent and do not take interest in their children's progress, leaving the learners with no choice but to develop and build on language skills only at school in the classroom. This negatively impacts the development of vocabulary, listening, speaking and eventual reading proficiency. Parents then fail to reinforce and assist the educators in their children's language development.

Conversing with parents and parental involvement will remain a challenge, and parents and educators need to assist the learners to progress in literacy skills, especially regarding vocabulary development and opportunities to practise by English First Additional Language learners in Grade R. Young learners that do not have support are hugely disadvantaged, and this becomes a very unfavourable situation to be placed in. Home, school resources and communication between parents, guardians, educators and learners become intertwined. The learners require much more exposure to English. Therefore, it would be beneficial for educators to teach English concepts and some phonological awareness aspects across the curriculum. The absence of parental involvement and time constraints because of parents being at work affects the development of learners. Such an environment is unconducive to learners reaching their full potential in areas of literacy and other curriculum learning areas.

Collaboration between parents and educators will allow the learners to feel more confident, and they will then be motivated to devote some time to learn English First Additional Language skills.

### 4.5.3.3 COVID-19, Teaching and Learning

Since my research was conducted during the pandemic, COVID-19 protocols and procedures made an impact during the interviews and whilst I was observing lessons. During the interviews, the participants all commented on at least one aspect of how COVID-19 affected either lessons, communication with parents or the interaction between educators and learners. All the Grade R participants mentioned the use of masks as being a huge challenge, especially regarding the literacy development of the EFAL learners. Masks prevent educators from showing the learners how their mouths move when a particular sound or word is said. Listening, speaking, reading, spelling and writing form the basis and foundation of language development. If learners cannot hear words and sounds correctly, how will they learn to spell the words and write them? Participant 3A said, *''sounds such as 'h', 'sh' and ''th'' require certain tongue and mouth movements when sounding which learners can't see with masks on''.*

Participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A agreed that the learners do not get enough time to practise speaking as they are playing less; they also need to abide by social distancing rules, and oral development is delayed, which will possibly affect their future reading skills. Participants 1A and 2A mentioned that the learners are not playing in the "Fantasy corner'' and are not conversing with each other unlike before COVID-19. Participant 1B stated*, "These masks also do not allow learners to show facial expressions easily*". Emotions are stunted a little bit. During my lesson observations, I observed that the participants had to repeat words and sentences loudly when speaking. They also had to ask learners to repeat what they said, as the participant could not understand what the learners were saying. Instructions were given loudly and more than once, which was very good. The participants all made an effort to sound out words a lot slower and emphasise the pronunciation of the words.

The challenges of COVID-19 protocols regarding the curriculum were also very concerning as the attendance of learners at school was reduced, and activities were either left out or not taught. Participants 1A and 3A said they had to rush through certain activities to ensure they completed the work that needed to be assessed. This put the participants under pressure, and they expressed that they felt overwhelmed. Participant 3A said, *"due to social distancing, learners are not able to play and mingle with each other, which is so difficult to observe. I can see the learners want to interact and socialise with their peers but can't"*. Participant 1B shared, *"Children learn through play, so it is difficult for us as Grade R teachers to observe the lack of playtime and fun"*. Learners learn through play, and play is imperative for gross motor, fine motor development, problem solving, reasoning using language and communication skills development.

## 4.6    CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the main focus was on the teaching of PA skills to Grade R EFAL learners. This chapter has highlighted effective strategies and challenges when teaching PA skills. The teacher interviews, with the observation of Grade R lessons taught and keeping notes of information from the document analysis, allowed for the triangulation of data. For the duration of this chapter, common themes, categories and differences in the data collected were emphasised. This led to fundamental data findings with regards to EFAL learning and the benefits of teaching phonological awareness skills.  Other teaching areas of the curriculum were also noted, which expose the learners to vocabulary development. However, the emphasis was on teaching learners the skills needed for future reading in the Foundation Phase.

**Chapter 5** includes a discussion of the pertinent literature, which will also bring forth answers to the research questions, recommendations for future studies and the conclusion of the study.

# CHAPTER 5

# THE DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4, data collected through interviews and observations were presented. Similarities and differences were highlighted through the use of relevant themes and categories. This fifth chapter presents a discussion of the relevant literature on teaching PA skills in Grade R to English First Additional Language learners, as presented in Chapter 2. This is accompanied by the data collected through the selected data collection tools. Discrepancies and agreements between the literature and data emerge giving support in answering the research questions referred to in Chapter 1.

## 5.2 FINDINGS

The findings of this study are presented by analysing the following secondary research questions based on the collected data together with the relevant consulted literature. The secondary research questions are as follows:

1. What are the educators' understandings of phonological awareness skills?
2. Which approaches are used during the teaching of phonological awareness skills?
3. Which challenges are experienced when teaching phonological awareness?
4. Which models or guidelines of teaching phonological awareness are used in teaching English First Additional Language learners?
5. Which documents guide educators in teaching phonological awareness skills?

These questions will assist in answering the primary research question of this study, *"How do teachers teach phonological awareness to English First Additional Language learners in Grade R?"*

Table 5.1 below presents a summary of the emerging themes in comparison with the consulted literature.

**Table 5.1: Summary of the emerging themes in comparison with the consulted literature**

| Themes | Author andyear of publication | Relevant Literature | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Teaching early sound awareness in Grade R | Jeanne Charll Model (1983) | Stages Development of the stages below is required for second language learners to develop reading skills. 1. Stage 0. Pre-reading 2. Stage1: Initial Reading 3. Stage 2: Confirmation, Fluency 4. Stage 3: Reading for learning the New 5. Stage 4: Multiple Viewpoints 6. Stage 5: Construction and Reconstruction | It is imperative that educators interact warmly with the learners, as well as acknowledge the child's interest in books, and reading. Most learners could understand the children's picture books, and they learnt new vocabulary and were able to formulate a rudimentary understanding of the themes and words covered in  Grade R classrooms. Learners could not, however, read, but they were able to recognise words incidentally. |
| 2. Exposure to hearing sounds and words in English. | | | The children in Grade R were in stage 1. They were exposed to a basic understanding of the relationship between printed and spoken words. They received direct instruction in letter-sound relations and got to practise the words and sounds in the classroom environment. This was done throughout the areas of the curriculum, not only in literacy lessons. |

| 3. Participants' understanding of phonological awareness | | | The participants were aware of the importance of teaching PA skills in laying the foundation for future reading. They integrated a variety of PA skill teaching techniques into their lessons. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Approaches used to teach PA. | Ehri's model (1994, 1998, 1999, 2002) | Phases of learning to read 1. Pre-alphabetic 2. Partial alphabetic 3. Full alphabetic 4. Consolidated alphabetic | In Grade R, the focal point was namely the development of English vocabulary by teaching the pre-alphabetic and partial alphabetic ways. |
| 5. Teaching letter-sound relationships across the curriculum | | | In the pre-alphabetic stage, learners could make an association between salient visual features of words and their pronunciation, for example, recognise logos. Learners developed the knowledge that words are made up of sounds. Learners were able to learn the connection between written words and pronunciations. They could name beginning sounds, say syllables in the word and formulate basic sentences. |
| 6. Morning Ring as a place for teaching PA skills | Elley & Cutting (2001) Acquiring Literacy in a Second Language | Having a balanced programme in terms of instructing literacy has proven to be successful in developing English literacy skills, including PA skills. A balanced programme and curriculum draws on the fundamentals of letter-sound correspondence, word study and decoding, as well as comprehensive experiences in reading, writing, speaking | A combination of approaches was used to teach Grade R learners. The phonic approach, whole word and balanced literacy approaches are beneficial if implemented in the class. This was effective and was included in the EFAL classrooms for teaching language, vocabulary and future reading skills. |

| | | and listening. This enhances the integration of teaching and learning experiences. | The participants used the following documents to aid their daily teaching plans: National Curriculum Statement Grade R, CAPS document for EFAL learners, Grade R books each term, provided by the DBE, Grade R resource kits, Daily Lesson Plans, Weekly lesson plans and Assessment documents. These documents guided the participants ensuring they develop from stage to stage. Participants used their resources over and above the departmental resources provided. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. Resources and documents used when teaching phonological awareness skills | | | |
| 8. Role of teaching phonological awareness to EFAL. Use of words, reading and PA such as syllable, onset-rime, phoneme and tone awareness in Gr R. Exposure to letters, sounds and meanings. | The Psycholinguistic Grain Size Theory | How effectively children of different languages understand and learn to read depends on how they learn availability, consistency and granularity. Phonological activation is a requisite for both beginner readers and skilled readers. Visual forms of a word (orthography) and their spoken sound (phonology) link and can be either whole-word level or sub-word levels, called psycholinguistic grain sizes such as syllables. | Reading acquisition requires cognitive prerequisites which are similar across languages. Vocabulary development, structural aspects, awareness of differences of phonological sound structures of words and syllable characteristics. Exposure to the four basic language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing is important. |
| 9. Challenges with the promotion of teaching phonological awareness skills | Muhammed (2013) | Second Language acquisition - challenges EFAL learners face as well as the educators' teaching; these learners have an impact on their academic achievement in their future studies. | Challenges were experienced by the learners and participants, namely, correct pronunciation of English words, a lack of parental communication at school and at home and COVID-19 with regards to teaching and learning. |

### 5.2.1 Discussion

Reading development is an ongoing process. In this study, I concentrated on the teaching of PA skills to EFAL learners and how educators work towards building and laying the foundations for reading development to take place. In **Table 5.1,** I have listed the relevant literature mentioned in Chapter 2 and linked it to themes. This gave meaning to the study by offering support and reading material for myself, as the researcher, to review or refer to how learners acquire reading skills and the stages or phases of reading skill development. Models can monitor and structure the progress of developing reading skills and give insight into the connection of different knowledge-base skills which require learners to read, write and comprehend. Educators can refer to the theories by formulating interactive approaches, progression from smaller to larger units and building on prior knowledge learners have learnt in their years before Grade R. In this chapter, I discuss the themes in relation to the literature review.

### 5.2.2 Discussion of themes in relation to the literature review

#### 5.2.2.1 *THEME 1: The participants' understandings of phonological awareness*

Having an understanding of how to teach Grade R learners PA skills is important. If an educator has no structure whilst working with younger learners, it will be more challenging for the learners to build on skills in order to progress to the next grade. I, therefore, needed to liaise with the participants during the interviews and also observe their teaching, noting their interactions with their peers, as a group and with the other participants. The more skilled and capable the learners are in a language, the more likely they are to succeed and achieve.

In **Table 5.1**, I summarised the findings. In the first column, I have emerging themes in comparison with the consulted literature. The authors, relevant literature and findings are listed in columns two, three and four. Early exposure to sound awareness and the participants' perspectives on teaching sound awareness in Grade R are linked to the theories mentioned in Chapter 2. The participants recognised the value of exposing Grade R learners to early reading and the initial stages of development. Participants were

aware that the more competent the learners are in a language, the more likely they will succeed and become positively involved in their capabilities to achieve their full potential. The participants' responses and teaching skills are linked to both Charll's and Ehri's stages/phases. As learners mature, they build on skills that they have already achieved prior to what is being taught. They also learn through repetition and practising the skills needed for vocabulary and literacy development.

Themes one, two and three listed in 5.2 are teaching early sound awareness in Grade R, exposure to sounds in English and the participants' understanding of PA. I found that the children's interest was sparked when their educators read to them and empowered them through the use of literacy. Learners understood the picture books, they acquired new vocabulary, and they were able to perceive, take in and develop their understanding of the English language. They could not read sentences but could identify and recognise words incidentally and were allowed to learn that there is a relationship between print and the spoken word. Techniques, steps and activities used in this study to expose the learners to sound awareness were mentioned in Chapter 4 in 4.5.1 and in 4.5.2, which entail many aspects, namely, identification of letters and learning about their sounds, singing and saying of rhymes, reading of stories, flashcards of learners' names and peers' names to identify sounds, phonic awareness, syllable awareness and lots of repetition. The participants taught and understood the early stages, according to Charll using pre-reading and moved towards the initial stage of reading development. Participants taught in English used question and answer techniques, and discussions about what the child already knew, for example, in 4.5.2.1, using mini-shopper items and then building on the knowledge by asking questions and giving learners the opportunities to answer questions. The participants' understanding using these stages was noticeable by moving from the pre-reading stage towards the initial reading stage of reading development.

Teaching Grade R learners PA skills needed to be done in an environment of literacy to promote progression, hearing, sounding and visual guidance. Using visual cues like flashcards, shape words and logos encouraged learners to recognise words as pictures and words that form a whole. Knowing about the pre-alphabetic phase, as mentioned in

**Table 5.1,** allowed participants to focus on what the next phase would and should be, which is the partial alphabetic phase. The participants realised that instruction for learners in the first phase should focus on PA, alphabet knowledge and grapheme-phoneme correspondence emerging, then the use of grapheme-phoneme or letter sound connections. Beginning and ending sounds and identification of the words using the beginning and ending sounds do not grant that learner can read but rather reinforce letter-sound awareness and phonemic awareness, emphasising the eventual identification of all the letters in the word. In Chapter 4, 4.5.1, it is apparent that the participants exposed the learners to letter-sound awareness and the relationships between sounds and words, and they had an understanding of what was beneficial for the learners regarding PA. Phonological awareness teachings were included through planned instruction, and this development would benefit and have a significant influence on children's spelling and reading. The CAPS document guided the participants regarding the concepts that needed to be covered and as colleagues, participants had phase meetings where they could put together their schedules, ideas and knowledge to benefit the EFAL learners' needs. Under theme 5 in Table 5.1, the teaching of letter-sound awareness took place across the curriculum.

In Chapters 2, 2.4.3 and 2.4.4, I mentioned the Psycholinguistic Grain Size theory. Psycholinguistic Grain Size theory assumes that smaller grain sizes like phonemes can develop early in a child's development processes. The earlier the learners form connections between written text and pronunciation, the more they can make meaning of what they read. The educators focused on the smaller grain sizes to move towards the larger units. As stated in **Table 5.1,** how efficiently children of different languages read depends on how they learn availability, consistency and granularity. Phonological activation is mandatory for both beginner readers and skilled readers. The finding was that reading acquisition requires cognitive prerequisites which are similar across languages: vocabulary development, structural aspects and awareness of differences in phonological sound structures of words and syllable characteristics. In Grade R classes, learners were exposed to the four basic language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

### 5.2.2.2 THEME 2 Approaches used to teach phonological awareness skills

Theme two discusses the approaches the participants used to teach PA skills to Grade R EFAL learners. The letter-sound relationships across the curriculum, morning ring activities, resources and documents used when teaching PA and the use of verbal and non-verbal communication were categories under this theme. These themes were discussed in Chapter 4, theme 4.5.2 and the categories 4.5.2.1, 4.5.2.2, 4.5.2.3 and 4.5.2.4. The participants exposed the learners to word recognition activities, vocabulary building, comprehension and phonemic awareness, for example, clapping of syllables like s-u-n. Then, they built on knowledge already known to the learners. In **Table 5.1**, I mentioned that a combination of approaches was used to teach Grade R learners. Elley and Cutting's theory (2001) of acquiring literacy in a second language affirms that a balanced programme regarding literacy has demonstrated successful development in English literacy skills. The findings were that the phonic approach such as in s-u-n, whole-word-like names of learners and balanced literacy approaches were implemented in the classrooms through the teaching of language, vocabulary building, syllable awareness and rhyming. The 'morning ring' activities mentioned in 4.5.2.2 were also extremely beneficial in exposing the learners to the teaching of PA skills. Building the basic skills in these activities supported the development of vocabulary building, building an understanding of what is being taught, sequencing activities and repetition. The repetition of techniques and the routine allowed for teaching PA skills more often. Teaching across the curriculum was highlighted, as EFAL learners need to hear, see and understand the language they are being taught in. Emphasis was placed on the following: Bible lessons, stories, shapes, daily repetitions, use of flashcards, alliteration in sentences, singing of songs and saying rhymes. This allowed the learners to express themselves using the English language. To emphasise alphabetic knowledge, all participants had wall friezes displayed on the walls in their classrooms which they used during the 'morning ring' lessons.

Within the context of Charll's stages of reading development, learners were within the 0–6-year age group. Reading skills using these stages can develop in a hierarchy, each skill layering upon the previous layer.

The first stage was pre-reading, where learners were allowed to understand that books contain words that provide meaning. They were able to handle books and also began to write the alphabet. Using flashcards, posters, rhyme charts, books, shape pictures and words, the learners were able to understand that the alphabet principle can connect to sounds and symbols. Some of the learners had reached the stage where they can recognise sight words, which indicated that they have possibly been exposed to more of the English language in prior years of schooling or even within their home environment. Learners can move through the stages at varying paces, as reading development is a dynamic process that may not always follow an exact list of progression.

Within the context of Ehri's phases, the alphabetic principles mentioned in the literature review, as well as in **Table 5.1**, emphasise the ability to associate sounds with letters and use the sounds to make words. Looking at phonological awareness, learners need to have an idea of how to read the letters to sound out the words and spell unfamiliar words. There is a correlation between both sound and spelling, as learners cannot have an understanding of the alphabetic principle before reading. Knowing the alphabet and letter-sound awareness is part of learning and understanding phonological awareness mentioned in Chapter Two. This is the basis of the English language and other languages. In this study, I observed the participants using different forms/steps of PA skill teachings, as discussed in 4.5.2.1. The educator used mini-shopper items which learners needed to say, clap the syllables of the words and allowed them to use the words in a sentence. The learners were exposed to very creative lessons to assist them and extend their knowledge through teaching techniques which are fun activities like making letters of their names using playdough, using words known to them in sentences as in Ouma rusks are delicious, rhymes about shapes and repetition of stories. Once the pre-alphabetic phase is developed, the partial alphabetic phase is next. In this phase, readers develop their alphabet awareness to segment and blend in the full alphabetic phase.

Grain size is a unit of sound (phonemes, rhyme, syllable) that is mapped to a unit of orthography. This is therefore an orthography-phonology correspondence (Goswami et al., 2003). Small grain size is a single letter or letter group mapped to a single phoneme. According to the PGST, children first gain awareness of syllables, and then they can

usually demonstrate this awareness in cognitive tasks by the age of 3. They then gain onset-rhyme units and can demonstrate awareness in cognitive tasks around the ages of 3 or 4. Then, they become aware of phonemes, which are dependent on language variations, for example, syllable structure. I observed the participants involving syllable awareness by clapping as in "pink'' vs "orange''. Learners could also develop this skill by reading and clapping peers' names which were on flashcards. The children thoroughly enjoyed this lesson, which was presented as they realised that they can read their peers' names. Onset and rhyme awareness was taught by the participants in the saying of rhymes such as rhymes about each shape. English is not as consistent in letter-sound correspondences as it is in other languages. Phonological awareness should depend on spoken language factors so that learners can show performance levels in both rime awareness and phoneme awareness. Learning the more alphabetic type orthography, as in 4.5.2.1, was noted in my observations as the verbal and written work that took place in the classes contained a system of sounding and writing symbols representing individual sounds, for example, the Grade R Rainbow Department workbook, practice writing the letter 's', say the letter s, whilst looking at the picture and word 'snake'. The participants created an environment of teaching using sounds, writing and spelling, labelled items in the classroom, saying days of the week and posters with rhyming words.

Themes one and two contain similar information in terms of how the participants teach phonological awareness skills and their understanding. Theme two draws on a category, however, that is dissimilar, namely, referring to verbal and non-verbal communication information. Within the context of the study, in Chapter Four, specifically 4.5.2.4, I observed actions that were used to model and guide learners through their learning processes. Gestures, actions and role-modelling techniques were noted during the observations of the lessons. Learners were allowed to hear (auditory), see (visual), feel (kinesthetic) and take part (actions) whilst learning in the Grade R classroom. Sentences were repeated, especially when reading stories, using words that they know in a sentence, they could move, sing, say and perform actions. These lessons drew attention to different ways of teaching PA skills without the learners knowing. Grade R learners are like "sponges'' for the more they learn when they are in the younger years of learning, the more beneficial it will be for them to progress and build foundations for future reading.

The findings show that through the use of resources, morning ring teaching activities, use of rhyming posters, theme posters, big books, story reading and creative techniques, the participants encouraged the development of building phonological awareness skills. In 4.5.2.3, the documents that the teachers used helped provide assessment criteria, baseline activities and integrated approaches for all areas of the curriculum. My findings mentioned in 5.2 of the documents used by the participants seemingly guided them to ensure that the learners progressed from the different stages, and the participants not only used the departmental resources provided to them but also their resources, as each classroom was set up by the educators and to their unique styles.

### 5.2.2.3  THEME 3

The challenges experienced in this study with regards to the promotion of phonological awareness included three categories, namely, vocabulary development and free play, parental communication and home language and the effects that COVID-19 had on the teaching times and the classroom environment. In **Table 5.1**, I referred to second language acquisition by Muhammed (2013), which states that EFAL learners face challenges. The learners are not English home language speakers, and this impacts the learners' academic achievements and the forms of teaching strategies The main findings revolved around what the participants viewed as challenges within the context of their teaching environment and not what other educators' views were. In addition to learning in a language that is not their language, other areas and concerns also played an essential factor in the development of the learner's progress in a Grade R class. The participants used certain strategies daily to reduce or overcome challenges and improve their English reading levels. The participants tried to include all the learners, even if they struggled.

In Chapter 4, the challenges experienced were discussed in 4.5.3. Teachers adjusted their teaching approaches due to having less teaching time in the classrooms. They did more group discussions and focused a lot more on oral teaching of sounds, as opposed to handing out worksheets that needed to be completed. They aimed to give learners enough vocabulary using pictures, big books, rhyming words, onset rhymes, flashcards

and discussions. A well-developed English vocabulary is necessary in order to succeed to read and understand English as mentioned in Chapter Two. It was important for the participants to know their students well, understand their learning abilities and capacities and motivate the children and build effective communication skills. The learners had been assessed at the very beginning of the year so that the educators could record what levels the learners were on.

In a Grade R setting, the children need to grasp techniques that focus on Charll's and Ehri's models in terms of developing an understanding of language and sounds and learners being able to code and decode words. This is discussed in Chapter 2. Picture clues and logos to recall written words, attribution of a word or concepts, symbol recognition of letter sounds, especially the first letters of their name and recognition of letter sounds and their connections were focused on in this study. The challenges, however, limited the progression of achievement at times, as participants struggled with a lack of support from parents as mentioned in 4.5.3.2. Verbal communication was lacking with the parents. COVID-19 which is discussed in 4.5.3.3 also limited teaching time, and free play was far less than in previous years due to social distancing. The finding regarding free play was that learners did not interact enough to learn from each other. In a relaxed environment, children can express themselves freely and in doing so, they teach each other words and phrases that adults may not have taught them. Learners were given time to play but were not allowed to play close to each other which the participants saw as a hindrance since the focus of teaching was to develop literacy skills and an understanding of the meanings of words. Based on the three theories mentioned in Chapter 2, learners progressed from phase-to-phase, stage-to-stage or followed the grain size method, from smaller grain sizes to bigger ones. Children are highly motivated to play and want to learn about the world around them in a caring environment, giving them time to explore, which, in this case, did not happen due to COVID-19. Moving from smaller grain sizes to larger ones, in this instance, did not allow for as many new experiences, self-development and independence. Adults were setting the boundaries. Therefore, this was something the children were not exposed to as opposed to preceding years.

Regarding parental involvement in 4.5.3.2, participants found that they could not easily communicate with the parents regarding their children's reading development. Many parents work; some of the learners are being raised by guardians and the COVID-19 aspect also kept people apart because the rules and regulations required that there was no direct interaction with others. The educators shared their success stories of learners that were very capable and involved, but there were also disappointments with regards to some learners' reading achievements. If EFAL learners do not develop comprehension and vocabulary skills successfully, reading difficulties can arise. Unfortunately, I was not at either school A or B at the end of the year to see their progression and development. The full assessment of the learners' abilities would have included their language development, academic and cognitive development and even their social development. According to the theories, if learners were competent in their home languages, they possibly would have been able to convey or transfer these literacy skills to English and become more competent in English as well, despite challenges that may arise. Once COVID-19 challenges end, I am hopeful that children will be allowed to settle at school and become more confident in themselves to develop phonological awareness skills. The PA skills would have equipped them with the skills required to move into the higher grades and develop their reading skills to cope better in the classroom environment thus laying the foundations for the future.

### 5.2.3    Secondary Research questions and answers

#### 5.2.3.1 *What are the educators' understandings of phonological awareness?*

The participants agreed that in teaching phonological awareness, you have to start first with the teaching of sounds, followed by the letters they represent. Since English is not a phonetic language, it was not easy to categorise sounds and their written counterparts, as is the case with African languages. The participants understand that teaching PA skills is important to the development of EFAL learners' reading skill development. They all agreed that it is important for PA to be taught as a foundation in Grades R - 3 so that learners can eventually study all areas of the curriculum in English in Grades 4-12.

### 5.2.3.2 Which approaches are used during the teaching of phonological awareness skills?

The most favoured strategies in both Schools A and B were an emphasis on phonics teaching, hearing the letter-sound relationships, hearing the syllables in the words, hearing rhyming words and developing vocabulary in English. The learners had the opportunity to build on the PA skills required of them.

The participants used different strategies in teaching phonological awareness. Teacher 1A used weather charts, shape posters and rhymes, b versus d posters, alphabet posters, days of the week and flashcards to teach awareness of different sounds. Teacher 2A used theme display words, story picture charts in a sequence, alphabet frieze charts, season charts and colour and shape charts. Her lesson focuses on the story chart, 'I am not going to bath'', with instructions encouraging learners to repeat sentences and words, putting the story into the correct sequence and retelling the story in their words. Teacher 3A also used poster charts, rhyme charts, theme table labels and discussion of the theme. The lesson observed had mini-shopper items which were used to teach sound awareness, sentence construction and vocabulary development. Teacher 1B also used a variety of theme charts and "morning ring'' charts, flashcards and the Rainbow book and also allowed the learners to learn and form letter sounds using dough. Repetition and revision of concepts daily were evident in my findings, and the responses of learners to visual aids were very promising. Participants A and B modelled Charll Ehri and the Psycholinguistics Grain Size Theory, thus developing from stage-to-stage, phase-to-phase and developing from smaller grain sizes to larger ones.

### 5.2.3.3 Which challenges were experienced when teaching phonological awareness skills?

The participants in schools A and B used strategies and approaches to teaching phonological awareness skills daily to better equip learners and help them to overcome the challenges they often experienced and also improve the learner's vocabulary and comprehension of English understandings thus strengthening their PA skill development.

The educator participants were not English home language speakers. In school A, Participants 1A, 2A and 3A are Afrikaans speaking, and 4A and 1B are African home language speakers. Educators need to ensure that they say and sound out words correctly and construct sentences soundly to model good English speaking.

The lack of free play and vocabulary development was a concern. Time to practise speech and language was mainly amongst the educator and learners, not between learners and their peers. Learners in both schools were seated at their desks when lessons were presented; they did not sit in groups on the carpet. This can negatively impact the acquisition of phonological awareness skills. Research suggests that children demonstrate their most advanced language skills during play, and these language skills are strongly related to emergent literacy (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff 2008). When children play, they are learning, and play is central to school readiness and school performance. Playful pedagogy supports social-emotional and academic strengths while instilling a love of learning (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, 2008).

Parent communication was a challenge that was divulged during the interview process. The absence of parental support was evident as participants addressed that parents are uninvolved in their children's education. The home languages of the parents were also seen as having a slightly negative effect on the learners' language development as the English language was not spoken at the learners' homes. Therefore, phonological awareness skills were only practised during teaching times at school.

COVID-19 restrictions and protocols were a huge challenge as learners did not attend school every day of the week, and the learners were unable to play as often as they should. In the classrooms in School A, learners were unable to play in the fantasy corner and could not sit in the book corner areas to experiment and communicate with each other. Vocabulary development is a key skill to learning another language. Wearing masks had an impact on hearing and seeing how sounds were modelled by the educators.

During the interviews, as well as observations, I can say that the Grade R educators used the learners' strengths to compensate for any weaknesses or use the abilities of certain learners to compensate for the weaknesses of their peers. The Grade R educators gave the learners opportunities to practise English as far as possible and were open-minded,

even with the COVID-19 rules and regulations. They were motivated and positive towards assisting the learners they teach. Both Schools A and B modelled the use of English in stories, songs, riddles and picture stories, and learners were encouraged to sound out words.

### 5.2.3.4 *Which models or guidelines of teaching phonological awareness are used in teaching English First Additional Language learners?*

During my research, I have referred to information that promotes phonological awareness skill development. It is important to remember that phonological awareness activities in Grade R do not only occur with written letters to only develop language skills in written form but also what informs the use of specific content-based reading strategies. In the previous chapters, I mentioned that it is vital for learners to participate in phonological awareness activities that link sounds (phonemes) to letter patterns (graphemes). The participants used a variety of teaching techniques to expose the learners to as much literacy as possible, hearing words, seeing print, sounding syllables, hearing rhymes, songs sung, pictures of themes, posters, stories read, writing of their names, using dough and mini-shoppers.

During my study, the participants from both Schools A and B had flashcards, words, and alphabet letters and encouraged rhyming of words to expose the learners to this stage. In the early alphabetic phase of Ehri's model, children begin to use letter-sound correspondence to decode words. In Schools A and B, it was evident that the participants exposed the learners to activities that promoted the alphabetic phase with the EFAL learners. The use of pictures helped a lot as learners could visualise what the words represented. Using these teaching techniques, it was evident that the participants used measures that reflected the psycholinguistic grain size theory. Participants in both schools used their morning-ring lessons to boost vocabulary development; they used flashcards to expose learners to incidental reading skills. They used their posters on their boards and the stories read (even Bible stories) to develop vocabulary.

### 5.2.3.5  Which documents guide educators in teaching phonological awareness skills?

The documents that the educators used were the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for Foundation Phase Grades 1-3 and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Gr R-12 which give expression to the knowledge, strengths, skill set and values worth learning in South African schools. Both Schools A and B used the "Rainbow" workbooks from the DBE to boost SA children's school performance. The participants also had many Grades R resources, namely, posters, big books, lesson plans and assessment activities for the year and teachers' guides with practical classroom ideas. Daily lesson plans and weekly lesson plan documents guided the participants on which concepts needed to be taught and how learning should be measured. Each participant, however, also had their unique resources as most educators love to make their resources, decorate and make their classrooms to their "taste''. The HOD of School A showed me a Primary School Improvement Programme package that they use. The package includes books that have a Primary Improvement Programme, a Subject Improvement Plan Portfolio of Evidence and a Template file to support the School Management Team. These documents give the school a guide that they can use to ensure they are keeping to the expectations required of the principal and the DBE. Weekly planning, themes and activities set to assist and guide the participants to ensure that the learning content taught to the young learners can benefit them holistically. The schools have four assessment (report) documents. According to the CAPS documents on teaching EFAL, oral vocabulary, environmental print, emergent reading and shared reading activities are important to build on literacy skills. The literacy skills are listening and speaking, reading and phonics, writing and language use. Numeracy and Life Skills are also assessed. Mark or assessment books are used to record the learners' progress. The learners were English First Additional Language learners, therefore, the educators' strategies emphasised on phonological awareness skills and vocabulary development. The other documents the teachers used daily were the duty lists such as the morning duty and break duty, as well as the aftercare duty.

## 5.3 FUTURE STUDIES

This study focused on phonological awareness teaching skills in a Grade R classroom to English First Additional Language learners. This study highlighted what educators understood about phonological awareness teaching, the techniques they used, resources used, documents that the participants referred to which guided their daily teachings and the challenges they experienced during the study.

Several topics for future studies are presented below:

- The impact of COVID-19 on the literacy development of English First Additional Language learners in the Foundation Phase.
- The use of technology in teaching reading to English First Additional Language learners.
- The effects of parental support and how it influences the development of English First Additional Language amongst the learners in  Grade R.

## 5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study showed that repetition and teaching across the curriculum were key to EFAL learners' grasp of the English sound system. Teaching phonological awareness cannot be conducted in a void but must lead to kinesthetic awareness as children learn through active participation. If all actions and teaching skills required to teach phonological awareness skills cannot be accomplished, the development of the learners' abilities will be compromised.

The results of the present study demonstrate and encourage educators to expose young learners to early identification of phonological awareness to improve English First Additional Language learners' literacy skills. The ability to attend to and manipulate sounds strongly correlates with a learner's reading success until the end of their schooling career. Research shows that difficulty with phoneme awareness and other phonological awareness skills is a predictor of poor reading and spelling development. Children who lack these skills cannot begin to connect the sounds of language to letters or letter combinations.

Learners must be able to isolate and blend sounds into word parts and words to learn to read and spell. If exposure to a rich language learning environment is not provided, the learners will have insufficient language skills and may be set back due to a lack of communication skills and vocabulary development.

Phonological awareness skill development must be a part of language development and I do believe that this study can create an impact on educators as well as learners by reminding them that PA teaching strategies are important. Early intervention is crucial, and these PA skills can assist learners in future reading and should therefore be a constituent of the curriculum teachings in the reception year. The inclusion of PA teaching skills can create a learning environment in which the learners are free to interact and build on literacy skills. With the appropriate content, learners will certainly benefit more in terms of listening, hearing, sounding words, vocabulary development and conversing in the English language. Most learners do not go home and continue to communicate in English; they rather speak their home language. Therefore, this implies that attending Grade R is imperative for learners to learn English before they progress to Grade 1 where they are expected to start writing and reading and eventually study in English. Previous experiences and previous studies reiterate that phonological awareness teaching is important.

In my study, I could see that the phonological awareness skill lessons were enjoyed by the learners as they were motivated to learn more and try harder by their teachers. Grade R learners looked up to their teachers as role models and were so excited to be actively involved in the lessons. As they listened and showed involvement, they acquired important English reading skills. Being exposed to all types of teaching techniques, a difference can be established, as the children will not only be exposed to listening and learning from their teachers but also whilst experiencing other teaching platforms.

Educators need to have access to systematic intervention resources that can assist them during lessons as well as provide fun and memorable learning experiences for the learners. Grade R educators should be reminded that ''All'' children can benefit from greater attention to language-based activities and instructions in preschool. Educators should also be creative as to how they teach Grade R learners PA skills by making it fun.

If educators look at the stages, phases and theories mentioned in Chapters 2 and 5, they can understand the steps required for learners to improve and build on skills with a clear focus on improving from stage-to-stage, phase-to-phase or increasing the psycholinguistic grain sizes.

Due to COVID-19, the learners were unfortunately unexposed to much free play, such as fantasy play and being able to look at books in the book corner. This is a serious concern, as learners had too little communication exposure with their peers. Educators should, therefore, become more conscious of these concerns and openly work towards creating an environment for the learners to improve on phonological awareness skills through other measures and lessons. This will possibly make an impact on the learners who were in Grades R and 1 in 2020 and 2021. The learners of 2022 and 2023, no matter which grade should be given more time to socialise and communicate with their peers, as the saying goes, "Practice makes Perfect". I do believe that future studies and statistics will reflect a change in the comprehensive development of learners in both language literacy development and mathematical skills development. Something that still resonates with me, as the researcher, is to build on the skills of a child first, in their native language and then expose them to the EFAL. An example is labels on theme tables and posters that can have English words and others in the native language. Learners may be able to transfer these skills to English easier thus becoming more proficient in English.

## 5.5    NEW KNOWLEDGE FROM THE STUDY

Throughout my study, I have read a lot about PA skills and the process of instructing learners regarding reading and reading development. As a qualified Foundation Phase educator, but this does not mean that I know everything about the teaching of reading and writing skills. I believe that we learn something new from those we teach daily. Educators learn from the children they teach and are guided by their learners' progress and abilities. A teacher cannot move on to more challenging concepts within the classroom environment if learners have not grasped the basic steps required to understand more challenging concepts. Whilst reading articles and working through the researcher's study, I came across interesting information regarding problems that stem

from a lack of phonological awareness skills which have been identified as a major cause of reading difficulties, one being dyslexia. Educators should approach the teaching of PA skills with a positive mindset, creativity and engagement, especially when learners are English First Additional Language learners and when they struggle to work on the basics.

I also appreciate the value of play in language development for Grade R learners, a whole lot more than I did before COVID-19. The children that I observed certainly missed out on playing together and socialising, which seemed to also stunt Grade R learners' progress in literacy development. Exploration, groupwork and interaction with peers are a necessity to assist with the comprehension and understanding of the language of learning. Foundational literacy skills are the launching pad to becoming confident readers. Reading is a skill that carries learners through life. Phonological awareness skills and the competency to work with sounds in spoken language set the stage for decoding, blending and eventually, word reading. This develops before the beginning of formal schooling and will continue through to the higher grades. I will value this knowledge for years to come and will do my best to assist the learners that I teach.

## 5.6    CONCLUSION

In Chapter 5, I discussed the relevant theories, along with the information I accumulated from my observations, the interviews, document analysis and field notes. This study was based on Charll's, Ehri's and the Psycholinguistic Grain Size Theory. I explained the information shared and that I noted, which is relevant to teaching PA skills to EFAL learners in Grade R. I have included future studies that could be researched, implications and the new knowledge that I learnt whilst conducting my research.

## REFLECTIONS

During my research studies, I have experienced both great learning experiences, and I have been exposed to many stressful situations. The positive experiences include meeting new teachers in two schools close to the school where I work. In meeting these teachers, I can keep open communication with them, and we can begin relationships between the schools. It is wonderful to be able to network and share ideas and experiences. It is even more beneficial for me, as I work at a private school and have never taught at a government school, so this truly assisted me to gain insight into a different environment.

The stressful moments have been meeting dates and deadlines. I work at a school and had to keep my work deadlines a priority, which created stress in having to submit my research. I am truly grateful to both of my supervisors for assisting and guiding me. Without them, I would certainly have struggled to get to where I am now.

In the process of all my experiences and stressful moments, COVID-19 put to a halt my studies and the dates I planned to visit the school and conduct my fieldwork. For many months, schools were not open and learners in Grade R started attending school after all the higher grades. Schools also had to abide by COVID-19 rules and regulations, which included learners attending school on alternative days and both schools had limits on visitors being able to be on the school property. The use of masks also negatively influenced lessons, as learners and staff had to have masks on. English and the development of the English language was very limited. Learners did not have as many opportunities to experiment, use and communicate in English.

In conclusion, I have enjoyed every moment of the journey leading up to the completion of this study. I am already thinking about what I am going to study next. As an educator, I have noted a definite decrease in learners' social, literacy and numeracy skills. I have started to note statistics at my workplace, and I look forward to what comes next in line with these challenges. I work with an amazing HOD who has allowed me to grow and develop in a phase that was not part of my Foundation Phase qualifications, and here, I

will be able to document and work with struggling learners who need to learn how to read and write correctly as their foundation was not that strong due to COVID-19. Even though I am a deputy principal at a primary school, it is never too late to learn something new, and there are always doors that open to develop further and open new opportunities.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: ETHICS

UNISA | university of south africa

**UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Date: 2020/05/13

Ref: **2020/05/13/32575580/19/AM**
Name: Mrs K Daly
Student No.: 32575580

Dear Mrs K Daly

**Decision:** Ethics Approval from 2020/05/13 to 2023/05/13

**Researcher(s):** Name: Mrs K Daly
E-mail address: 32575580@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0836601296

**Supervisor(s):** Name: Professor Nkidi Phatudi
E-mail address: Phatun1@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 4582

Name: Dr Phajane Masello
E-mail address: phajamh@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0124292002

**Title of research:**

**Teaching Phonological awareness in the Reception Year (Grade R): To English First Additional Language Learners.**

**Qualification:** MEd ECD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2020/05/13 to 2023/05/13.

The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2020/05/13 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached

Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.

The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
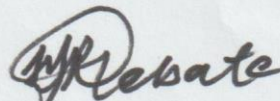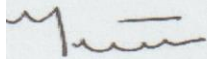
The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2023/05/13**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

eference number **2020/05/13/32575580/19/AM** should be clearly indicated on rms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the iittee.

gards,

# UNISA | university of south africa

## UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2020/05/13

Dear Mrs K Daly

**Decision: Approved**

Ref: **2020/05/13/32575580/19/AM**
Name: Mrs K Daly
Student No.: 32575580

**Researcher(s):** Name: Mrs K Daly
E-mail address: 32575580@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0836601296

**Supervisor(s):** Name: Professor Nkidi Phatudi
E-mail address: Phatun1@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 4582

Name: Dr Phajane Masello
E-mail address: phajamh@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0124292002

| **Title of research:** |
| --- |
| **Teaching Phonological awareness in the Reception Year (Grade R): To English First Additional Language Learners.** |

**Qualification:** MEd ECD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research.

Recommendations

None

Kind regards,

**Prof AT Motlhabane**
**CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC**
motlhat@unisa.ac.za

## APPENDIX 2: PERMISSION LETTER TO MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

4 Lava Street, Ben Fleur, Witbank 1035

Date: October 2021

The Mpumalanga Department of Education

Dear Sir/Madam

**Request for permission to conduct research at 2 schools in Witbank/Emahlaleni.**

My name is Kirstin Barnes a Med Curriculum Studies student at the University of South Africa. I am conducting research on teaching 'Phonological Awareness skills' to Grade R English First Additional Language Learners under the supervision Prof. NC Phatudi, Chair of the Early Childhood Education Department. The title of my research topic is: Teaching Phonological Awareness in Grade R: To English First Additional Language Learners

The aim of this research is to gain more insight into phonological awareness skills and the teaching of phonological skills as a precursor to reading. I would like to research the teaching skills, strengths and weaknesses experienced by teachers as well as observe the resources used when teaching Grade R learners.

Information will be collected through interviews, observations, document analysis and field notes. The findings of the study will benefit both the practitioners and any further studies of phonological awareness skills. There will be no potential risks involved during data collection. No reimbursements or any incentives for participation will be required in the research.

The feedback procedure will entail the researcher visiting the site to inform participants of the findings. Participants will also be provided with the researcher's contact details. No names will be recorded, and no one will be able to connect the schools used and the answers the practitioners give. The practitioners will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Yours sincerely

Kirstin Barnes
Researcher's signature: _____

Date: October 2021

Contact details: 0836601296/32575580@mylife.unisa.ac.za OR alternatively kirstin.daly@mweb.co.za

**MED RESEARCH – CONSENT LETTER FROM MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT SUPERVISOR (RETURN SLIP)**

I, _____ (the Mpumalanga Department Supervisor), hereby give permission to Kirstin Barnes to conduct research at the selected schools). I have read (and it was explained to me), and I understand the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation in this study. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and hereby give permission for the researcher to conduct the study. I am aware that the practitioners will participate voluntarily after signing the consent form and that the school documents will be used in the study requiring my permission. The researcher has assured me that the school's name will be kept confidential unless specified otherwise.

Mpumalanga Department Supervisor

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Prof Phatudi Supervisor: Signature_____

Date: _____

Dr Phajane Masello (Co-supervisor)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Mrs Kirstin Barnes (Researcher)

Signature: _____

Date: October 2021

# APPENDIX 3: PERMISSION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPALS

**(Request for permission to conduct research at School A)**

**Title of my research:** Educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness to English First Additional Language Learners in Grade R

Dear Sir/Madam                                                                                          October 2021

I, Kirstin Barnes, am doing my research under the supervision of Prof NC Phatudi, a Chair of Department of Early Childhood Education towards a Master's degree in Curriculum Studies at the University of South Africa.  This study has been approved by the University of South Africa's Ethics Committee and, as part of that approval process, I am required to obtain permission from the schools from which I would like to use participants.

The aim of this research is to gain insight into phonological awareness skills and the teaching of phonological skills as a precursor to reading. Your school has been selected because of its location as well as the fact that your school has English Additional First Language learners. The study will entail observations, interviews, as well as document sourcing from the school. One of the potential benefits of this research is the identification of effective teaching strategies in education which can currently be applied to a variety of different classroom environments.

There are no potential risks involved. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Feedback procedure will entail the researcher visiting the site to inform the participants of the findings. Participants will also be provided with the researcher's contact details.

Your Sincerely


_____

Kirstin Barnes (Researcher)
Date: October 2021
Contact details: 08366011296, 32575580@mylife.unisa.ac.za or alternatively kirstin.daly@mweb.co.za

**MED RESEARCH – CONSENT LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL (RETURN SLIP)**

I, _____ (Principal), hereby give permission to the researcher to conduct the study in Grade R classes. I have read (and it was explained to me), and I understand the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation in this study. I have had enough opportunity to ask questions and hereby give permission for the researcher to conduct the study. I am aware that the practitioners will participate voluntarily after signing the consent form and that school documents will be used in the study requiring my permission. The researcher has assured me that the school's name will be kept confidential unless specified otherwise.

The researcher has also indicated that the findings of the study will be processed into a research report, journal and chapter publications and/or conference proceedings.

I therefore agree/do not agree that the researcher proceeds with the research.

Principal of _____Witbank

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Prof Phatudi Supervisor: Signature_____

 Date: _____

Dr Phajane Masello (Co-supervisor)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Mrs Kirstin Barnes (Researcher)

Signature: _____

Date: October 2021

**PERMISSION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL OF SCHOOL B**

**(Request for permission to conduct research at School B)**

**Title of my research:** Educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness to English First Additional Language Learners in Grade R

Dear Sir/Madam                                                                                              October 2021

I, Kirstin Barnes am doing my research under the supervision of Prof NC Phatudi, a Chair of the Department of Early Childhood Education towards a Master's degree in Curriculum Studies at the University of South Africa.  This study has been approved by the University of South Africa's Ethics Committee and, as part of that approval process, I am required to obtain permission from the schools from which I would like to use participants.

The aim of this research is to gain insight into phonological awareness skills and the teaching of phonological skills as a precursor to reading. Your school has been selected because of its location as well as the fact that your school has English Additional First Language learners. The study will entail observations, interviews, as well as document sourcing from the school. One of the potential benefits of this research is the identification of effective teaching strategies in education which can currently be applied to a variety of different classroom environments.

There are no potential risks involved. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Feedback procedure will entail the researcher visiting the site to inform the participants of the findings. Participants will also be provided with the researcher's contact details.

Your Sincerely


_____

Kirstin Barnes (Researcher)

Date: October 2021

Contact details: 08366011296, 32575580@mylife.unisa.ac.za or alternatively kirstin.daly@mweb.co.za

**MED RESEARCH – CONSENT LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL (RETURN SLIP)**

I, _____ (Principal), hereby give permission to the researcher to conduct the study in the Grade R classes. I have read (and it was explained to me), and I understand the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation in this study. I have had enough opportunity to ask questions and herby give permission for the researcher to conduct the study. I am aware that the practitioners will participate voluntarily after signing the consent form and that school documents will be used in the study requiring my permission. The researcher has assured me that the school's name will be kept confidential unless specified otherwise.

The researcher has also indicated that the findings of the study will be processed into a research report, journal and chapter publications and/or conference proceedings.

I therefore agree/do not agree that the researcher proceeds with the research.
Principal of School B Witbank
Signature: _____          Date: _____

Prof Phatudi Supervisor: Signature_____

 Date: _____

Dr Phajane Masello (Co-supervisor)

Signature: _____
Date: _____

Mrs Kirstin Barnes (Researcher)

Signature: _____
Date: October 2021

## APPENDIX 4: CONSENT LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANTS

<div align="right">

4    Lava Street, Ben Fleur, Witbank 1035

Date: January 2020

</div>

TITLE: Educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness to English First Additional Language Learners in Grade R

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Kirstin Barnes and I am doing research under the supervision of Prof NC Phatudi, in the Department of Early Childhood Education towards an MEd Degree in Curriculum Studies at the University of South Africa. I would like to invite you to participate in the study entitled Educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness to English First Additional Language.

This study is expected to collect important information that could benefit Reception year and Foundation Phase teachers. You have been chosen as you are a Grade R educator or the relevant HOD for the Foundation Phase in which the study is being conducted. The study involves observations, interviews, document analysis and field notes sourced from the school. The types of questions you will be asked will have to do with phonological awareness teaching skills, strategies or methods used in your daily classroom and what you as an educator feel are the challenges, weaknesses or strengths when teaching skills using phonological awareness strategies. Observations will happen during both structured and unstructured classroom activities and lessons. Interviews will happen when you as the practitioner have time to give, be it during school or after school (a mutually agreed upon time). The interviews will be semi-structured and in person face-to-face.

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participate. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. No anticipated risks except that practitioners may be inconvenienced by being asked to avail themselves after hours.

The benefits are that the practitioners involved may have ideas which would assist other practitioners when teaching phonological awareness skills and how these skills can be a precursor of reading. Practitioners that are not exposed to this teaching style or concepts may learn from the information and the data analysis. The information and resources used can open ideas for those that may not have the skills or resources that other schools may have.

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, researcher and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes such as research report. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in that report.

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. The information will be destroyed if there is ever a necessity as the hard copy will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer, using a relevant software programme.

There is no payment or incentive for participation in the study. This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the CEDU Committee, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you wish. If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Kirstin Daly at 0836601296, 32575580@mylife.unisa.ac.za or alternatively kirstin.daly@mweb.co.za. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Prof NC Phatudi on 012 4294582 or phatun1@unisa.ac.za. Should you have concerns about how the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr Phanjane at 0124292002 or phajamh@unisa.ac.za.

Yours Sincerely

_____

Kirstin Barnes (Researcher)

**CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)**

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

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunities to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (If applicable).

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 agree to the recording of the observations and semi-structured interviews.

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

Participant Name & Surname:

(Please print) _____          Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Researcher's Name & Surname: Kirstin Barnes

_____          Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

## APPENDIX 5: LETTER TO THE PARENTS

Dear Parent                                                              Date: October 2021

My name is Kirstin Barnes and I am doing research under the supervision of Prof NC Phatudi, a Chair of the Department of Early Childhood Education, towards an MEd degree in Curriculum Studies at the University of South Africa.

Your child is invited to be a part of a study entit**led:** Educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness to English First Additional Language Learners in Grade R.

I am undertaking this study as part of my Master's research at the University of South Africa. The purpose of the study is to collect important information that could benefit Early Childhood Education practitioners by capacitating them in phonological awareness skills as a precursor to reading. The possible benefits of the study are that practitioners will be provided with knowledge on phonological awareness teaching strategies and support future teachers in their Grade R classrooms.

I will be observing the class teacher while she is interacting with the whole class during presentations of lessons. Your permission for your child to be part of the class is therefore requested. I expect to have all the other children in your child's class to be part of the study.

If you allow your child to participate, I shall request him/her to be present at school. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. His/her responses in the class will not be linked to his/her name or your name or the school's name in any written or verbal report based on the study. Such a report will be used for research purposes only. There are no foreseeable risks to your child by participating in the study.

Your child will receive possible educational benefits which are possibly outlined by sharing knowledge on the teachings of phonological awareness skills and lay a possible foundation for future reading skills of your child.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Neither you nor your child will receive any type of payment for participation in the study. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not affect him/her in any way. Similarly, you can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

The study will take place during regular classroom activities with the prior approval of the school and your child's teacher. However, if you do not want your child to participate, an alternative activity, in the form of fantasy play or book corner will be available.

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study and you, and your child will be asked to sign the assent form which accompanies this letter. If your child does not wish to participate in

the study, he or she will not be included. The information gathered from the study and your child's participation in the study will be stored securely on a password locked computer in my locked office for five years after the study. Thereafter, records will be erased.

If you have questions about this study, please ask me or my study supervisor, Prof NC Phatudi, Department of Early Childhood Education, College of Education, University of South Africa. My contact number is 0836601296 and my email is [32575580@mylife.unisa.ac.za](mailto:32575580@mylife.unisa.ac.za). The email of my supervisor is [Phatudi1@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Phatudi1@unisa.ac.za). Permission for the study has already been given by the principal and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

Therefore, if you agree to let your child participate in this study, your signature below will indicate that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study. You make keep a copy of this letter.

Yours Sincerely

_____

Kirstin Barnes


**CONSENT/ASSENT FOR MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY: (RETURN SLIP).**

Name of Child: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardians name: _____ Parents/Guardian Signature: _____

Researchers Name (Print): _____ Researchers Signature: _____

Date: _____

# APPENDIX 6: ASSENT LETTER TO THE LEARNERS

4 Lava Street, Ben Fleur

Date: October 2021

Mrs K Barnes

UNISA

0836601296

Dear Learner

My name is Kirstin Barnes. I would like to ask you if I can come and observe some of your literacy lessons and watch how your educator teaches phonological awareness skills. I am trying to learn more about how children learn and do phonological awareness activities with their educators as well as the interaction between you, the learner and your Grade R educator. If you say YES to doing this, I will come and observe some of the activities you take part in.

I will also ask your parent's permission and if you can take part. You can say Yes, or you can say No, and no one will be upset if you don't want to take part or change your mind at a later stage. You can ask questions at any time. Please speak to mommy and daddy about taking part before you sign this letter. Signing your name means that you agree to be in this study.

Kind Regards

Kirstin Barnes

| Your Name: | Yes, I will take part  |  No, I don't want to take part |
|---|---|---|
| Name of the Researcher: Kirstin Daly | Signature: | |
| Date: | | |
| Witness: Class teacher | | |

# APPENDIX 7: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR HODs OF FOUNDATION PHASE

Thank you for taking time to do the interview with me. You have been selected to be interviewed as you are the HOD of the Foundation phase. This interview is designed to determine your understanding of Phonological awareness skills and your views on these skills which can provide support to Grade R learners as a precursor to reading. Please assist me in answering the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview is confidential. You will not be individually identified in any information or reports produced from this data. Participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any point. You are also free to choose not to answer questions that you are not comfortable with. I appreciate you taking the time because I believe that your feedback on this research topic is very important. The interview should take 30 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions currently?

## SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1.  Your Nationality: _____
2.  Your Home Language: _____
3.  Years of experience as an Early Childhood Practitioner: _____
4.  Years of experience as an HOD: _____
5.  At which institution did you study?: _____
6.  Which grades have you taught previously (If any)?: _____

## SECTION B: JOB EXPERIENCES AS AN HOD

1.  What are your key duties as an HOD with regards to the Grade R curriculum?
2.  What are the most rewarding aspects of your job?
3.  What are the most challenging aspects of your job?
4.  Do you teach a specific grade, or do you only fulfil HOD duties and responsibilities?
5.  What is your understanding of phonological awareness skills/teaching strategies? Were you exposed to this teaching strategy in your studies?
6.  Do you feel phonological awareness is an important part of the reading process? If yes/no, why?
7.  Which elements do you feel are the most important when teaching early reading skills in the Foundation Phase and Grade R?
8.  Which challenges have you or do you experience when teaching English First Additional Language learners?
9.  Do you or have you used any phonological awareness teaching skills, in the past or currently?
10. What positive experiences have you experienced when teaching learners using phonological teaching skills?
11. What difficulties have you experienced when teaching these phonological awareness skills?
12. What impact do you believe is made, when learners are taught early reading readiness skills such as phonological awareness skills?

13.   Would you be interested in learning more about phonological awareness during an in-service training day?

**Thank you, I really appreciate the time that you have taken for this interview. Is there anything else that you feel would be helpful for me to know?**

# APPENDIX 8: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PRINCIPALS

Thank you for taking time to do the interview with me. You have been selected to be interviewed as you are the principal of the school. This interview is designed to determine your understanding of phonological awareness skills and your views on these skills which can provide support to Grade R learners as a precursor to reading. Please assist me in answering the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview is confidential. You will not be individually identified in any information or reports produced from this data. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point. You are also free to choose not to answer questions that you are not comfortable with. I appreciate you taking the time because I believe that your feedback on this research topic is very important. The interview should take 30 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions currently?

## SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Your Nationality: _____
2. Your Home Language: _____
3. Years of experience as a teacher before becoming a principal: _____
4. Years of experience as a principal: _____
5. At which institution did you study?: _____
6. Which grades have you taught previously (If any)?: _____

## SECTION B: JOB EXPERIENCES AS A PRINCIPAL

1. What are your key duties as a principal with regards to the Grade R curriculum and school?
2. What are the most rewarding aspects of your job?
3. What are the most challenging aspects of your job?
4. Do you teach and grade subjects, or do you only fulfil Principal duties and responsibilities?
5. What is your understanding of phonological awareness skills/teaching strategies? Were you exposed to this teaching strategy in your studies?
6. Do you feel phonological awareness is an important part of the reading process? If yes/no, why?
7. Which elements do you feel are most important when teaching early reading skills?
8. Which challenges have you or do you experience when teaching English First Additional Language learners?
9. Do you or have you used any phonological awareness teaching skills, in the past or currently?
10. What positive experiences have you experienced when teaching learners using phonological teaching skills or Teaching Second Language Learners?
11. What difficulties have you experienced when teaching these skills?
12. What impact do you believe is made, when learners are taught early reading readiness skills such as phonological awareness skills?

13. Would you be interested in learning more about phonological awareness during an in-service training day?

**Thank you, I really appreciate the time that you have taken for this interview. Is there anything else that you feel would be helpful for me to know?**

# APPENDIX 9: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PRACTITIONERS; RECEPTION YEAR TEACHERS

Thank you for taking time to do the interview with me. You have been selected to be interviewed as you are a Grade R educator. This interview is designed to determine your understanding of Phonological awareness skills and your views on these skills which can provide support to Grade R learners as a precursor to reading. Please assist me in answering the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview is confidential. You will not be individually identified in any information or reports produced from this data. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point. You are also free to choose not to answer questions that you are not comfortable with. I appreciate you taking the time, because I believe that your feedback on this research topic is very important. The interview should take 30 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions currently?

## SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Your Nationality: _____
2. Your Home Language: _____
3. Years of experience as an Early Childhood Practitioner: _____
4. Years of experience as a Grade R Teacher: _____
5. At which institution did you study?: _____
6. Which grades have you taught previously (If any)?: _____

## SECTION B: JOB EXPERIENCES AS A GRADE R TEACHER

1. How many children are currently in your class?
2. What is your understanding of phonological awareness teaching skills?
3. What are the most challenging aspects of your job?
4. Are the learners in your class mainly English First Additional language learners?
5. Do you as a Grade R teacher, expose your class to early sound awareness?
6. Do you use phonological awareness teaching skills in your daily teachings? If yes, name which teaching skills you use?
7. What is your perspective on teaching Grade R learners basic sound awareness skills to lay the foundation for future grades? Is there a relevant impact on learners? If yes, how?
8. Which resources do you use to teach phonological awareness skills or to teach literacy concepts?
9. What challenges do you experience when teaching English First Additional language learners?
10. What challenges do you experience when teaching sound awareness skills?
11. Which positive experiences have you experienced when teaching phonological awareness skills?
12. Do you feel you can benefit from more information regarding phonological awareness and teaching Grade R learners, and lay the foundation for future learning?

13. Would you be interested in learning more about phonological awareness during an in-service training day or a day that practitioners can share their ideas, methods and resource use?

**Thank you, I really appreciate the time that you have taken for this interview. Is there anything else that you feel would be helpful for me to know?**

# APPENDIX 10: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STUDENT EDUCATORS

Thank you for taking time to do the interview with me. You have been selected to be interviewed as you are a student teacher. This interview is designed to determine your understanding of Phonological awareness skills and your views on these skills which can provide support to Grade R learners as a precursor to reading. Please assist me in answering the questions. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview is confidential. You will not be individually identified in any information or reports produced from this data. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point. You are also free to choose not to answer questions that you are not comfortable with. I appreciate you taking the time because I believe that your feedback on this research topic is very important. The interview should take 30 minutes. Are you available to respond to some questions currently?

## SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1.    Your Nationality:  _____

2.    Your Home Language:  _____

3.    Years of study:  _____

4.    When will you qualify?  _____

5.    At which institution are you studying? _____

6.    In which grades have you done practical teachings?  _____

## SECTION B: JOB EXPERIENCES AS A STUDENT TEACHER

1.    What are your key duties as a student teacher?

2.    What are the most rewarding aspects of your job or studies so far?

3.    What are the most challenging aspects of your studies, and practical teachings?

4.    What is your understanding of phonological awareness skills/teaching strategies? Have you been exposed to this teaching strategy in your studies?

5.    Do you feel phonological awareness is an important part of the reading process? If yes/no, why?

6.    What elements do you feel are most important when teaching early reading skills in the Foundation Phase and Grade R?

7.    Which challenges have you experienced when teaching English First Additional Language learners?

8.    Do you or have you used any phonological awareness teaching skills, in any of your practical teachings? Give an idea of the lesson.

9.    What positive experiences have you experienced, or do you feel would be worthwhile when teaching learners using phonological teaching skills?

10.    What difficulties have you experienced or you would expect when teaching these skills?

11.    What impact do you believe is made when learners are taught early reading readiness skills such as phonological awareness skills?

12.    Would you be interested in learning more about phonological awareness during an in-service training day?

**Thank you, I really appreciate the time that you have taken for this interview. Is there anything else that you feel would be helpful for me to know?**

## APPENDIX 11: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

**Grade R**

**Date:** _____　　　　　　　　　　**Time:** _____

**Subject allocation/Lesson on the Weekly Timetable:** _____

| A: Questions Guiding the observation | B: What was observed, write in detail. |
|---|---|
| Are there verbal interactions between the practitioner and the learners? | |
| Which nonverbal interactions were observed between the practitioner and the learners? | |
| What strengths have been observed according to phonological awareness teaching skills? | |
| What weaknesses were observed or teaching skills that may not be conducive to the teaching of phonological awareness skills? | |
| Is the practitioner supportive of the learners? | |
| Do the activities include phonological awareness teaching skills? | |
| Does the practitioner model the correct use of sounds and phonics? | |
| Do Grade R learners communicate in English during routine activities in the daily routine? | |
| Which resources are used in the classroom during literacy lessons? | |

## APPENDIX 12: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

**Registered with the South African Translators' Institutes (SATI)**

**Reference number 1000686**

**SACE REGISTERED**

07 April 2023

*Educators' experiences of teaching phonological awareness to English First Additional Language Learners in Grade R*

This serves to confirm that I edited substantively the above document including a Reference list. The document was returned to the author with various tracked changes intended to correct errors and to clarify meaning. It was the author's responsibility to attend to these changes.

Yours faithfully

Dr. K. Zano

Ph.D. in English

kufazano@gmail.com/kufazano@yahoo.com

+27631434276

# APPENDIX 13: TECHNICAL EDITING DECLARATION

**DECLARATION OF TECHNICAL EDITING**

23 4TH STREET
MENLO PARK
PRETORIA
0102

20th February 2024

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

I, Sharon Baxter hereby confirm that I have done the technical editing of the dissertation titled:

**EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS TO ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN GRADE R** by **Kirstin Barnes,** Student number 32575580, submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Masters of Education in Curriculum Studies at the University of South Africa.

**Sharon Baxter**
Private Email: nbaxter@lantic.net
Cell: 0722502075