

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 ORIENTATION

In Chapter One the literature reviewed informed a clarification of the main constructs and presented initial literature-driven insights into the rationale for this study. The literature and policies explored in Chapter Two further illustrated the context of the research. In this chapter the literature review offered augments the literature already introduced in the first two chapters. The focus is on exploring the constructs for and the context of the study further as well as providing background to the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Four by situating the study within recent empirical research literature.

For the literature review presented, it is recognised that there is a vast corpus of research into reading literacy internationally (for example, Allington & Johnston, 2002; Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007). Conversely, concurring with the concerns raised by Pretorius and Machet (2004b) regarding the paucity of reading research in South Africa (see Chapter One), O'Sullivan (2003) argues that the literature on teaching reading to young learners in developing countries is limited. Perry (2008) verifies this by stating that although literacy development in early schooling in Africa has received increased attention from scholars, it is still under-represented in the scholarly literature. Moreover, Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) observe that there has been a wide variety of research into reading and writing in English-speaking countries, which has mushroomed in the past six decades or so, but again, there has been comparatively little research on literacy development on the African continent. With this in mind, as the research focus area reflects a localised research problem potentially germane to other countries, a decision was made to focus the review primarily on literature from South Africa, and, where applicable, to align it to broader international perspectives.

As an orientation to the chapter, in the next section (3.2) a brief discussion of literacy and literacy monitoring worldwide is provided. Section 3.3 continues the discussion of South African learners' achievement of reading literacy, as first considered in Chapter One. In section 3.4, an overview of factors influencing learners' reading literacy achievement is presented, followed by consideration of specific school factors (3.5) and classroom factors (3.6) identified in the literature which may impact learners' achievement (3.5).

3.2 INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK ON READING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

In this section a generalised discussion about the status of literacy worldwide and on the African continent in particular is deliberated upon (3.2.1), together with discussion of the role of international comparative studies in monitoring and evaluating learners' academic development (3.2.2).

3.2.1 A global snapshot

Literacy is recognised as being crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, especially in the knowledge driven societies of today. A United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) report on its Education for All (EFA) initiatives claims that literacy is a right denied to nearly a fifth of the world's adult population. In absolute numbers, the majority of those without literacy skills are from Sub-Saharan Africa, South, East and West Asia and the Pacific. In relative terms, with only about 60% literacy rates, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab states are the regions with the lowest literacy rates. Albeit that these regions would appear to need to make the most gains in diminishing illiteracy, direct testing of literacy does suggest that the global challenge is much greater than the conventional numbers based on indirect assessments would indicate, and, that the challenge affects both developing and developed countries (UNESCO, 2005). Certainly, South African learners' participation in the PIRLS 2006 assessments (Howie *et al.*, 2007) has reinforced the gravity of the challenge of addressing literacy development for the South African population.

As emphasised in the introduction to this chapter, in spite of the challenges of illiteracy in Africa, many reading studies cited in the international research literature involve educational contexts in developed countries where resource availability, access to reading texts in learners' vernacular, quality of instructional methods and literacy levels are not problematic. Localised research, taking into account context and the impact of these challenges, is therefore needed, especially as the findings of a slowly burgeoning number of individual studies and large-scale national assessments suggest that learners in Africa battle in their accomplishment of literacy (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007).

In South Africa, out of a population of over 47 million people, it is estimated that between 7.4 and 8.5 million adults are functionally illiterate, and that between 2.9 and 4.2 million people have never attended school. Moreover, one million children in South Africa live in a home where no adult can read (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2007). Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) estimate that about 86% of South African adults have achieved basic

literacy, but this does not mean that they have achieved advanced levels of literate understanding. This lack of literate understanding is compounded by a society where reading for enjoyment is scarce and where reading materials are not readily available (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007).

The need to monitor and evaluate the global drive towards the eradication of illiteracy (UNESCO, 2005) means that both national and international assessments of literacy have a key role to play. The role of international studies in this monitoring is considered in the next sub-section.

3.2.2 The role of international comparative studies of reading literacy

Interest in assessment specifically increased following the 1990 World Conference on EFA in Jomtien, Thailand, during which student achievement was proposed as a major point of reference in judging the quality of education. Whilst national examinations have long been prevalent in African education systems, national assessments are a relatively new occurrence (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2005). South Africa, together with other African countries, has participated in a number of these assessments, such as the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) and the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) project. However, only a handful of African countries, including South Africa, have participated in the array of international comparative studies that have come to the fore in recent decades (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2005). Organisations such as UNESCO, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are involved in monitoring literacy development, but only the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) is discussed here as this research is based on South Africa's participation in an IEA study.

The IEA, which conducts the PIRLS, initiates comparative studies focused on educational policies and practices around the world. The IEA is headed by a permanent Secretariat in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, supported by a Data Processing Centre in Hamburg, Germany, and has a membership of about 70 countries. The IEA studies use the world as an "educational laboratory", in which the strengths and weaknesses of educational practices can be assessed (Mullis, 2002, p.2). Many countries have national policies governing variables such as curriculum and teaching strategies, and, without much differentiation in the approaches used within a country, it is difficult to estimate the effectiveness of various policies and practices in relation to educational outcomes. Across-country comparison therefore allows examination of the impact of different educational approaches on achievement and additional insight into a country's own educational system (Mullis, 2002).

Thus these studies have a variety of purposes including comparison of levels of achievement between countries; identification of the major determinants of national achievement within a country; examination of similarities and differences across countries and identification of factors that affect differences between countries. Specific functions of such studies include benchmarking, monitoring, enlightenment, understanding and cross-national research (Howie & Plomp, 2006). The benefit of insight into one's own educational system is of particular relevance for this research, an argument furthered in the discussion of the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 data (Chapter Five).

The background information collected as part of large-scale assessments such as the PIRLS is significant to help understand the factors that influence learners' educational experiences and to describe the learners being assessed. The collection of background information is also used to inform policy by collecting descriptions of the contexts of learning, sometimes described as *Opportunity-To-Learn* (OTL). This incorporates the content officially specified in the curriculum, whether and how it is taught, learners' propensity to learn, as well as home and school reports that can contribute to learning (Mullis, 2002). Therefore, background data can "... provide a picture of what is being done and how that coincides with what is thought to work best" (Mullis, 2002, p.4).

In fact, in large-scale assessments, priority is given to identifying instructional practices that relate to high achievement. However, there may be problems with identifying these instructional practices as strategies deemed to be effective might be reported as being used, but in actuality may not be implemented in ways envisioned to enhance learning. Also, what is considered effective may evolve and change over time, and therefore it may be difficult to report timely data about best practices. Nevertheless, it is seen as important for large-scale studies such as the PIRLS to collect information about instructional practices to help ascertain the extent to which current research recommendations are being implemented and to capture what teachers are actually doing (Mullis, 2002). As in the case of this study, such reporting can also provide a springboard to further research.

As with any research, international studies do present some further concerns that are important to acknowledge. Kellaghan and Greaney (2005) highlight further problems identified with international studies. Firstly, it may be difficult to design an assessment procedure that will adequately measure the outcomes of a variety of curricula despite common elements across the world. There are also considerable differences in expected standards of achievement and in what is taught between developing and industrialised countries (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2005).

Secondly, issues of translation of instruments into one or more languages is a concern as the achievement differences that become apparent may be attributable to language-related differences in the difficulty of the assessment tasks, making question equivalence difficult to achieve. A third challenge relates to the cross-country equivalence of the populations and samples of learners being assessed. For instance, where retention rates differ or where countries differ in their inclusion of children with special education needs or learning problems in the study. A fourth difficulty occurs when the primary focus in reporting the results of the study is on the ranking of countries in terms of the average scores of their learners, since rankings in themselves say nothing about the many factors that may underlie differences between countries in performance. Finally, the relationships between inputs, processes and outcomes need to be examined in the context of individual countries as one cannot assume that practices associated with high achievement in one country will reveal a similar relationship in another (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2005).

In their review of the benefits and limitations of international educational achievement studies, Beaton, Postlethwaite, Ross, Spearritt and Wolf (1999, p.34) of the International Academy of Education, concluded that "... there are many benefits to such studies *on condition that* [Beaton *et al.*'s emphasis] the studies have been well conceptualised and conducted". The validity and reliability of the PIRLS 2006 assessment conceptualisation and its implementation, translation and determination of learner populations (Howie *et al.*, 2007) is outlined in Chapter Five. Beaton and colleagues (1999) further explicate that the type of studies conducted by organisations such as the IEA focus on the variables that might improve achievement in a current system of education. Thus, these types of studies are worthwhile but do require effort on the part of the participating countries, much expertise on the part of the researchers and great care in the interpretation by researchers and policymakers. Resulting recommendations for policy changes in a country need to consider not only the results of the international analyses but also the educational and cultural context in which that country operates (Beaton *et al.*, 1999), which mirrors the argument adopted by Kellaghan and Greaney (2005) about the importance of context in interpretation. For this study, this account of the educational and cultural context of the results of the PIRLS study is explored in-depth via secondary analysis of PIRLS data and PIRLS data informed case studies, especially since it would appear that more investigation is needed into context given South African learners' poor performance in the study.

3.3 SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS' READING LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

Matier Moore and Hart (2007) note that there is a growing corpus of research and debate which suggests deep problems in the South African education system linked to learners' low levels of literacy achievement. They further posit that the root of these problems lies in the ineffective teaching of reading in schools and learners' consequent inability to learn from reading across the curriculum independently. Research findings which connect with Matier Moore and Hart's (2007) observations are explored in this section. Learners' performance on the PIRLS 2006 International benchmarks is summarised (see 3.3.1). Aside from the PIRLS 2006 findings, other studies of reading literacy which also illustrate the difficulties learners' experience are discussed. These studies include the second Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II) (3.3.2), the DoE's systemic evaluations at Grades 3 and 6 (3.3.3) and small-scale empirical studies in individual classes and schools (3.3.4).

3.3.1 South African learners' performance on the PIRLS 2006 International benchmarks

As mentioned in Chapter One, South African learners' performance in the IEA's PIRLS 2006 reading literacy assessments was also scrutinised by means of a process of benchmarking. Benchmarking provides qualitative indications of learners' performance on a scale in relation to questions asked in an assessment. The PIRLS international mean was set at 500 points with the range of performance of learners being aligned to four set benchmarks. These benchmarks included an *Advanced International Benchmark* set at 625 points, a *High International benchmark* of 550 points, an *Intermediate International Benchmark* of 475 and a *Low International Benchmark* set at 400. These benchmarks are cumulative in that learners who were able to reach the higher ones also demonstrated the knowledge and skills for the lower ones (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

Table 3.1 (below) shows the benchmarks, outlining the international achievement median for each and indicating South African Grade 4 and 5 learners' median achievement. Only 13% of South African Grade 4 learners reached the *Low International Benchmark*, in stark contrast to the 94% of Grade 4 learners managing to do so internationally. Apart from South African learners' poor representation on the international benchmarks, it also has to be noted that 87% of Grade 4 learners and 78% of Grade 5 learners did not reach any of the benchmarks. More than half of the English and Afrikaans speaking learners and over 80% of African language speakers did not reach the *Low International Benchmark*, meaning they lacked basic reading skills and strategies to cope with academic tasks. Of the minimal percentages

of South African learners reaching the *High* and *Advanced International Benchmarks*, no African language learners were represented (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

Table 3.1: Percentage of South African learners reaching the PIRLS 2006 International Benchmarks

PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks	Benchmark descriptions	International median	South African median (SE)	
			Grade 4	Grade 5
Low (400- 474)	Basic reading skills and strategies (recognise, locate and reproduce explicitly stated information in texts and answer some questions seeking straightforward inferences).	94	13 (0.5)	22 (0.2)
Intermediate (475-549)	Learners with some reading proficiency who can understand the plot at a literal level and can make some inferences and connections across texts.	76	7 (1.1)	13 (0.8)
High (550-624)	Linked to competent readers who have the ability to retrieve significant details embedded across the text and can provide text-based support for inferences.	41	3 (2.0)	6 (1.6)
Advanced (625+)	Able to respond fully to the PIRLS assessment by means of their integration of information across relatively challenging texts and the provision of full text-based support in their answers.	7	1 (1.5)	2 (1.1)

In contemplation of these findings regarding South African Grade 4 learners' reading levels, the phenomenon of so-called "fourth-grade slump" must be acknowledged. In discussing the North American reading research landscape, Moss (2005, p.46) reports that much has been made of a so-called "fourth-grade slump", which has been observed in Grade 3 learners from low income families. These learners had been reading at grade level but experienced a sudden drop in reading scores in Grade 4. A number of explanations have been offered to explain this phenomenon, namely that, (1) school tasks change significantly from Grade 3 to Grade 4, (2) assessment instruments shift from an emphasis on decoding to the reading of expository text between these grades, and (3) previously unimportant reading difficulties may arise for the first time in Grade 4 when children encounter informational materials (Moss, 2005).

However, it seems improbable that many South African learners would experience a similar fourth-grade slump, as they may not in any event be reading at grade level when they enter Grade 4, especially in light of the DoE's Grade 3 systemic evaluation findings (see 3.3.3) (DoE, 2003). Nonetheless, the reasons that Moss (2005) outlines for a fourth-grade slump are still likely to be complicit in South African learners' difficulties in reading comprehension as, regardless of their levels of reading development, they will still face similar changes in the

composition of their teaching and learning tasks, which may be overwhelming for those who already have poorly developed reading skills.

3.3.2 The second Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II)

For SACMEQ II, a regional assessment, Grade 6 learners from 14 African countries including South Africa completed purpose-designed tests in reading. It was the first time that South Africa participated in the study. Analysis in South Africa focused on establishing learners' levels of achievement in reading and examining whether differential levels of achievement existed according to gender, socioeconomic status and school location. Analysis was also aimed at determining the percentage of learners who demonstrated mastery of essential test items aligned to curricular content. Although fluctuating substantially according to provincial location, overall average learner performance for reading was 492 points, which was below the fixed international mean score of 500 (Moloi & Strauss, 2005).

Moreover, providing an apt illustration of the literacy continuum in South African classrooms, in-depth analysis demonstrated large discrepancies in learners' levels of literacy development. About 19% of the learners assessed had achieved *basic reading* skill competence, another 19% were functioning on an *emergent reading* level and, worryingly, 12% had only *pre-reading* skills. The other learners, a cumulative 50%, had reading competency levels *above basic reading* skills. These 50% included 16% of learners who could *read independently*, 9% who had *interpretive and inferential* reading skills, 7% with *critical reading* skills, 11% percent with *analytical reading* skills and 7% with the highest level of reading competency in the assessment, *insightful reading*. As Moloi and Strauss (2005) indicate, the distribution of reading competency levels was heavily skewed towards the lower competencies. It is further argued that the broad range of reading competencies amongst these learners has implications for training of teachers to deal with individual learner reading needs and competence levels (Moloi & Strauss, 2005).

3.3.3 Grade 3 and Grade 6 systemic evaluations

In another national study, the DoE (2003) undertook a systemic evaluation of the status of Foundation Phase education, which incorporated assessments of Grade 3 learners' Literacy, Numeracy and Life skills. A learner mean of 54% was obtained for the literacy assessment administered, which included the components of *reading and writing* and *listening comprehension*, with national means of 39% and 68% being achieved respectively (DoE, 2003). Thus, although the overall mean performance of 54% for literacy is seemingly

acceptable, the mean score of 39% for *reading and writing* is less so. The high mean for *listening comprehension* perhaps points to a very strong teaching emphasis on oral comprehension rather than written comprehension activities.

Further analysis also revealed that learners were more successful in selecting answers from multiple choice comprehension questions than in answering free response type questions. The mean score for free response type questions was just under 35% and the mean score for multiple choice questions was just over 50%. Moreover, learners' writing was worse than their reading, with a national mean for reading being in the region of 55% and that of writing being 30% (DoE, 2003).

One has to query the level of difficulty of this local systemic assessment as there are seemingly large differences in performance in reading between these Grade 3 learners and the Grade 4 learners who completed the PIRLS 2006 assessments. Conceivably, one would conclude that results would be somewhat similar in these two assessments if they had comparable testing content, given the expected progression in reading literacy abilities from one grade to the next. Furthermore, possible reasons for the systemic evaluation outcomes are not explored in the report, nor are actual teaching practices for reading literacy. Presumably these difficulties with literacy filter into Intermediate Phase classrooms. Perhaps as evidence of the continuance of these problems, learners also fared poorly in the Grade 6 systemic evaluation which followed three years after the Grade 3 evaluation. A national mean of 38% was obtained for English as the LoLT (DoE, 2005). Further stressing this point, in the USA, national longitudinal data show that three quarters of learners who exit Grade 3 as struggling readers continue to read poorly in high school (International Reading Association (IRA), 2006).

3.3.4 Small-scale empirical studies in South Africa

A number of small and localised studies on primary school reading have been published in South Africa in recent years (e.g. Matjila & Pretorius, 2004; Pretorius & Machet, 2004a; Lessing & Mahabeer, 2007; Manyike & Lemmer, 2008; Scheepers, 2008). These local studies focused mostly on concerns for literacy development amongst English as Second Language (ESL) learner populations. Moreover, research emphasis was placed on teacher perceptions, learner attributes and/or small-scale interventions to address learner reading difficulties.

There are two studies at Grade 7, one of which tracked the effect of a reading programme on Grade 7 learners' vocabulary development in a high poverty township school on the outskirts

of Pretoria (Scheepers, 2008), whilst the other compared the first and second language reading performances of 162 Grade 7 learners in English and Xitsonga. The findings were that these learners' reading skills were poor in both their home language, Xitsonga, and in English as their second language (Manyike & Lemmer, 2008).

Lessing and Mahabeer's (2007) study investigated the barriers that hinder Zulu-speaking ESL learners in the Foundation Phase from acquiring reading and writing skills. A random cluster sample of teachers (N=104) from 16 English medium schools in and around Durban completed questionnaires about which barriers hindered their learners' progress. With a 1% level of significance, the teachers perceived parental involvement, poor socioeconomic backgrounds, proficiency in English language structure, fear of responding to tasks and knowledge of phonetic skills as contributory factors to these learners' inability to read and write in English ($p=0.01$). At a 5% level of significance, teachers perceived that their proficiency in Zulu was important for the teaching of English language structure ($p=0.05$) (Lessing & Mahabeer, 2007).

Pretorius and Machet (2004a) conducted research into the effects of an out-of-school literacy enrichment programme on the literacy skills of an intervention group of Grade 1 and Grade 4 learners in five rural primary schools in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Fifteen learners were included in the intervention group per grade at each school. As part of a broader project, five randomly selected Grade 1 learners per school participating in the intervention and their randomly selected non-participant peers were given a battery of tests that tapped into their emergent literacy skills and knowledge in Zulu. The Grade 1 learners who attended the programme showed gains in most of the literacy measures with the most consistent gains shown for those activities involving reading. The assessment of five participating Grade 4 learners per school was focused on Zulu literacy and numeracy, Zulu comprehension, English word recognition and English oral fluency and comprehension. A levelling-off effect was apparent as the gains were not as numerous and differences between intervention and non-intervention groups not as marked as those of the Grade 1 group (Pretorius & Machet, 2004a).

The literacy practices and perceptions of the Grade 1 teachers were also investigated (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b). Teachers were interviewed and given a questionnaire regarding perceptions of reading, their literacy habits at home as well as at school. Of the small number of 20 teachers who completed a questionnaire, 60% classified themselves as "an average reader" in contrast to the 10% who saw themselves as "a fast, highly skilled reader", which is a characteristic one might expect of most teachers. About 57% of the respondents indicated having received "a thorough training" in reading theories and methods,

yet only 34% recognised that their learners were not really performing up to standard. Thus, there was a mismatch between the teachers' perceptions of the reading abilities of their learners and their actual reading levels as revealed by the formal assessments. The lack of external assessment and national standards were hypothesised as perpetuating the idea that their learners' reading levels were adequate (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b).

As a further example, signifying the contributory effects of primary teachers' potential inability to deal with reading literacy development, Matjila and Pretorius's (2004) research over a three-year period in high poverty South African township schools also revealed that Grade 8 learners were entering high school with very poor reading skills, regardless of whether they were reading in their vernacular or English. The findings reinforced the claim that inadequate attention is being given to the development of reading in primary schools (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007), thus highlighting the necessity for research into the teaching of reading literacy in primary school classrooms.

As national performance in reading is often viewed as an indicator of the effectiveness of an education system (Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005), there are clearly grave concerns about the effectiveness of the current education system. In the next section, an overview of contributing factors to learners' achievement levels is presented.

3.4 OVERVIEW OF FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNERS' READING LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

Four distinct reasons are often given for the variation in learner average achievement across different schools (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). The first reason is that some schools are located in privileged areas. The assumption is that learners in these schools come from homes where parents care about their children's education, ensure that their children are well-fed, try to help their children to learn to read as early as feasible, show interest in schoolwork, and provide access to books at home. In contrast, schools serving less privileged communities have larger proportions of learners without the background characteristics of their more advantaged counterparts.

Secondly, schools with higher learner achievement are better equipped than schools with low achievement. These schools have ample space, enough places to sit and write, textbooks for every learner, sufficient classroom and school library reading materials, small class sizes, and appropriately designed classrooms. Thirdly, schools with high average learner achievement have good teachers. The teachers know their subject matter, have high expectations of their learners, know how to structure the material to be learned and keep

good order in the classroom. These teachers also obtain systematic feedback from learners on which objective types the learners have mastered and give help to those learners who are battling mastery of the objectives. Alluding to these teachers' understanding of the curriculum, it is also claimed that these teachers will have a superior grasp of the education system's aims and a better knowledge of which strategies are most likely to address them. A fourth reason for high levels of learner achievement is that these schools are well-managed, with the principals helping teachers through enthusiasm and creative leadership in terms of school pedagogy (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992).

Postlethwaite and Ross (1992, p.2) wisely advise that:

There are various "movements" within the educational world that would tend to support one or more of these four reasons as the key to explaining variation among schools in terms of average student achievement. However, as with many social processes, the most likely answer is that the explanation lies in some kind of combination of all four reasons.

Providing further insight into combinations of factors that impact learning, Todd and Mason (2005) relate the findings of studies of factors that influence learning. They particularly refer to the work of Wang, Haertel and Wahlberg (1993), which considered the power of proximal and distal factors in influencing school learning. Of relevance to this study is the assertion that, in general, proximal variables such as psychological, instructional (related to teaching) and home environment, exert more influence on learning than distal variables such as demographic, policy and organisation factors. With distal variables being one step removed from the daily experience of learners, simply instituting new policies will not necessarily enhance learning. Rather effective policies require implementation by teachers with their learners in the classroom. Of course, one cannot assume that distal factors such as sufficient funding for adequate schools, classrooms and textbooks and qualified teachers and catering for learners according to socioeconomic needs do not impact classroom learning, but once these are satisfied, the actions of teachers, learners and their parents matter most in learning outcomes. However, since it is unlikely that learners' social status or quality of educational infrastructure available to under-qualified teachers will change in the short term, teachers' implementation of classroom factors that enhance learning become fundamental (Todd & Mason, 2005).

The PIRLS 2006 explanatory model (Mullis *et al.*, 2006) (Figure 3.1, below) illustrates the dynamic interaction of context, home, school and classroom factors for learner achievement outcomes mentioned above as factors for learner achievement by Postlethwaite and Ross (1992). The model shows the relationships among the home, school and classroom influences on children's reading development and how this interaction is situated within and

shaped by the community and country. Learner outcomes, both their achievement and attitudes, are a product of instruction and experiences gained in a variety of contexts. The model as a whole can be viewed as a system of reciprocal influences as learner outcomes also feed back into the home, school and classroom environments to some degree (Mullis *et al.*, 2006). Macro level national and community contexts influencing achievement were discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, especially *governance and organisation of the education system* and *curriculum characteristics and policies*. While the home context is recognised as being highly influential in learner outcomes, factors linked to the home environment (*languages in the home, economic resources, activities fostering literacy, and learners' out-of-school literacy activities*) are not focal points for the literature reviewed in the rest of this chapter.



Figure 3.1: Contexts for the development of reading literacy (Mullis *et al.*, 2006, p.24).

This non-focus on home factors is due to the focus of this research being on teachers' classroom practices and the schooling conditions that support or impede these practices, and is also based on the assumption, as argued by Todd and Mason (2005), that teachers' implementation of classroom factors to enhance learning are fundamental. School level factors include *school policy and curriculum* and *school environment and resources*. At the classroom level, the discussion of influential factors includes *teacher training and*

preparation, classroom environment and structure, instructional strategies and activities, instructional materials and technology and homework and assessment (Mullis *et al.*, 2006).

The next two sections of this chapter further expand on the four reasons given by Postlethwaite and Ross (1992) for learner achievement with more heed being paid to the South African situation in particular. School level factor influences (3.5) on learner achievement and micro classroom level factor influences (3.6) are specifically addressed.

3.5 SCHOOL LEVEL FACTORS

School-wide reading programmes impact class teaching (Taylor, 2008). Allington and Cunningham (2007) relay that when schools have a few good teachers it is usually as a result of individual initiative, whereas when a school has many good teachers it is a result of leadership. In this section, important factors in the creation of effective schools in reading literacy are discussed. Firstly, school management and shared vision are considered (3.5.1) and, secondly, school resource factors are contemplated (3.5.2).

3.5.1 School management, shared vision and cohesion in objectives

Although choosing effective educational inputs is the first step towards improving learning, managing these inputs well at school level is also necessary (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). Over the forty years following the Coleman report (Coleman *et al.*, 1966) educational effectiveness research expanded rapidly. The contributions of US and British research literature in this regard bear remarkable similarities (Reynolds, 1998). South African educational effectiveness research for reading literacy is not as forthcoming. Sailors *et al.* (2007) note the non-availability of such research for reading literacy locally, in what would appear to be the only published contribution to understandings of school effectiveness for reading literacy in South African schools.

Sailors *et al.* (2007) investigated the qualities of seven high-performing schools in reading literacy serving low-income South African learners. These schools had participated in a five year intervention focused on school-improvement initiatives, training of teachers in effective teaching strategies and providing classrooms with high-quality learning materials. These schools stood out as consistently high performers across all measures of learner achievement in the sub-sample of schools evaluated at the end of the intervention. Documents and artefacts, field notes, observational and interview data (from teachers, deputy-principals, and principals) were collected at each, as well as a measure of the print environment in the school and classrooms from Grades 1 to 7. Five broad themes linked to these high-performing schools were identified: (1) a safe, orderly, and positive learning

environment; (2) strong leaders; (3) excellent teachers (competent, committed, caring, collaborative); (4) a shared sense of competence, pride and purpose for the school; and (5) high levels of school and community involvement (Sailors *et al.*, 2007). The findings confirm that these local effective schools had similar attributes to their overseas counterparts from the school effectiveness literature (see Reynolds, 1998). Even so, the Sailors *et al.* (2007) study reveals little insight into what makes a school effective in terms of reading literacy practices in particular.

Lockheed, Verspoor and colleagues (1991) also provided general insights into the role of effective educational management. The provision and effective use of education inputs are the role of educational management at all levels. Effective schools manage to transform their given inputs into children's learning, in spite of poor conditions in some instances. Moreover, such schools have an orderly school environment, clear goals, high expectations, a sense of community and strong instructional leadership. In terms of an orderly school environment, there is good attendance by learners and teachers; clean facilities in good condition; and routine provision of teaching materials. The academic emphasis of these schools is evident in high expectations and defined goals for academic achievement; a curriculum which is focused on teaching both basic and complex goals; the concentration of available resources and their operations on achieving these goals; sufficient time for teaching these goals; coordination of instruction across grade levels; and continuous monitoring of learner progress to check whether goals have been achieved (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). Related to coordination of instruction across grade levels, Moats (2009) particularly emphasises that all teachers, not only reading specialists, need to understand best practices of reading instruction. Prevention and amelioration of reading problems further need to be viewed as a whole school responsibility involving teamwork and a coordinated approach between teachers and other role-players in a school. Thus, a common knowledge base between all teachers who must collaborate to the benefit of learners must be held (Moats, 2009). In consideration of strong instructional leadership, the principal is highly visible at school and devotes considerable time to coordinating and managing instruction. A common sense of commitment and collegiality amongst staff is evident and a participatory management style is employed (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991).

Further elaborating on these factors for effective reading instruction, there are a number of features of school-wide reading programme initiatives that positively impact classroom practices (Taylor, 2008), and school change initiatives that enhance learners' academic achievement (Allington & Cunningham, 2007). In effective schools, the staff is committed to the idea that all learners can learn to read and write and thus work to produce this outcome. Teachers work together to develop a cohesive school-wide programme. They collaborate

between themselves and other resource teachers. Interventions are in place to meet the needs of learners experiencing reading difficulties, those with special educational needs or who are second language learners. Support programmes are reorganised to connect such support with classroom instruction and teachers, especially by means of collaboration. Cohesion is created in the amount of time for reading instruction across different grades and blocks of time during the school day (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Taylor, 2008). According to Allington and Cunningham (2007), this is important in that nearly every study of classroom effectiveness in primary schools has concluded that teachers who allocate more time to reading and language instruction are those whose learners show the greatest gains in literacy development. Such studies also show that the amount of time allocated to teaching reading and writing varies substantially from school to school and even within schools, as teachers schedule more or less time. In effective schools, more classroom instructional time is allocated to reading and writing activities while using multiple approaches to literacy instruction, and, cross-curricular integration of reading and writing into other learning areas. Moreover, school-wide assessment plans in which learner data are collected and used regularly to inform instruction are utilised. Successful schools also work to involve families. Parents are not just expected to monitor homework but also help to make decisions about the use of school resources, curriculum and schedules. These schools thus work effectively with parents as partners (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Taylor, 2008). Allington and Cunningham (2007) further highlight that, in such schools, substantial investments are made in teachers' professional development, primarily to enhance their instructional skills and to create teaching and learning environments that support high quality instruction.

There is also investment in classroom libraries and reading material resources (Allington & Cunningham, 2007). The fundamental place of instructional resources in effective schooling for literacy is discussed more in the next sub-section.

3.5.2 Material resources

Lockheed and Verspoor (1991, p.47) wrote that "Instructional materials are critical ingredients in learning, and the intended curriculum cannot be easily implemented without them", and it has been found that learners in well-resourced schools are inclined to attain higher literacy levels than learners from schools with high levels of poverty (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b). The problems of quality in basic education in Africa are linked to a shortage of resources for education and the inefficient use of those resources that are available (Sedel, 2005). Researchers have argued that there is a so-called "book famine" in Africa (Perry, 2008, p.64). Schools in rural areas are thought to experience particular challenges in gaining access to books, and, even where they are available there are not always enough for

all learners. Books other than textbooks may be even rarer. Textbooks play a significant role in Southern African education so shortages have serious consequences for teaching and learning. Textbooks can be the only source of academic knowledge and information in classrooms, especially in cases where teachers are unqualified, poorly trained or have not obtained higher levels of education themselves. Access to textbooks is however not enough to promote reading achievement in developing countries, as learners must have access to a wide range of reading materials, especially for the majority of second language learners. The scarcity of books may also mean that African children have little opportunity to read for enjoyment, and, outside school, enter a nearly bookless culture (Perry, 2008). Perry (2008) also argues that availability of resources is a serious consideration for language policy in African schools as many countries simply do not have enough resources to supply either the teachers or the materials necessary to provide local-language education to all children.

In illustrating literacy instruction resources in South Africa specifically, Scheepers (2008) reveals that the print environments in many schools are poor. As in the rest of Southern Africa, books that children in township and rural schools use are mostly textbooks, which often need to be shared. Moreover, she relates that there is a dearth of both fiction and non-fiction titles published in the African languages, giving learners scant opportunities to develop first language vocabulary (Scheepers, 2008). Pretorius and Currin (2010) concur with Scheepers' (2008) comments by highlighting that, in South African schools, there are few if any storybooks or classroom readers in the African languages, and schools are poorly resourced so storybook reading seldom occurs in the classroom (Pretorius & Currin, 2010).

Lack of access to school libraries compounds the issue of non-available or poor quality books in classrooms. For the PIRLS 2006 main study, 60% of the learners were reportedly in schools without a school library. Those that were in schools with a school library fared far better in the assessments than their peers who were not (Howie *et al.*, 2007). The DoE's (2008b) *National Literacy Strategy* document states that it is rare to find schools with well-used general libraries. It is further acknowledged that some classrooms have no books, and even those classes with sets of readers may have them at a developmentally inappropriate level (DoE, 2008b).

An intervention study reported by Pretorius and Currin (2010) revealed that when high poverty schools were given assistance in making books available to learners and motivating them to read, their reading levels did improve. The authors stress that one crucial factor requiring financial outlay is that of making books available to learners, and as poor schools cannot afford to buy print resources on their own they will continue to produce poor readers.

Crucially, Mnkeni and Nassimbeni (2008) underscore the discrepancies between the curriculum and school realities regarding literacy resources. These two authors reason that the curriculum relies on the use of a variety of resources to assist learners in their construction of knowledge with the school library being the provider of all of the required resources for teaching and learning. Regardless of the emphasis on resource-based learning in the curriculum, school libraries are not referred to in the C2005 documents, despite emphasis being placed on information literacy skills. The RNCS documents also put special emphasis on resource-based learning and teaching, with learners being given the opportunity to learn from a variety of resources (Mnkeni & Nassimbeni, 2008).

Therefore, what materials do learners need to enhance their reading literacy development? Ready access to books, magazines and other reading materials is an essential factor, and, in this regard, classroom libraries are particularly important. Moreover, when classroom libraries are well-designed, offering a wide-range of appropriate books and magazines, children are more likely to use them. Copious amounts of easy and interesting reading are also essential to develop reading strategies and foster positive reading motivation, especially for those learners who struggle (Allington & Cunningham, 2007).

Curriculum material use can be grouped into three broad categories, namely, (1) commercial reading series, (2) reading series and trade books, and (3) trade books. Commercial reading series are most commonly used. However, although reading series can play a useful role, no such series can make up the whole reading and language curriculum in itself. Heavy reliance on these series limits learners' development of reading stamina and book selection strategies (Allington & Cunningham, 2007). Nor are textbooks always well written or interesting, and they can be too difficult for many learners to read (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

In their study of exemplary Grade 4 classrooms, Allington and Johnston (2002) found that teachers organised their instruction around multiple curricular materials rather than relying on a single text or curricular material. Although the teachers sometimes used textbooks of subject areas, they hardly ever followed a traditional curriculum plan, varying their activities and materials from week to week. There was a strong literary emphasis in the classrooms observed, each of which had a substantial library. Teachers used historical fiction, biography and information texts in subject areas other than language. Either teachers or learners drew materials from the Internet, from magazines or from other non-traditional curricular sources. More extensive use of materials other than just textbooks provided greater opportunities to read and introduced substantially more content. Materials in these classrooms also reflected diversity in genres, of class experiences, of gender and of culture. There were also texts that varied in their range of difficulty, meaning that all learners were able to read and understand

them. Difficulty, relevance and meaning were important aspects of text choices made by teachers. Even so, teachers worked with limited organisational support, receiving multiple copies of the same text. This meant that teachers had to locate the supplementary texts and purchase other materials with their own funds (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

3.6 CLASSROOM TEACHING FACTORS

Teachers are an important part of a school's resources (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b). In this section, teachers' competency in teaching reading literacy is first considered (3.6.1). Thereafter, the status quo of reading literacy teaching in South African schools is discussed (3.6.2), with issues around teaching English language learners being specifically considered (3.6.3). Finally, teacher qualities, teaching goals and reading instruction practices recognised as being relevant in the development of learners' reading literacy are delineated (3.6.4).

3.6.1 Teacher competency

In a 2009 report on trends in education macro indicators from the DoE (2009a), it is stated that the percentage of qualified teachers in South Africa increased by 30% between 1994 and 2008. These gains occurred largely amongst Black teachers, implying that equity in the distribution of qualifications has increased. However, the DoE (2009a) admitted that these figures only reflect formal certification courses, not any measure of teachers' classroom competency or subject knowledge, which was conceded as an issue that remains a serious concern.

The DoE (2008b) lists teacher competency as a specific challenge for implementing its *National Reading Strategy*. Teachers in South Africa may have an under-developed understanding of teaching literacy, especially reading and writing. They may not know how to teach reading or may know only one method meaning they cannot adapt to the instructional needs of individual learners. As a result of misunderstandings of the role of the teacher in teaching reading for C2005 and the subsequent RNCS, many teachers mistakenly thought that they did not have to actively teach reading but merely had to facilitate the process as children would teach themselves to read. Teachers were also expected to develop their own teaching materials and reading programmes as part of curriculum implementation, aspects which it is now recognised they did not have the experience to undertake (DoE, 2008b).

As hinted at in the DoE's (2009b) macro indicator report, teacher preparation for the teaching of reading literacy is not unproblematic either. A 2008 survey of the Foundation Phase literacy programmes for the Bachelor of Education degree for Early Childhood Development

and/or Foundation Phase teacher preparation at eight South African higher education institutions revealed wide variation in the programme goals espoused and the design of the programmes at the different institutions. Whilst the content of the programmes was mostly well considered, with goals in line with the national curriculum and international trends, time limitations, resource inadequacies and less than optimal student practicals in schools impeded optimal initial teacher preparation for teaching reading (Zimmerman, Howie & Long, 2009a). Linked to this survey, a case study of a specific institution's initial preparation of Intermediate Phase language teachers revealed a lack of specific focus on preparation for the teaching of reading, a scenario likely to be present for the majority of Intermediate Phase Language teacher preparation programmes in the country (Zimmerman, Howie & Long, 2009b).

Notwithstanding the influence of educational policy and school context, Bloch (1999) contends that how teachers understand the process of becoming literate has consequences for what they identify as appropriate teaching strategies in the classroom. Intermediate Phase teachers may not be automatically aware of the connections amongst basic reading skills and reading comprehension. They may notice that learners in the Intermediate and upper grades read poorly but may not understand that proficiency in basic reading skill must be taught before learners can progress. Furthermore, without instruction and practice, teachers are unlikely to develop strategies that can promote thoughtful reading by their learners (Moats, 1999). As Stoller and Grabe (2001) assert, the requirements for the development of reading fluency necessitate that teachers as well as curriculum developers determine what instructional options are available to them and how to go about the optimal pursuit of instructional goals in various contexts. Moats (1999) reinforces this by stating that classroom teaching for reading instruction needs to be considered as the critical factor in preventing reading problems and must be the central focus for change. As such, teachers' acquisition of the teaching skills necessary to bring about the development of literate language competency is critical, especially as, in South Africa, many assumptions have been largely unquestioned about how to teach reading and writing, which languages to use and what counts as high quality practice in classrooms (Bloch, 1999).

3.6.2 The status quo for teaching reading in South African primary schools

Depending on the medium of instruction at each school, reading skills in South African schools are developed during the Foundation Phase of schooling using mother tongue basal readers (Pretorius, 2002). Much emphasis is placed on the teaching of decoding skills but this is often done in a superficial, haphazard and decontextualised fashion. Children may

read lists of syllables or words aloud from the chalkboard. As teachers assume that when learners can decode they will be able to comprehend, little attention is given to reading comprehension, therefore the transition from decoding syllables or words on a chalkboard to meaningful reading activities using extended texts does not happen easily (Pretorius & Currin, 2010).

In the Intermediate Phase, learners' reading as a language and information-processing skill is then largely presumed to be developed as they can decode text. The texts used also change from predominantly first language narrative formats to English expository texts with topics and issues that learners are unlikely to be familiar with. The focus on decoding of text in the primary language essentially means that non-English learners have most likely not yet mastered reading comprehension skills in their vernacular. As a result, these learners lack the necessary skills to transfer to literate reading in English. The system through which these learners then progress does not place enough emphasis on promoting reading skills and is strongly characterised by rote learning principles, verbatim recall and oral modes of information dissemination (Pretorius, 2002). The focus on decoding of texts in the Foundation Phase also likely means that even first language learners' comprehension skills may not be adequate as they enter further primary school education.

The only empirical research found which begins to broach South African teachers' overall literacy teaching practices is the SACMEQ II study (Moloi & Strauss, 2005) (first discussed in sub-section 3.3.2). For the SACMEQ II, investigation was also conducted into South African Grade 3 teachers' personal characteristics (age, gender, SES), training, time allocation for teaching, preparation and marking, and viewpoints on learner activities, teaching goals, approaches and assessment procedures. Teachers were particularly asked about their opinions of the most important learner activities for teaching reading, their decisions about the most important goals for teaching reading, and to give ratings of their most frequently used reading activities for instruction and assessment of reading. Percentages of teachers according to response to categories provided were given.

Approximately 45% of teachers rated reading for comprehension as the most important learner activity for teaching reading, 22% rated learning new vocabulary and 13% rated sounding words as most important. Small percentages of teachers rated listening to reading, silent reading, taking books home to read, reading materials at home and reading aloud in class as most important. Teachers' ideas about the most important goals of teaching reading were also sought. About 29% thought the most important goal was to develop a lasting interest for reading in learners, 32% considered the development of life skills to be most important, 11% indicated making reading enjoyable and another 15% suggested that

improving reading comprehension were the most important goals in teaching reading. Small percentages referred to the improvement of word attack skills, extending vocabulary and opening up career opportunities as the most important goals. Teachers were also asked to rate their most frequently used teaching activities for reading according to the most often used. Majority percentages of teachers reported asking questions to deepen understanding (91%), asking questions to test comprehension (88%), giving positive feedback (84%), reading aloud to the class (72%) and introducing the passage before reading (67%) as the most often used strategies. Using materials made by the teacher was the least often used strategy for teaching reading, with only 37% of teachers reporting using it. In relation to the assessment of reading, 36% of teachers reported giving weekly reading tests, whereas a further 41% reported only giving reading tests two or three times per month (Moloi & Strauss, 2005). Nonetheless, these teacher survey data offered only superficial signs of teachers' opinions and do not give any indications of which strategies teachers use or how they use and adapt them to diverse learner populations in the classroom. Nor do they provide any indications of the quality of these strategies or the school contexts that support them.

3.6.3 Teaching and learning in English for English non-vernacular learners

In multilingual educational situations, Bloch (1999, p.41) reveals that the teacher has to make decisions not only “about how to teach literacy but also about which languages children should learn in”. She further explains that “(a)t the moment, many teachers are not confident that they can provide appropriately the kind of education they have themselves experienced to teach children who do not speak the same language as they do leaves them feeling ill-equipped” (p.41).

There is much controversy about whether reading problems are caused by low level proficiency in a second language or by a learner's difficulty in transferring reading strategy skills from their mother tongue to second language texts (Macaro, 2003). As Matjila and Pretorius (2004) point out, as the education system is tasked with promoting bilingualism, then, due to literacy's undeniable linkage to academic achievement in bilingual education settings, it is also tasked with promoting biliteracy. There is an assumption that if one is proficient in a language then one will automatically be able to read in that language. However, although there is a link between proficiency in a language and reading capability in that language, the relationship between the two is asymmetrical. Proficiency in a language does not guarantee reading fluency in it (Matjila & Pretorius, 2004).

To illustrate this, Pretorius (2002) maintained that, in South Africa, reading problems tend to be masked by language proficiency issues. It is assumed that poor academic performance is caused by poor mother tongue proficiency. An associated assumption is that, when learners have difficulty using reading as a tool for learning, their comprehension problems are a product of limited language proficiency. This then leads to the idea that language proficiency and reading ability are alike. However, this is not the case. Improving the language proficiency of learners does not automatically improve their reading comprehension. Attention to reading improves reading skill and as a result language proficiency also improves. Therefore, although reading ability alone cannot guarantee academic success, it is highly likely that a lack of reading ability can function as a key barrier to academic achievement (Pretorius, 2002). Although English is the main language of instruction in South African schools, poor literacy results cannot be solely attributed to second language instruction, as learners are battling to read in the African Languages as well as English (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b; Howie *et al.*, 2007). As Alexander (2006, p.2) comments:

Language medium policy and practice in and of themselves are a necessary but not sufficient explanation of poor academic performance. There are many other factors that are part of the causality. Of these, socio-economic status, teaching method and parental involvement are probably the most important.

Research focused on the second language medium of instruction situation in some South African content classrooms found that teachers did not have the methodological and presentational skills or language associated with effective second language instruction. These teachers were thus considered incapable of “consciously promoting” functional language skills for content (Uys, Van der Walt, Botha & Van den Berg, 2006, p.68). Second language learners may experience reading comprehension in another language as an overwhelming task and teachers may not be aware of the difficulties that these learners may confront as they attempt to gather meaning from text in another language (Stoller & Grabe, 2001). As Dyers (2003) notes, teachers are struggling to respond adequately to the increased linguistic diversity amongst learners in their classrooms. These teachers’ formal training experiences may have afforded limited consideration of the practicalities of promoting these learners’ literacy development (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2009a; 2009b).

Theron and Nel (2005) did conduct research into the needs and perceptions of South African Grade 4 teachers who taught ESL learners. The sample only included teachers at schools where English had been the medium of instruction from Grade One¹⁶. Survey research was conducted by distributing a closed ended questionnaire to a sample of Grade 4 teachers (N= 100) in one district, which sought information about these teachers’

¹⁶ Such a school is referred to as an ‘EFL’ school for this research.

perceptions of: learners with language barriers; language issues that exacerbate language barriers; demographic factors that complicate teacher support of ESL learners; and supportive strategies that teachers used for ESL learners. Although the importance of other foci for the study is recognised, of specific relevance to this study were teachers' reported uses of supportive strategies to aid and accommodate these learners in their classrooms. Roughly 86% of the teachers reportedly: experimented in the classroom by trying out new methods, tools and techniques or using alternative teaching practices such as stories, words and concepts that related to the learners' immediate environment, drilling of words with flash cards, role play, drama and dialogue. Development of vocabulary was recognised as a priority task. Adaptation of the level of teaching by use of additional time for remediation, adaptation of levels of assessment or adaptation of worksheets was reported. The compilation of language enrichment programmes for these learners was also indicated, as was teacher use of code-switching to assist these learners and the use of peer translators. These outcomes provide some interesting insights into teacher adaptation according to learners' ESL status. Even so, the findings offer only a surface level description of a small sample of teachers' practices in engaging ESL learners in English medium schools only.

Given the scarcity of research on South African teachers' reading instruction practices, the literature review now turns to recognised goals and practices for developing learner reading literacy in primary schools in the international literature.

3.6.4 Teaching goals, teacher qualities and teaching practices advocated

In this sub-section, goals for teaching reading are briefly listed (3.6.4.1). Attention is then turned to the qualities of excellent reading teachers (3.6.4.2) followed at length by the explication of teaching practices considered effective for literacy development (3.6.4.3).

3.6.4.1 Reading teaching goals

In the Intermediate and Senior Phases of schooling there is a need for learners to become increasingly fluent readers, and as they do so it is expected that reading independence will be exhibited and many of the behaviours listed below will become automatic. For newly fluent readers it is proposed that they will be able to read in such a manner that they will:

- rarely interrupt the flow of their reading to decode words
- consistently integrate and use cueing systems (phonics, meaning, and structure) to confirm the meaning of the text
- use all the information in the text to confirm the message

- retell, summarise and infer meaning
- self-monitor and self-correct while reading
- use inference, deduction, and prior experiences to predict and make meaning from text
- read flexibly and strategically from a variety of texts
- ask questions as an extension for further reading
- make inferences, predictions and generalisations
- confirm and extend knowledge
- use word identification strategies very effectively
- discuss point of view
- contrast text themes and types.

(Lapp *et al.* 2001, pp.5- 6)

3.6.4.2 *Reading teacher qualities*

Teacher abilities may have a greater impact on learner achievement than actual instructional programmes (Topping & Ferguson, 2005). Indeed, competent teaching can alleviate the severity and consequences of reading failure, especially for high risk populations such as children of low SES, from second language backgrounds and those with reading disabilities (Moats, 2009). As Taylor (2008) stresses, teachers need to focus not only on the content of reading instruction but equally on the pedagogy as well.

The research-based qualities of excellent reading teachers are that they: (1) understand reading and writing and believe that all children can learn to read and write; (2) continually assess children's individual progress and link reading instruction to children's prior experiences; (3) know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine methods into an effective instruction programme; (4) offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read; (5) use flexible grouping strategies to fit instruction to individual children; and (6) are good reading coaches in that they provide help strategically (Blair, Rupley & Nichols, 2007).

In a study comparing effective teachers of reading, Wray, Medwell, Fox and Poulson (2000) found that it was common for such teachers to teach a range of literacy skills and knowledge at the word, sentence and text level via shared text. There were distinctive beginnings and endings to lessons, and learners were often required to present a review at the end of an activity. The teachers followed a brisk pace and used time-limits for sub-tasks within lessons. They re-focused their learners' attention to the task regularly and used modelling and demonstration to teach both purposes and processes of literacy. The teachers used a wide

range of questions and were inclined to ask learners open-ended questions about decisions and strategies (Topping & Ferguson, 2005).

In summarising research on effective elementary teachers of reading, Taylor, Peterson, Pearson and Rodriguez (2002) also noted a number of similar characteristics of these teachers, notably that they maintain an academic focus, keep more learners on task and provide direct instruction. Such direct instruction involves making learning goals clear, asking learners questions to monitor understanding of content or skills covered and providing feedback to learners on their academic progress. These teachers also use modelling and explanation to teach learners strategies for decoding words and understanding texts, and emphasise higher-order thinking skills more than lower order skills. More small group than whole group instruction is provided and these teachers elicit high levels of learner engagement. They also coach rather than instruct in interacting with learners, and engage in more higher level thinking for reading. Telling indicates a strong teacher-directed stance and lessens opportunities to assist learners to take responsibility for their own skills and strategies. Balance is also achieved in the reading programme by teaching skills, fostering much reading and writing and developing self-regulation in learners' use of strategies (Taylor *et al.*, 2002).

Interestingly, Reynolds (1998) notes that certain teaching factors may apply only in certain contexts. He indicates that effective practices in low SES contexts involve the teacher behaviours of:

- generating warm and positive affect
- getting a response before moving onto new materials
- presenting small segments of material with practice before moving on and showing how bits fit together
- emphasising knowledge and application before abstraction, therefore putting the concrete first
- having strong lesson structures and well-planned transitions
- using individually differentiated materials
- using experiences of learners.

In contrast, effective teaching behaviours in middle-income SES contexts include (Reynolds, 1998):

- requiring extended reasoning
- posing questions that require associations and generalisations

- giving difficult materials
- providing projects for independent judgement, discovery, problem-solving and use of original information
- very rich verbalising
- encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning

Perhaps related to this SES-based outlook on differentiated instruction, Moats (2009) argues that teachers who are able to identify their learners' abilities and needs and can then adapt their instruction to meet them are more likely to experience success with a range of learner abilities. Moreover, the provision of differentiated instruction is dependent on teachers' insight into what causes variation in learners' reading achievement (Moats, 2009).

In a study of the expertise of literacy teachers from preschool to Grade 5, Block, Oakar and Hurt (2002) found that highly effective Grade 4 teachers distinguish themselves by their abilities to simultaneously instruct learners who are either learning to read, reading to learn, trying to use higher-order thinking skills to gain more information from content-area texts and using higher level comprehension abilities. These teachers can also move literacy activities up or down the cognitive scale as learner needs dictate (Block *et al.*, 2002).

In the only comprehensive study of Grade 4 teachers of reading found in the scholarly literature, Allington and Johnston (2002) studied the characteristics of exemplary teachers of reading at Grade 4 in the USA. Classroom observations of and interviews with 30 Grade 4 teachers in five US states (New York, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Texas and California) identified as exemplary through a nomination process participated. The schools in which the teachers taught were located in a variety of communities according to geographical location, school size and learner SES. Ten days of classroom observation, two semi-structured **interviews**, spontaneous informal interviews, interviews with target children from each classroom, samples of student writing and reading logs and end-of-year achievement test performances were collected. The observations focused on the structure of classroom activity (time allocation, grouping, movement) and the essence of the language environment (who talks, the nature and content of talk) (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

Cross-case analyses of the features (personal characteristics, beliefs, attitudes and values and practice) associated with these exemplary teachers both confirmed and extended the features of exemplary teachers already noted in the literature review for the study. In terms of their personal characteristics, these teachers were: warm, caring, supportive, encouraging, friendly, enthusiastic about their work, confident, accurate in self-judgements with a sense of agency and a genuine like of people. Related to their beliefs, attitudes and expectations,

these teachers: expected diversity, assumed potential, recognised that learning is social, requires ownership, relevance and choice, and that error and modelling is important (Allington & Johnston, 2002). Table 3.2 (below) reveals the practice features (classroom talk, curriculum materials, the organisation of instruction and evaluation) of these teachers as reported by Allington and Johnston (2002).

Table 3.2: Practice features associated with exemplary Grade 4 teachers

Classroom talk	<p>Learners talk to each other publicly; respectful, supportive and productive talk is expected, modelled and taught.</p> <p>Talk between teacher and learner is personalised; teachers actively learn about learners.</p> <p>Teachers encourage learners to engage each other's ideas, thereby distributing authority.</p> <p>Discussion is common, including "tentative" talk, making it possible for others to complete incomplete ideas or otherwise contribute to the group thinking.</p> <p>"No" or "wrong" are rarely heard. Teachers support the partially correct, turn attention to the process, and encourage further thinking or reflection, even about a "correct" answer.</p> <p>Teachers admit their limited knowledge of various topics (especially those raised by learners), their mistakes, and their own interests.</p> <p>Inquiry and problem-solving processes are normal topics of conversation, such as "How do we find that out?" Emphasis is on making meaning and finding the means for doing so.</p>
Curriculum materials	<p>Instruction is multi-sourced (e.g. in social studies: historical fiction, biography, biography, informational books)</p> <p>Multi-sourced curriculum is also multilevel, with texts varying with difficulty.</p> <p>Relevance and meaning are important aspects of curriculum materials selected</p> <p>Language itself is treated as a curriculum material; even word study emphasises a search for meaningful patterns, meaning acquisition, interest in words and turns of a phrase, and the strategic, purposeful selection of words.</p> <p>Strong literary emphasis.</p> <p>Instruction often guided by an awareness of state or district standards but not driven by them.</p>
Instructional organisation	<p>Plan open instructional opportunities on which to capitalise.</p> <p>Curriculum coverage is lower on agenda than curricular engagement.</p> <p>Instruction is personalised (versus "individualised"); teachers know learners' interests, strengths and needs.</p> <p>Utilise managed choice: strategically arrange for learners to have choices and make them productively, or learn from their errors.</p> <p>More individual and small-group than whole-class instruction; learners learn to consult with one another.</p> <p>Collaborative, meaningful problem-solving is common; learners learn how to learn, to teach, and to interact in ways that foster mutual learning.</p> <p>Learners are expected to manage group work; breakdowns are dealt with not as misbehaviour but as interactional problems to be solved strategically.</p> <p>Foster personal responsibility for learning by providing choice, goal setting guidelines, and collaborative independence.</p> <p>Much of the schoolwork is longer-term in nature rather than a series of small and unrelated tasks.</p> <p>Integration across subjects, topics, and time fosters engagement and curricular coherence.</p>
Evaluation	<p>Improvement, progress and effort are valued more than achievement of a single priori standard.</p> <p>Personalised attention is given to individual development and goals.</p> <p>Rubrics designed for teachers are adapted for learner use and focused on complex achievements.</p> <p>Self-evaluation is widely encouraged, shaped and supported.</p>

Source: Allington and Johnston (2002, pp.214-215).

One of the classroom level factors which consistently and most strongly affects reading test scores is Opportunity-To-Learn (OTL) whether it is measured as the amount of the curriculum covered or the percentage of test items taught. It can be linked to length of school day, year and hours of reading experience taught. It is also linked to the quality of teachers' classroom management, and time on task, and linked to the use of homework, which expands available learning time. In ensuring OTL, effective teachers emphasise academic instruction with learning as the main classroom goal. Instructional time is spent on curriculum based learning activities in a task-oriented, business-like manner within a relaxed and supportive environment. The classroom itself is well-organised and there are minimal disruptions or learner misbehaviour. The learners are active rather than passive participants in their own learning, with teachers asking many questions and involving learners in class discussion (Reynolds, 1998).

3.6.4.2 *Specific instructional strategies advocated*

Reynolds (1998) notes that successful teaching of reading equips learners to draw on phonic knowledge, word recognition, grammatical knowledge and contextual information when reading to make meaning. Frequent opportunities are given for children to listen to, read and discuss texts and to think about the language and content used. Good library use is also stimulated and required alongside the provision of time for productive individual reading both at school and at home (Reynolds, 1998). Dimensions of effective instruction supported by research include instruction in phonemic awareness; phonics; fluency; vocabulary; and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2000; Taylor, 2008).

Rasinski and Padak (2004) observed that after years of debate about which approaches to reading instruction were more effective, i.e. whole language or phonics, skills-based or literature-based based instruction, comprehension-oriented or word-based, the field has generally concluded that they are all important and need to be taught. Although they further indicate that this balance makes sense, particularly the inclusion of the aforementioned dimensions of effective instruction, these authors (Rasinski & Padak, 2004, p.92) argue that a balanced approach has to be "more than the simple conglomeration of disparate approaches to literacy instruction - in a truly balanced system, one element influences other parts of the curriculum, and that interrelationship of parts needs to be considered". The significance of their position is acknowledged, albeit that each of the dimensions of effective instruction is considered separately, as in this rest of this sub-section.

- Phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency

Most learners, especially those in the first grades of schooling, benefit from systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. Effective systematic phonics instruction approaches include letter-by-letter decoding and decoding by onset and rhyme. Oral reading used to develop decoding fluency and during which learners receive teacher guidance and support has a positive impact on their overall reading (Taylor, 2008).

- Vocabulary

Although weak readers do need robust instruction in decoding, teachers also need to realise that disadvantaged children specifically may have one half of the oral language vocabulary typical of children from more privileged backgrounds. This means that vocabulary development is a cornerstone of good teaching (Moats, 2009).

Given other studies on vocabulary growth in childhood, McKeown (2010) suggests as target vocabulary growth 1,000 words a year through elementary school. Vocabulary growth in the intermediate grades is mostly a result of interactions with texts rather than from oral interactions. All children in the intermediate grades do experience vocabulary growth but such rates vary and for some children it is not fast enough to help them to deal with the text materials from which they should be reading and learning. Poor readers also have difficulties interacting with text, meaning that they have fewer opportunities to learn new words too (McKeown, 2010).

There is very little vocabulary instruction in schools and most often such instruction is organised around a dictionary as a source of word meanings. This can be ineffective if learners cannot make sense of the information offered by the dictionary. Otherwise, most vocabulary is learnt incidentally from context during reading. Instead, intensive instruction is needed to provide learners with opportunity for vocabulary growth adequate to keep pace with academic demands (McKeown, 2010).

McKeown (2010, p.4) proposes that learners in Grades 4 and 5 should be building vocabulary by developing

- knowledge of individual word meanings and ability to use these words in multiple contexts
- ability to apply a word's meaning to make sense of text in which the word is used
- ability to extend meanings metaphorically

- ability to work out meanings of inflected and derived forms of words, e.g. *run* to *running*
- ability to use context to acquire information about word meaning
- awareness of common prefixes and suffixes
- recognition that words share word parts that can have similar meanings across words
- ability to find words in a dictionary and interpret the information given
- awareness of how words are used to convey meaning, including figurative language.

Beneficial vocabulary instruction techniques involve direct teaching of specific words, pre-reading instruction in words, learning to use strategies to determine word meanings and learning words in rich contexts and incidentally through wide reading. The words studied also need to be of use to the learner in many contexts (Taylor, 2008). McKeown, Beck and Blake (2009) also indicate that teaching vocabulary can enhance comprehension, particularly if the kind of instruction provided can help learners to build meaningful associations onto their knowledge base and more than a brief definition is provided.

- Comprehension

Reading comprehension is recognised as a multidimensional process that is an essential component of the learning process (NICHHD, 2000; Lesaux, Lipka, & Siegel, 2006). Lesaux, Lipka and Siegel (2006) observe that this process of comprehension can be undermined by a number of different factors at various levels, including the reader, the actual text, and activities associated with the reading process itself. There are two types of reading comprehension breakdown for English language learners specifically. There are those learners who are poor comprehenders and readers due to difficulties with lower-level processing skills, and there are poor comprehenders who experience difficulties at the higher-level text level despite good word recognition skills. The latter may battle with higher-order processing such as inference making, working memory and story structure knowledge (Lesaux, Lipka & Siegel, 2006).

The U.S. National Reading Panel's (NRP) *Teaching Children to Read* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD) 2000) analysis of 203 studies on instruction of text comprehension strategies led to the identification of 16 different kinds of effective procedures. Of the 16 different types of instruction, eight were determined to have a firm scientific basis for concluding that they actually improve learner comprehension. These eight types of comprehension instruction are presented in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Effective instruction types to improve learner comprehension

Instruction type	Description
<i>Comprehension monitoring</i>	The learner learns how to be aware of his or her understanding during reading and learns procedures to deal with problems in understanding as they arise.
<i>Cooperative learning</i>	Learners work together to learn strategies in the context of reading.
<i>Graphic and semantic organisers</i>	Allow the learner to represent graphically through writing or drawing the meanings and relationships of the ideas that underlie the words in the text.
<i>Story structure</i>	From which the learner learns to ask and answer who, what, where, when and why questions about the plot and, in some cases, maps out the time line, characters, and events in stories.
<i>Question answering</i>	The learner answers questions posed by the teacher and is given feedback on the correctness.
<i>Question generation</i>	The learner asks himself or herself what, when, where, why, what will happen, how, and who questions.
<i>Summarisation</i>	The learner attempts to identify and write the main or most important ideas that integrate or unite the other ideas or meanings of the text into a coherent whole.
<i>Multiple-strategy teaching</i>	The reader uses several of the procedures in interaction with the teacher over the text. Multiple-strategy teaching is effective when the procedures are used flexibly and appropriately by the reader or the teacher in naturalistic contexts.

Source: NICHHD (2000, pp. 4.5-4.6).

Gill (2008) confirms that teaching even one comprehension strategy can improve learners' comprehension. For example, activating prior knowledge, generating questions while reading, visualising text, inferring, predicting, retelling, deciding what is important, evaluating, synthesising, summarising and graphic and semantic organisers. Gill (2008) also holds that those learners who can understand plot, character, setting, point of view and theme of texts are able to better understand what they read. Another factor is vocabulary development. Comprehension does improve when teachers help learners to understand important vocabulary and concepts they will encounter in their reading, or demonstrate strategies that they can use to work out unknown words as they read (Gill, 2008).

3.7 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This literature review was aimed at highlighting the factors that may influence reading literacy teaching practices at Grade 4. A number of studies were discussed which highlight the difficulties that learners are experiencing in their development of reading literacy and the research available on the teaching of reading literacy in South Africa. The importance of international assessments in monitoring learners' reading development was also presented, alongside the benefits and limitations of such studies. Lastly, factors indicated in the

scholarly literature regarding effective schooling and teaching for reading literacy were discussed.

In spite of a number of South African studies outlining the problems of schooling and the factors that affect literacy accomplishment in the last decade, it is only in the last two years that the government has started to take tangible steps towards rectifying the situation (DoE 2008a; 2008b; 2008c). Given the lack of evidence of any publications elucidating instructional practices and schooling conditions for teaching reading literacy in South Africa in depth, it is important to investigate what teachers are actually doing. This is particularly so given the vast corpus of research literature in other countries which explicates the practices of effective schools and effective teachers for reading literacy development.

In the next chapter, Chapter Four, the conceptual framework for the study is elucidated.

-∞-