CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"The greatest gift is the passion for reading. It is cheap, it distracts, and it gives you knowledge of the world and experience of a wide kind. It is a moral illumination."
Elizabeth Hardwick

This study proposes to identify, illuminate and explain relationships between some major factors associated with successful reading at Grade 5 level in South African primary schools. In an attempt to understand learners' difficulties with reading and writing, Rhodes and Dudley-Marling (1996:2) stated the following:

> Working with struggling students inevitably means working with disproportionate numbers of poor White, Black, Hispanic, Aboriginal and bilingual students – students whose struggles in school have less to do with their capabilities than the abilities of schools to recognize the range of individual, social and cultural differences students bring with them to school. The standardized, one-size-fits-all curricula found in so many schools today imagine students to be pretty much the same, but they're not.

In an attempt to investigate South African learners' reading performance when given reading tasks in the language of learning and teaching, this study is in agreement with Rhodes and Dudley-Marling: the causal elements and reasons for struggling to read are not the same for all learners. Just as one-size-fits-all curricula are inappropriate, so a singular or a one-dimensional explanation for learners' poor reading performance is equally inappropriate and inadequate for addressing a vastly varying and diverse learner population.

In understanding the reasons for poor reading performance and identifying those factors that can be associated with successful readers and with those learners at risk of failure, three systems have a major influence on reading

performance, namely the home, the school and the learners themselves. Factors pertaining to Grade 5 learners that could impact on reading performance through their home environment, the classroom and the school, will be identified in this study, and used to map learner profiles within each of the country's language groups.

This study makes use of data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2006 (PIRLS 2006), a recently conducted study undertaken in South Africa in October 2005 under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). PIRLS 2006 is the second study, in a planned series of five-year cycles of assessment (beginning with PIRLS 2001) to measure trends in children's reading literacy achievement and in policy and practices related to literacy, across more than 40 countries. In South Africa the PIRLS 2006 instrument was used to assess Grades 4 and 5 learners at suitably sampled schools.

 PIRLS 2006 aims to describe trends and international comparisons for:

- The reading achievement of Grade 4 learners
- Learners' competencies in relation to goals and standards for reading education
- The impact of the home environment and the manner in which parents foster reading literacy development
- The organization, time allocations and reading materials for learning to read in schools
- Curriculum and classroom approaches to reading instruction

For reasons explained in a subsequent chapter, the South African PIRLS 2006 Grade 5 data is the focus of this study.

On the African continent, indicators of educational achievement are echoed in studies such as the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for the Monitoring of Educational Quality (SACMEQ I and II). Indicators of educational

achievement in African countries can typically be divided into five categories, namely: (1) Learner background characteristics (such as regularity of meals taken, parents' education, school related factors such as frequency of homework); (2) Teacher characteristics (including age, sex, training, experience); (3) Institutional characteristics (availability of infrastructure and state of facilities); (4) Teaching resource characteristics (such as teaching materials and the availability of basic learning materials); and (5) Teaching function characteristics (including aspects of frequency of assessment, meeting with parents and school climate).

This study, partly through its use of the South African PIRLS 2006 Grade 5 data, is placed within a broader educational context, but also emphasizes the role of reading, literacy and lifelong learning alongside learner, teacher and school indicators of achievement.

1.1. THE LEARNING-TO-READ PROBLEM IN ITS SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The realities for some South African school children have to be born in mind when making any attempt to understand or illuminate those factors that affect reading performance. The following extract illustrates the need for a contextual understanding of learner performance in a study such as PIRLS 2006:

> Not even the crocodile infested Nyalazi River can keep the eager children of Bhekinkosi Senior Primary away from school. Driven by a desperate yearning for education, the children leave their home at the crack of dawn to cross the often swollen river – also home to hippos and snakes. When the river is running high the children, some as young as six, cram into a makeshift raft of shriveled branches and use their hands to paddle across. With a few books and their school uniforms held high over their heads, they make their way along a narrow footpath on their 8km trek to school. The pupils often miss school when the river is in flood. Sometimes the raft becomes waterlogged and cannot be used. At

other times they are delayed when there are lots of people wanting to cross. (Govender, 1998, p.14).

According to Rule (2006), South Africa has 15 million people who have had less than nine years schooling, while 4.5 million people have never been to school. In addition, this disadvantaged population is generally regarded as functionally illiterate and can neither contribute effectively to the economy nor benefit from the economy as its members might hope.

In an attempt to provide the reader with a clear picture of the social and economic background against which the National and Provincial Departments of Education are expected to provide quality education, the following section will report some basic statistics on South Africa as a country. This profile will be followed by detailed descriptions of some prominent issues the country faces in terms of learner drop-out and failure rates, the impact of HIV/AIDS, and the prevalence of poverty in the country's profile. These issues are mentioned not in an attempt to find answers in the current study, but rather to sketch a contextual background against which many learners in the schooling system are expected to perform and progress from one grade to the next.

1.1.1. South Africa: A Brief Background and Basic Statistics

South Africa is an upper-middle-income country (World Bank, 2008). The country consists of nine provinces with 11 official languages. It is characterized by stark contrasts and it is not uncommon to see evidence of hunger, destitution and poverty side-by-side with affluence and wealth.

Currently, World Bank estimates place the GNP at $224 billion per annum (World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2008). South Africa's social context over the last ten years paints a disconcerting picture, as Aliber (2001) refers to an adult poverty line of R325 per month and states that 71.6% of all poor people reside in rural areas. Stated otherwise, it implies that 70.9% of all

rural people are poor. Using the same poverty line as reference, 61% of Blacks are poor, 38% of Coloureds, 5% of Asians and 1% of Whites.

According to Woolard (2002) approximately 15% of the adult population is illiterate and about 9.2% of children under the age of five are malnourished. Among households in the poorest quintile in 1995, 51% of all expenditure was on food. Around 23% of children under the age of 6 are stunted, indicating chronic under-nutrition, while the most frequently affected children can be found in rural areas where mothers have relatively little education (Aliber, 2001).

The turn of the century saw South Africa suffering from acute problems in several social and demographic aspects. Life expectancy had dramatically declined from 62 years in 1990 to only 48 years in 1999, mainly as a result of the impact of HIV/AIDS (Woolard, 2002). It was estimated that 13% of the population and as many as 25% of the adult population were infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Nor have the figures improved, with the Statistics South Africa Mid-Year Population estimate report (2009) suggesting an overall HIV prevalence rate at 10.6%, an infant mortality rate at 45 per 1000 live births and the maternal mortality rate standing at 230 per 100 000 live births. From a total population of 44 million, approximately 8 million are surviving on less than the one dollar per day poverty line (the international benchmark indicating poverty, roughly less than R7.00 per day), with another 18 million living on less than 2 dollars per day (between R7 and R14 per day).

In terms of South African currency, 37% of households survive on less than R1000 per month as measured in 2002, while 60% of the poor do not receive government aid in the form of social transfers or grants (Woolard, 2002). Access to services is highly skewed by income level, location and race. Aliber (2001) mentions that 18% of households within the poorest decile must travel more than one kilometer to access water, as opposed to 1% of households in the top three deciles.

Table 1.1 (below) is adapted from the General Household Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2004) covering the period 2002 to 2004 and provides information on education and employment:

Table 1.1: General Household Survey Totals for Education and Employment

Indicators	2002	2003	2004
Number of Persons (Thousand) Education	**45 533**	**46 007**	**46 459**
Number of Persons aged 7-15 years	9 104	9 118	9 244
Percentage attending school	96.3	97.1	97.8
Employed Persons (15-65 years)			
Percentage of population of more skilled occupations (including managers, professionals, semi-professionals and technicians)	21.6	22.0	22.4
Source of financial support for persons not employed (15-65 years)			
Percentage of population receiving old age pension/disability grant	6.8	8.4	9.4

The statistics for schools follow a similar pattern to that of the country's overall population. Reports from 2000 stated that the majority of schools were still poorly resourced, to the extent that one-quarter were water-deprived and did not have water within walking distance (Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000). Only approximately 8% of these schools have access elsewhere to a communal tap, and this facility is often at some distance. Electricity provision in schools is scarce and the provision of toilets and sanitary facilities falls short of reasonable standards. Harber and Muthukrishna (2000) reported that in KwaZulu Natal. 66% of schools do not have telephones, 66.2% do not have toilets and one quarter of school buildings are considered to be too dangerous for occupation by learners and hence not fit for educational purposes. Textbook provision falls between categories of 'adequate' and 'inadequate', yet more disturbingly 82% of schools do not have media or teaching equipment.

Despite this bleak picture, enrolment rates in schools at the turn of the century were still high (Woolard, 2002). Yet despite high enrolment rates, Harber and Muthukrishna (2000) noted an absence of 'a culture of learning and teaching' in South African schools. In the province of Gauteng in particular, many schools were characterized by sporadic attendance of staff and learners alike, principals who had lost interest in solving problems and teacher morale that was so low that many had lost their desire to teach. Problems of violence in schools were a by-product of extreme poverty, with gangsterism, vandalism, drug abuse and rape rampant. These conditions were particularly to be found in rural areas, where the contrast with urban schooling was most pronounced (Woolard, 2002).

In light of these extensive problems that seemed to pervade reports on South African education since 2000, attempts have been made to put a number of improvements in place. For example, the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, appointed a Ministerial Committee on Rural Education, whose report was presented to the minister in June 2005 (DoE, 2005). Upon their recommendation, a framework for Quality Education in Rural Areas was formulated to focus on the improvement of teaching and learning in rural schools; attracting and retaining learners; planning; restructuring and improving infrastructure; building effective school governance and management; advocacy, and promoting sustainable partnerships to implement programmes for rural development and community cohesion. Further work and recommendations by a number of panels and committees are represented in the Department of Education's National Report on the Development of Education (2009).

Racially segregated education was one of the central pillars of the apartheid system in South Africa and resulted in black South Africans specifically having severely limited residential and school choices, as well as tightly constraining funding and staffing decisions by management (Case & Yogo, 1999). The Bantu Education Act of 1953 had ensured control of Black education and linked tax receipts from blacks to public expenditure on those elements of education to which they were permitted access (Thomas, 1996).

However, despite the emergence of radical social change after the 1994 democratic elections, economic and educational change and the distribution of educational growth and attainment has not been the same for all racial groups. According to Thomas (1996), growth in educational attainment for Whites, Coloureds and Asians has accrued to those at the bottom of the educational ladder, and the effects of growth can best be discerned among the less educated. However, amongst blacks, the least educated have largely been excluded from the rise in years of schooling over the last 50 years and instead, blacks at the top of the education ladder have benefited most. In terms of actual figures, blacks in the top quartile have completed seven more years of schooling over the last five decades, in comparison to blacks in the bottom quartile, who have gained only an additional 1.5 years, over the same period. For women, educational attainment and growth has increased slightly faster relative to men in the White, Coloured and Asian groups. Yet again, there has been no growth in the bottom quartile, while the top quartile enjoyed the most growth, amongst black women (Thomas, 1996).

With the first all-race democratic elections in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) - led government inherited a more or less functional social security system, but very little in terms of existing systems to assist poor people to find a way out of poverty. According to Aliber (2001), government strategy up to that time had been to promote economic growth in order to expand employment opportunities and income levels. However, real growth had been modest and the most tangible anti-poverty strategies had involved improved access to services and infrastructure in urban and rural areas (Aliber, 2001).

Results from the General Household Survey conducted in July 2004 (Statistics South Africa, 2004) support claims of modest growth, suggesting that in terms of the main dimensions of poverty (including education, health, employment and access of households to water supply and sanitation services), the situation in South Africa marginally improved between 2002 and 2004. For example, the Household Survey indicated that the percentage of dwellers living in informal structures decreased from 12.7% in 2002 to 11.3% in 2004. In terms of water supply, sanitation and refuse removal services, a steady increase was noted

from 55% of all households in 2002 to 57.1% in 2004. Over the same period the percentage of households in which an adult went hungry decreased by 6.9% (Statistics South Africa, 2004). Examples of positive outcomes like these can perhaps be construed as some positive contributory factors to the modest improvement of living standards and circumstances in South African households.

1.1.2. The Impact of HIV and Aids

Another phenomenon in South African society of great concern is the spread and prevalence of HIV and AIDS. According to Noble (2007), the South African Department of Health estimated that 47% of all deaths during 2006 in South Africa could be ascribed to AIDS. Among adults aged 15-49 years of age, these estimates were as high as 71%, with worst occurrences in the provinces KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and Gauteng. Dorrington, Johnson, Bradshaw and Daniel (2006) provided equally disturbing figures of 5.4 million people out of a total population of 48 million estimated to be HIV positive in mid-2006. Maree and Ebersohn (2002) reported estimates dating to May 2001, of at least 4.7 million South Africans being HIV positive. It was inferred that the number of orphans and children under 15 years of age who have lost one or both parents will rise steadily throughout the subsequent ten years to reach a peak of 2.5 million by 2012.

The effect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa can be illustrated by anecdotal evidence during the PIRLS 2006 field test conducted in March 2005, in that a sampled school could not be visited on schedule due to the number of funerals being held for teachers having died in the same week because of the disease.

In relation to the impact of HIV and AIDS on the education sector at the turn of the century, Coombe (2000) noted the sector included some 375 000 teachers, at least 12% of whom were reported to be HIV positive. In this regard Maree and Ebersohn (2002) predicted that a vast numbers of educators would be lost

to education, not only due to death, but also to social mobility, as educators were likely to leave the service for better jobs in the private sector. Meanwhile Coombe (2000) predicted that many educators would lose interest in professional development once they knew they were HIV positive. Even uninfected educators were likely to struggle emotionally and financially with sickness and death among relatives, friends and colleagues. Most educators would be forced to take on additional teaching responsibilities in the wake of sick and affected colleagues unable to come to work.

Maree and Ebersohn (2002) stated that fewer children would be likely to enrol in school because of HIV and AIDS. With mothers dying young and children who themselves were ill, impoverished, orphaned or caretakers of younger siblings, school enrolment rates were predicted to fall along with retention, transition and completion rates. Booysen, Bachmann, Matebesi and Meyer (2004) pointed to the growing orphan crisis that came to impact significantly on family life and household composition. The extended family plays a crucial role in terms of support and care. Evidence from a study conducted in the Free State (with data collected in Welkom and Qwaqwa) indicated that the epidemic was impacting entire communities rather than individual households, particularly in the context of the orphan crisis (Booysen et al., 2004).

In addition, financial constraints were predicted to make it difficult for provincial Education Departments to provide formal education of adequate scope and quality. Maree and Ebersohn (2002) predicted that increasingly resources would be switched away from education to other social sectors, such as health and welfare, while contributions from parents and communities could be expected to decline as HIV-affected households were unable or unwilling to keep children educated and in school. According to Maree and Ebersohn (2002), the trauma of death and loss was likely to overwhelm individuals and communities, and at the very least school performance would inevitably decline. With predictions of 20% to 30% of all educators, departmental officials and learners ill and affected by HIV, morale was expected to be low, with an accompanying inability to concentrate on learning and professional matters.

1.1.3. Learner Drop-Out and Failure Rates

Since 1994, South Africa has been undergoing radical social, political, economic and cultural changes. Changes on the education front included the new curriculum and the introduction of an outcomes based system of education (OBE). As Zinn (2000) records, other changes involved the introduction of a single National Department of Education, replacing the 19 different education departments of the past era. The rationalization of the civil service drained the teaching core of thousands of valuable, experienced educators.

Despite national efforts, South African school learners have repeatedly been failing grades or leaving school, a trend that is reported by Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler (2008) in their review of educational changes in South Africa since 1994. Almost half of learner drop-outs from the system were attributed to a lack of basic learning skills, more specifically, a lack of adequate language skills. According to Motala (1995), reducing repetition and drop-out rates amongst primary school-goers was one of the new government's major challenges. The 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All had identified a number of problems facing the primary school sector in developing countries. These problems include access, retention, completion and quality, highlighted in the context of estimates that fully 1.6 million African children between the ages of 6 and 13 were not in school in 1992, and that only between 51% and 62% of African enrolments in the first year of primary schooling would reach Grade 8 within 12 years. This percentage for black children was in contrast to 96% of white learners reaching the same grade within 8 years (Motala, 1995: 161). Two of the most significant consequences of drop-out rates and repeated failure were that children were likely to leave school illiterate before ten years of age. Another consequence was the creation of a 'bottleneck', or congestion in lower primary schools, where enrolments of 50% more than expected could place additional burdens on a system that was already under-resourced.

Since the publication of disturbing figures of learner drop-out rates in the late 1990s, a Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System was appointed by the then minister Naledi Pandor. Some key

findings and conclusions of the committee stated that the problem of learner retention was more pronounced after Grade 9. For these learners, the system did not provide sufficient alternatives. The committee found no evidence of anomalies between Grade 1 and Grade 2 that pointed toward dropping-out, and while retention was improving, South Africa now compares more favourably to other developing countries on progression rates (DoE, 2007).

According to Pretorius and Naude (2002), South African learners compared unfavourably with other countries with regards to literacy and numeracy development, while the repeating of grades and the failure rate in the National Senior School Certificate examination taken in Grade 12 both indicated considerable underachievement, specifically amongst black learners.

Also of concern was the ever-widening gap in performance between children from rural or township backgrounds and children from urban areas. In the South African context, townships refer to those informal settlements, often found on the outskirts of urban areas, characterized by makeshift houses (or shacks). These townships are associated with lack of basic services (such as sanitation), lack of resources and generally poor quality of schooling offered to children inhabiting them. In a study undertaken by Pretorius and Naude (2002) on the topic of poor reading and writing ability among children in South African townships, it was found that only 36% of primary school children could take a book, turn it into the correct position and open it as if they were about to read from it. Only 43% of children knew that words tell the story in a book. Pretorius and Naude (2002) ascribe this underachievement to a lack of books in the home, to parents or caregivers who themselves are illiterate and do not demonstrate reading at home, and to the lack of proper pre-school education. Adding to the problem was an enormous gap between a rural home culture and that of the school culture of children living in townships. Many parents are originally from rural areas and they uphold a rural home culture, but have become urbanized by occupation. The rural home culture seems to be in a state of uncertainty and turbulence, resulting in children being confronted with two different systems, namely a rural culture at home and a school culture rooted in a western paradigm.

Linked to failure rates and the tendency to drop out of school is that South Africa, like many other developing countries, had food security concerns. According to Bonti-Ankomah (2001), estimates were that 39% of the South African population was then vulnerable to food insecurity, with 29% of children under the age of nine being stunted due to chronic malnutrition. Stunted growth implies such children have a low weight for their age and deficiencies in nutrients such a vitamin A, iron and iodine. Food insecurity was highest among the black population and rural households and Bonti-Ankomah (2001) believed that women and children would bear the worst long-term consequences of food insecurity because of its impact on their learning ability and productivity in adult life. Poor nutrition leads to limited capacities to learn, attention deficits, sensory impairments and poor school attendance.

School feeding programmes, in which learners are fed meals at school, were seen as a way to reduce short-term hunger and improve nutrition in order to enable children to concentrate and perform better academically. According to Abrahamson (2004), feeding schemes would also provide parents with the economic incentives to send their children to school. Where food was offered at school, attendance and enrolment rates were shown to increase. As part of the National Department of Education's commitment to providing quality education, schools in areas of extreme poverty were provided with food to give children meals at least once daily, as part of the Primary School Nutrition Programme (PSNP). As part of the Reconstruction and Development Strategy Framework established in April 1994, the emphasis of feeding schemes at primary schools aimed at improving children's active learning capacity, educating learners about nutrition, and enhancing broader development initiatives. According to Bonti-Ankomah (2001), the October Household Survey of 1999 indicated that 4.26 million children in South Africa aged between 7 and 15 years benefited from such feeding schemes at school. This number represented 45% of children of that age group in South Africa, of whom 90% were black, and 31% from urban areas as compared to 56% from rural areas.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THIS STUDY

The potential significance of this study is that factors associated with reading literacy achievement can be illuminated and understood against objective measures of achievement in each of the 11 official languages. The magnitude of the PIRLS 2006 study for South Africa has to be taken into account, since 11 official languages in essence implies that the study had to be replicated 11 times to provide assessment measures for all language groups in the country.

This study will not only add to the body of knowledge of South African learner achievement, but will also attempt to create new theories and insights into patterns of achievement when language is controlled for. Importantly, for the first time, data is available for almost 16 000 Grade 4 and 15 000 Grade 5 learners taken from a representative national sample. The available data not only pertains to achievement data, but also contextual data on learner, home, classroom and school-level. Such a rich source of data allows for multi-level analyses.

The South African PIRLS 2006 study forms part of a larger study with the primary aim to compare educational achievement across 40 countries. This PhD study takes the form of a secondary analysis of the South African PIRLS 2006 data, thus utilizing achievement data as obtained from a nationally representative sample within the context of an internationally comparative study.

The main research question that guides this PhD study is:

What are the factors that could be associated with Grade 5 learner performance in reading literacy?

Measurements obtained in at least proxy data from the PIRLS 2006 project will be used in an attempt to answer this question. Factors emanating from contextual questionnaires of Grade 5 learners, their home environment, their

schools and classrooms will be identified in conjunction with learners' test scores on the PIRLS 2006 achievement tests.

The main research question can be divided into the following sub-questions:

1. What is the Grade 5 learner performance on the PIRLS 2006 assessment?
2. What is the extent of variation across the language groupings in Grade 5 learners' reading literacy performance?

Based on Grade 5 learners' performance in the PIRLS 2006 achievement tests, the assumption is that variation will exist between different groups of learners, in this case particularly based on language group. It is hypothesized that variation within groups of learners on reading literacy tasks will differ between groups and the sources of variance might be different for distinct groups. In cases where learners struggle to read, the reasons for struggling might be varied. Two further sub-questions therefore aim to investigate these sources of variance for various groups of learners participating in PIRLS 2006.

3. What factors related to the learners' background (for example motivation to read, language skills and home environment) affect performance in reading literacy?
4. To what extent do the school and classroom environment affect reading literacy performance?

Factors emanating from the PIRLS 2006 learner and parent questionnaires will be used to answer sub-question 3, while information gathered through the school and teacher questionnaires will be used to answer sub-question 4.

It is expected that some factors might have a direct impact on reading performance, but it is proposed that the relationship between factors and reading performance might not necessarily be linear or direct. A simple example of a direct, linear relationship between factors and reading performance would be that an enabling home environment will likely lead to the development of an

enabled child. This relationship in turn is likely to lead the child to enter into an enabling school, thus resulting in a successful reader who has the ability to use reading effectively in everyday life. On the other hand, a disenabling pathway means that a child coming from an ineffective home is likely to be at a developmental disadvantage, and is likely to attend a disenabling school environment characterized by ineffective teaching practices and lack of opportunity for the child to read and learn. The result of such a pathway would be a disenabled reader, who is unable to read to learn.

These examples illustrate a conceptual path in a very simplistic fashion, where one enabling factor leads to the next, resulting eventually in a desired outcome and an equally simplistic path by one disenabling factor leading to the next, resulting in which a lack of reading ability.

For the majority of South African Grade 5 learners, a picture of more complexity is suspected, where an exchange between factors is more likely to occur. Currently, the South African learner population is characterized by great diversity and variation. At one end of the spectrum, a learner from a rural, disadvantaged community with lack of resources might not be able to read. At the other end of the spectrum, a learner from an advantaged, affluent community where resources are widely available might also not be able to read. Just as these learners come from two different environments, the factors behind their inability to read are also vastly different. The developmental paths they followed, their cultural, social and individual circumstances and the influencing factors that impacted on their reading abilities may be greatly different, but for both learners lead to the same result: an inability to read.

An interaction between factors therefore implies a multiplicity of exchanges or interactions between enabling and disenabling factors, resulting in the possibility of a number of complex combinations of factors that could predict learner reading performance. The fifth sub-question then arises:

5. How do these relationships between factors differ or remain constant across the language groupings in South Africa?

The 11 official languages in South Africa can be classified and reduced into five groupings, namely English, Afrikaans, Tshivenda, Sotho and Nguni, with Afrikaans and English as the languages spoken by a large part of the population and Nguni languages forming the largest group. The remaining languages can be classified as Sotho (including Sesotho, Sepedi and Setwana) and Nguni (including isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Siswati and Xitsonga). Tshivenda completes the list as the language spoken by a very small section of the population. Whereas Afrikaans, English and Tshivenda are considered distinct languages, the Sotho and Nguni language groupings share common linguistic roots. Any reference to language groupings in this study would therefore allude to these groupings and are of relevance for data classification and reduction purposes.

With 11 official languages, current educational policy in South Africa advocates that learners in Grade 1 to 3 are taught in their first language (any one of the 11 official languages). When these learners progress to Grade 4, the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) becomes English or Afrikaans. For many learners this means changing to a second language. At this developmental stage, learners are also expected to advance from learning to read to a stage where they can use reading in order to learn. Using learners' achievement scores as obtained in the PIRLS 2006 assessment when tested in their language of learning, question 5 will aim to investigate whether instruction in a native language contributes significantly to the relationship of factors associated with reading performance.

A distinction is made in this study between 'first language', 'language of learning' and 'language of the test'. South African children start their learning at school from Grade 1 to 3 in their home language (first language). However, many schools are faced with teaching learners in these grades in a language of learning that is still different from what is spoken at home. When learners approach Grade 4, the language of learning changes again, resulting in more than 80% of learners being taught in a further second language (mostly English, a language spoken by less than 10% of the population). For Grade 1 to 3 learners, 'first language' does not necessarily coincide with 'language of

learning' or 'language of the test'. For the purposes of data analysis in this study, language groups will therefore be defined by means of 'language of learning' (in Grades 1 to 3), since the term 'first language' is not accurately indicative of whether a learner does in fact receive instruction in his or her home language. Reference to 'language of learning' and 'language of the test'[1] will be used interchangeably.

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2 of this thesis builds on constructional elements mentioned in this introductory chapter, by elaborating on the South African schooling system, policies and reforms that have characterized the national Department of Education (DoE) over the past few years. Of particular importance are the language-in-education policies, and particular attention is paid to describing the status and profile of each of the language groups in South Africa. The focus in chapter 2 on language should not create the expectation that this study takes the form of a linguistic study. Rather, data will be reduced and classified according to language groups in an attempt to identify those factors that have a significant impact on Grade 5 learners' reading achievement in one or more language arenas.

Chapter 3 reviews current literature on Grade 5 reading achievement and provides a detailed account of the conceptual framework that is used and adapted to serve as a theoretical point of departure for the purposes of this study. The factors associated with reading achievement as found in internationally comparative assessments are considered. South African reading achievement in particular and the status of learner achievement in the country is described in reference to nationally conducted studies thus far. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the factors at learner, home, school and classroom-level that are known to impact on reading achievement.

---

[1] PIRLS 2006 requires the language of the test to be the language in which learners have received instruction in the first four years of schooling. For this reason, Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners were tested in all 11 official languages for purposes of PIRLS 2006.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the PIRLS 2006 study. Particular attention is paid to the study's design in South Africa and also provides detailed information on the study's background, its research questions and conceptual ideas with regards to reading achievement. Technical aspects pertaining to instrument design and development in terms of the achievement booklets and contextual questionnaires, sampling frameworks, assessment frameworks, data collection and data processing are also discussed in-depth.

Chapter 5 elaborates on the research design and data analysis techniques employed for the purposes of this study. It describes in particular the methods that will be employed to answer research questions posed by this study and outlines the theoretical framework that will be used for the purposes of selecting variables for analyses in building models per language group. The PIRLS 2006 main study sought to make international reading achievement comparisons among participating countries. This set of comparisons is accomplished by deriving a national mean score based on plausible values from performance data of Grade 4 learners from each country (Grade 5 learners in the case of South Africa). For the purposes of this PhD study however, overall mean scores will not be of such importance. Rather, data will be reduced and classified according to the five different language groupings, namely Afrikaans, English, Nguni, Sotho and Tshivenda languages. In this way the study seeks to determine relationships between variables that could impact on learners' reading achievement within each specific language grouping.

Chapters 6, 7 and **8** focus upon data analysis and answering the research questions. Statistical techniques will be used in the form of Hierarchical Linear Modelling (HLM). The aim of these analyses would be to establish the nature and strength of evidence for the relationships between one or more explanatory variables (in this case obtained from items in the contextual questionnaires) and one or more outcome variables (reading achievement scores for the different language groupings), for learners who are nested within schools. While chapter 6 focuses on providing descriptive results for the variables that were selected for this study, chapter 7 focuses on providing the reader with information on how the models were constructed.

Chapter 8 discusses the HLM results for the analyzed data on learner, classroom and school-level by describing the models involving statistically significant evidence for factors that affect learner reading achievement for each language grouping.

Chapter 9 summarises the main findings and presents the conclusions drawn. Issues arising from chapter 8 are discussed in light of the conceptual framework used for this study. Chapter 9 concludes with recommendations for research and policy development and practice in South African schools.

CHAPTER 2: THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLING SYSTEM

"Reading is a means of thinking with another person's mind; it forces you to stretch your own."
Charles Scribner

The early 1980s ushered in a period of extensive social, economic and political change in the South African landscape. The widely discredited apartheid system began to disintegrate as a result of massive internal resistance, but also in response to external pressure, such as the imposition of economic sanctions (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). January 1994 saw the dawn of a democratic era, followed by the first fully representative elections in April of the same year. Thus began the ambitious task of transforming apartheid structures, governance and policies to put in place a system in line with the needs and rights of all South African citizens. An integral part of this process of change included the transformation of the education system.

The main components of transformation in the early years of the new South African education system are summarized by Kamwangamalu (2001) as:

- The introduction of compulsory education for all population groups, specifically for children between the ages of 7 and 15, as a matter of government policy.
- A single, unified, national education system with nine provincial departments, replacing the nineteen distinct education departments of the apartheid era.
- The new national curriculum, based on the principles of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), known as 'Curriculum 2005'.

Chapter 2 is devoted to sketching a picture of South African schools and changes that were brought about within the transition from an apartheid system to a democratic one. Attention is also paid to the curriculum landscape, the

implications and principles behind adopting an outcomes-based philosophy of education, and reforms that took place to establish the current education system. The chapter concludes with a discussion of relevant language-in-education policies and practices in light of the 11 official languages spoken within the South African population.

2.1. THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Since the transition in 1994 to a democracy, the education system has undergone extensive changes and reforms. South Africa has a long history of segregated and unequal education, dating back to the early days of British rule. Blacks who managed to receive some form of education were initially educated by foreign churches and missions which took it upon themselves to tutor learners in the English language and according to western ideologies (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). By the time South Africa adopted an apartheid system, with 'separate development' along racial lines, churches and mission groups were providing schooling for nearly two-thirds of Blacks. In 1953, Parliament passed the Bantu Education Act, giving churches and mission groups a choice of either surrendering control of their schools to the government or accepting gradually diminished state subsidies.

The education system under the apartheid government sought to exercise comprehensive control over every aspect of education, and reflected National Party views in its organizational structures (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). The apartheid ideology reflected the idea that South Africa's four racial groups ("Blacks", "Whites", "Coloureds" and "Indians") should live and develop independently of one another. Consequently, separate education systems were established for each of the groups. In 1984, a tricameral parliament was created to provide Coloureds and Indians with strictly limited political powers, alongside a dominant White Assembly. Each of the three chambers was empowered to take charge of its own schools through its own departments of education. Therefore, the last years of the apartheid system of education saw White learners attending schools under the control of the House of Assembly (HOA), Coloured

learners in schools represented by the House of Representatives (HOR), and Indian learners under the directorship of the House of Delegates (HOD). Black learners had no system of their own, nor any political power, and were placed under the control of the Department of Education and Training (DET), run under the HOA. Four additional departments of education were in control of schools in the 'independent' homelands of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Transkei and Venda (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). The result of such an organizational structure of education meant the existence of a national Department of Education that was supported by a number of separate education departments.

Hofmeyr and Buckland (1992) used data from the Department of Education and Training of 1989 and the 1990 reports from the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) to summarize and compare education expenditure as it occurred in 1989 at the height of apartheid. Table 2.1 (below) provides an indication of the racial hierarchy and unequal provision of education at the time:

Table 2.1: Comparative Education Statistics: 1989

	White Education	Indian Education	Coloured Education	Black Education
Pupil-teacher ratios	17:1	20:1	23:1	38:1
Under-qualified teachers (less than Grade 12, plus a 3 year's teacher's certificate)	0%	2%	45%	52%
Per capita expenditure including capital expenditure	R3 082,00	R2 227,01	R1 359,78	R764, 73
Matriculation pass rate	96.0%	93.6%	72.7%	40.7%

The resources and outcomes of Indian education most closely approximated White education in the late 1980s, substantially ahead of Coloured education. Black learners, who numbered 7.1 million (or 78.1% of all learners), were the most educationally disadvantaged, and if they received schooling in rural areas matters were worse. 24% of the DET's Black learners received education in farm schools in rural areas, where great inadequacies and inequalities existed in comparison to urban schools. At the time, a mere 3% of the total of 5 782 rural schools offered schooling beyond Grade 7 (or Standard 5), while 21% of rural schools did not offer schooling beyond Grade 4 (or Standard 2) (Hofmeyr & Buckland, 1992). Fataar (1997:341) provides evidence that, despite

inadequate and unequal educational opportunities for Black learners, their numbers grew exponentially between 1953 and 1988 (see Table 2.2, below).

Table 2.2: African Learner Enrollment: 1953 - 1988

Year	Primary School Enrollment (Thousands)	Secondary School Enrollment (Thousands)	Total (Thousands)
1953	852.0	30.7	882.7
1955	970.2	35.0	1 005.2
1960	1 452.3	47.6	1 499.9
1965	1 833.0	65.6	1 898.6
1970	2 615.4	122.5	2 737.9
1975	3 378.9	318.5	3 697.4
1980	4 063.9	774.0	4 837.9
1985	4 820.1	1 192.9	6 012.9
1988	5 365.6	1 662.0	7 027.6

The expansion of African learner numbers was by no means an indicator of the quality or outcomes of their schooling. Fataar (1997) states that no improvement in the quality of education occurred, thus the challenge for the newly elected government, inter alia, was not only to expand access to schooling, but also to address low standards of existing schooling, specifically for Black learners. In their analysis of various South African data dating back to 1910, Fedderke, De Kadt and Luiz (2000) stated broadly that although the South African educational system followed a trajectory that drew ever larger numbers of learners into the system over a number of decades, it was distorted and ultimately dysfunctional.

The democratically elected government of 1994 sought to establish a single, national department of education. While accommodating approximately 11.6 million school learners, 26 489 schools and 340 000 teachers ("Educational Structures", 2006), the aim of the national Department of Education was to develop, maintain and support an effective education and training system. In such a system, it was the goal that everyone would be able to exercise the right to receive basic education. According to the government's document "Educational Structures" (2006), this right included adult basic education and

further education. The document affirmed the responsibility of government to make education progressively accessible and available to all South Africans.

Wilmot (2004) recognizes that in 1994, the newly elected government was faced with the task of reforming the education system it had inherited from the apartheid government, by means of introducing a plethora of policies with the explicit purpose of reconstructing the legacy of an unequal and divided past into a more equitable framework. The newly elected government, known as the Government of National Unity (GNU) was faced with various problems pertaining to education in South Africa. Fedderke et al. (2000) point out that since 1910, race instead of class had been the main predictor of educational opportunity in South Africa and therefore, by default, the main factor that provided structure to people's individual life chances and prospects.

Against this background, the democratically elected government was faced with such problems as the provision of equal access to schools, eradicating a system of unequal education opportunities, irrelevant curricula, inadequate finances and educational materials and resources, an enrolment explosion and a shortage of well-qualified teaching staff (Botha, 2002). Motala (1995) adds to this list the daunting task of reducing fall-out and repetition rates, specifically among Black primary school-goers.

2.2. THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES

In the first few years of the new millennium, the South African government attempted to improve infrastructure and resources, specifically to those schools previously designated as being for Blacks only. President Thabo Mbeki was quoted by Reddy (2006) as having said that "attempts have unfolded at a much slower pace than envisaged". Reddy (2006) summarized government's transformation process in two phases. Phase one entailed systemic changes, resulting in policy, legislation, protocols and other structures being put in place. Systemic changes meant that government sought to create a single, national system of education with nine provincial sub-systems. The nineteen racially

defined systems of the apartheid government were replaced by a single national system that would cooperate with each of the nine provincial education departments within the nine newly formed provinces (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Systemic changes included the introduction of nine years of compulsory schooling. Fiske and Ladd (2004) saw government as giving absolute priority to the provision of nine or ten years of free and compulsory education, ranging from and including Grade R to Grade 9. Systemic changes also involved establishing school governing bodies with increased decision-making power, and consolidating the teaching service (Reddy, 2006). One may also note the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework (the NQF) and the introduction of an Outcomes-Based 'Curriculum 2005' (Reddy, 2006), designed to effect changes in the educational system.

Phase two was characterized by policy implementation, as debates in education shifted from issues of equal access and participation to issues of quality of teaching, the learning process and inputs at local level. Implementing new educational policies in the late 1990s was guided by a draft 'Policy Framework for Education and Training' document issued in January 1994, spelling out the guiding principles for policy reforms (Reddy, 2006). As a first step, policy reforms aimed at integrating education and training, thereby affording individuals, who had previously been denied social and vocational opportunities, the prospect of gaining new skills and formal recognition of already possessed skills and knowledge (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). The draft policy document therefore proposed to establish a single, national ministry of education, along with a national South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), to assist learners to progress along a system of advancing levels of education and training. It was proposed that the compulsory stage of general education be followed by three years on a variety of tracks that would provide learners at all levels with credentials consistent with the integration of education and training (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

Aspirations of policy reforms lead to the acceptance of the SAQA in 1995 (Human Sciences Research Council {HSRC}, 1995) and its official conceptualisation as a governmental body responsible for the management and

development of the National Qualifications Framework. Comprising a board of between 22 and 30 members, appointed by the Ministers of Education and Labour, and consisting of a Chairperson, Executive Director and support staff, SAQA was tasked with the following functions:

- To oversee the development of the National Qualifications Framework
- To formulate and publish policies and criteria for the registration of bodies responsible for education and training standards and qualifications
- To accredit bodies responsible for the monitoring and delivery of standards in terms of such standards and qualifications (HSRC, 1995).

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was intended to serve as a vehicle for fundamental restructuring of the education and training system. The NQF was conceptualized as a way of organizing learning in order to facilitate a developmental progression for learners, regardless of the particular field of learning, in which they would be engaged. In this way, the creation of flexible, new curricula would be encouraged, the upgrading of learning standards would take place, the quality of qualifications would be monitored and evaluated, and a system of accumulated credits would allow for high levels of articulation between qualifications (HSRC, 1995).

The NQF is often represented as a table (see Table 2.3, below) illustrating a broad outline of levels that compose the framework. The eight levels can be divided into three main sections, representing bands or learning contexts, each with its associated qualification or award. The General Education and Training Band (GET) represents formal education and includes learners from a reception year up to Grade 9, as well as an equivalent Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) qualification. The Further Education and Training band (FET) includes Grade 10 to 12 and a number of industry-based and non-formal education providers (such as technical, youth and community colleges). The Higher Education band (HE) comprises nationally recognized diplomas and certificates up to and including postgraduate degrees. The levels of learning on the NQF

form the basis for progression and serve as the facilitating mechanism for achieving a coherent system of education and training (HSRC, 1995).

Table 2.3: The National Qualifications Framework

NQF Level	Band	Types of Qualifications or Certificate
8	Higher Education and Training (HE)	• Doctorates • Further research degrees
7		• Higher degrees • Professional qualifications
6		• First degrees • Higher diplomas
5		• Diplomas • Occupational certificates
4	Further education and Training (FET)	• School, college, trade certificates
3		• School, college, trade certificates
2		• School, college, trade certificates
1	General Education and Training (GET)	• Grade 9 (10 years of formal education) • ABET Level 4 • Grade 7 (8 years of formal education) • ABET Level 3 • Grade 5 (6 years of formal education) • ABET Level 2 • Grade 3 (4 years of formal education) • ABET Level 1

The remainder of this section will focus on the GET band as illustrated in Table 2.3, since this study pertains to learners in Grade 5 who form part of general

education in South Africa. The GET band is responsible for the development and implementation of policies of early childhood education, school education, ABET, inclusive education and other in- and pre-service education and training programmes (Educational Structures, 2006). To date, the band claims to have accomplished the following:

- Replaced the apartheid curricula with a new, Outcomes-Based alternative
- Improved the qualifications of many teachers who had previously been unqualified or under-qualified
- Established democratic governance in all schools
- Provided training in literacy for formal ABET programmes for over 1 million adults.

The band is structured as three phases, namely the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3), the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6) and the Senior Phase (Grades 7-9), and constitutes the compulsory component of the education system. The implementation of Grade R started gradually after 2002 and many children still enter the schooling system without having attended Grade R.

The target group of this study is the group of learners who have just been through the Foundation Phase of their school careers and who find themselves in the middle of the Intermediate Phase at Grade 5 level. The Foundation Phase lasts for the first three years, as most learners enter the schooling system. Learning activities during these first three years are built around Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. One additional language is introduced in Grade 3. Once the learner progresses to the Intermediate Phase, learning activities focus on a number of learning areas, namely Language Literacy and Communication, Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation, Human, Social, Environmental and Management Sciences, and Natural Sciences and Technology.

It is during the General Education phase that Early Childhood Development (ECD) receives encouragement and impetus from government. ECD, a context

and background against which Grade 5 learners (the subjects of this study) should be seen, refers to the processes by which children under the age of nine develop intellectually, socially, physically, emotionally and morally. They were supposed to benefit from the Department of Education's stance on an integrated, cross-sectional approach to child development that includes health, nutrition, education and psychosocial factors. However, a 2001 audit of over 23 000 ECD centres and service providers revealed that the field was dominated by non-governmental contributions and initiatives ("Educational Structures", 2006). Departmental provisions mainly seemed to cater for children from the age of three to school-going age, thus leaving an estimated 90% of children under the age of nine without access to ECD prior to attending school.

2.3. OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM 2005: CURRICULUM REFORMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

In March 1997, the then Minister of Education, Sibusisu Bengu announced the launch of Curriculum 2005, which not only marked a clear departure from the apartheid curriculum, but also a departure from content-based teaching and learning to Outcomes Based Education (OBE). The following section will provide a background to the basic tenets of OBE, followed by the aims and features of Curriculum 2005, a curriculum that has since been revised and incorporated into the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in operation in the South African education system at the time of the administration of PIRLS 2006.

2.3.1. Outcomes Based Education and Curriculum 2005

Cross, Mungadi and Rouhani (2002) described OBE as a global educational curriculum reform phenomenon that was competency-based and had its origins in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Scotland and limited areas of the United States. With few exceptions, OBE remains an experiment at different levels of national policy, as can be seen in Australia where, for example, it has become

part of a national mission with regional adaptations, or in Scotland, where it is restricted to vocational programmes within Glasgow.

Spady (1994) explains OBE as a means of clearly focusing and organizing an educational system around the essential components of proficiency that learners need by the end of their educational careers. The key elements are described as the development of a clear set of learning outcomes around which all other components can be focused, as well as the establishment of conditions and opportunities within the system that would enable and encourage learners to achieve the set outcomes (Spady, 1994).

For Botha (2002), OBE is a commonsense idea built around the notion that the quality of education should be judged by learner outcomes or results. In this regard, OBE is concerned with what is actually learnt and how well it is learnt, as measured by academic results rather than simply regurgitating what was supposed to be learnt. This idea challenges the relevance, or at least the adequacy, of traditional gauges of education quality, such as input and process, professional intentions and efforts, the characteristics of institutions and services and financial resources made available to the educational sector.

OBE is characterized as a learner-centered approach, where the emphasis is not on what the teacher wants to achieve, but rather on what the learner should know, understand, demonstrate and become (Botha, 2002). In an OBE system, both teachers and learners are focused on a predetermined result or outcome that is to be achieved by the end of each learning process. These outcomes are intended to relate to real-life needs and situations, and integrate knowledge, competence and orientations which learners need to become responsible, critically-thinking, competent adults.

The three tenets of OBE build upon the idea of a learner-centered approach to education, affirming firstly that all learners are able to learn and succeed, but acknowledging that success does not come on the same day in the same way for every learner. Secondly, successful learning promotes more successful learning and, thirdly, schools are in direct control of (some of) the conditions

that affect successful school learning (Spady, 1994). The first premise takes into account differences in the rates and styles at which learners are able to learn by not viewing those contrasts as a barrier to successful learning, and instead regarding differences in learning as a factor that must be kept in mind in the design of any instructional process. The second tenet assumes that successful learning is dependent upon learners having had a strong cognitive and psychological foundation of prior learning success. The third tenet is built on the belief that those who implement OBE are capable of changing the way schools operate (Spady, 1994).

With the principles and tenets of OBE in mind, Curriculum 2005 not only meant a departure from content-based to outcomes-based teaching, it also marked a departure from racially-based prescribed sets of learning objectives to learner-centered teaching and associated learning strategies. According to an outcomes-based curriculum, traditional subjects are not an adequate basis for framing or encapsulating everything that should be taught or learnt. In light of this belief, Cross et al. (2002) outline what Curriculum 2005 tried to achieve as follows:

- Align school goals with workplace, social and political goals
- Use experiential and cooperative learning strategies
- Develop citizens with imaginative and critical problem-solving skills
- Acknowledge diversity of values in race, gender and culture.

According to these guidelines, Curriculum 2005 identified eight Learning Areas as a way of breaking away from traditional subject boundaries between school subjects, while integrating within and across the different disciplines and organizing the core curriculum. Traditional subjects are therefore accommodated within eight newly specified Learning Areas, namely Arts and Culture, Language, Literacy and Communication, Economic and Management Sciences, Human and Social Sciences, Life Orientation, Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Sciences, Physical and Natural Sciences and Technology.

To encourage further integration between the different Learning Areas, and integration between all teaching and learning, critical outcomes were developed, proposing, among other objectives, that learners should be able to do the following:

- Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and language skills, either orally or in writing
- Identify and solve problems creatively and through critical thinking skills
- Organize and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively
- Collect, analyze, organize and critically evaluate information
- Understand that the world is a set of related systems and those problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

The critical outcomes provide guidelines for each of the Learning Areas, with specific outcomes also formulated to refer to the specific knowledge, attitudes and understanding that should apply to a specific context. Assessment criteria provide evidence that learners have achieved these specific outcomes and serve as indicators of the observable progress and products of learners' achievement. According to Cross et al. (2002), the Department of Education put learning programmes in place as sets of activities in which learners could engage in the achievement of specific outcomes.

2.3.2. Critique of OBE and Radical Educational Reform

The OBE model was proposed as the possible cure for lack of quality education in the South African educational system. Botha (2002) is of the opinion that it can be successful so long as it is implemented in a realistic manner, giving both schools and teachers ownership of the content of the curriculum and the process of implementation. Botha (2002) also states that learners may be empowered if they are allowed the opportunity to engage rationally, reflectively and imaginatively in educational matters. Ironically, this pre-condition is

precisely what advocates of OBE assume such an approach to education would achieve.

On the other hand, some aspects of OBE have met with opposition and objections. According to Spady (1994), questions and concerns centre around nine distinct, but interrelated themes, namely:

- What exactly constitutes an outcome
- Whether outcomes are of real substance or mere symbolism.
- What precisely OBE is, since substantial controversy is caused by debates around pinpointing outcomes and their substance.
- Governmental control and accountability, where it is believed that government could be overstepping its bounds by requiring learners to demonstrate what they have learnt as conditions for promotion.
- Philosophies and worldviews that differ in viewpoints about children, families and schools. Advocates of OBE have a very optimistic viewpoint about children and believe that they are able to accomplish when inspired, stimulated and challenged appropriately. On the other hand, critics of OBE tend to oppose change from systems that are currently functional and clearly understood, within existing operational structures and curriculum focus.
- Cost versus effectiveness.
- What is proven versus what is regarded as experimental.
- Standards versus success, where the perception is that OBE lowers standards in order for learners to achieve success.
- Instructional opportunities that match the slowest learner in an attempt to equalize achievements and success of every learner.

In South Africa, OBE has not been handed down and accepted uncritically, nor has its introduction been met with the same optimism and idealism as stated by Botha (2002). Its origins can be traced within the labour movement that sought to change the education system to incorporate an integrated approach to education and training (Cross et al., 2002). In this regard, the largest labour union in South Africa, COSATU, and the National Training Board (NTB)

produced a policy document which laid the basis for training, curriculum and assessment. For the NTB, growth in South Africa required the use of technology, which in turn required an educated labour force, literate in mathematics and science and an attitude of flexibility, versatility, problem-solving skills and teamwork abilities. The primary focus for these two organizations was on labour and the training sector, since both organizations were concerned with improvement and accreditation of labour skills in the workplace. COSATU discussed the issue of competency based education as the instrument to provide training and accreditation in the labour sector. Thereafter, proposals for an integrated approach to education and training gained popularity in the education field and soon schools were incorporated in the NTB's and COSATU's proposed framework (Cross et al., 2002).

According to Cross et al. (2002), much of the debate surrounding a competency-based system was largely conducted within the labour movement and business communities, resulting in little or no integration with educational ideas and aspirations. The OBE system resonated with COSATU and the NTB, while its philosophy dominated the NQF, and the curriculum framework for Curriculum 2005, with the difference being that 'competencies' were framed as 'outcomes'. Cross et al. (2002) point to the danger that these developments and debates took place without an explicit realization that education could easily dissipate into a 'melting pot' of training and skills development associated with the labour market.

Jansen (1998) argued that OBE was doomed to fail in the South African educational system, since it was driven by politics and policy and was far removed from the realities of classroom life in the average classroom. Jansen (1998) felt the language associated with OBE was complex and confusing. A teacher wanting to make sense of OBE would be confronted by more than 50 different concepts and labels and would have to keep track of changes in meaning and priorities afforded to these terms over time. For example, the concept of 'outcomes' can only be understood when one understands what is meant by 'competencies', 'unit standards', 'learning programmes', 'assessment criteria' and 'specific outcomes'.

He (Jansen) predicted that OBE was destined to fail in the South African educational system since it is based on flawed ideas and assumptions about what happens inside schools, how classrooms are organized and what kinds of teachers exist within the system. Claims that OBE is a system characterized by flexible, collaborative, outcomes-based and empowerment-oriented approaches to learning suggests that highly qualified teachers exist to make sense of such a challenge to existing practice. The policy requires not only the application of skill, but also an understanding of its theoretical underpinnings and the capacity to transfer skill and understanding to different learning contexts (Jansen, 1998). Jansen (1998) also criticized OBE as trivializing content, even as it claimed to have the potential to move away from the content coverage found in the current education system. In this regard Jansen (1998) stated that: "Children do not learn outcomes in a vacuum. Curriculum content is a critical vehicle for giving meaning to a particular set of outcomes…Content matters." (p.327).

Cross et al. (2002) echoed this argument by stating that Curriculum 2005 fell short of setting up an effective curricular framework for teachers and learners, since it focused too much on outcomes and neglected issues of content that were left to individual teachers to construct. Cross et al. (2002) referred to Curriculum 2005 as a bureaucracy-driven process of reform, resulting in deficiencies not only in content at the expense of outcomes, but also in terms of imposing a highly regulated framework, whilst being too closely aligned to socio-economic concerns at the expense of pedagogy.

The review of the first five years of curriculum reform in South Africa was met with pessimism, a pessimism that interpreted the reform as a drastic phase of politics, with frameworks and policies justified as questions of priorities, while the leadership of the day attempted to establish an identity and a new state representative of the interests of the majority. Regardless of the degree of pessimism from whichever point of view, Cross et al. (2002) stated that there seemed to be a general consensus that the criticism, pessimism and critique associated with OBE and Curriculum 2005 were symptomatic of the problems facing educational reform in South Africa.

2.3.3. Review of Curriculum 2005 and the Current Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS)

Curriculum 2005 came under review in 2002 as a result of the Department of Education's appointment of the Policy Review Committee. The task of the committee was not to dispense with Curriculum 2005 or to question the OBE approach adopted by the South African educational system, but rather it was challenged to investigate how enabling Curriculum 2005 had been in the achievement of educational and societal goals, how implementable it was and whether it was a good basis for achieving its stated critical outcomes.

Cross et al. (2002) summarize the committee's proposals as follows:

- A revised and streamlined outcomes-based curriculum framework based on integration and conceptual coherence consistent with a human rights approach.
- A national teacher education strategy aimed at instituting teacher development and preparation for the new curriculum within higher education. Ultimately, the strategy should result in the identification, selection and training of a special cadre of curriculum trainers working with non-governmental organizations and higher education institutions for short-term orientation.
- The increased production of learner support materials and textbooks.
- Budgeting for the curriculum.
- Reorganization of curriculum functions within the Department of Education and the different provinces.
- Relaxation of the pace of implementation.
- A managed process of phasing out Curriculum 2005 and phasing in a newly revised Curriculum 21, to become later known as the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS).
- The appointment of a task team to manage the phasing in and out of the different curricula.

Following on the work of the Review Committee, a paradigm shift seemed to appear in respect of the ways in which curriculum change and implementation were conceptualized. These ideas included a change towards an increasing concern with the role of schools in society, the concern with returning to the 'basics' of curriculum organization and delivery, the importance of cognitive knowledge and a return to pedagogical issues, despite the existence of a progressive pedagogy embedded in an OBE system (Cross et al., 2002).

Based on the Review Committee's work, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (Department of Education, 2002) emerged and established its Learning Outcomes as not only critical but also developmental outcomes. The developmental outcomes for learners from Grade R to 9 ("RNCS Grades R-9", 2002) envisage learners who would be able to reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively, while also being able to participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities. The developmental outcomes portrayed learners as culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts, and described learners who could explore education, career and entrepreneurial opportunities.

2.4. THE LANGUAGE PROFILE OF SOUTH AFRICA

During the apartheid era, South Africa had two official languages, namely English and Afrikaans. The end of the era brought about a new Constitution that gave official status to 11 local languages, nine of which were indigenous. Mesthrie (2002) clustered the predominant languages and stated that these clusters denote a set of varieties that are closely related along linguistic lines:

- Nguni, consisting of isiZulu, isiXhosa, SiSwati, Xitsonga and isiNdebele
- Sotho, made up of Sepedi (Northern Sotho), Sesotho (South Sotho) and Setswana

Apart from the clusters as identified by Mesthrie (2002), Tshivenda, Afrikaans and English complete the set of officially recognized languages in South Africa.

Table 2.4 (below) provides an indication (as taken from Mesthrie, 2002) from the 1996 Census, of numbers and percentages of people reporting each of the official languages in South Africa as their own language:

Table 2.4: Distribution of Home Language in South Africa

Language:	Numbers:	Percentage:
Nguni		
isiNdebele	586 961	1.5
SiSwati	1 013 193	2.5
isiXhosa	7 196 118	17.9
isiZulu	9 200 144	22.9
Xitsonga	1 756 105	4.4
Sotho		
Northern Sotho	3 695 846	9.2
South Sotho	3 104 197	7.7
Tswana	3 301 774	8.2
Other official languages		
Tshivenda	876 409	2.2
Afrikaans	5 811 547	14.4
English	3 457 467	8.6
Non-official languages	228 275	0.6

Based on numbers derived from the 1996 and 2001 census (Statistics South Africa, 2001), Figure 2.1(below) provides an indication of the estimated percentage of census population reporting each of the 11 official languages, as well as changes in these estimations observed between 1996 and 2001.
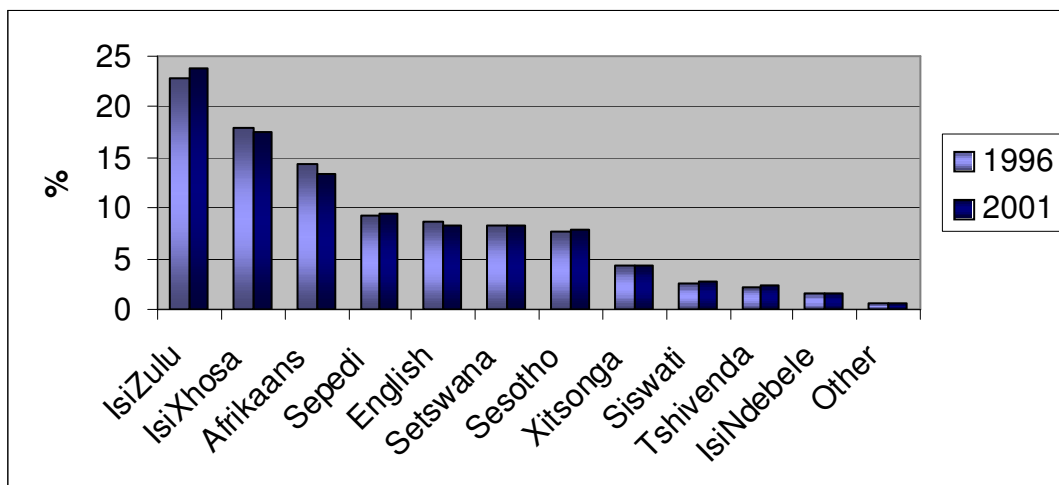

Figure 2.1: Percentages and Changes in Home Languages Spoken Between 1996 and 2001

Three quarters of the South African population are Black, but this category of people is neither culturally nor linguistically homogenous. According to "The languages of South Africa" (2007), many of South Africa's indigenous people share an original common ancestry, but as time passed, clans, groups and communities diverged and separated in attempts to gain autonomy and more fertile pastures for livestock, thus resulting in the development of variations in the common languages.

IsiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Xitsonga and SiSwati are collectively known as the Nguni languages due to similarities in syntax and grammar. IsiZulu is spoken as a home language by around 9.2 million people, thus forming the largest language grouping and found predominantly in the provinces of KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and Gauteng. Numerically, isiXhosa closely follows as a language spoken by approximately 7.2 million people, largely residents of the Eastern Cape and Western Cape. Of the Nguni languages, SiSwati and isiNdebele are the less-used languages, and not spoken in as many areas of South Africa, or by as many people as isiZulu and isiXhosa ("The languages of South Africa", 2007).

SiSwati (also referred to as Swazi) is spoken by approximately 1.0 million people, mainly located in the Mpumalanga region. A number of isiNdebele communities originated in the former homeland area of Ndebele, but have spread to include areas of the Gauteng and southern Mpumalanga region. IsiNdebele is only spoken by an estimated 0.6 million people as a home language ("The languages of South Africa", 2007). Xitsonga (also known as Shangaan), a language also found towards the northern regions of Limpopo, is spoken by about 1.8 million people.

The Sotho languages make up the second grouping of African languages in South Africa and include Sepedi, Sesotho and Setswana. Sepedi, also known as Northern Sotho, is mostly spoken in the northern provinces of South Africa by approximately 3.7 million people. In contrast, Sesotho (or Southern Sotho) was originally the official language of the Kingdom of Lesotho, but over time its speakers moved to the Free State and southern Gauteng. Sesotho is the

mother tongue of approximately 7.7% of South Africans, or about 3.1 million people ("The languages of South Africa", 2007). Tshivenda, one of the smaller African languages, is spoken as a home language by approximately 0.9 million people mostly in the northern regions of the country.

South Africa's white population descends largely from the colonial immigrants of the late 17th, 18th and 19th centuries from Europe. Linguistically it is composed of Afrikaans and English-speaking groups. English is generally understood in all regions of the country and is the language most commonly used in official, commercial and public life ("The languages of South Africa", 2007). Despite the fact that nearly 3.5 million people use English as their home language, it is only ranked joint fifth out of 11 languages as a home language. Afrikaans, a language that has its roots in Dutch, is spoken by nearly 6 million people as a home language.

2.5. LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICIES

With the inclusion of language in the proposed investigation, this study does not become a linguistic study. However, language policies are elaborated upon in this section since they may be relevant to the current state of reading achievement among Grade 5 learners in South African schools. After much debate, discussion and public comment, the national Department of Education announced the Language in Education Policy (dated 14 July, 1997). Two policies were announced, namely:

- The Language in Education Policy in terms of Section 3 (4) (m) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act 27 of 1996).
- The Norms and Standards regarding Language Policy published in terms of Section 6 (1) of the South African Schools Act, 1996.

These two policies had different objectives, but both deserve mention here since they complement each other and do not function in isolation from one another.

2.5.1. The Language in Education Policy in terms of Section 3 (4) (m) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act 27 of 1996).

In the preamble of this policy document ("The South African National Educational System Language Policy", 1997), it is recognized that the cultural diversity of South Africa is a national asset. With this asset in mind, the Language in Education policy aimed at promoting multilingualism and the development of all 11 official languages specified in the South African Constitution. The policy was therefore meant to facilitate respectful communication across language, colour and regional barriers. This approach was in line with global norms where individual lives and societies are seen to be characterized by multilingualism. The policy stated that learning of more than one language should be general practice and principle in South African society.

The Language in Education Policy ("The South African National Educational System Language Policy", 1997) states further that its underlying principle is to maintain home language(s), while providing access to the effective acquisition of additional languages. The Department of Education therefore was to follow an additive approach to promoting bilingualism from a mother tongue base.

In terms of languages as school subjects, the policy stated the following for the Foundation and Intermediate Phases:

- All learners shall be offered at least one approved language as a subject in Grade 1 and Grade 2 (p. 2)
- From Grade 3 onwards, all learners shall offer their language of learning and teaching (LOLT) and at least one additional approved language as subject (p.2),
- All languages shall receive equal time and resource allocation (p. 2)
- Promotion requirements in Grade 1 to Grade 4 are based on performance in one language and Mathematics (p. 2),
- From Grade 5 onwards one language must be passed for promotion (p.2),
- The provincial departments of education determine the level of achievement required for promotion (p.3),

54

- Any LOLT in a public school in South Africa must be an official language as set out in the Constitution (p.3).

Kamwangamalu (2001) summarized the aims of the Language in Education policy as promoting additive multilingualism, which meant the maintenance of home language while providing access to additional languages. The policy is also aimed at promoting all 11 official languages, while addressing disadvantages resulting from mismatches between home language and LOLT. Lastly, the policy aims to develop programs for the redress of previously disadvantaged languages.

The logic of the Language in Education Policy is based on the recognition that South Africa is a multilingual society and that mother tongue is the most appropriate language of learning. According to Heugh (2000), although the policy recognizes that the learner will need a strong proficiency in at least one other language and that of most learners, English will be a language of high priority. Bilingual or multilingual education is conceptualized as adding a second or even a third language to the learner's repertoire, in order to promote academic and linguistic success. The policy neither prevents access to English, nor diminishes the learner's opportunity to engage meaningfully in English. Instead, the policy offers the use of English a much better opportunity for expansion as medium of communication (Heugh, 2000).

According to Barkhuizen and Gough (1996), the Language in Education policy is composed of two interrelated components, namely decisions about what languages should be taught as subjects, and decisions about languages used as media of learning. With regards to language as subject, the notion of a common, core syllabus underlying the goals and design of all languages emerged at the time of national and regional level discussions in formulating the 'Language in Education' policy. In principle, a core syllabus would specify the objectives of all language instruction and emphasize the role of the teacher as being that of teaching language rather than as a teacher of a specific language.

Graphically, the Language in Education policy and how it was planned can be illustrated as in Figure 2.2.

With regards to the language of learning, support was garnered for a bilingual language-of-learning policy, which was considered essential for promoting a national additive bilingualism in which one of the languages of learning would typically be an African language. Barkhuizen and Gough (1996) illustrated that in the past, typically, children with an African language as mother tongue, Coloured and Indian children had to learn through the medium of a second language. White children, on the other hand, were taught in their mother tongue.

Seen against this instructional practice, the concept of additive bilingualism is favoured, because it is likely to promote multilingualism and the development of specifically African languages. The RNCS (2002) states that, specifically for the Language Learning Area, a curriculum is provided that follows an additive approach to multilingualism. With such an approach, all learners learn their home language and at least one additional official language. This structure allows for them to become competent in an additional language, while their home language is maintained. The RNCS (2002) states explicitly that the LOLT should be the learner's home language, particularly in the foundation phase, when children learn to read and write for the first time.
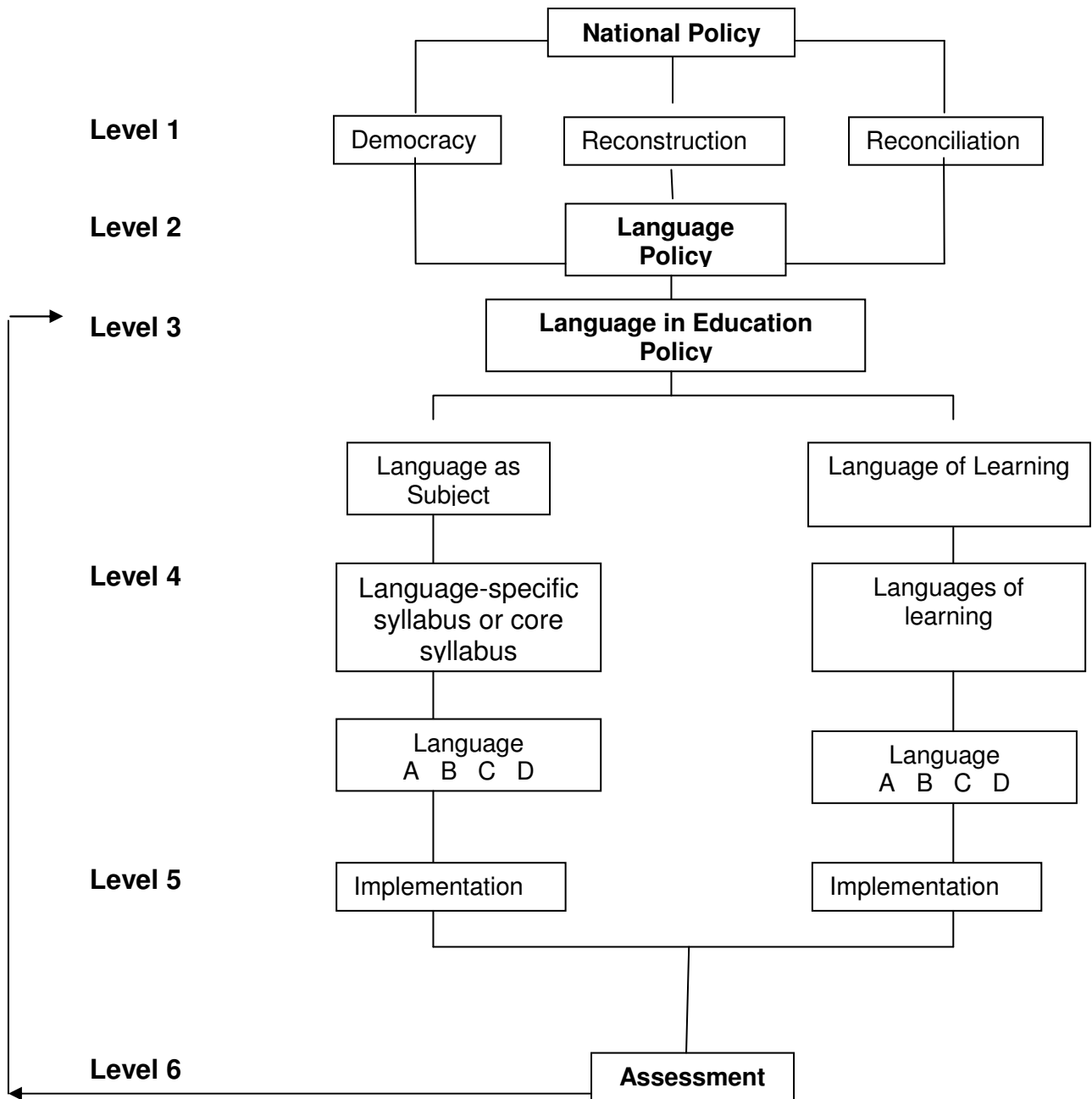
```
                              National Policy

Level 1        Democracy      Reconstruction      Reconciliation

Level 2                        Language
                               Policy

Level 3                   Language in Education
                          Policy

                   Language as              Language of Learning
                   Subject

Level 4            Language-specific         Languages of
                   syllabus or core          learning
                   syllabus

                   Language                  Language
                   A  B  C  D                A  B  C  D

Level 5            Implementation            Implementation

Level 6                        Assessment
```

Figure 2.2: Language in Education Policy Planning (Barkhuizen et al, 1996, p. 456).

2.5.2. The Norms and Standards regarding Language Policy published in terms of Section 6 (1) of the South African Schools Act, 1996.

According to policy documents, the Norms and Standards with regards to Language Policy aim to protect, promote, fulfill and extend the individual's language rights and means of communication in education ("The South African National Educational System Language Policy", 1997). Similar in purpose to the National Education Policy Act, this act promotes bilingualism or multilingualism, and aims to redress the neglect of historically disadvantaged languages in school education.

The norms and standards aim to protect the rights of individuals by means of the following principles:

- The parent of the minor learner has the right to exercise language rights on behalf of the learner
- The Department of Education has the responsibility to provide the learner with the option to choose the language of teaching, upon application for admission to a particular school
- In cases where the particular school uses the LOLT chosen by the learner and should there be place available, the learner must be admitted
- In cases where no school in a district offers the desired language as medium of instruction, the learner may request the provincial department to make such provision.

2.5.3. The RNCS Outline of the Language Learning Area

In terms of each of the Learning Areas, the RNCS defines the Language Learning Area as consisting of all eleven official languages, including South African sign language and Braille. While the curriculum document supports the use of home language as LOLT, it also provides for a second and third additional language. A second additional language assumes that learners do not necessarily have any knowledge of the language when they arrive at school, but the curriculum allows them to better learn and understand such a second

language. Literacies and skills acquired through the learners' home language are transferred to the first additional language, and the curriculum provides strong support for those wishing to use their first additional language as LOLT. A second additional language is intended for learners who wish to learn three languages, and such a language may be an official or foreign language (RNCS Grades R-9, 2002).

The Language Learning Area Outcomes that are included in the curriculum document have been written to provide focus on specific skills and knowledge. Since this study will make use of data provided by Grade 5 learners' reading ability in a language in which they have received instruction for the first three years of formal education, four Learning Outcomes related to the learner's ability to use language are of relevance.

Learning Outcome 3 refers to reading and viewing, and the learner's ability to read and view for pleasure and information, as well as responding critically to the emotional, aesthetic and cultural values in texts. Learning Outcome 4 refers to writing and the learner's ability to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes. Learning Outcome 5 relates to the learner's ability to think and reason using language as an instrument to access, process and use information for learning, while Learning Outcome 6 addresses the learner's ability to use sounds, words and grammar to create and interpret texts (RNCS, 2002, p. 62-75).

2.6. LANGUAGE COMPLEXITIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

The language profile of South Africa is very complicated and diverse. For the purposes of this study, a distinction is made between 'first language' and 'language of learning' (also referred to as 'language of the test' for the purposes of this study).

South African children are supposed to start their learning at school from Grades 1 to 3 in their home language (mother tongue). However, many schools

are faced with teaching learners in these grades in a language of learning that is nonetheless different from what is spoken at home. When learners approach Grade 4, the language of learning changes again, resulting in more than 80% of learners being taught in a further second language (usually English, a language spoken by less than 10% of the population). For Grades 1 to 3 learners, 'home language' does not necessarily coincide with 'language of learning' or 'language of the test'.

Figure 2.3 (below) attempts to illustrate this language complexity faced by many learners in schools in South Africa. In this example, an existing Setswana-speaking learner attends a school that teaches in isiZulu, only to switch to English as language of learning by Grade 4. For the purposes of data analysis in this study, language groups will therefore be defined by means of 'language of learning' (in Grades 1 to 3), since the term 'home language' is not accurately indicative of whether a learner receives instruction in his or her home language. Reference to 'language of learning' (Grades 1 to 3) and 'language of the test' will be used interchangeably.
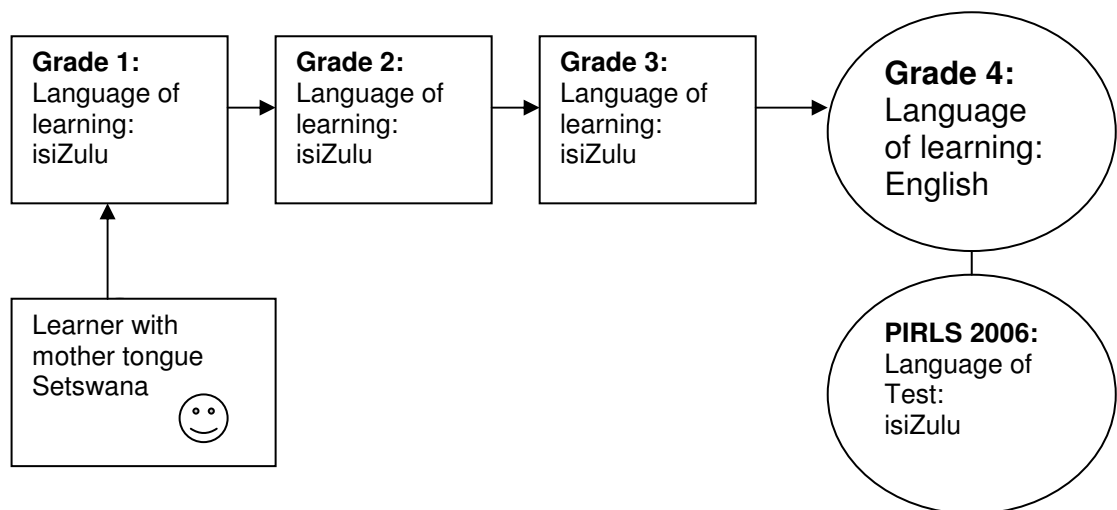

Figure 2.3: Illustration of Language Complexity in Terms of Language of Learning, Home Language and Language of the Test

A common occurrence in South Africa is therefore that individuals are proficient in more than one language. In provinces like Gauteng it is quite common and in this regard Mesthrie (2002) quotes an example taken from a 23 year-old male student from the town of Germiston as saying:

> My father's home language was Swazi and my mother's home language was Tswana. But as I grew up in an isiZulu speaking area we used mainly isiZulu and Swazi at home. But from my mother's side I also learnt Tswana as well. In my high school I came into contact with lots of Sotho and Tswana students, so I can speak those two languages as well. And of course I know English and Afrikaans. With my friends I also use Tsotsitaal.

This quotation confirms the argument of Setati, Adler, Reed and Bapoo (2002), that the majority of South Africa's teachers work in classrooms where English is the official LOLT, but that English is neither the teacher's nor the learners' main language. With the exception of texts used for teaching a specific language as a subject (for example, isiZulu or Setswana), most teaching and learning materials are printed in either Afrikaans or English. Anecdotal evidence supports this claim, as outdated Afrikaans textbooks that are not in use in urban schools have been observed in many classrooms of particular rural schools. Ironically, English and Afrikaans remain languages that are spoken as the major home language by only a minority of South Africa's teachers and learners (Setati et al., 2002).

Setati et al. (2002), supported by earlier work of Rutherford and Rollnick (1993), provide evidence of 'code-switching' and language practices in mathematics, science and English classrooms in a sample[2] of schools in South Africa. The sample consisted of ten urban and rural schools, and although findings cannot be generalized to the larger population, the study is nonetheless situated within a policy and practice environment in education in which additive bilingualism and multilingualism are advocated. These researchers make mention of

---

[2] 'Sample' is used here in the sense of a small data set or selection of schools rather that a random or unrepresentative sample.

contextual differences in the use of English as it occurs in urban and rural schools. They report that in their sample of rural schools, most teachers and learners (with some exceptions) shared the same non-English background. Learners in these schools typically read, wrote or spoke English only in their classroom environment. The use of textbooks was limited due either to classrooms having to share, or teachers wishing to preserve an already scarce resource, thus refraining from textbook use at all. Setati et al. (2002) came to the conclusion that, for rural schools, the use of English can be more accurately described as a foreign language rather than an additional language, since exposure to English for these learners is exclusively limited to the school environment.

On the other hand, urban schools in the sample were served by teachers who worked with learners coming from a range of main languages. This multilingual setting complicates teaching practices, but urban schools seem to be supportive of the use of English as a LOLT. Urban areas are exposed to far more examples of environmental print in English, and teachers and learners have far better access to newspapers, magazines, television and speakers of English. In an urban context, Setati et al. (2002) describe the use of English as an additional language, since learners and teachers have the opportunity to acquire the language informally outside the classroom.

Webb (2002) states that an over-estimation of English and an under-estimation of African languages as instruments of learning are major contributors to educational complexities. Cognitive development is dependent on the learner knowing the language well. Skills such as the ability to understand the central theme of a text, the ability to select relevant information and to summarize it into a new coherent whole, and the ability to recognize relations between events and abstract concepts can only occur when a learner has a sufficient grasp of a language. Generally, this requirement will only be satisfied by the learner's first language (Webb, 2002).

In spite of government's drive to promote mother tongue learning, Black parents in South Africa still prefer their children to be taught in English, as it is equated

with success, economic power and opportunity. In many cases, parents are of the opinion that the only way their children can acquire English is by using it as a language of learning. Webb (2002) poses a counter-argument to this view, by stating that if the development of cognitive skills does not take place, this deficit arises not because learners are unfamiliar with the language of development, nor because English was not acquired effectively, but because learning skills have not been developed sufficiently. Instead, by using an African language (or home language) as basis for cognitive, social and affective skills development, learning skills may be better developed, resulting in English being acquired more effectively.

In the 1990s, the then minister of education, Kader Asmal, stated that language policy was not working for all and required an immediate review. In a newspaper article dating back to May 2001, Kamwangamalu (2001) quoted the then minister's opinion that although the policy promulgated in 1997 was theoretically sound, it was not working on the ground. The succeeding Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, attempted to explain the imperatives of the language policy, as in a press release at a language colloquium held in Cape Town on 31 July, 2006, she argued that the language policy in the South African national educational system was seeking to achieve a number of important imperatives. The language policy encouraged the use of mother tongue as a clear departure from past practice. The policy aimed to introduce a diversity of learning opportunities that had largely been unavailable to learners in the past, and promoted effective learning and teaching of previously neglected indigenous languages. For this reason, the policy was not intended to deny learners the opportunity to acquire English or another second language, but rather to empower learners by making language-learning opportunities available in all 11 official languages.

However, even then, the Minister echoed the views of her predecessor and also believed that the language policy, adopted in 1997, had not been implemented convincingly to date. Resources had not been made available to give effect to the policy, and a poor response existed due to parents' perceived fears arising from past practices of Apartheid education. In addition to this lack of

implementation, the language policy had not received a prominence similar to the profile of other policy shifts that the educational system had experienced in recent years. According to the Minister, the main obstacle faced in promoting mother-tongue learning was the preference of many parents for their children to be taught in English. To add to this obstacle, teachers had not been adequately trained to teach in English. The minister's press release also drew on the conventional wisdom that a strong mother-tongue foundation provided the most desirable platform on which to base the learning of a second language. In this regard, the Minister alluded to 'mounting evidence' that the loss of mother tongue correlated with educational difficulties experienced by learners who used another language for learning.

Webb (2002) summarized some of the language problems in South Africa as the dominance of English, where it is perceived to have more economic, social and political power than the other languages used in South Africa. Another language problem pertains to low proficiency in English, where levels of English proficiency are largely inadequate for many people in terms of the functions they have to perform. Insufficiently adapted African languages are another problem, since these still carry extremely low status and are not considered to be useful as instruments of learning, economic activity, social mobility and public business. South Africa experiences difficulties with establishing multilingualism and growing monolingualism in the use of English. There is a politicization of some languages, specifically in the unevenness of the knowledge of languages, the strong ethnic nationalism associated with Afrikaans, the generally positive socio-political meaning of English and generally negative feelings associated with the use of African languages as media of learning.

Mda (2004) identified the factors and tensions that inhibit the effective implementation of the Language-in-Education Policy, as socio-political, language status and inequalities. She echoed Webb (2002) in identifying the negation of African languages and preference for English as a negative factor, adding teacher training as a problematic factor, where methodologies for teaching different languages in higher education institutions had been separate,

so that, for example, an Afrikaans method, a Xitsonga method and a isiXhosa method may now exist rather than a language method. Another weakness in teacher training is that very few language-across-the-curriculum programmes have been established or put into practice (Mda, 2004).

Heugh (1999) made the bold statement that until learning materials are available in all the learning areas from Grades 1 to 12 in all 11 official languages and until matriculation examinations can be written in each of these languages, there will be no equality of education in South Africa. However, the language policy is based on additive bilingualism, meaning that for the majority of South African learners English is a second language of learning. In light of this function of English, Heugh (1999) advocates massive in-service teacher training to equip the majority of teachers with bilingual teaching skills and an adequate grasp of English for teaching purposes. According to Heugh (1999), teachers agree that English language proficiency of teachers is inadequate for effective teaching. Similarly, English-speaking teachers do not have the required proficiency in a second language to teach in schools where there is an additive approach to bilingualism.

The aims of the Language in Education policy of 1997, described above, stated that multilingualism should be promoted as a valuable resource. Knowledge of more than one language should be regarded as an asset in the immediate economic sense, but also in the broader social sense. The policy aimed to break down the legacy of apartheid by promoting African languages in elaboration, modernization and development of these languages. Despite the noble aims, Kamwangamalu (2001) argued that it was too early to tell the effects, if any, this campaign would have on language practices in South Africa. Despite the Constitution's principle of promoting language equity, research findings by the Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG) indicated that there seemed to be a drift towards unilingualism in English, thereby marginalizing all other languages. In light of these findings, Kamwangamalu (2001) came to the conclusion that the inclusion of nine African languages in the Constitution seemed to be merely symbolic, and that it was becoming increasingly difficult to convince parents and learners either that multilingualism was a resource, or that

African languages could be used as medium of instruction throughout the education system. Kamwangamalu (2001) agreed with views stated by Webb (2002) in saying that it was not surprising that when presented with the following models of literacy, parents overwhelmingly opted for the third model:

1. Initial literacy in mother tongue, followed by a shift to English
2. Initial bi-literacy in English plus an indigenous language
3. Literacy only in English throughout the educational system

The complexity of the language issue becomes more apparent when reference is made to the views of Heugh (2000), which were diametrically opposed to those of Kamwangamalu and Webb. Heugh (2000) based her argument on findings of a study conducted by the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) in 1999, the results of which were published in 2000. According to these findings, 88% of people favour the maintenance of the home language throughout the education system, or at least the home language alongside a second language such as English. In that study, there appeared to be a high degree of support for languages other than English, as opposed to the views of Webb and Kamwangamalu who clearly stated that the preference was swinging in favour of the use of English. Despite Heugh's (2000) disagreement, the views of Webb and Kamwangamalu are not invalid. It is evident that some people and a number of parents might choose the use of English above the use of the home language. However, according to Heugh's views as stated already in 2000, the fact was that many parents opt not to make such a choice, in which case the preferences of a minority are presented as if they are valid and representative of the majority (Heugh, 2000).

Kamwangamalu's (2001) statements about the complexity of language in South Africa conclude this chapter. He offers a way forward by stating that the Language-in-Education policy should be revised to state unequivocally which official languages should be used for what purposes. It is not enough to have legislation in place that provides equal status and recognition of all 11 official languages. Instead, language policy needs to be sustained and purposefully

implemented. An egalitarian language policy does not necessarily result in equal outcomes, nor does it ensure the promotion of all languages (p.409).