

CHAPTER ONE

MOTIVATION FOR AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 ORIENTATION

The aim of this study is to explore schooling conditions and teaching practices for the implementation of the curriculum for Grade 4 learners' reading literacy development across a range of education contexts in South Africa. This chapter offers an introduction to the premises of the study and the structure of the entire thesis. Firstly, the background (1.2), rationale, aims and expected contribution of the study (1.3) are presented. Thereafter, the research questions, which have been formulated on the basis of the literature review and conceptual framework presented later in the thesis, are outlined (1.4). This is followed by operational definitions of key terminology used in the study (1.5). Lastly, as a conclusion to the chapter, content outlines for the remaining chapters are explicated (1.6).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The ability to read is crucial for functioning in contemporary society. The importance of literacy is accentuated by its inclusion amongst larger political debates about the economic competitiveness of countries and international trends such as globalisation (Murphy, Shannon, Johnston & Hansen, 1998). Locally however, young learners in South Africa are struggling to acquire the reading skills needed for their future academic and occupational progress (Fleisch, 2008; Howie *et al.*, 2007; Moloji & Strauss, 2005; Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007; Sailors, Hoffman & Matthee, 2007).

Indeed, worldwide, in both developed and developing countries, learners' low reading skill attainment remains problematic (Coltheart & Prior, 2007; Commeyras & Inyenga, 2007). In South Africa, ongoing concerns surrounding the development of learners' literacy skills drive the literacy teaching and learning research landscape. Concerns associated with learners' development of basic reading literacy skills at the foundational levels of education (Bloch, 1999; Hugo, le Roux, Muller & Nel, 2005; Lessing & de Witt, 2005), concerns about their acquisition of more advanced literacy skills in high school (Matjila & Pretorius, 2004; Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005) and concerns about their attainment of the academic language skills needed for tertiary level education (Banda, 2003; Pretorius, 2002) are consistently reflected in local research.

Reasons for learners' low reading literacy outcomes are varied and often difficult to pinpoint due to the complex interplay of socioeconomic, linguistic, cognitive, educational, familial and personal variables. Regardless of the underlying reasons for learners' poor outcomes, the responsibility for dealing with the improvement of these outcomes is usually placed predominantly upon a country's education authorities, a responsibility which filters down to schools and ultimately becomes the task of the individual teacher to address. This task must be accomplished within the parameters of the curriculum; national and provincial education directives; the resources available; adherence to school management of the reading programme; and within the realms of teachers' own conceptions about reading literacy instruction.

The accepted assumption in South Africa is that after the Foundation Phase of schooling, a phase in which to attain basic Literacy, Numeracy and Life skills, learners will be prepared to make the transition from *learning to read* to *reading to learn* during the Intermediate Phase of schooling¹ using the default language of instruction, which is often English (Lessing & de Witt, 2005; Moss, 2005). Intermediate Phase teachers may, as guided by national curriculum policies (South African National Department of Education (DoE), 2002a), anticipate that learners entering their classes will be able to read effectively enough to allow for their acquisition of more advanced reading literacy outcomes associated with mastery of learning area content. To the frustration of these teachers, learners, for various reasons, may not be able to read and thus comprehend text, as would be expected. Learners' difficulties with reading literacy, if not addressed, then permeate all future educational undertakings as the gap between their reading literacy skills and the demands of the curriculum widens.

Some South African researchers report learner performance outcomes associated with this educational dilemma (DoE, 2003; Moloï & Strauss, 2005) and others provide indications of the type of interventions that are considered to promote optimum literate language development for learners (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007; Sailors *et al.*, 2007). However, teachers remain at the frontline, where these learner assessment results and praxis advocacies are perhaps of little consequence as they deal with the reality of reading literacy teaching to diverse learner populations in schooling contexts which are often less than optimal. This study departs from the consideration of this pragmatic education predicament, placing emphasis on Grade 4 reading literacy instruction practices and the schooling conditions that support or impede these practices.

¹ This assumption is mirrored internationally where learners are expected to start using reading as a tool for learning after four years of schooling at approximately nine years of age (Mullis, Kennedy, Martin & Sainsbury, 2006).

1.3 RATIONALE, RESEARCH AIM AND CONTRIBUTION

The specific research rationale, aim and the potential contribution that this study may make are outlined in the next sub-sections (1.3.1- 1.3.2).

1.3.1 Rationale and research aim

The teaching of reading literacy in South Africa as a developing country context is underpinned by numerous challenges. Specific challenges that the South African education system and therefore teachers face are how to:

- provide all learners with equitable opportunities to learn to read, especially in their own language, whilst developing learners' overall literate language abilities;
- advance many young learners' English reading literacy to a level that these African Language² vernacular learners can effectively continue learning in English after the Foundation Phase of schooling; and
- develop learners' repertoire of reading skills to aid in their comprehension of content and the acquisition of more advanced levels of knowledge and understanding.

These challenges are compounded by anecdotal and small-scale empirical evidence of South African teachers' difficulties with their own reading for learning purposes; teachers' unofficial absence from the classroom; the underutilisation of teaching resources in schools; ineffective teaching methods; and teachers' weak subject knowledge and misunderstandings of the demands of the curriculum in some educational settings (Fleisch, 2008). Moreover, in launching a *National Literacy Strategy* aimed at addressing the challenge of learners' reading literacy development, the DoE has officially acknowledged the difficulties that South African teachers experience in teaching reading and the teaching conditions that complicate their task further (DoE, 2008b).

The urgency of addressing the challenge of learners' reading literacy development and teachers' levels of reading literacy instruction expertise is disclosed by a small number of studies that provide indications of South African learners' poor performance in localised

² The term "African Language" is used throughout this thesis to refer to nine of the eleven official languages of South Africa, these languages being historically associated with Black South Africans. These languages are: isiXhosa; Tshivenda; Sesotho; Sepedi; isiZulu, Xitsonga, Setswana; Siswati; and isiNdebele. These nine official languages function as majority languages within different regions of the country, and current language policy allows for regional bias in decisions about their status and usage. Furthermore, influx of these diverse regional languages, along with migrant language populations into urban centres of the country, has led to a more complex and multilingual situation in these centres (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998).

literacy assessments (DoE, 2003; DoE, 2005; Moloi & Strauss, 2005; Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007)³. Most recently, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 was implemented for the first time in South Africa, by the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) at the University of Pretoria during 2005⁴, with a sample of South African Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners. Results suggested that learners at both grades were struggling to develop the reading literacy competencies needed to make a successful transition to reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

The PIRLS 2006 is an international assessment study of reading literacy in which 40 countries worldwide participated. The study is conducted every five years. For the PIRLS 2006, more than 30 000 Grade 4 and 5 learners were assessed using instruments translated into 11 official languages to cater for South African language populations. Grade 4 learners, age 9.5 years and older, were chosen, expressly as the fourth year of formal schooling is considered “an important transition point in children’s development as readers. Typically, at this point, students have learned how to read and are now reading to learn” (Joncas, 2007a, p.3; Mullis, Kennedy, Martin & Sainsbury, 2006). The Grade 5 learner sample was also included as a national option⁵ in South Africa. The PIRLS 2006 focused on three aspects of learners’ reading literacy, namely: (1) *processes of comprehension*, which involve being able to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information, make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, and examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements; (2) *purposes for reading*, which include the examination of literary experience and the ability to acquire and use information; as well as (3) *reading behaviours and attitudes towards reading*. As part of these foci, information on the home, school and classroom contexts of these learners was also gathered (Mullis *et al.*, 2006).

To elaborate on the findings of the PIRLS 2006, the South African Grade 4 and 5 learners achieved the lowest mean performance scores in comparison to Grade 4 learners from 39 other participating countries. Although the Grade 5 learners had a higher mean performance (302 scale points, SE = 5.6) than the Grade 4 learners (253, 4.6), this average mean score was still approximately 200 points below the fixed international mean of 500 points for Grade 4 learners. Most tellingly, 87% of the Grade 4 South African learners did not reach the lowest of four international benchmarks on the PIRLS achievement scale, a benchmark which required proficiency with basic reading skills. This is in stark contrast to the 94% international

³ The significance of these studies in relation to this research will be explicated in the literature review in Chapter Three.

⁴ PIRLS 2006 data were collected in 2005 for Southern Hemisphere countries and in 2006 for Northern Hemisphere countries.

⁵ Grade 5 was included as a national option due to concerns about Grade 4 being a transition year in schooling and out of a desire to examine the progress or differences in reading knowledge and skills from Grade 4 to 5 (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

median of Grade 4 learners who did achieve this benchmark. One positive finding was that there was a significant difference in achievement between Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners in South Africa perhaps indicating a slight progression in reading achievement from Grade 4 to Grade 5 (Howie *et al.*, 2007; Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy, 2007).

The PIRLS 2006 learner reading literacy performance results, together with others (DoE, 2003; DoE, 2005; Moloï & Strauss, 2005), strongly imply that teachers, for various reasons, face huge challenges in assisting young learners towards optimum development of their reading abilities during the primary school years. In South Africa, there appears to be little if any research that outlines which reading literacy teaching practices are being used, either in the Foundation Phase or Intermediate Phase. Pretorius and Machet (2004b) state that there is little research on reading in South Africa while Fleisch (2008) indicates that there have been few published studies that describe and explain the patterns of classroom life that lead to academic achievement or failure. Furthermore, given that school contexts play an integral role in classroom undertakings (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992; Reynolds, 1998), there is also scant research into the schooling conditions which either promote or impede the teaching of reading literacy in South African primary school classrooms. This non-availability of empirical information means that there is no utilisable resource for the planning and monitoring of future literacy development initiatives in schools or to aid teacher education. It is thus necessary to illuminate teaching practices in Foundation (Grades 1 to 3) and Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 7) classrooms. This is to aid understanding of the teaching contexts in which South African learners learn to read and then continue in their development of reading literacy, and, indeed, the contexts in which teachers are confronted with learners who struggle to successfully achieve fundamental reading skills for further academic development.

This study is specifically focused on reading literacy instruction at Grade 4. Although investigation of Foundation Phase practices is also recognised as important, the study is focused on Grade 4 reading literacy instruction practices due to the use of Grade 4 data from the PIRLS 2006 for this research. The Grade 4 school year particularly signals an influential change in the focus for reading instruction and in the medium of instruction for learning from an African language to an English language medium of instruction in many school settings across the country. South African researchers (Lessing & de Witt, 2005; Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005) briefly acknowledge the intricacies of the shift in focus from acquiring foundational reading skills to using reading as a tool for learning, and, for many learners, the transition from teaching and learning in an African Language to education in English. However, it seems to be taken for granted that teachers will be able to address this transition. Additionally, as Allington and Johnston (2000, p.2) declare, “[Grade 4] has long been

considered a critical point in the [primary] school experience". They further note, in reference to the United States of America (USA), that despite much focus on the Grade 4 school year due to high-stakes assessments, there has been little research on the nature of instruction in Grade 4 classrooms (Allington & Johnston, 2000, p.2).

The aim of this study is therefore to explore schooling conditions and teaching practices for the implementation of the curriculum for Grade 4 learners' reading literacy development across a range of education contexts in South Africa. The impact of language of instruction, phase transition, schooling conditions and curriculum learning expectations play central roles in this investigation. Enabling teaching conditions that may have a bearing on learner reading literacy progress are sought as a factor pivotal to the development of learners' literacy proficiency appears to be the strategies that teachers initiate to assist in the growth of learners' reading competency. Moreover, the schooling conditions that may either enhance or impede both learners' educational experiences and teachers' practices for reading literacy are investigated.

1.3.2 Potential contribution of the research

This study is one of a number of secondary analyses designed to inform and contextualise the results of the PIRLS 2006 (Howie *et al.*, 2007). The findings of the PIRLS 2006 study in South Africa offer a springboard to assist in investigating Grade 4 teachers' reading instruction practices and schooling conditions, using learner assessment outcomes as a starting point to guide the research. Of specific relevance to this study was the implementation of a PIRLS 2006 teacher survey questionnaire which sought information about Grade 4 learners' Language teachers' classroom reading literacy instruction practices. The PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire, which sought information from the school principal at each sampled school about the school's reading curriculum, instructional policies and demographics and resources (Kennedy, 2007, p.25), is also useful in describing the conditions of practice in which teachers operate. These data are especially pertinent as this is the first time that large-scale data on schooling contexts for reading literacy and reading literacy teaching practices has been gathered in the Intermediate Phase in South Africa.

An initial analysis of these questionnaires has revealed many areas in need of further in-depth qualitative investigation to enrich the survey findings, such as: teachers' understanding of the intended curriculum; how school-level organisation and management of the reading programme impacts teachers and how teachers' reported instructional strategies manifest in the classroom (Howie *et al.*, 2007). The study may also aid in contextualising the findings associated with a potential PIRLS 2011 trends study in South Africa.

The research is thus intended to contribute to in-depth understandings of the practical implementation of reading literacy instruction at the beginning of the Intermediate Phase in South Africa for overview, planning and implementation of future reading literacy initiatives. The research may specifically help in:

- providing a framework for understanding the findings of national and international literacy assessments from the perspective of teachers' instructional methods and the schooling contexts in which these practices take place;
- contributing to teaching and learning strategies for learners at Grade 4; and
- informing curricular development for pre-service and in-service teacher education and curriculum implementation in school contexts.

The main research question for the study and its sub-questions follow.

1.4 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

Given the abovementioned educational landscape of reading literacy instruction for Grade 4 learners, I pose the following overall research question:

What influence do schooling conditions and teaching practices have on curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy development?

This overall research question has two sub-questions, which each manifest themselves at both phases of the research process, as discussed in Chapter Five, and which answer aspects of the overall research question. These questions are:

Research sub-question 1:

What are the schooling conditions in which Grade 4 reading literacy instruction practices occur at each identified PIRLS 2006 achievement benchmark⁶?

Research sub-question 2:

What are the practices of teaching Grade 4 reading literacy at each identified PIRLS 2006 achievement benchmark?

⁶ Use of the term "identified PIRLS 2006 achievement benchmark" in the research sub-questions will become clear in the description of the research design and methodology for the study in Chapter Five.

The rationale for the focus on the PIRLS 2006 achievement benchmarks for this research, as reflected in the research sub-questions, is not based on a goal to investigate teacher effectiveness as linked to learner performance. Rather it is to investigate how teachers engage with learner literacy instruction, given a number of average learner performance outcomes, ranging from low to high performance, and schooling conditions. A supposition for the study is that teachers will teach reading literacy and adapt methods according to the levels at which their learners are functioning and the educational context in which they teach⁷. Thus, rather than offering definitive explanations for learner performance in PIRLS 2006 in terms of teachers' practices and schooling conditions, the goal is to offer nuanced perspectives of how teachers are addressing reading literacy instruction for learner cohorts functioning at a variety of levels on the literacy development continuum in various contexts representative of schooling in South Africa.

1.5 OPERATIONALISATION OF KEY TERMS FOR THE STUDY

It is essential to attend to the meaning afforded to the key terms for this study. Although it is acknowledged that the meaning of the terms as considered in sub-sections 1.5.1 to 1.5.6 is malleable according to context and individual interpretation (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), it is also recognised that readers need to be familiar with how these terms have been operationalised for the purposes of this research.

1.5.1 Reading literacy

For this study, the distinction between 'literacy' and 'reading literacy' is made. Literacy is considered one's overall communicative competence as it is thought to encompass not only all acts of communication - reading and writing, listening and speaking - but also the thinking processes that underlie one's understanding of concepts and knowledge associated with subject areas (Bouwer, 2004). Although the importance for language teaching of the integration of all of the receptive (i.e. reading and listening) and expressive (i.e. speaking and writing) language components (Lerner, 2003) is recognised, the actual development of reading literacy and reading specifically are the foci for this study. Reading literacy is demarcated according to the definition provided for the PIRLS 2006 by Mullis *et al.* (2006, p.3) as:

the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment.

⁷ See Chapter Four for an exposition of these assumptions in the form of a conceptual framework for the study.

Of notable importance to this study is the emphasis placed on learners' abilities to construct meaning or comprehend texts. Effective reading comprehension which involves the integration of syntactic, lexical, semantic and background knowledge in an almost automatic manner as people read is therefore considered a key element for learners' reading literacy development, and as such a focus on teachers' development of learners' reading comprehension is a fundamental part of this research (Stoller & Grabe, 2001).

Moreover, this study departs from the assumption that literacy and reading literacy acquisition are developmental processes that have implications for teachers' instruction. Every learner is deemed to be at some place on this non-hierarchical developmental continuum, and, there is no point on the continuum that is either a good or bad place to be, only places informed by learners' previous knowledge and construction of literacy concepts (Lapp, Fisher, Flood & Cabello, 2001).

1.5.2 Reading literacy instruction

Reading literacy is a multidimensional construct and involves the development of a number of related areas. No singular instructional activity will lead to the development of reading literacy competence. This multidimensionality, coupled with learner diversity in classrooms, allows for a wide range of approaches to learner reading literacy development. It also allows for a wide range of interpretations as to how to teach for optimal reading literacy development.

For this study, reading literacy instruction is not viewed solely as the act of teaching learners to decode text. Components of effective reading literacy instruction include the development of learners' phonemic awareness and decoding skills; word recognition fluency; comprehension of words in text and the construction of meaning; vocabulary development; spelling; and writing knowledge (Carreker, Swank, Tillman-Dowdy & Neuhaus, 2005). The DoE (2008b) also states that the critical areas of reading that need to be taught are phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Stoller and Grabe (2001, p.99) accentuate the value of these components in instruction by reporting that reading fluency requires rapid and automatised word recognition skills; a large recognition vocabulary; sound knowledge of syntactic structure and discourse organisation; metacognitive awareness of reading purposes and text comprehension; flexible and appropriate uses of combinations of strategies; fluency in executing and integrating reading processes; extensive exposure to print; motivation to read; ability to integrate information across texts for learning purposes; and a supportive learning environment. As touched on in

sub-section 1.5.1, the value of practice of other aspects of language such as writing, speaking or listening for the development of the overall language system are also recognised (Lerner, 2003), albeit they play a background role in data collection for this investigation.

1.5.3 Grade 4 English language teaching

Reasons for the focus on Grade 4 English language teachers' reading literacy instruction practices are threefold, in that: (a) this grade and these learning area teachers were the focus for the PIRLS 2006 and data from the study are utilised in this research; (b) it is also a grade in which reading tasks change and language of instruction may change, making it a critical transition point in education; and (c) these language teachers are likely to dedicate the most teaching time to reading literacy instruction in comparison to their other learning area colleagues who teach Grade 4 learners.

1.5.4 Grade 4 classes with an English Additional Language learner cohort

At Grade 4 level there are schools with classes of learners who first start using English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in the Intermediate Phase. Prior to this grade, these English Additional Language (EAL) learners have used another language, usually an African language mother tongue, as the LoLT. In accordance with the additive approach to bilingualism promoted by the DoE (1997)⁸, these learners have also received instruction in English as their additional LoLT during the Foundation Phase. The switch to English as the dominant language of instruction in Grade 4 affords these learners the status of EAL Learners. Sometimes they are referred to as English Second Language (ESL) learners in the literature (Lessing & de Witt, 2005). However, this nomenclature has been deliberately avoided for this study as for some learners in South Africa English may not be their second language but could be a third or even fourth language to which they have had exposure. Therefore, the term would be misleading in these instances.

1.5.5 Grade 4 classes with an English First language learner cohort

The defining attributes of those Grade 4 classes with learners learning in English as a First Language (EFL) are that they are situated in primary schools where instruction is only offered in one language, English, from the Foundation Phase, despite the enrolment of learners with other vernaculars at these schools. A number of EFL schools are so-called *former Model C schools*, which, prior to the dissolving of the apartheid government in 1994, had advantageous access to educational resources as a result of their status as "for Whites

⁸ Refer to Chapter Two for further explication of the Language in Education Policy (DoE, 1997).

only” educational institutions. Other schools are private, with a dominant Black African learner population who learn in English from school entrance due to parental demand for this teaching medium (De Klerk, 2002).

1.5.6 Intended, implemented and attained curriculum

Van den Akker (2003) states that teaching curricula which offer plans for learning can be presented in various forms, and a common distinction is made via three levels of curriculum that are present in any teaching and learning situation. These levels are depicted in Table 1.1 (below), which outlines a typology of curriculum representations used in this study.

Table 1.1: A typology of curriculum representations

INTENDED	Ideal	Vision (rationale or basic philosophy underlying a curriculum)
	Formal/ Written	Intentions as specified in curriculum documents and/ or materials
IMPLEMENTED	Perceived	Curriculum as interpreted by its users (especially teachers)
	Operational	Actual process of teaching and learning (also: curriculum-in-action)
ATTAINED	Experiential	Learning experiences as perceived by learners
	Learned	Resulting learning outcomes of learners

Source: (Van den Akker, 2003, p.3)

A particular focus of this research is on exploring the implemented curriculum, how this implementation is informed by teachers’ perceptions of the intended curriculum as influenced by interactions with their learners and their unique teaching contexts, and in what ways their operationalisation of the curriculum either enhances or impedes the intended curriculum and learners’ attainment of this curriculum.

As a conclusion to the chapter, a summation of the contents of this chapter and indications of the contents of the rest of the chapters for the thesis are presented.

1.6 CHAPTER DELINEATION FOR THE STUDY

Chapter One has aimed to provide an overview of the reasons this study has been undertaken. The chapter presented the background, rationale, aims and potential contribution of the study, as well as the research questions which drive the entire thesis. The key terms associated with the study were then clarified.

In the next chapter, **Chapter Two**, literature contextualising the study is presented. An overview of the South African education system in terms of historical context and policy developments and implementation particularly for reading literacy is provided.

In **Chapter Three**, a literature review is presented. Firstly, to contextualise the study a brief global overview on reading literacy development is presented, together with consideration of the role of international comparative studies of reading literacy. Secondly, a review of the scholarly literature as it relates to the focus of this study is provided. Emphasis is placed on South African research studies into learners' levels of reading literacy and teacher practices. Literature elucidating the school factors that influence these practices is discussed. This attention to localised research is supplemented by consideration of other international literature of relevance to the study.

Chapter Four elucidates the conceptual framework which acts as an exploratory and/or explanatory tool for findings associated with the study. Concepts and components used in the framework are firstly introduced. Thereafter, the actual conceptual framework for this study adapted from these concepts and components is discussed in detail.

Chapter Five involves the explication of the research design and methodology for the study. The chapter first incorporates discussion of the ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings of this research. Thereafter, the research design and the particular methods of sampling, data collection and analysis used to answer the research questions are considered. The contexts in which the research was undertaken are also furnished. Finally, a discussion of the trustworthiness of the research undertaking and the steps taken to ensure the integrity of the research in terms of ethical procedures is conducted.

Chapter Six incorporates the presentation and discussion of the quantitative research findings for research sub-question one of the study. Findings linked to the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire data are dealt with in this chapter. The goal of the chapter is to describe and compare the characteristics of school milieus across the identified PIRLS 2006 class achievement benchmark re-classification sub-samples identified for this study.

Chapter Seven presents the qualitative research findings for research sub-question one. Qualitative case studies of selected schooling contexts for the development of reading literacy are presented. The findings complement and extend the results of the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire data presented in Chapter Six.

In **Chapter Eight**, quantitative findings addressing research-sub-question two are explored. The descriptive statistics for selected variables from the PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire re-classification data are presented.

Chapter Nine incorporates the presentation and discussion of the qualitative research findings linked to research sub-question two. Qualitative case studies of selected teachers' instruction practices for the development of reading literacy are presented. The findings complement and extend the results of the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data presented in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Ten presents findings for the overall research question for the study. The chapter particularly presents a summary of the study and the main findings. It also includes reflections on the research methodology and conceptual framework utilised. The chapter also draws conclusions for the study and offers its implications for policy, practice and further research.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE MACRO LEVEL EDUCATION LANDSCAPE: SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY ISSUES IN CONTEXT

2.1 ORIENTATION

Building on the discussion in Chapter One, this chapter serves to describe the South African education landscape in order to contextualise this study further. The content will particularly endeavour to sensitize the reader to macro level historical antecedents, policy factors and curriculum developments that may play a role in teaching practices in South Africa, aspects which have a bearing on the analysis of the data for this research.

Section 2.2 provides an overview of developments in the South African education system. Section 2.3 addresses the policies that influence classroom practices, particularly reading literacy at Grade 4.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section deals with the historical antecedents shaping schooling (2.2.1) and the impact of desegregation (2.2.2) on the education system.

2.2.1 Historical antecedents

The end of the apartheid era and the emergence of a democratic state in 1994 brought many ongoing changes to South Africa, including its education system. Informally, during its colonial history, and formally, during the apartheid years, schooling had been conceptualised and structured differentially according to race and ethnicity. This stratification led to segregation of administrative and schooling structures, with the goal of political and economic oppression of the Black majority for the social and economic advancement of the White minority. In accordance with this goal, education for White learners was controlled nationally by the Department of Education and Culture (House of Assembly); for Indian learners by the House of Delegates; for Coloured learners by the House of Representatives; and for Black learners by the Department of Education and Training. All of these systems were in turn run centrally by the apartheid state, via the Department of National Education (Lubisi & Murphy, 2002).

Sailors, Hoffman and Matthee (2007, p.368) explain that, on the one hand, prior to the abolition of apartheid, there was one system that could “rival any nation in the world” and which served White learners exclusively. On the other hand there were the non-White systems, based on the institutionalisation of racist practices. White teachers were trained at either primary school teacher training colleges or received degrees from universities for high school teaching in preparation for teaching in schools for White learners. In the homelands⁹, control over primary school teacher training for Black teachers was allocated to the area itself. In non-homeland settings, Black teachers were trained in special colleges located mostly in the townships and designated for them. The language of instruction was mother tongue for Black learners in the primary grades, with an abrupt shift to English and Afrikaans at the beginning of secondary school, after eight years. The use of these official languages of the apartheid state, in equal proportions, led to many Black learners failing and dropping out of the education system at this point, due to their inability to succeed in these languages. As a result of this social engineering by the apartheid state, the majority of the population remained illiterate and undereducated. After the 1976 Soweto uprising in protest of policies to enforce Afrikaans, the government backed down and passed the 1979 Education and Training Act, which reduced mother-tongue instruction to four years of primary school, followed by a choice of English or Afrikaans as language of instruction thereafter (Sailors *et al.*, 2007).

Vandeyar and Killen (2007) argue that the political, social and economic changes in post-apartheid South Africa have been accompanied by considerable changes in the education system. Most notable of these has been the desegregation of schools, the creation of a National Qualifications Framework, the adoption of new language policies for education and the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE).

2.2.2 Desegregation of the education system

The first democratically elected government inherited a complex education system with 18 education departments split according to provinces, homelands and population groups (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). After 1994, the new government restructured the education system, dividing it into national, provincial and local school levels (Schlebusch & Thobedi, 2004). The educational landscape was reconstituted to bring together different teachers and their various classroom practices under one administrative body in each province (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). As already related, before 1991, state schools were racially segregated according to staff and learner profiles. The collapse of the apartheid government and abolition of school segregation in the early 1990s led to an influx of Black learners into city

⁹ Areas in South Africa designated to separate Black people from White people (Sailors *et al.*, 2007).

schools previously reserved for White, Indian and Coloured learners. However, nearly two decades later, schools in the Black African townships remain Black African in terms of learner profile, due in part to the perception that they have lower standards and so parents from other races do not want to place their children in them (Lubisi & Murphy, 2002). In some cases this has resulted in diminished enrolments in township schools and overcrowding in suburban schools.

These schools also maintain a Black African learner profile due to the economics of school fee payment and current economically disadvantaged communities being in areas previously designated for Black people. Although public education is free to all learners, the local fees that a school charges can and do vary enormously with schools using them to supplement the minimum level of support provided by local departments of education. Many schools battle to collect fees for the children enrolled at their schools. If parents wish to enrol their child in a school outside their residential area, they have to pay the school fees for that school. Whilst no school can deny a child access because fees cannot be paid, it can deny admission if he or she is from outside the immediate area and there is another school in the child's own neighbourhood. As a result, communities previously designated for Black learners continue to have a Black African racial make-up, to some extent perpetuating the status quo. Meanwhile, the other system, with more advantaged schools, caters for White learners and the children of an emerging middle class of non-White professionals and learners who have migrated to these schools from township areas. Most of these schools have an English medium of instruction (Sailors *et al.*, 2007). There are also a small number of exclusive private schools which largely cater for children of the upper middle class, with fees that are beyond the means of most South Africans. A large number of children in rural areas still attend so-called 'farm schools', which are often owned by a local White farmer and cater for children of the farm labourers. These schools are often small and poorly resourced, with teachers having to teach multi-grade classes (Lubisi & Murphy, 2002).

Sailors *et al.* (2007, p.368) refer to the two systems in South African education as "...a tale of two cities...", and concerning learner outcomes there is a distinct "bimodal distribution of achievement" between them (Fleisch, 2008, p.v; Howie, 2002). This distribution refers to a pattern of achievement in South African schools that if plotted on a graph would show a majority of between 70 and 80 percent of learners clustered around the first mode. This first mode is characterised by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who are unable to read fluently in the school's LoLT. The second mode, which produces most university entrants and graduates, is well-resourced and consists of former White and Indian schools. It serves a burgeoning private sector, representing a higher-achieving group, predominantly comprising a number of middle-class Black and White learners who attend relatively well-resourced

schools and who become proficient readers by the end of their primary school years (Fleisch, 2008). The existence of these two disparate education systems is fundamental to the sampling strategy for this research, to be examined in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Two further issues have shaped teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning in post-apartheid South Africa. The most direct influence is OBE as the framework for curriculum design and pedagogical practice. A second influential issue resulting from desegregation is the increase in linguistic and cultural diversity in the learner population (Vandeyar & Killen, 2007). These two policy issues are discussed in the next sub-section.

2.3 SYNOPSIS OF POLICY INFLUENCES IN EDUCATION

Matier Moore and Hart (2007) argue that although the legacy of apartheid education policies is a factor in what they see as a deepening crisis in the education system linked to low literacy levels, the introduction of the progressivist OBE in Curriculum 2005 (C2005), the subsequent Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and National Curriculum Statement (NCS) have contributed to the situation. In sub-sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, the focus is on considering the impact of the introduction of OBE into South African schools and on presenting those aspects of the RNCS¹⁰ for Language at Grade 4 that deal with the teaching of reading literacy. Moreover, additional policies that have since come to the fore to aid the teaching of reading literacy in primary schools are examined (2.3.3). In sub-section 2.3.4, the impact of language policy changes are also explicated.

2.3.1 The introduction of Outcomes-Based Education

Utilising Spady's (1994) philosophy of OBE, South Africa developed its own model (Lombard & Grosser, 2008). OBE is a learner-centred approach that emphasises what the learner should know, understand, demonstrate and become. In theory, teachers and learners work to achieve predetermined results or outcomes by the end of each learning process. The outcomes integrate knowledge, competence and orientations needed to become thinking, competent and responsible future citizens (Botha, 2002).

As such, the introduction of an OBE system after 1996 led to emphasis being placed on learners' achievement of specific outcomes, as well as the reporting of learner achievement in terms of these outcomes (Vandeyar & Killen, 2007). Three design features characterised the new curriculum. Firstly, as the name indicates, it was outcomes-based. Secondly, it

¹⁰ In November 2009, planned changes to the RNCS with its OBE underpinnings were announced by the DoE (Motshekga, 2009b). Thus, at the time of data collection for this study, this was not yet apparent. Therefore, the planned changes (2009a) are reflected on in the final chapter in relation to the findings for this study.

incorporated an integrated knowledge system with eight learning areas from Grades 4 to 9, and, thirdly, the curriculum promoted learner-centred pedagogy (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). OBE constituted a radical break from apartheid educational rulings. The democratically elected African National Congress government, in striving to root out apartheid education, chose OBE as a model most likely to address what it perceived as a crisis in the system and to lead to the future empowerment of South African citizens. A response to international trends¹¹ in educational development, OBE had as its goal the emancipation of teachers from a content-based curriculum, improvement of the quality of education by means of guaranteed success for all, ownership through decentralised curriculum development, empowerment of learners via a learner-centred ethos, and making schools more accountable in ensuring success and effectiveness. OBE was concerned with what learners actually learn and how well they learn it, measured against academic results. This was in contrast to the former system, in which what they were supposed to learn was measured against a chronologically defined normative standard (Botha, 2002). The idea of critical cross-field outcomes is fundamental to this model, with these sub-divided into seven critical and five developmental outcomes, giving prominence to the cultivation of cognitive capacity (Lombard & Grosser, 2008). The outcomes were formulated to emphasise the development of critical, investigative, creative, problem-solving, communicative and future-oriented citizens (Botha, 2002).

The introduction of C2005 in 1997 was controversial (Botha, 2002). Jansen (1998) argued that the new curriculum was a political response to apartheid schooling rather than one concerned with the modalities of change at the classroom level. He further argued that OBE would fail for numerous reasons, one being that the language of the curriculum was too complex, confusing and at times contradictory. Chisholm (2007, p.298) observes that C2005's

... original formulations were clothed in a complex framework of outcomes that provoked a range of criticisms drawing attention to the behaviourist underpinnings, excessive assessment requirements, and difficulty of implementation in under-resourced contexts with poorly-trained teachers.

As a result, three years after it was introduced, a review was made of C2005, which concluded that it made little difference to what was actually happening in the classroom. Well-resourced schools were found to be better able to adopt learner-centred approaches and new assessment methods than poorly resourced schools. There were complaints about the language used, excessive paperwork related to new forms of continuous assessment and expectations that were too complex. A revision was therefore proposed and accepted

¹¹ OBE has been implemented in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States where it originated (Botha, 2002).

(Chisholm, 2007), which resulted in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) of 2002 for Grades R to 9. Pudi (2006, p.104) stresses that:

[t]here is no paradigm shift from OBE to C2005 to RNCS...The evolutionary sequence from OBE to C2005 is based on the rationale to apply OBE in a way that is relevant to the South African situation and the evolutionary sequence between C2005 to the NCS or the RNCS is based on augmenting/ filling the gaps realised in the implementation of C2005.

Tellingly, Todd and Mason (2005, pp.222-223) note that:

...outcomes-based education is an innovation that assumes basic structures, such as functioning schools with qualified teachers and adequate classrooms, desks and textbooks, are already in place, which might be the case in the developed world, but is by no means guaranteed in developing world educational contexts. Given the historical and situational constraints, most South African schools are not well placed to take on an innovation as radical as an outcomes-based education, without first putting in place some of the basic requirements of effective schooling.

Todd and Mason (2005) further contend that formal changes do not guarantee better practice, and, particularly in cases where policymakers do not adequately take context and the agents of implementation into account, policy may impede implementation. Notwithstanding these noted problems with the implementation of the OBE curriculum, one cannot investigate the practices of teachers without considering the role that mandates from government in the form of the intended curriculum play. In the next sub-section, the RNCS and those components of it that address reading literacy development are scrutinised.

2.3.2 The Revised National Curriculum Statement¹²

In this sub-section, the place of LoLT in the primary school years is presented (2.3.2.1), followed by the Foundation Phase literacy curriculum (2.3.2.2) and the Intermediate Phase Languages learning area (2.3.2.3).

2.3.2.1 The place of language instruction in the primary school years

The primary school years form part of the General Education and Training Band (GET). Primary schooling is spread across three educational phases. The first phase, the Foundation Phase, includes a reception year, Grade R, and Grades 1 to 3, which mark the beginning of more formalised education activities. There are three 'Learning Programmes' in the Foundation Phase, namely: Literacy, Numeracy and Life skills. The second phase is the Intermediate Phase, and includes Grades 4 to 6. The last phase, the Senior Phase,

¹² The RNCS for Grades R to 9 is sometimes referred to as the National Curriculum Statement (NCS).

incorporates Grades 7 to 9 with Grade 8 being the first grade of high school. In the Intermediate and Senior Phases, learners currently have eight learning area subjects, namely: Languages; Mathematics; Life Orientation; Arts and Culture; Natural Science; Economic and Management Sciences; Social Sciences; and Technology (DoE, 2002b).

The developmental outcomes for learners from Grades R to 9 (DoE, 2002a) envisage learners who are able to reflect on and explore a variety of strategies for more effective learning, while also being able to participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities. The overall expected outcome in terms of the reading curriculum for the Language learning area in the GET is the following (DoE, 2002a: p.20): “The learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional value of texts”. This *reading and viewing* outcome is placed with five other expected outcomes associated with overall language competency, namely *listening, speaking, writing, thinking and reasoning*, and *language structure and use*. Each of these learning outcomes has its own Assessment Standards (ASs) (DoE, 2002b).

The discussion in the next sub-section will not only encompass scrutiny of ASs for the Intermediate Phase RNCS for Grade 4, but will also consider the Foundation Phase RNCS for the learning outcome *reading and viewing*. This dual focus on the intended reading curriculum for both the Foundation Phase and Grade 4 is as a result of the acknowledgement that Grade 4 teachers of reading literacy have to deal with learners at different stages along the literacy continuum, as suggested in Chapter One. This may mean that some learners have not yet achieved the intended outcomes for the Foundation Phase curriculum when they enter Grade 4. This consideration of both the Foundation Phase and Grade 4 curricula is further based on recognition that difficulties noted with the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase will impact Grade 4 teachers’ practices.

2.3.2.2 *The Foundation Phase Literacy curriculum*

According to policy, following the learning activities of the Foundation Phase (Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills), one additional language is introduced in Grade 2. The RNCS (DoE, 2002a) states that the most important task of the Foundation Phase teacher is to ensure that all learners learn to read, and to this end, 40% of teaching time in the Foundation Phase is allocated to literacy. It is recognised that all learners need to be taught strategies to help them to read with understanding and unlock the code of written text. Furthermore, they must know how to locate and use information, to follow a process or argument, summarise, build their own understandings, adapt what they learn, and demonstrate what they learn from their reading in the learning process. A so-called “balanced approach” to literacy

development is used in the curriculum beginning with children's emergent literacy and thereafter involving them in reading books, writing for genuine purposes and giving attention to phonics (DoE, 2002a, p.23).

Curriculum AS guidelines for the learning outcome *Reading and viewing* in the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3) (DoE, 2002a, pp.32-33) require that the learner:

- is able to use visual clues to make meaning (Grades R-3)
- is able to role-play reading (Grades R-1)
- is able to make meaning of written text (Grades R-3)
- starts recognising and making meaning of letters and words (Grade R)
- begins to develop phonic awareness (Grade R)
- develops phonic awareness (Grades 1 and 2)
- consolidates phonic awareness (Grade 3)
- recognises letters and words and makes meaning of written text (Grade 1)
- reads for information and enjoyment (Grades 1-3)
- recognises and makes meaning of words in longer texts (Grade 2)
- reads texts alone, and uses a variety of strategies to make meaning (Grade 3).

2.3.2.3 *The Intermediate Phase Languages Learning Area*

In the Intermediate Phase, learning activities focus on eight learning areas. Twenty-six hours and 30 minutes of contact time for formal teaching of these learning areas is allocated per week. The largest percentage of this teaching time, 25% or seven hours and 30 minutes, is allocated to the Language Learning Areas, which include the learner's home language or first LoLT as well as the learner's first additional language. Learners consolidate and extend their literacy skills over a wider range of texts than during the Foundation Phase (DoE, 2002a; 2008c).

Specific learning skills for the Language *reading and viewing* outcome acknowledge that the "reading of South African and international fiction and non-fiction is necessary for learners' emotional and personal growth, for language development, for literacy, for understanding of values, and for enjoyment" (DoE, 2002b, p.56). Table 2.1 (below) reveals the ASs for the Grade 4 *reading and viewing*¹³ learning outcome of the *English Home Language Learning Area* (DoE, 2002b).

¹³ Appendix A outlines the other five learning outcomes and their assessment standards for Grade 4 English Home Language. Appendix B provides the Grade 4 Additional Language learning outcomes for reading and viewing for comparison purposes.

Closer scrutiny of the RNCS ASs for *reading and viewing* at both the Foundation Phase and Grade 4 reveal differences in developmental task expectations for achievement. There is a lack of continuity between AS expectations for the Foundation Phase and expectations at Grade 4. The question therefore arises as to whether enough scaffolding of skills leading to the expected learning outcomes reflected in the Grade 4 ASs has taken place during the Foundation Phase. This would be necessary preparation for the achievement of these skills one academic year later (Long & Zimmerman, 2009).

Table 2.1: Assessment Standards for the Grade 4 Home Language reading and viewing learning outcome (DoE, 2002b, pp.72-76).

AS 1: Reads a variety of South African and international fiction and non-fiction texts for different purposes (e.g. poems, stories, myths, brochures, reference books and text-books).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i. Reads independently using a variety of reading and comprehension strategies appropriate for different purposes.</i> <i>ii. Skims for general idea.</i> <i>iii. Scans for specific details.</i> <i>iv. Surveys content page, headings, index for overview.</i> <i>v. Makes predictions, uses contextual clues to determine meaning, and makes inferences.</i> <i>vi. Reads aloud clearly and with expression.</i>
AS 2: Views and comments on various visual and multimedia texts for different purposes (e.g. pictures, posters, cartoons and, where available, computers and CD-ROMS).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i. Interprets message.</i> <i>ii. Identifies and discusses graphical techniques such as colour, design, choice of images, etc., and how they affect the message conveyed.</i> <i>iii. Describes feelings about the text (factual or literary, visual or multimedia), giving reasons.</i>
AS 3: Discusses how the choice of language and graphical features influence the reader.
AS 4: Shows understanding and identifies and discusses aspects such as central idea, characters, setting and plot in fiction texts.
AS 5: Infers reasons for actions in the story.
AS 6: Understands the vocabulary and discusses the choice of words, imagery and sound effects in poems, stories and multimedia texts (e.g. rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, word pictures, humour).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i. Identifies the different purposes of texts (e.g. speeches, stories, poems, advertisements).</i> <i>ii. Identifies the way texts are organised.</i> <i>iii. Identifies how language and register (degree of formality) differ according to purpose and audience.</i> <i>iv. Identifies the language used in different kinds of texts (e.g. direct speech in fables, sequence words in procedures, passive speech in reports).</i>
AS 7: Identifies and discusses values in texts in relation to cultural, social, environmental and moral issues (e.g. moral of the story and its validity in different contexts, issues of fairness and equity in relation to different situations and characters).
AS 8: Understands and responds appropriately to information texts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i. Identifies main and supporting ideas.</i> <i>ii. Scans for specific details in texts (e.g. weather reports, bus timetables, maps).</i> <i>iii. Follows short printed instructions and directions.</i>
AS 9: Interprets simple visual texts (tables, charts, posters, graphs, maps) and can change text from one form to another (e.g. graph to explanatory paragraph).
AS 10: Selects relevant texts for own information needs (e.g. dictionaries, children's encyclopaedias and reference books).

2.3.3 The *Foundations for Learning Campaign* and the *National Reading Strategy*

In 2008, a number of DoE curricular directives supplemented the RNCS for Languages at Grade 4. Whilst the implementation of the content of these directives is ongoing, it is nevertheless important to discuss their content. In March 2008, in response to the findings of national, regional and international studies which showed that South African children were unable to read, write or count at expected levels, the DoE (2008c) launched its *Foundations for Learning Campaign*, a four-year campaign aimed at providing teachers and schools with clear directives on the DoE's expectations of schools and teachers in the achievement of expected levels of performance. The focus of the campaign is on primary schooling, with the intention of ensuring that learners across the system have a solid foundation of learning. By 2011, all primary schools are expected to have increased average learner performance in Literacy/ Language and Numeracy/ Mathematics to no less than 50%. Minimum expectations for improvement of learner achievement are focused on teaching time allocation, resource sufficiency and assessing, tracking and recording learner progress in reading, writing and numeracy (DoE, 2008c).

In relation to time allocation for literacy activities, it is expected that every teacher in the Foundation and Intermediate phases will spend at least 30 minutes on reading for enjoyment daily. Out of a weekly time allocation of seven hours and 30 minutes for Languages at Grade 4, an hour and 30 minutes must be allocated per day in addition to the half hour of reading for enjoyment¹⁴. Resources such as word walls, sight word charts, writing charts, and reading motivation posters are recommended for Intermediate Phase classrooms. Personal dictionaries, language textbooks and exercise books, work cards for each reading book, and bookmarks and/or reading record cards are also suggested for learners at these grades. Teacher resources should include: vocabulary flashcards; grade-level shared texts; spelling and reading vocabulary lists for the year; graded readers or other texts; read-aloud texts such as short novels or newspaper magazines; a classroom library with different levels of fiction and non-fiction books; dictionaries; and a dictionary for the teacher. Moreover, additional resources such as educational magazines and children's encyclopaedias are recommended. Assessing, tracking and recording learner progress should take place monthly for class records and on a quarterly basis for submission to a district office of the DoE (DoE, 2008c).

Of the one hour and 30 minutes of instructional time for Languages in the Intermediate Phase, 60 minutes are dedicated to a *literacy focus time* and 30 minutes to *language*

¹⁴ The 30 minutes of reading for enjoyment presumably does not form part of the overall time allocated to Languages. However, this is not clearly stated in the document itself (DoE, 2008c).

development. The *literacy focus time* must be in the learners' LoLT and/or Home Language three times per week and in their First Additional Language twice a week. The *writing*, *listening* and *speaking* components of language development must take place in the LoLT once a week each and in the FAL once a week each (DoE, 2008c, p.14). Specific guidelines for teacher activities during the *literacy focus time* in the Intermediate Phase include (DoE, 2008c, pp.14-15): shared reading or shared writing (15 minutes); word and sentence level work (15 minutes); and group, guided and independent reading/ writing (30 minutes). In the *language development* time slot, 30 minutes of writing must take place three times a week and 30 minutes of listening and speaking must occur twice a week.

The goals of the *Foundations for Learning Campaign* dovetail with those espoused by two further DoE documents published during the same timeframe: *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades: A teacher's handbook* (DoE, 2008a) and a *National Reading Strategy* (DoE, 2008b). The first document provides practical teaching guidelines on how to implement the *literacy focus time* and *language development* periods (DoE, 2008a). The latter document, the *National Reading Strategy*, elucidates the nature of the problem with and reasons for children's poor reading abilities, and offers more all-encompassing goals than the *Foundations for Learning Campaign* in terms of reading, namely to (DoE, 2008b, p.11):

- put reading firmly on the school agenda
- clarify and simplify curriculum expectations
- promote reading across the curriculum
- affirm and advance the use of all languages
- encourage reading for enjoyment
- ensure that not only teachers, learners and parents, but also the broader community understand their role in improving and promoting reading.

Six key pillars are viewed as crucial to the success of the *National Reading Strategy*, namely: (1) monitoring learner performance; (2) teaching practice and methodology; (3) teacher training, development and support; (4) management of the teaching of reading; (5) resources; and (6) research, partnerships and advocacy (DoE, 2008b, p.13).

Another DoE publication (DoE, 2008d, pp.27-28) from this time, *Foundations for Learning: Assessment Framework: Intermediate Phase*, furthers the expectations for learner outcomes by providing term-by-term expected language milestones¹⁵ and assessment task guidelines

¹⁵ Milestones also defined as 'knowledge and skills' (DoE, 2008d). See Appendix C for the Foundations for Learning Grade 4 per term milestones and assessment task guidelines for reading.

for oral work, reading, writing, spelling and grammar and investigation at Grade 4 (DoE, 2008d, pp.33-35).

Since the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (DoE, 1997) plays a fundamental role in teaching and learning at Grade 4, it is now also discussed.

2.3.4 The Language-in-Education Policy

In contrast to educational settings where interest in bilingual education is partly the result of an influx of minority second language learners (Martin, 1999; Jones Diaz, 2001; Durgunoglu & Öney, 2000), across Sub-Saharan Africa, second language learners account for the majority of learners in schools (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007). In South Africa specifically, there is an increasing incidence of learning taking place in a second or even third language, usually English (Myburgh, Poggenpoel & Van Rensburg, 2004). English is perceived as the *lingua franca* with the best prospects of assisting learners towards gainful employment upon completion of their schooling. As such, although research reveals that it is best to achieve the foundations of education in one's mother tongue, societal factors lead an ideological, political, social and economic push for English as the LoLT for non-English learner populations (Heugh, 2006).

Literacy programmes in schools cannot ignore the language debate because language provides the basis for the acquisition of literacy skills (Perry, 2008). For this study, government policy on LoLT in education is recognised as a major contributor to teaching practices and learner outcomes. As such, the current policy, which has aided in the design of the research, needs to be carefully considered.

The Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) (DoE, 1997) promotes multilingualism and the equal importance of all eleven official languages in the country. It particularly advocates an additive as opposed to subtractive approach to multilingualism. In 'additive multilingualism' all learners learn in their home language and at least one additional official language of the country. It is envisaged that the learner will become increasingly competent in their additional language, whilst the vernacular is developed and maintained (DoE, 2002b). The goal is thus to maintain home language(s) while supporting access to and the effective development of additional language(s) (Plüddemann, 2003).

Accordingly, the use of learners' home language for teaching and learning is recommended wherever possible, especially in the Foundation Phase where learners are developing fundamental literacy skills such as reading and writing (DoE, 2002a). English is supposed to

be introduced as an additional language in Grade 1 for African Language vernacular learners (DoE, 2002a) (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007).

In reality, in schools where English or Afrikaans has not been the medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase, Grade 4 signals a shift to English as the medium of instruction for all learning tasks. The LiEP is therefore based on a transitional bilingual education model in which many South African learners make the transition from a bilingual programme of English and an African language to English monolingual education. The transition can be considered an early exit programme as the assumption is that learners will benefit from making the transition to English as early as possible (Cummins, 2003).

Dyers (2003) writes that teachers in certain schools in the country feel that the LiEP, which calls for the switch to English instruction after Grade 3 in schools where the majority of learners are English Additional Language (EAL) speakers and learners, is contributing to educational failure. As Plüddemann (2003, p.287) further articulates:

...the vast majority of African-language-speaking learners experience a debilitating transition to English-medium teaching after three... years of H[ome] L[anguage] ("mother tongue") [author's addition] education. Despite the additive bilingual intent of the LiEP, African languages continue to be 'subtracted' from curricular use before sufficient language development has taken place. Linguistically demanding 'content subjects' such as mathematics, science, history, geography, accounting and technology are (officially) [author's addition] taught and assessed through the medium of English from Grade 4 upwards.

Heugh (2006, p.9) affirms that most learners who have to make the transition to reading to learn in Grade 4 "simply fall into the gap between learning in the mother tongue and learning through a second language of education, English. Most teachers do not know how to help their learners successfully bridge this gap". Heugh (2006) argues that the early exit from a first language to a second language medium of instruction at this point is actually a weak bilingual model, as an additive approach should involve at least six to eight years of first language education, together with good provision of the second language, followed by dual medium education in the latter years.

This is in line with the research-evidenced hypothesis that it takes two-to-three years to develop what Cummins (1981) refers to as the 'Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills' (BICS) of a second language, and up to seven years to develop full Cognitive/ Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). To elaborate, Cummins (1981) proposed the idea of a distinction between conversational language ability and more advanced language competence needed for formal learning. Conversational language ability refers to the surface level ability to hold a simple conversation. This surface ability seems to develop relatively

quickly. This surface level fluency may not be enough to cope with the language-based requirements of the education curriculum. BICS is thought to be acquired when there is much contextual support in a classroom, at home and in the local community. For a learner to cope with the curriculum requirements of formal education, Cummins has argued that they need to have developed CALP as this particular level of language proficiency is needed in context-reduced situations associated with more abstract academic tasks. This means that conversational competence must not be mistaken for ability to cope with the overall curriculum (Baker & Prys-Jones, 1998). Indeed, according to Cummins' (1981) theory, English as a First Language (EFL) learners who speak English as a mother tongue are at the age where they should have achieved CALP in English. In contrast, in optimal circumstances, their English as an Additional Language (EAL) peers have only developed BICS in English at this stage.

In 2006, planned alterations to the LiEP were announced (Pandor, 2006). Although not evident at the time of writing up this research, in 2010, amendments to the policy may lead to the promotion of a further two years of mother tongue education. In effect, this may mean that the switch to English will more than likely occur at the beginning of the Grade 7 year of schooling for those learners who have been learning in languages other than English or Afrikaans. This shift in policy is in line with a large corpus of research into bilingual education "best practices" (Alidou *et al.*, 2006). Nonetheless, despite this proposed change to six years of mother tongue education, if learners have still not developed the literacy skills and reading proficiency needed to cope with academic tasks, and for academic progress, there may be little change to learners' poor academic performance outcomes.

2.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Pudi (2006) suggests that teachers have an obligation to be conversant and to keep up to date with not only what is happening in the classroom but also with changes in education. They not only need to know, understand and appreciate the ideals of educational change but also need to implement these changes according to the spirit of the policies and documents of the Department of Education. Pudi's (2006) ideals are perhaps somewhat idealistic, especially given the challenges that teachers currently experience with both the curriculum and its implementation in South African classrooms. As Vandeyar and Killen (2007) argue, although government educational policy changes were aimed at redressing past inequalities in educational provision, they have not necessarily resulted in major changes at classroom level, with some teachers still applying the same pedagogical practices they used a decade ago.

The results of schools' and teachers' non-adaptation to policy changes is evident in the findings from a number of studies that have shown the extent to which South African learners are struggling in their development of reading literacy. In the next chapter, Chapter Three, key findings from these studies will be presented, together with considerations of the school and classroom level factors that may play a role in learners' achievement of reading literacy as part of a literature review.

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