

CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 ORIENTATION

The findings of the PIRLS 2006 highlighted concerns about support for and the quality of reading literacy teaching in South African primary schools (Howie *et al.*, 2007). In South Africa there is a dearth of research outlining schooling conditions for literacy development and primary school teachers' reading literacy teaching practices especially in the Intermediate Phase. The aim of this study was to explore schooling conditions and teaching practices for the implementation of the curriculum for Grade 4 learners' reading literacy development across of range of education contexts. In this chapter, a summary of the research process undertaken to answer the research questions posed in pursuit of this aim is firstly provided (10.2). Secondly, the main research findings from the two phases of the research are synthesised and deliberated to answer the overall research question for the study (10.3). Thirdly, the research methodology and conceptual framework are reflected on (10.4). Finally, recommendations for further research, policy and practice are provided (10.5).

10.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS UNDERTAKEN

In this section a brief overview of the research design implemented (10.2.1) and summations of both the phase one (10.2.2) and phase two (10.2.3) research methods employed for the study are provided.

10.2.1 Overview of research design implemented

This study comprised secondary analyses of survey data and related case studies using a partially mixed sequential equal status mixed methods research design (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2005). The two research sub-questions used to answer the overall research question for the study each manifested at two phases of the research.

These sub-questions were:

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

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

The two phases of the research addressing these research sub-questions are summarised in more detail in the next two sub-sections.

10.2.2 Summary of the phase one research process

To measure trends and collect baseline information about key factors related to learners' home and school environments, cross-sectional structured survey questionnaires were collected from learners, parents, teachers and school principals as part of the PIRLS 2006 (Howie *et al.*, 2007). For this phase specifically, the teacher and school survey data were used to describe and compare schooling conditions and classroom reading literacy teaching practices via the reclassification of the PIRLS 2006 sample according to class mean performance on the four PIRLS international benchmarks and South African benchmarks generated according to EFL and EAL classroom samples. The teacher questionnaire sought information about the structure and content of reading instruction in the classroom as well as the school as a whole. Information about teachers' experience and preparation to teach reading at Grade 4 level was also sought (Kennedy, 2007). In cognisance of the role of school context, selected items concerning school demographics, resources, school reading curriculum and instructional policies from the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire were also included for analysis (Kennedy, 2007).

The PIRLS 2006 three-stage stratified cluster sample of schools, Grade 4 learners and teachers were included in the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 data. For this research, the realised sample of schools for PIRLS 2006 was reclassified according to the mean PIRLS 2006 achievement performance of each school's sampled Grade 4 class of learners ($n = 14\ 299$) aligned to the PIRLS international benchmarks and school language profiles (EFL or EAL). When the sample was reclassified it became evident that 70% (5.3) of learners tested in English were in EFL classes where the class average was below the PIRLS international benchmarks, with only 11% (4.3) of learners in EFL classes where the class average was at the *Low international benchmark* (400), 13% (5.0) of EFL learners in classes

where their mean class performance reached the *Intermediate international benchmark* (475), and six percent (3.9) in EFL classes with an average aligned with the *High international benchmark* (550). No EFL learners were in classes with a mean performance aligned with the *Advanced international benchmark* (525). All learners tested in an African language were in EAL classes where the average class achievement was below the *Low international benchmark*.

For further analytical purposes, it was thus necessary to create new benchmarks to allow for greater insight into group variations between classes, especially those with EAL learner cohorts. South African benchmarks of 175 and 325 were chosen for further analysis. The majority of the learners that did not reach the PIRLS international benchmarks were in classes with an average achievement score at South African Benchmark 175, with 59% (4.1) of the EAL and 25% (7.0) of the EFL learners represented at this benchmark. About 2 percent (1.2) of learners in EAL classes were represented at Benchmark 325, the highest achieving EAL classes in South Africa according to class average, making this benchmark an extremely important analytical choice for this research. Also, nearly as many EFL learners (23%, 6.4) were in classes reaching Benchmark 325 as those EFL learners in classes reaching Benchmark 175 (25%, 7.0).

Using these two South African benchmarks of 175 and 325 and the PIRLS 2006 *Low* (400), *Intermediate* (475) and *High* (550) International benchmarks, descriptive analysis of the selected items from the PIRLS 2006 school and teacher questionnaires took place within and across the seven benchmark and language reclassification sub-samples (EAL 175, EFL 175, EAL 325, EFL 325, EFL 400, EFL 475 and EFL 550) generated.

10.2.3 Summary of the phase two research process

Using maximum variation sampling, collective case studies (Stake, 1995) of schools and their Grade 4 teachers were undertaken during phase two of the research. Schools and Grade 4 classes that were reclassified according to class language profiles and the average performance of their learners on the benchmarks for the first phase of the research provided the sampling frame for purposive sampling strategies used in the second phase. Six schools with a mean class benchmark achievement at EFL 550, EFL 475, EFL 400, EFL 325, and EAL 175 and one Grade 4 teacher from each school participated.

For each case, PIRLS 2006 school and teacher questionnaire data, an Opportunity-To-Learn questionnaire, photographs and learner workbooks were collected. Classroom observations

of a reading comprehension lesson were undertaken at each Grade 4 class and semi-structured interviews with the teacher and HoD for Language at Grade 4 were conducted. Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) techniques were used to assist in the analysis of the data collected for this phase of the research.

10.3 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section the phase one and phase two findings for each of the research sub-questions are integrated and summarised⁶⁵ to answer the main research question, which is:

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

Although this research question reflects the conceptual linkages made between schooling conditions and teaching practices (see Chapter Four), findings for each are first summarised separately. In sub-section 10.3.1, schooling conditions that may enable or impede classroom curriculum implementation are summarised (see Chapters Six and Seven). In sub-section 10.3.2, teaching practices that may enable or impede curriculum implementation are contemplated (see Chapters Eight and Nine). In sub-section 10.3.3 the main findings from each are then discussed to answer the overall question.

10.3.1 The influence of schooling conditions on the implementation of the curriculum for Grade 4 reading literacy development

In Chapter Four, the influence of the meso school level on classroom teaching practices was conceptualised. To recap, decisions made at this level are made by school-based role-players, such as school management and via departmental, grade level and general staff meetings (Klein, 1991) to institute school level goals for curriculum implementation. For this research it was hypothesised that these goals would have to be formulated on the basis of school course offerings and instructional support functions as determined at the macro level, and considerations of the factors that contribute to or impede school effectiveness in reading instruction at the school site. Factors impacting school effectiveness in reading instruction include: teacher quality; school management characteristics; location of the school; materials

⁶⁵ For summary purposes, the EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325 and EAL 325 schooling contexts are referred to as *low-performing schools*, the EFL 475 and EFL 550 contexts as *high-performing schools* with the EFL 400 contexts still described as *EFL 400 schools* as sometimes they shared the characteristics of low-performing schools and sometimes they had more in common with the high benchmark schools.

and resources available and the involvement of the community particularly parents in the school (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). It was further hypothesised that learner characteristics impact school effectiveness in reading instruction. Another hypothesis of this study was that school goals lead to determination of instructional support availability to staff, learner grouping, time allocation for learning, location of learning and, certainly, the setting of school curricular aims and objectives and the content of learning. The organisation and management of learning support availability to teachers was also an addition to the model at this level. All of these meso level components together constitute the professional organisation and environment of the school.

In this sub-section, findings on school, learner and parent characteristics are considered (10.3.1.1) followed by the consideration of organisational attributes in schools impacting Grade 4 reading literacy curriculum implementation (10.3.1.2). Thereafter, school resource management and adequacy are reviewed (10.3.1.3). Lastly, perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation are also briefly discussed (10.3.1.4).

10.3.1.1 *School, learner and parent characteristic influences*

- School characteristics

Learners in the low-performing schools were mostly in rural areas as opposed to the urban and suburban environments of learners in the high-performing schools and EFL 400 schools. It was also only for learners at the highest-performing schools where there were high levels of school climate and school safety. Large class sizes of 40 or more learners characterised organisation for learning at EFL 400 and the low-performing schools. At the EFL 400 case study school large class sizes at Grade 4 were being rectified due to recognition of the need to provide more support for learners during this transitional year. For the case studies specifically, there were vast differences apparent in the school fee structures between the highest and lowest performing schools with the latter having poor school fee funding availability and the former having high levels of funding likely impacting resource availability and allocation.

- Learner characteristics

With the exception of only the high-performing schools, most learners were in schooling environments which had much learner diversity in terms of SES and language. In low-performing schools, the majority of learners were from economically disadvantaged homes.

Even for the highest percentages of learners in EFL 400 schools, more than half were from disadvantaged homes. In comparison, at high-performing schools there were only negligible numbers of learners from a disadvantaged background. This SES variation between high and low performing schools was evidenced for the case study schools too.

For the majority of learners in the low-performing EFL schools and at EFL 400, more than half were tested in English as their second language. In comparison, the majority of the learners in low-performing EAL schools were tested in their home language suggesting reasons other than LoLT for their poor performance. For the high-performing schools it was only at EFL 550 that there was a very high level of congruence between reports of learners' home language and language of testing.

The LoLT was not an issue for the high-performing case study schools either with EAL learners attending the EFL 475 school only struggling with low frequency words and the nuances of the language likely as a result of English exposure at home and in preschool. The LoLT was more problematic at EFL 400 and low-performing case study schools. Issues at the EFL 400 school included: learner disinterest in English, a lack of CALP in the language and learners with limited English proficiency enrolling at the school after the Foundation Phase. Code-switching to a vernacular was apparent at a low-achieving EAL and an EFL medium school, suggesting that learners had not yet achieved optimal BICS in English regardless of differences in instructional exposure to the language as a result of the LoLT in the Foundation Phase. First exposure to English language teaching at Grade 3 was a major problem for learners at the EAL 175 school.

The highest percentages of learners across benchmarks had teachers who reported that their reading levels were *average* which is incongruent with achievement levels at the low-performing schools. Regardless of their achievement level, some teachers at the case study schools only reported a few learners with reading problems. However, teachers at the case study schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks were specifically concerned about learners' lack of motivation to read, and, indicated that their strong audiovisual-technological orientation could be complicit in this. One teacher blamed what she perceived as the late starting age for schooling in South Africa for learners' lack of reading motivation later in primary school.

Another factor impacting achievement was learners' poor levels of early literacy skills at school entrance. It was only at the EFL 550 benchmark that lack of early literacy skills at school entrance was not a major problem. Generally, most South African learners do not

enter school with adequate preparation for reading literacy, and this may impact negatively on their achievement, as evidenced by these data. For the qualitative findings, in EFL case study schools learner attendance of preschools with English exposure, especially the school's own Grade R, was thought to have a positive impact on learners' language abilities later on in schooling.

- Parental involvement influences

Parental involvement and interest in their children's schooling had a positive influence at the case study schools. However, not all of the schools took active steps to encourage such involvement. It was only at the highest achieving school that there was an active drive with tangible strategies to elicit parental involvement. At the other schools teachers battled to get cooperation from the parents of struggling learners.

10.3.1.2 *School organisational attributes for reading literacy development*

- Planning, coordination and teacher cooperation influences

Although most learners at EFL 400 and the high-performing schools had teachers with formally scheduled time to meet to share or develop instructional materials and approaches weekly, learners at the low-performing schools mostly had teachers with only monthly meetings. The qualitative data mirrored this trend as the high-performing case study schools and the EFL 400 schools were the only ones at which it was clear that formally scheduled planning meetings with a clear purpose took place regularly.

The EFL 400 and EFL 550 schools had better planning and monitoring structures in place than at the other case study schools with high-level involvement of an HoD for these purposes. The EFL 550 school was the only one where it was evident that the principal was also directly involved in strategising reading literacy teaching and learning. Similarly, collegial support for learners' reading literacy development was only apparent at the EFL 550 and EFL 400 schools, with teacher teamwork particularly emphasised at the former. It was less clear how planning took place at the other schools with no planning taking place at the lowest performing EAL school and apparent teacher resentment of HoD monitoring attempts.

High percentages of learners across the achievement benchmarks were in schools which did not have a *written statement of the reading curriculum to be taught at the school*. Although formal strategy documents were lacking for many learners in schools at each of the class

benchmarks, the majority were in schools which had *informal initiatives to encourage learners to read*. Such informal initiatives were only evident in practice for the EFL 400 and EFL 550 case study schools.

Very high percentages of learners across the benchmarks were in schools which had their own *guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers*, although it was still only at the EFL benchmarks, where all learners were in schools with such guidelines in place. The implementation of such guidelines was however not evident at the EFL 475 and lower case study schools. At the three schools reaching the international benchmarks the need for such coordination was being grappled with but it was only the EFL 550 school that had an active strategy for coordination across each grade and phase in place.

- Teacher development opportunity influences

It was only at the EFL 550 benchmark that all learners were in schools that had school-based programmes for teachers geared towards the improvement of reading. At three of the low performance benchmarks, small majorities of learners were in schools which had such programmes for their teachers. All of the learners in schools across the benchmarks had teachers with opportunities to attend short courses, workshops and seminars and in-service training programmes. From the qualitative findings, it seemed that the EFL 400 and 550 case study schools were proactive in organising CPTD for teachers whereas at the EFL 475 school lack of time, finances and geographical access limited CPTD.

- Language teaching time allocation

Learners at EFL 400 followed by learners at EFL 550 had the most mean time allocated for language instruction. Teachers at four case study schools complained that the time allocation was not enough for curriculum implementation. Learners with difficulties and teacher administration could impact negatively on the time available.

10.3.1.3 *School resource availability, adequacy and management*

- School library availability and use

Most learners were in schools which had a school library at EFL 325, EFL 400 and at the high performance benchmarks. In contrast, most of the learners in the other low-performing schools did not have a school library. For those learners in schools with a library, only

learners at the high-performing schools had access to reasonable amounts of *book titles and magazine or periodical titles*.

Only those case study schools reaching the international benchmarks had well-managed and well-resourced libraries featuring recent reading materials. Learners had access to the library at break or after school and learners at the two high-performing schools had a formally scheduled weekly library period.

- Specific resource shortages and inadequacies

Shortages of and inadequacies in qualified teaching staff were not an issue at the high-performing schools whereas such shortages or inadequacies impacted most learners in schools to small or large extents at EFL 400 and lower. Shortages of and inadequacies in teachers with a specialisation in reading were not an issue in schools reaching the international benchmarks and at EFL 325 but there were clearly still some low-performing schools where this was an issue that impacted the teaching and learning of reading. Most learners in schools reaching the international benchmarks were only negatively affected a little by shortage or inadequacy of second language teachers, likely not English teachers. Such shortage of or inadequacies in second language teachers were more prominent at the low-performing schools where the highest percentages were reportedly affected some or a lot by a shortage of or inadequacy in second language teaching staff.

- Classroom reading resource availability and management

It was only for the high-performing schools that shortages or inadequacies in instructional materials were not at all an issue. At EFL 400 and lower, shortages or inadequacies in instructional materials had a negative impact on most learners. At the case study schools differences in reading resource availability and management between the three schools reaching the international benchmarks and those that did not were also apparent. At the three schools, resource allocation was either not a problem or required careful management or budgeting due to government budget cuts. The EFL 550 school appeared to be the only one which monitored effectiveness of reading programmes and materials purchased. Specific problem areas in terms of materials allocation at the low-performing case study schools were lack of budget for materials and lack of information or support from management to acquire them.

Other salient issues regarding reading resources were: a lack of appropriate information and samples from publishers to help make informed decisions about purchases; a need for differentiated materials at each grade due to mixed ability learner groupings; and the need for affordable reading series. At the low-performing case study schools poor print environments were observed in the Grade 4 classrooms. At the EFL 400 and EFL 550 case study schools the creation of print rich classes with reading corners were school policy although the EFL 550 Grade 4 classroom was superior in this regard. The discrepancy between literate classroom environments at Grade 3 and Grade 4 were also noticeable at some of the case study schools with Grade 3 classes being much better.

- Learning support resource influences

The vast majority of learners at EFL 400 schools and the low performance benchmarks had no access to any reading specialists to support them with reading difficulties. It was only at the high-performing benchmarks that more learners had some form of access to onsite learning support. Moreover, at most of the case study schools, learners experiencing difficulties were reliant on teacher and/or parental assistance. Foundation Phase materials were a common source used for remediation. Only the highest performing school had ample learning support resource access and structures in place. At the next highest performing school, although a remedial teacher was available onsite to work with learners this was not always optimal. At the EFL 400 school teachers consulted with other teachers who had training in remedial education. Access to external support professionals was not ideal at the EFL 475 case study school and lower. Support from DoE appointed psychologists was specifically problematic at three of the schools as these learning support professionals visited infrequently and did not have contact with the teachers to support them in their teaching.

In deliberation of this lack of learning support resources, it is important to take into consideration the EFL 400 and EFL 475 teachers' concerns about mixed ability grouping of learners. Such grouping was experienced as stressful for these teachers who thought that it had a negative impact on learners in realising their potentials as those requiring extension were held back, and those with difficulties were left out. Teachers could be forced to teach to the middle range of the class and the pace of curriculum implementation could be negatively affected. The requirement to provide proof of interventions for learners with special educational needs to the DoE could also be overwhelming for classroom practice.

10.3.1.4 *The perceived curriculum at school level*

Barriers to optimal implementation of the curriculum at the case study schools were identified as:

- a lack of adequate support from DoE officials or interference of district office demands on teaching and learning;
- the impact of administrative tasks on teaching time;
- implementation backlogs caused by slow curriculum implementation in the Foundation Phase and learner needs dictating the pace of implementation;
- vague and non-user friendly curriculum documents with complex terminology;
- a curriculum requiring much expertise and experience to interpret;
- a lack of guidelines to ascertain whether learners were progressing at an acceptable level leading to a lack of consistency in implementation across schools;
- a resource-dependent curriculum for resource-deprived schools;
- too much focus on oral work (listening and speaking) instead of a balanced approach to implementation; and
- teachers' lack of integration of multiple Assessment Standards into single lessons.

The EFL 550 and the EFL 400 case study schools had the most comprehensive strategies of curricular alignment and coverage not evidenced at the other schools. The two high-performing schools deemed operationalisation of the curriculum to specific goals necessary. At these two schools and another, teachers felt it necessary to combine traditional approaches to teaching reading literacy with curricular approaches.

10.3.2 The influence of teaching practices on curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy development

For the conceptual framework it was further argued that, within the context of meso level school goals and the professional organisation and environment of the school, the curriculum is implemented by the teacher in the micro level classroom. Decisions made at higher levels are channelled through the teacher who often determines what decisions are actually implemented (Klein, 1991). Teacher characteristics such as background, subject matter orientation, and pedagogical beliefs impact teachers' content goals (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996). For this research, it was further argued that teachers' grasp of curricular materials and expectations of learners also play a role in this goal-setting. In connection to subject matter orientation and pedagogical beliefs, it was further hypothesised that the types of framework

teachers have for deciding what and how to teach reading (a methods, material or literacy framework) (Leu & Kinzer, 2003) impact their content goals for teaching reading literacy as well. Teachers' content goals, namely the perceived curriculum (Van den Akker, 2003), are then enacted in the classroom leading to the operational level of decision-making. The operational level is the interactive level or the way in which the curriculum unfolds in the classroom due to the engagement of the teacher and learners with the content to be learned (Klein, 1991). It would appear that the decisions teachers make about a plan for learning then create the nature of Opportunities-To-Learn in the classroom. Therefore, teachers interpret the rationale, aims and objectives, content, time, location, and grouping components of the curriculum to formulate their own roles in teaching as well as learning activities and assessment. Moreover, teachers' planning should be based on their use of the materials and resources available to them at the school and in consideration of the characteristics of the learners in their classes.

In this sub-section, findings on teacher background, training and preparation are summarised (10.3.2.1) followed by the summary of findings on the availability and use of reading resources by teachers (10.3.2.2). Teaching goals and instructional practices for teaching reading literacy are then considered (10.3.2.3). Finally, a synopsis of homework and assessment practices is provided (10.3.2.4).

10.3.2.1 *Teacher background, training and preparation*

Most teachers at each of the benchmarks were aged between 30 and 59 years. The teachers had a high mean number of years teaching altogether and teaching at Grade 4 specifically although the teachers had less average years of Grade 4 teaching experience in comparison to their average number of overall years in the profession. Teachers participating in the case studies were qualified, and, judging by their age ranges and reported years of teaching, each had much experience thus sharing characteristics of most teachers for the quantitative findings.

The highest percentages of learners at most of the benchmarks were taught by teachers who had completed *college or a post Matric certificate*. At the two high-performing benchmarks, about half of the learners had teachers who had *finished a postgraduate degree* whereas at EFL 400 and lower much less had teachers with such a qualification. Most learners at EFL 550 were taught by teachers with a 4-year college diploma or JPTC. The highest percentage of learners at the low-performing schools and a high percentage of learners at EFL 400 were taught by teachers with a 3-year college diploma. EFL 475 stood out from the other

benchmarks with the highest percentages of learners taught by teachers with a PGCE as did EAL 325, the highest performing EAL learners, where were taught by teachers with an ACE.

For teachers at the low-performing schools a main focus of their training was on addressing learning diversity such as remedial reading, special education, second language learning, children's language development and reading theory. Although remedial reading and special education were linked to these other diversity foci which were areas of emphasis for training, neither of these focus areas received any emphasis. Secondary focus was placed on reading pedagogy and language from a traditional subject matter orientation.

10.3.2.2 *Availability and use of reading resources by teachers*

- Classroom libraries and reading corners

Nearly all of the Grade 4 learners at the PIRLS 2006 international benchmark schools were in classes with a library. At most of the low-performing schools, learners did not have access to a classroom library. With the exception of the two EAL class average benchmarks, there appeared to be sufficient mean numbers of books with different titles in the classes which did have libraries at the rest of the schools. EFL 550 learners had the highest mean number of magazine titles available to them. It did seem that if a classroom library was available in the classroom then it was a frequently utilised resource, and, with the exception of learners at EFL 325 and EFL 400, most learners were able to take books home from the class library. Most learners at the international benchmarks had access to another library outside the classroom once or twice a week. In stark contrast, the highest percentages of learners at the low-performance benchmarks did not have access to a library outside of the classroom.

- Classroom reading materials

Textbooks, reading series and worksheets or workbooks were used frequently for instruction across the benchmarks whilst newspapers and magazines featured infrequently at each. It was only at the high-performing schools that a variety of children's books were used daily for most learners whereas at EFL 400 and lower exposure was infrequent. Significant differences were revealed through significance testing between benchmarks. Confirming these descriptive trends, a factor analysis of the materials used for reading instruction at the low-performing schools revealed that children's books, materials from other subjects and materials written by learners linked together as infrequently used instructional materials along with technology for reading instruction in EAL medium schools. Core materials at EAL

schools included textbooks, workbooks and worksheets as well as newspapers and magazines. At EFL medium low-performing schools, reading series, workbooks or worksheets and children's newspapers or magazines were core materials, and, materials from other subjects, technology for reading instruction and materials written by learners were infrequent reading materials used for instruction. The majority of learners across the benchmarks used fiction and non-fiction materials at least weekly. At all of the benchmarks except EFL 550, the majority of teachers reported using the same materials with learners at different reading levels working at different speeds. Teachers of the majority at EFL 550 reported using different materials with learners at different reading levels.

At the high-performing case study schools and EFL 400, there were no problems with access to reading materials with teachers using reading series and set work novels for instruction. It was only at the two high-performing schools that the use of multiple text types was evident. In contrast, the reading materials used at the low-performing schools were less than optimal with either no materials, no variety of materials, or lack of enough materials for all learners being problems observed. Reading materials for EAL learners in the EFL 400 school were further experienced as not being challenging enough for the learners.

10.3.2.3 *Teaching goals and instructional practices for teaching reading literacy*

- Teaching goals

Five overall teaching goals were identified in the analysis of each of the teacher's reading literacy teaching goals at the case study schools. These were: improving learners' spoken English; encouraging positive emotional responses to reading; learners' comprehension development; learners' reading skill development; and vocabulary development. Only teachers at the high-performing schools and EFL 400 had a goal to work on specific comprehension strategies with their learners.

- Typical language activities

Insights into overall language teaching strategies were gleaned from the case study data. There was much diversity in the teachers' approaches to language teaching for their Grade 4 learners. Differing markedly from the other schools, the highest performing school employed a variety of approaches, contextual teaching and was the only school at which daily reading occurred. At most of the other schools more rigid approaches were employed, with certain activities taking place on certain days or during the course of a specific time for lesson

implementation. Teachers mostly had a reading lesson and built other activities such as comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and writing around this reading lesson. Theme-based teaching with cross-curricular integration goals was evident. Specific approaches used at each school were however slightly different.

Much more work output was evident in the learner workbooks at the case study schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks. Much more variety was evident in the EFL 400 and EFL 550 workbooks as well as use of worksheets and texts from multiple sources. The EFL 550 workbook specifically displayed creativity and comprehensive curriculum coverage while the EFL 475 workbook had much reinforcement and repetition. The workbooks of the learners at the low-performing schools were characterised by short written exercises based on rote-principles, minimal work output and little evidence of written comprehension activities. The activities in the books were much shorter and less cognitively engaging or challenging for the learners.

- Reading instruction activities
- *Reading instruction time allocation*

Mean time allocation for reading instruction and/or activities including cross-curricular reading ranged from 3 hours to 9 hours and 24 minutes across the benchmarks. The majority of learners had some of this time explicitly appointed to formal reading instruction. Mean time allocation for formal reading instruction at each of the benchmarks ranged between 1 hour 18 minutes and 2 hours 48 minutes. Less time was allocated to formal reading instruction at the two high-performance benchmarks than to such instruction at the other benchmarks perhaps suggesting less of a need for such instruction at these benchmarks.

Whereas most learners at the international benchmarks had reading instruction or activities every day, there was variation in the frequency of reading instruction at the low-performing schools. At the EFL 325 and EAL 325 schools many had reading instruction every day but still many others did not. At the benchmark 175 schools most only had reading instruction or activities either *three or four days a week* or *fewer than three days a week*. The case study schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks had the most time allocation for reading instruction during a week with up to two hours at each school.

- *Reading instruction activities*

Vocabulary and decoding skill development were core features of instruction at the low-performing schools. In EFL medium classrooms at these low-performance benchmarks these activities also featured with independent reading activities as a core focus for instruction. Vocabulary development coupled with independent reading activities were core instructional practices at the high-performing schools. Notably, the teaching of strategies for decoding sounds and words was an infrequent feature of reading instruction activities at the high-performance benchmarks. Reading aloud activities and other combinations of silent and/or independent reading activities played secondary roles to the core activities across the benchmarks considered. Teaching or modelling different reading strategies did not play any major complementary role in reading instruction teaching at any of the benchmarks which may be an oversight for reading instruction at grade 4.

Whole class grouping and same-ability grouping for reading instruction was generally used frequently across the benchmarks. Although not a feature at the two highest benchmarks, mixed-ability grouping for reading instruction appeared to be more prominent than same-ability grouping for instruction at EFL 400 and lower. Individualised instruction for reading sometimes occurred for the majority at the PIRLS international benchmarks. In contrast, most learners at low-performing schools always or almost always received such instruction.

Case study school teachers used combinations of reading aloud, silent reading and paired reading. The teacher at the lowest performing school still used a phonics approach for the learners who had just started to read in English. A difficulty for one teacher was to get all learners to read aloud due to large class sizes. The highest performing school was the only one where the teacher had a number of other strategies for reading instruction including computer software, monitoring and increasing reading speed, flash reading for word recognition and 30 minutes of formal reading instruction a week during which reading strategies were taught.

- Reading comprehension development

- *Reading comprehension skills and strategies*

With the exception of making predictions, making generalisations and drawing inferences and describing style or structure of texts, frequent teaching of the majority of the skills and strategies for comprehension development were reported across the benchmarks. Frequent

activities included: getting learners to identify the main ideas of what they had read, explaining or supporting learners' understanding of what they had read and getting learners to compare what they had read with their own experiences. Factor analyses further revealed that for the low-performing EFL schools and high-performing schools identifying the main ideas, explaining or supporting understanding, making predictions, making generalisations and drawing inferences, and describing the style or structure of the text were core reading comprehension skills and strategies taught. Comparing reading with other things read and comparing reading with experiences played a secondary role at each. Frequent post-reading activities across the benchmarks were: answering questions in workbooks or on a worksheet; writing something about or in response to reading; and answering oral questions and providing oral summaries of reading.

For the case studies, the EFL 550 teacher reported more strategies to improve learners' reading comprehension than teachers at the other schools. Strategies used for comprehension were: vocabulary extension; grammar inclusions; visual literacy; pictorial sequencing; consolidation of characters, plot, setting in mind maps; question formulation with key words; recognition of multiple perspectives and personal opinion; and colour coding. The school was the only one where theoretical models of comprehension were used to guide instructional activities. Comprehension instruction at the other schools was less dynamic. At the EFL 475 school, most comprehension activities were centred on a literature study for the learners' set work novel. Issues noted at the low-performing case study schools were: too much focus on oral comprehension to the detriment of written comprehension; not enough comprehension activities; and an apparent lack of understanding of reading comprehension skills and strategies.

- *Comprehension exercise output in the learner workbooks*

The high-performing case study schools and EFL 400 had the most written comprehension exercises evident in their learners' workbooks whilst the lowest-performing schools had the least. The comprehensions evident for the international benchmark case study schools showed that the learners had exposure to more text types and questions requiring information retrieval, inference and interpretation whereas comprehensions at the low-performing schools focused mostly on information retrieval questions only.

- *Reading comprehension lesson observation*

Although there were varying degrees of pedagogical expertise displayed by each teacher, the overall approaches to the comprehension lesson observed at each of the case study school were similar. Some form of reading of the text would take place followed by the answering of reading comprehension questions. At most of the schools vocabulary extension was included either prior to or during reading. At the EFL 400 school and one of the EFL 325 schools, the vocabulary extension took up the most teaching time for the lesson likely as the learners were second language learners.

The lesson at the highest performing case study school was superior to those of the other schools. In the lesson, the teacher was able to integrate more activities in less time than at the other schools. The teacher made the most use of prior-reading activities, including scene-setting, vocabulary extension with language structure and use, and a visual literacy activity invoking higher order thinking. Multiple reading strategies involved all of the learners, as they silently read a de-contextualised paragraph, read aloud as a class, or the teacher read to them and asked them to predict what would happen next in the story. Moreover, the post-reading comprehension exercise was the most strategically organised. Providing much scaffolding, the teacher read through the questions, discussed the answering requirements, got the learners to highlight key words in the questions and read the passage to the learners again so that they could look for answers before writing them.

Most of the teachers at the other schools did not make optimal use of strategies to elicit learner participation or comprehension prior to reading. Reading was either teacher-centred or only involved a few learners in reading aloud. Post-reading activities mostly involved discussion in which not all of the teachers probed for further meaning and answering of questions.

The text choices for the lessons at most schools except the lowest performing school were appropriate for Grade 4 learners. However, the text choice at the lowest performing school was very short and simplistic. The learners also had the least number of questions to answer, requiring information retrieval and mostly one-word responses.

10.3.2.4 *Homework and assessment*

- Homework

Most learners at the low-performing schools had far less homework for reading assigned than their peers in classes with average performance levels at the international benchmarks. Most of the learners at the all of the benchmarks except EFL 175 and EFL 550 had a *16-30 minute* time allocation when reading was assigned for homework for any subject. As gleaned from the case studies, problems in issuing homework to learners included: illiterate parents, lack of take-home reading materials and reliance on parents to make sure homework was done. The highest performing school was the only one that took proactive steps to encourage parents to interact with their children for reading homework and gave the learners activities linked to their homework to make sure it was done.

- Assessment

The main monitoring sources at each of the class average benchmarks were teachers' use of their own professional judgement and classroom tests. Diagnostic testing was less prominent but still received some emphasis for high percentages of learners at each of the benchmarks. The use of national or regional achievement tests did not feature as a monitoring source for most learners across the benchmarks. The factor analysis of frequency of assessment practices for learners' reading performance revealed two main foci across the benchmarks. Verbal assessment activities were the central focus for reading assessment at most of the benchmarks with less emphasis given to written assessment tasks.

10.3.3 Main conclusions for the study

Differences in schooling conditions and teaching practices across the PIRLS benchmark achievement spectrum were generally aligned to the differences between advantaged, high-achieving schools and disadvantaged, low-achieving schools. The findings for this study provide insights into the high levels of between school inequalities in the South African education system which are so marked that test scores typically reveal a bi-modal distribution in which two sub-populations appear to behave differently (Taylor, Fleisch & Schindler, 2008). The bi-modal distribution of achievement wherein the majority of low-achieving learners are from disadvantaged backgrounds and attend poorly resourced schools whereas in contrast those learners with higher achievement are likely to be in well-resourced schools (Fleisch, 2008; Howie, 2002) was thus evidenced.

The findings further provide empirical insights into possible school and classroom level reasons for this achievement gap evident between Grade 4 learners in schools reaching the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks and those that did not. Insights regarding the main conclusions for schooling conditions that either enhance or impede curriculum implementation for reading literacy development at Grade 4 are discussed in 10.3.3.1 whilst teaching practices are contemplated in 10.3.3.2.

10.3.3.1 *Schooling conditions*

In a DoE task team review report about the implementation of the overall school curriculum published in October 2009 following data collection for this study, the authors' stress that "... the conditions under which teachers work is central to their ability to enact the curriculum... without addressing some of these issues [conditions], it is both unlikely, and unfair, to expect teachers to be able to implement the curriculum as intended" (DoE, 2009a, p.58). Schooling condition problems noted in the report included: management of the curriculum at school level; role specification for curriculum implementation at managerial level; overcrowding in classrooms; and the issue of lack of support for the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties in mainstream⁶⁶ classes (DoE, 2009a). These problems are similar to some of the school-level impediments to curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy development found for this study and thus, in some instances, the findings of the report are considered together with the findings for this study especially as the report findings appear to form the basis of many planned curricular changes (see Motshekga, 2010). Each of the findings are reflective of some of the school effectiveness attributes considered in Chapter Four, which Postlethwaite and Ross (1992) note as factors impacting school effectiveness in reading instruction such as: school management characteristics; location of the school; materials and resources that are available; and the involvement of the community particularly parents in the school.

⁶⁶ This implicit reference to mainstreaming as equivalent to inclusion is in itself inaccurate. Inclusion is not the same as mainstreaming. Whilst mainstreaming involves placing learners with special needs or disabilities in the same environment as those learners in the general education classroom for all or part of the school day (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000), inclusion is not just another form of special education (Booth & Ainscow, 1998). Inclusive education practices are those educational practices which are responsive to the diverse requirements of all learners (Naicker, 1999) regardless of their learning needs and a learner-centred approach to education is envisaged (DoE, 2001).

- **Main conclusion 1: *Low-performing schools in the PIRLS 2006 reflect disadvantaged schooling conditions.***

In contrast to high-performing schools, low-performing PIRLS 2006 schools were characterised by lower levels of school climate and school safety (see sub-sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.3), the probability of less school fee funds availability (7.2) and the strong likelihood of a rural location for learning (6.2.1). These school characteristics confirm one of the reasons Postlethwaite and Ross (1992) give for variation in learner achievement across different schools which is whether or not schools are located in privileged areas. Rural school settings in South Africa specifically present many educational challenges. Specific issues that affect the quality of rural education are the curriculum; teaching and learning resources; teacher shortages; and approaches to teaching and learning. External factors such as poor infrastructure; hungry learners; unemployed parents; and lack of parental involvement in the education of their children also play a role (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).

Only the two highest performance benchmarks had schools with minimal numbers of learners impacted by low SES status (6.4.1). Most schools were also characterised by large class sizes of 40 or more learners with up to an average of 51 learners at the EFL 175 benchmark (8.3.1). Moreover, the higher the mean class size apparent, the lower the class average achievement in the PIRLS. For the PIRLS main study, whilst the international average class size was 24 (0.1) learners, South Africa had a mean class size of 42 learners (0.8), which was also the highest mean of all the participating countries (Mullis *et al.*, 2007).

Not all of the case study schools took steps to encourage parental involvement meaning that parental partnership in their child's reading literacy development is not promoted (7.3.2). This factor is however fundamental in effective schools of reading literacy (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Sailors *et al.*, 2007; Taylor, 2008).

- **Main conclusion 2: *South African primary schools lack effective managerial and monitoring structures to promote school wide literacy development.***

The findings for this study confirm Klein's (1991) argument that significant curriculum development is not often undertaken at the school level although it is an essential focus for school improvement. This is based on the lack of planning and organisation for the implementation of the curriculum for reading literacy development evident at the low-performing schools. To elaborate, formal planning meetings for curriculum implementation

were generally more infrequent at low-performing schools (6.3.1) with the possibility of a lack of clear purpose in their execution (7.5.2). As suggested by the case studies, there may also be less or no involvement of school management in curriculum implementation at low-performing schools (7.5.2). High-performing schools may have more active involvement of an HoD or subject area leader who assists in coordinating learning across the grade or phase, helps to plan and monitor curriculum implementation or may even have the involvement of a principal who participates in curriculum implementation initiatives (7.5.1-7.5.5). As argued in the DoE's (2009a) task team review report, school management in South African schools may lack the capacity to mediate the curriculum so as to systematise its administrative procedures and interpret curriculum documents for classroom implementation. Principals may also not regard curriculum management as their key responsibility. Moreover, HoDs may not be clear on what their roles and responsibilities are (DoE, 2009a).

The conclusion is also based on the high percentages of learners in schools across the achievement spectrum that did not have a written statement of the reading curriculum to be taught (6.3.2). In a country where there is such a problem with children's literacy development, it is unfathomable that so many learners are in schools without a documented school-based literacy development strategy. This can perhaps be interpreted as a lack of operationalisation of the intended curriculum at school level. This then raises a question as to the availability and/or quality of school goals set for the teaching of reading.

The conclusion is also based on the possibility of a lack of coordination of reading instruction across teachers in schools. Although high percentages of learners were in schools across the benchmarks which had their own guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers (6.3.2), given the lack of planning meetings and a lack of a written statement on the reading curriculum to be taught, one has to query this finding. This is especially as such coordination of reading instruction across grades and phases was only evident at the highest performing case study school and HoDs at the two other PIRLS international benchmark schools acknowledged that their schools were only beginning to grapple with the need for such coordination (7.5.2). A lack of coordination and planning at school level could be a factor in reported curriculum implementation lags. The task team review report (DoE, 2009a) did highlight problems with phase and grade transition in South African schools. Emphasis was placed on problems of an overload of subjects in the Intermediate Phase. Moreover, concerns were raised about the switch of LoLT to English at Grade 4. The reduction of subjects in the Intermediate Phase and stressing the importance of EAL instruction from Grade 1 were recommendations (DoE, 2009a). Nowhere in the report is there any reference to the need to coordinate instructional goals and targets between these

grades and the primary school phases to ensure continuity, which seems to be a serious oversight.

Another factor is that although the majority of learners were in schools across the benchmarks which had an official policy statement for promoting cooperation and collaboration among teachers (6.3.1), this finding is also dubious. That is, if meetings and coordination of schools goals are a measure of cooperation and collaboration amongst teachers at a school then policy alone does not lead to active collegial engagement in that teacher teamwork for learners' reading literacy development was only apparent at two case study schools reaching the international benchmarks (7.5.4).

- **Main conclusion 3: *Learners in low-performing schools have inadequate reading resource access due to lack of funding, ineffective resource management and non-resourcefulness of teachers.***

The findings of this study affirm that schools with higher learner achievement are better equipped than schools with low achievement (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). As Allington and Cunningham (2007) point out, enormous amounts of easy and interesting reading materials are an absolute necessity to developing effective reading strategies, and, a strong, balanced literacy curriculum requires children's access to a large supply of books. They further point out that all school libraries need wonderful school library collections as well as substantial classroom libraries. This is particularly necessary for schools serving many poor children because they have less access to literacy resources outside of school (Allington & Johnston, 2007).

Most learners in low-performing schools for this study did not to have a school library (6.2.4), and, even those that did were likely to have less book titles and magazine or periodical titles than learners in schools at the international benchmarks with libraries (6.2.4). The quantitative data for this study did not address the quality of library materials available or management of libraries but from the qualitative case study data it was apparent that of those schools which had a library, only schools at the international benchmarks were well-resourced, readily accessible to learners and teachers, and well-managed with recent materials (7.4.1). This lack of school library access at low-performing schools was exacerbated by shortages or inadequacies in instructional materials (6.2.5.4) and lack of classroom libraries or reading corners (8.4.1.1; 7.4.2.2). Moreover, it was only at high-performing schools that learners had daily exposure to a variety of children's books. In comparison, a variety of children's books, materials written by learners or from other subjects

were infrequently used materials for reading instruction at the low-performing schools (8.4.2). At the low-performing case study schools poor print environments were observed in the Grade 4 classrooms too (7.4.2.2). At the EFL 400 and EFL 550 case study schools the creation of print rich classes with reading corners were school policy (7.4.2.2). This lack of access to reading materials and poor classroom print environments at low-performing schools amounts to an extremely deprived literate language environment in the majority of South African schools.

Additionally, what was clear was that case study schools reaching the international benchmarks had better financial allocations and managerial support for the purchasing of reading materials. At low-performing schools issues were lack of funds to acquire materials and lack of support from management for making purchases (7.4.2.1). A managerial factor across most schools could be a lack of monitoring of the effectiveness of materials purchased for reading literacy teaching and learning. The DoE task team review (2009a) noted the crucial role of school management including HoDs in the selection and ordering of LTSM and that expertise and responsibility for this task is not clear in many schools. A recent study of the implementation of the Science and Mathematics curriculum in the Further Education and Training band also concluded that teachers do not have the expertise to manage and maintain adequate resources (Howie, van Staden, Draper & Zimmerman, 2010), and, for this study it seems that this may be also be an issue in terms of reading material resource management in primary schools.

In a study of literacy practices in Ugandan primary schools, Muwanga *et al.* (2007) found that there was a widespread lack of commitment, creativity, innovativeness and resourcefulness among head teachers and teachers when it came to reading materials. Although the current South African curriculum calls for use of a diversity of materials (DoE, 2002a), a variety of self-sourced and relatively inexpensive reading materials such as magazine articles, newspapers and recipes which were evident in the workbooks of learners in case study schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks were not evident in the work output in the learner workbooks at low-performing case study schools (9.4.2). It therefore seems a lack of commitment, innovativeness, resourcefulness and creativity could also play a role at school and teacher level in low-performing South African schools.

As suggested by the International Reading Association (2007), effective literacy instruction involves teachers' who can engage learners with instructional materials and other texts within a rich literacy environment that can support teaching. To do this teachers must know and be able to apply strategies to create a high quality classroom environment which includes

attention to children's and young adult literature, commercial reading series, electronic-based information resources, and locally created materials. Teachers must also be able to critically analyse, adapt and use instructional materials for instruction within their particular teaching context (IRA, 2007).

- **Main conclusion 4: *The primary school education system does not cater effectively for the reading literacy development needs of the diverse learners within it.***

The findings affirm that with the exception of only those learners at the highest performing benchmark schools, South African Grade 4 learners are heterogeneous in terms of language backgrounds (6.4.2; 7.3.1) , SES (6.4.1; 7.2), early literacy foundations (6.4.3; 7.3.1.2) and literacy learning needs (7.3.1.1; 7.3.1.3). Schools and teachers have to contend with this diversity and its impact for further development of these learners' reading literacy.

It is further apparent that most schools and teachers must address learners' individual needs within the restrictive parameters of large class sizes (8.3.1) and limited access to support professionals (8.3.2) and support resources to deal with mixed ability learner groupings (8.3.1; 7.3.1.1). This is as the vast majority of learners at EFL 400 schools and those below the international benchmarks had no access to any reading support specialists to support them with learners' reading difficulties. It was only at the high-performing benchmarks that more learners had some form of access to onsite learning support (8.3.2). Moreover, at most of the case study schools, learners experiencing difficulties were reliant on teacher and/or parental assistance and teachers did not have materials specifically for learners experiencing difficulties (7.4.3). Access to external support professionals especially from the DoE was not optimal either due to infrequent contact and no collaboration with teachers (7.4.3). Teachers may also lack adequate training to deal with this diversity in terms of pedagogy (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2009a; 2009b) with procedures for differentiating instruction being particular needs.

In effective schools of reading literacy, interventions are in place to meet the needs of learners experiencing reading difficulties, with special educational needs or who are second language learners. Support programmes are reorganised to connect such support with classroom instruction and teachers, especially by means of collaboration (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Taylor, 2008). Thus, from these findings it is apparent that the South African education system still has a long way to go in reaching its goals of providing equal educational opportunities to all learners (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996a, 1996b; DoE, 2001) via teaching practices and support for learning to meet the diverse learning needs of

all learners. As stated in Chapter One, reading literacy acquisition is a developmental process. Every learner is deemed to be at some place on this non-hierarchical developmental continuum, as informed by previous knowledge and construction of literacy concepts (Lapp *et al.*, 2001). The education system needs to cater for this developmental continuum and its implications for teaching practice.

10.3.3.2 *Teaching practices*

The findings regarding teaching practices by and large revealed deficits or impediments to curriculum implementation for reading literacy development at the low-performing PIRLS 2006 schools and factors that would enhance curriculum implementation at the high-performing schools.

- **Main conclusion 5: Learners in low-performing schools do not have enough opportunities to read**

Although it was difficult to ascertain any meaningful patterns in response distribution regarding overall mean time allocation for language and reading instruction across the class average benchmarks (8.5.1-8.5.2), studies of classroom effectiveness reveal that teachers who allocate more time to reading and language instruction have learners who show the greatest gains in literacy development (Allington & Cunningham, 2007). What is obvious from this study is that whereas most learners at schools reaching the international benchmarks had reading instruction or activities every day, there was variation in the frequency of instruction at the low-performing schools with most learners at the lowest-performing schools not having instruction daily (8.5.2). From the case studies, it seems that there could be a tendency for teachers to conduct one reading lesson a week around which all other language activities are built for the rest of that week (9.4.1).

Perhaps escalating the problem of lack of daily instruction, most learners at the low-performing schools had less homework for reading assigned than their peers in classes at the international benchmarks (8.7.1). Government policies (DoE, 2008b; 2008c) post the PIRLS 2006 learner achievement findings (Howie *et al.*, 2007) advocate daily reading instruction but do not deal with the importance of allocation of reading for homework. It is not clear why struggling learners do not receive daily reading for homework, although this could be due to a lack of take-home reading materials at these low-performing schools, poor parental involvement with homework or teacher non-awareness of the importance of continuing to issue reading for homework at Grade 4. Combined with a lack of school and

classroom library access and teachers who may not expose these learners to a variety of reading materials, this means that the majority of learners do not have enough exposure to reading activities. Moreover, the fact that decoding skill development (8.6.1.1) tended to be core feature of reading instruction activities at the low-performing schools suggests that these learners' had not yet achieved reading fluency making it all the more important for them to have frequent reading opportunities both for fluency and for further vocabulary development given that English was a second language for the vast majority of these learners.

- **Main conclusion 6: Teachers do not maximise opportunities to develop learners' comprehension skills and higher-order thinking and reasoning**

Frequent teaching of most skills and strategies for reading comprehension development were reported across the benchmarks. Making predictions, making generalisations and drawing inferences and describing the style or structure of texts were exceptions (8.6.2.1). However, these exceptions are fundamental to the development of higher-order comprehension skills which are needed to achieve more than just basic literacy involving information retrieval. They are also prerequisites for success in the PIRLS as the assessments require of the learner 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 (Mullis *et al.*, 2006).

It was also telling that only teachers in case study schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks stated that working on specific comprehension strategies was a goal for teaching (9.2.2). As attested to by Gill (2008) in Chapter Three, teaching even one comprehension strategy can improve learners' comprehension. Additionally, the comprehensions evident in those learners' workbooks at the case study schools reaching the international benchmarks showed that they had exposure to questions requiring information retrieval, inference and interpretation and describing text style and structure whereas those at the low-performing schools focused on information retrieval questions only (9.6.2). Furthermore, from the lesson observations it was apparent that teachers tended to ask information retrieval questions during oral questioning and did not try to elicit learners' higher-order thinking and reasoning via their questioning strategies (9.6.3). It is worth taking note again that the teacher at the highest performing case study school reported more strategies to improve learners' reading comprehension than teachers at the other schools, and, the school was the only one where theoretical models of comprehension were used to guide instructional activities (9.6.1).

An HoD at School B noted that there is no direct reference to comprehension in the current curriculum (7.6.1) (DoE, 2002a). Indeed, review of the curriculum in light of this statement confirmed this. Although the ASs refer to using language to think and reason, process information, investigate and explore and think creatively, the language used is vague and nowhere is there any reference to the need to develop comprehension skills and strategies or to explicitly work on developing learners' higher-order thinking and reasoning abilities via clearly stated strategies. Moreover, the Foundations for Learning (DoE, 2008d) milestones for reading at Grade 4 were meant to make it clearer what learners must achieve but again there is little elaboration on what this requires of the teacher for comprehension development.

- **Main conclusion 7: *Teachers do not have adequate guidelines to determine the levels of reading literacy competency their learners should have achieved***

A concern raised by teachers in the case study schools was that the current curriculum (DoE, 2002b) does not provide adequate guidelines to help them to ascertain whether or not their learners are progressing at an acceptable pace (7.6.2). Another problem noted by teachers that may contribute to this is that the current documents are vague, requiring much expertise which not all teachers may have (7.6.2). Teachers' lack of ability to judge whether or not their learners were progressing at an acceptable pace is perhaps revealed in the reports by the majority of teachers that their Grade 4 learners' reading abilities were average or above average (8.3.1), when clearly this was not the case at the low-performing schools. This suggests that teachers had inaccurate perceptions of their learners reading abilities at these lower levels of achievement which would impact the teaching goals they set and the level of cognitive demand placed on learners. This in turn could lead to a curriculum implementation lag (7.6.5) in instances where teachers' misjudge the demands of the curriculum for their learners. In their study of Grade 1 learners' literacy accomplishments (see Chapter Three), Pretorius and Machet (2004b) also found that there was a mismatch between the teachers' perceptions of the reading abilities of their learners, and their actual reading levels as revealed by the formal assessments. The lack of external assessment and national standards were hypothesised as perpetuating the idea that their learners' reading levels were adequate which could be a possible explanation for the findings for this study as well given that national or regional achievement tests did not feature as a monitoring source for most learners across the benchmarks (8.7.2).

- **Main conclusion 8: Learners in low-performing schools do not do enough written work related to language and reading specifically**

Although frequent post-reading activities across the benchmarks reportedly involved answering questions in workbooks or on a worksheet, writing something about or in response to reading and answering oral questions and providing oral summaries of reading (8.6.2.2), written post-reading activities were very rare and of poor educational value in the workbooks of the learners at the low-performing case study schools (9.4.2; 9.6.2). The high-performing case study schools and EFL 400 had the most written comprehension exercises evident in their learners' workbooks whilst the lowest-performing schools had the least (9.6.2). Also, the factor analysis of frequency of assessment practices revealed that verbal assessment tasks were the central focus for reading assessment across the benchmarks with less emphasis given to written assessment tasks (8.7.2). On this basis it seems that learners in low-performing contexts do not get enough opportunities to consolidate their learning via written application. One possibility for the lack of written output at the low-performing schools may be that too much focus is being placed on speaking and listening skills with little transfer to written application, an important factor in achievement throughout the rest of schooling. As the PIRLS assessments are reliant on learners' written responses, lack of written response opportunities could have played a role in the South African learners' achievement.

10.4 RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

In this section reflections on the research methodology used for the study are provided (10.4.1). The conceptual framework used is also reflected upon in light of the findings (10.4.2).

10.4.1 Methodological reflections

In this sub-section, reflections on the research methods used for the study are acknowledged and discussed. In 10.4.1.1, reflections on the phase one research methods are considered, and, in 10.4.1.2, reflections on the phase two methods are contemplated.

10.4.1.1 Phase one of the study

There are many perceived limitations of secondary data analysis as a method (Smith, 2008). Firstly, it often involves the analysis of data that has been collected with a very different purpose in mind. However, for the secondary analysis undertaken for this research, the

purpose was to illuminate the finer nuances present in the primary data with a goal that was not foreign to the goals from which the PIRLS 2006 main study ensued (Howie *et al.*, 2007). Secondly, the secondary analyst can also be very far removed from the source of the data and may be unaware of the context in which the research took place (Smith, 2008). My involvement in the analysis of the data for the PIRLS 2006 main study (Howie *et al.*, 2007) and my use of case studies of participating schools from the main study may have addressed this concern to some extent.

Thirdly, Smith (2008) argues that the use of secondary data in social research is full of errors and there are concerns about the reliability of large scale data for these purposes. With regard to the idea that secondary analysis is wrought with errors and the assumption that other data are error free, Smith counteracts (2008) that, as with all data, whether numeric or otherwise, awareness of its limitations and scepticism about its technical and conceptual basis is essential. The methodological norms for this phase of the research were provided in Chapter Five. Fourthly, it is thought that due to the socially constructed nature of social data, the act of reducing these data to a simple numeric form cannot encapsulate their complexity (Smith, 2008). In relation to the idea that the social world adds complexity to such data, Smith (2008, p.331) contends that secondary data can provide a “window on to the social world” by helping to identify trends and inequities which can be used to guide further inquiry through other methods to explore the issues in a more in-depth manner. Smith (2008) observes that it is the role of the social scientist to engage with the data, understanding its limitations, to help to establish the link between the empirical data, its social context and the theoretical models that might help explain it, all of which are projected outcomes of this research. Another benefit is that secondary data analysis can allow researchers access to data on a scale that they would not have been able to achieve individually (Smith, 2008). As the most complex international comparative study ever undertaken within the scope of international comparative studies (Howie *et al.*, 2007) this is certainly the case with the South African PIRLS 2006 dataset.

A further concern for this research, as raised by Smith (2008), is that descriptive studies often have a lower status in academic circles than research that tests a model or tries to substantiate a prediction, and, are perhaps seen as less scientific or not leading to useful generalisations. Nonetheless, a rush to explaining phenomena via tests and models may mean that important phenomena may be under-described and poorly measured (Smith, 2008). In the South African research literature, it would appear that there may have been a tendency to rush to implement interventions and to test these interventions in the South African teaching context (see Chapter Three). This is as there is no empirical evidence of in-

depth research attempts to understand why teachers are experiencing problems with the teaching of reading literacy or even thorough descriptions of what they are doing in their classroom practices. As such, description is considered an important outcome goal as the rush to theory testing may pre-empt adequate description or measurement of the phenomenon (Smith, 2008), meaning that current interventions may be based on less than solid foundational understandings of what is happening and what is needed to address the difficulties experienced by teachers and schools.

In consideration of more practical limitations for the first phase of the research a number of points are also offered. Firstly, the number of sub-samples created and used for the secondary analysis did create complexity in the analysis and interpretation of the differences and similarities between each of the sub-samples. Also, although language of instruction is a fundamental issue in South African schools it was difficult to differentiate conditions and practices between EAL and EFL schools below the PIRLS international benchmarks via the methods used. Another limitation was the small sample size for the EAL 325 and EFL 550 sub-sample groupings which meant that associated findings for these groupings are illustrative and not generalisable to the overall school population. It must also be noted that content validity for the South African benchmarks of 175 and 325 on the PIRLS achievement scale was not established as such an undertaking was outside of the parameters of the present study.

Also, although some insights were gleaned from the descriptive statistics and factor analysis regarding teachers' comprehension instruction practices, and significant differences were found between the benchmarks (see appendix J), it was difficult to ascertain any major patterns of response distribution or practices that stood out from the others at each of the class average benchmarks. Although the reason for this is not entirely certain, this may have been as a result of overly positive reporting by teachers for the items or misunderstandings of the meaning of the items. The use of teacher questionnaires in relation to teaching practices in low-performance contexts such as South Africa may therefore be problematic as teachers may feel vulnerable and defensive resulting in unreliable or unrealistic answers. Another possible explanation as pointed out by Shiel and Eivers (2009, p. 355) in relation to the PIRLS teacher questionnaire data is that

There is difficulty in establishing associations between frequency of teaching various skills or strategies and student performance. Teachers may emphasise a particular strategy (.e.g. daily teaching of decoding, engagement of students in oral reading) because a class is weak and needs additional support, or because it is on the curriculum and must be covered. Hence, many associations between

frequency of instruction and achievement in PIRLS are weak, not statistically significant, or counter-intuitive.

As a result, the phase two case studies of teachers' instructional practices were important in extending the findings further.

10.4.1.2 *Phase two of the study*

A limitation may have been created by the sequential nature of the mixed method research design chosen for this research. Smith (2008) mentions that a problem can be defined by large-scale analysis of relevant secondary data of a numeric nature. In a second phase, this problem can be examined in-depth with a subset of cases selected from the first phase (Smith, 2008). As secondary data were used to inform the second phase of this research which involved the generation of primary data, there was a delay between the collection of the PIRLS 2006 data in 2005 and data collection from schools and teachers in 2009. This time delay was not regarded as problematic as no major changes to these educational settings, to the larger communities in which these schools are situated, to learner educational characteristics or to teacher expertise were surmised for this time period. This is especially as formalised government initiatives to improve reading instruction in schools were introduced in the first quarter of 2008 (DoE, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2008d) and were only in the process of being implemented in the Intermediate phase in schools at the time of data collection.

Related to this time delay, participant selection at these school sites may have been more of a limitation. Although an attempt was made to contact those teachers who participated in the 2005 PIRLS main study, this was not feasible in every instance (see 5.3.4.3). Thus, of the six teachers who participated only one could definitely remember participating in the 2005 study. Nevertheless, the characteristics of the teachers that did participate were not dissimilar to the characteristics of those teachers from the 2005 study as identified in the descriptive statistics. It was determined that their age ranges followed the same trends for the majority of teachers and their years of experience also suggested similar characteristics to the participants for the 2005 study. Moreover, analysis of these teachers' practices revealed that they generally aligned to overall trends linked to whether or not these teachers were teaching in low or high-performing schools from the PIRLS 2006. Another limitation is that no case study of an EFL 175 or EAL 325 school was able to be implemented during the time allocated to data collection.

Another potential drawback identified for this phase of the research is that the use of multiple case studies can lead to trade-offs in the level of description offered by each case (Barone, 2004). One trade-off was a limited amount of time spent in classrooms doing the observational component of the second phase research. This may have meant that the lessons observed may not have been truly representative of typical learner-teacher interactions for reading instruction (Purcell-Gates, 2004) as a result of participant reactivity to the presence of myself as researcher (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). This was not automatically considered problematic in that if participants attempted to produce an ideal reading instruction lesson, I felt that this would perhaps reveal insights into what these teachers deemed to be optimal practice, which was thought to be analytically meaningful in its own right. Indeed, Yin (2003) argues that case studies need not take a long time, as this misconception confuses the case study method with ethnographies which require long periods of time in field and detailed observational evidence.

Another difficulty experienced was some of the HoDs' and teachers' apparent uneasiness in sharing their teaching experiences and practices during data collection. Although every attempt was made to establish rapport with these teachers and they did become more comfortable with the research process over time, this could have played a role in the outcomes of this phase of the research. The multiple sources of data collected for each case may have helped to circumvent gaps in understanding due to this. It is also recognised that some challenges are posed by the use of qualitative case studies. Case studies can be complex in that they involve large amounts of data. This can become a downfall in that any attempts to summarise them can result in the leaving out of data through a process of subjective bias by the researcher. Additionally, it is argued that the biggest downfall of the case study is that it is impossible to generalise from the results (Hayes, 2000). In addressing the central criticism of a case design as not being generalisable, Hayes (2000) replies that case studies are deliberately idiographic, that is to say, the purpose is never to identify general laws pertaining to all but rather to chart and provide an in-depth illustration of unique aspects (Hayes, 2000).

One may also be doubtful of the relevance of the data for School A (EFL 550), a highly privileged schooling context, for the majority of South African primary schools, due to the potential impact of high learner SES and high school resource availability on learner achievement. This may also be because affluent students tend to perform better on standardised tests even if qualities of teaching expertise are absent in the instruction they receive (Collins Block, Oakar & Hurt, 2002). However, the case of School A is important, not just to demonstrate what learners can achieve given multiple teaching resources, but more

importantly as an illustration of exemplary management structures employed for reading development, practices and structures which can be transferred to less privileged teaching environments with minimal resource expenditure. Furthermore, analysis of teaching practices and organisation of the literacy programme at the school did reveal examples of exemplary practices identified from the literature review for the study.

Additionally, most school improvement research has involved the study of places where something exceptional appears to be happening such as at School A. A strength of this study is that it also investigated a range of school-situations to learn what is possible under “normal” circumstances (Levin, 2006). Levin (2006) argues that we will not learn how to improve learner outcomes broadly by looking only at places which are already exceptional. Indeed, the research design for this study fits with Levin’s (2006, p.401) suggestion that we need “...*less attention to studies of effective schools that are based on outliers in favour of much broader samples of schools, including some that are failing badly*”. In this regard, School C at EFL 400 is particularly significant as despite sharing many of the characteristics of low-performing benchmark schools for the study, many of the organisational and teaching practice structures evident at School A were also present at the school. This revealed that it is possible for learners from lower SES and second language backgrounds to achieve basic reading literacy skills by Grade 4 if their schooling conditions promote this.

10.4.2 Conceptual framework reflections

The conceptual framework used as an exploratory lens for this research was useful in guiding data selection, collection and analyses. It was also helpful in guiding investigation of the two levels at which the curriculum is implemented, namely the meso school level and the micro classroom level as well as assisting in exploring the interactions between these two levels for curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy development. The broad focus of the study at these two levels meant that some components of the conceptual framework received more emphasis than others during the research process. This was due to the practicalities of the research particularly with regards to the case studies. The case study research methods chosen and the time allocated to data collection meant that it was not possible to gain in-depth insights into assessment practices and use of assessment results at the micro and meso levels or teachers’ perceptions of the curriculum with the exception of ascertaining their teaching goals and obtaining their opinions on the intended curriculum. Also, due to some participants’ inability to reflect on and articulate their teaching practice intentions and due to the focus of others on broader issues impacting their practices, the type of teaching frameworks (material, methods or literacy) (Leu & Kinzer, 2003) used by

teachers were not evident from the data. These types of teaching frameworks are thus not included in this reflection due to a lack of findings to shed light on them.

Nevertheless, as the research led to further insights into the bi-modal distribution of reading literacy achievement in South African primary schools, it is possible to further map factors that impede curriculum implementation onto the conceptual framework for the study⁶⁷. Figure 10.1 (below) is an adaptation of the initial conceptual framework (see Figure 4.5). The research findings which may impede optimal curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy development leading to poor learner outcomes are mapped onto the conceptual framework in colour. An issue with the macro level intended curriculum was its vague directives and lack of specific teaching and learning targets. Moreover, in Chapter Four it was noted that the macro level contains a scholarly academic level, a societal level and a formal level. The formal level, which is likely to have more direct influence on individual schools, incorporates local and provincial government amongst others (Klein, 1991). As highlighted in the revised framework, local government may act as a barrier to curriculum implementation at meso and micro levels in the South African context, due to lack of effective support to schools and misinterpretation of the intended curriculum, misinformation which district officials may then convey to schools (see 7.3.1.1).

⁶⁷Although fundamental to the findings for this study, factors that enhance curriculum implementation are not presented in the revised conceptual framework or reflection on it for the sake of brevity in the reporting. However, factors that enhanced implementation for this study were the opposite of those that impeded it. Therefore, this must be borne in mind when reading this section and referring to Figure 10.1.

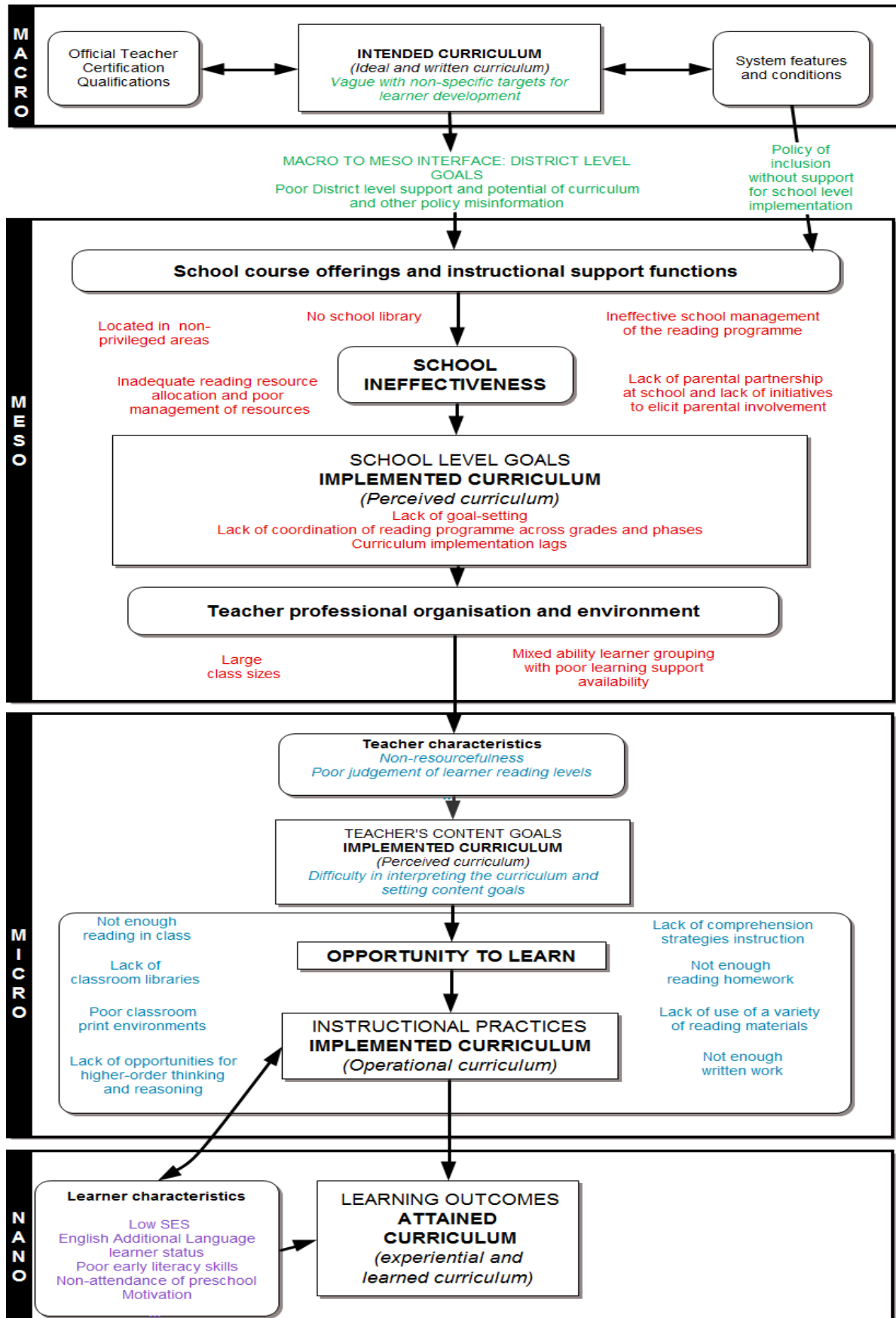


Figure 10.1: Factors impeding curriculum implementation for learners' reading literacy development

A system feature and condition which impacts both the meso and micro levels is inclusive education policy implementation without the resources or support infrastructure provisions to assist schools and teachers in catering for learners' diverse learning needs.

At the meso level specifically, it is likely that curriculum implementation is not adequately undertaken leading to non-conducive professional organisation and environments for teaching reading literacy. This is due to a number of school effectiveness factors not apparent for school wide reading literacy programmes (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Taylor, 2008). As highlighted in Figure 10.1, these factors leading to school ineffectiveness included: non-privileged status of schools; managerial ineffectiveness; lack of provision or management of reading resources; and lack of parental partnership or initiatives to encourage partnership. The lack of effective school management could specifically lead to the non-setting of school-level goals for reading literacy, poor teacher collegiality, lack of coordination of teaching practices across grades and phases and could lead to curriculum implementation lags. A definitive judgement on the impact of teacher quality on school effectiveness could not be made from this study.

In Chapter Four it was further argued that nano level learner characteristics would impact both school level effectiveness and classroom practices. Specific learner characteristics that could act as barriers to effective curriculum implementation for reading literacy development without support sources and teacher expertise to deal with these characteristics are: low SES; English as an Additional Language status when English is the LoLT; lack of early literacy skills and/or inadequate ECD experiences; and poor reading motivation. The professional organisation and environment for teaching was also characterised by large class sizes and mixed ability learner groupings which together with these learner characteristics could be impediments to effective teaching as a result of a lack of macro level support provisions translating into a lack of school level support to deal with learner diversity in overcrowded classrooms.

This study provided insights into classroom level teaching factors that could be specific impediments to learners' reading literacy development. One teacher characteristic that stood out was a lack of teacher resourcefulness linked to the availability and use of a variety of reading materials in classrooms. Another was teachers' possible inability to properly judge whether their learners' reading abilities were adequate for their developmental status. Other findings on classroom level teaching factors can be considered barriers to the creation of OTL (Reynolds, 1998). Specific classroom level factors negatively impacting Grade 4 learners' reading literacy development were lack of: reading opportunities both in class and

for homework; comprehension strategies instruction; written language work especially comprehensions; higher-order thinking and reasoning opportunities and exposure to a variety of print materials.

10.5 POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the conclusions drawn for the study, recommendations for educational policy (10.5.1), practice (10.5.2) as well as further research (10.5.3) are offered in this section.

10.5.1 Education policy recommendations

Government curriculum policy outlook did change significantly in 2009 after the data were collected for this study (DoE, 2009a). Therefore, many of the general curriculum implementation issues brought to the fore in this research have started to be addressed (DoE, 2009a; Motshekga, 2010). Nonetheless, this study does confirm the value of some of the proposed curricular changes and raises some further policy considerations for curriculum implementation for primary school reading literacy development in particular.

Firstly, there is a need for policy with clear guidelines on the development, implementation and management of school wide literacy programmes. For effective school wide literacy development, school management teams including principals, HoDs, subject area leaders and all teachers in every subject need to be actively involved in goal setting, monitoring and implementation. School management also need to initiate teacher support and mentoring, monitoring of effectiveness of implementation strategies and coordination of literacy programmes across the primary school grades and phases. Thus, as suggested in the task team review report (DoE, 2009a), principals, HoDs and subject area leaders need clear directives on their roles and responsibilities for curriculum implementation for reading literacy development.

Secondly, linked to the first recommendation is the need for adequate reading materials provision in all schools but especially poor schools. For practical purposes, teachers need to be provided with a variety of reading materials and differentiated reading instruction materials in particular. A caveat to this recommendation is provided by Taylor *et al.* (2008) who argue that although poor schools need to be provided with resources such resources will have little impact on the quality of teaching and learning unless effectively managed. Thus, a policy directive on the effective management of the acquisition, utilisation and maintenance of reading resource materials at schools is needed.

Thirdly, although the DoE (Motshekga, 2009) aims to develop a simple coherent set of curriculum documents to be implemented in 2011 which describe the content, concepts and skills to be taught and assessed per subject per phase, it is not yet apparent how this will be undertaken for reading literacy specifically. This study provides some further insights into teachers' needs in this regard. The curriculum documents need to have clear targets regarding the levels of literacy competence learners should have reached at the end of each grade and phase. This may assist in teachers' pace of curriculum implementation and may help to prevent curriculum implementation lags which impact negatively at later grades and phases. Such targets need to be thoroughly investigated by means of research into international guidelines to ensure that the targets arrived at are developmentally appropriate and do not underestimate the learning potential of learners at each grade and phase. Moreover, such documents need to address specific reading strategies and skills to be taught, the amount of reading instruction needed, reading homework guidelines as well as placing emphasis on oral and written comprehension skill development and the teaching of comprehension strategies. Teachers also need practical examples on how to invoke learners' higher-order thinking and reasoning via constructivist teaching principles.

Fourthly, the severe lack of support availability to teachers to cater for the diverse learning needs of all of their learners needs to be addressed. The curriculum needs to provide guidelines on assisting learners from diverse backgrounds⁶⁸. At present, the curriculum does not provide guidelines on how to teach learners whose vernacular differs from the LoLT despite the fact that the vast majority of learners in South Africa will learn in a language other than their mother tongue at some point in their education. Furthermore, teachers also need guidelines and intensive training on: identification of reading problems; development of intervention programmes for learners experiencing difficulties; and need support materials to assist learners experiencing difficulties. Fifthly, poor quality ECD provision will continue to impact the development of learners' language and early literacy skills, and, thus remains a crucial area for policy development.

Finally, continued external monitoring and evaluation of learners' reading literacy levels and teaching quality for reading literacy is needed. The findings and recommendations derived from such monitoring and evaluation need to be communicated to all schools to allow for school-level and teacher-level reflection on these outcomes and practice changes.

⁶⁸ The recent DoE (2010) publication "Guidelines for inclusive teaching and learning" is a starting point but further work is needed in this regard especially in terms of teacher education, learning support materials and diagnostic tools. Moreover, the document refers to current curricular terminology and learning areas. Thus, adaptation will be needed in light of the planned changes to the curriculum (Motshekga, 2010).

10.5.2 Teaching practice and teacher education recommendations

In sub-section 10.5.2.1 recommendations for Grade 4 teaching practices for reading literacy development are provided. These recommendations are derived from the main conclusions as well as from the reported practices of those teachers at high-performing schools who participated in the case study component of the research (see Chapter Nine). In 10.5.2.2, recommendations for teacher education are then offered.

10.5.2.1 *Teaching practices for reading literacy development*

Teachers need to provide more reading and comprehension development opportunities for learners. Such opportunities do not have to be separate from attention to other areas of language development but can be integrated with these. Learners need daily time for reading instruction wherein they are actively engaged in reading using a variety of approaches and materials. Thus, the guidelines in the *Foundations for Learning* curricular documents (2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2008d) need to be implemented. Learners also need daily reading homework to reinforce their reading development.

Exposure to more than just basic reading texts is a must to create cognitive challenges for learners and to encourage their interest in books and motivation to read. With regard to materials, teachers need to be creative and resourceful in seeking and selecting texts which will engage the interest of Grade 4 learners and expand their experiences. One reading source is likely not enough for these purposes and teachers need to look for materials which are readily available in the print media and which are relatively inexpensive. Teachers also need to create print-rich classroom environments including posters and reading materials. Given the expense of reading materials and shortage thereof in primary school classrooms, one innovative solution is the creation of a book room. The book room is a site in the school where a collection of instructional materials is stored for the use of the whole school. A substantial collection of books at different levels of difficulty, on different themes, of different genres and by different authors is built up over time for school wide use and collections are rotated between classes (Allington & Cunningham, 2007) maximising learners' exposure to different texts. The involvement of school management in the sourcing and dissemination of reading materials is essential in this regard.

For comprehension development, learners need more opportunities to engage in both written and verbal question-answering which requires the deliberation and answering of higher-order questions such as those that involve the interpretation and integration of ideas and

information; and examination and evaluation of content, language and textual elements (Mullis *et al.*, 2006). Multiple learner perspectives also need to be encouraged and closed questions avoided. Comprehension strategies need to be taught to assist with reading and comprehension tasks and vocabulary development remains critical. Learners also need to engage in more written work, especially the answering of high-quality written comprehensions.

School management and teachers need to work together to actively plan, monitor and coordinate the school wide reading programme. Strategies to elicit parental involvement in their child's reading development need to be developed and implemented as well as initiatives to encourage learners to read created.

10.5.2.2 *In-service and pre-service teacher education*

The following recommendations are offered for further teacher development:

- PRESET and INSET for primary school literacy and language teachers focused on: the teaching of comprehension strategies; eliciting higher-order thinking and reasoning via teaching strategies; choosing creative, developmentally appropriate texts; and question development for reading comprehensions.
- Training for school management and teachers in the coordination of the school wide literacy teaching strategy.
- Training for school management and teachers in effective budgeting for reading resource materials and the effective management of available resources.
- Training in reading instruction for all teachers, regardless of their subject area specialisation.
- The re-introduction and/or promotion of PRESET and INSET for remedial education/ learning support. Differentiated instruction, identification and intervention for reading difficulties are of particular relevance for such training.
- The gravity of the problem with reading literacy instruction in South African schools may be beyond the scope of district-based DoE support teams to deal with. There is a need for school-based support for reading literacy teaching and learning. The

training of reading coaches via postgraduate qualifications for such purposes may be a potential solution. Reading coaches (also referred to as literacy coaches or reading specialists) are involved in teachers' professional development experiences by means of theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and classroom coaching. The primary role of reading coaches is to provide support to teachers for classroom reading instruction. These coaches need to have experience of teaching at the level at which they provide coaching to, in-depth knowledge of reading processes and acquisition, assessment and instruction as well as skill in facilitating teacher reflection, observing, modelling and providing feedback to teachers (IRA, 2004). Teachers with such a specialisation could play a central role in school-level curricular planning and the creation of school wide literacy programmes, monitoring of the coordination of reading instruction and teacher mentoring.

10.5.3 Further research recommendations

The research recommendations offered in this sub-section are derived not only from the main conclusions drawn for the study but also from issues in need of further investigation that came to the fore throughout data reporting for this thesis. These recommendations are:

- As indicated in the first chapter of this thesis, a study of Foundation Phase instructional practices for reading literacy development is still needed. The fact that this study focused on Grade 4 does not detract from the need to investigate Foundation Phase practices.
- The content validity of the South African benchmarks (175 and 325) established as part of sampling for this study needs to be determined. Alternatively further research which investigates what the majority of South African learners are capable of in terms of reading literacy needs to be undertaken.
- Although only mentioned by one research participant as an issue for reading literacy development (7.3.1.1), the potential influence of differences in reading skill and psychosocial status on reading motivation could be an important area of research. The implications of age at start of schooling in relation to this could be particularly meaningful to investigate to inform South African policy in this area.
- This research only focused on language teachers in the main LoLT at Grade 4. In recognition of the importance of cross-curricular reading in all Intermediate Phase

learning areas, research focusing on cross-curricular reading instruction practices and the coordination thereof could be informative.

- More focused research is needed into how school management and teachers in South African primary schools manage the acquisition and utilisation of reading materials.
- Little insight into practice variation between low-performing EAL and EFL schools for reading literacy development was derived from this research. Further research into reading literacy teaching practices for EAL learners in both EAL and EFL medium schools is therefore needed.
- Connected to teachers' ability to determine their learners' reading levels, is the need for further research into the adequacy of teachers' assessment practices for reading.
- In recognition of the the importance of teacher goals, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions for reading and learners' reading development, further research is needed into the impact of these aspects on teachers' practices in the South African context.
- Finally, although rich exploratory insights were revealed via the methodology used for this study, an in-depth multilevel analysis of the possible factors affecting Grade 4 learners' performance would enhance further understanding as this study focused on a specific portion of the rich data available in the PIRLS 2006 database.

10.6 CLOSING THOUGHTS

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, there are multifarious reasons for learners' low reading literacy outcomes, some of which this study did not directly investigate. The study findings did however accentuate and confirm that a number of prevailing schooling conditions and teaching practices in the South African education system will continue to make it extremely difficult to ensure that all learners have equitable opportunities to develop the levels of reading literacy needed for their personal progress and to lead to the human capital development needed for the country's future economic growth and competitiveness.

As far as learner achievement is concerned, the most successful countries tend to be those with the lowest levels of inequality (Levin, 2010). Thus, the onus is still on all role-players in

the education system to work towards lessening the existing inequalities which perpetuate the achievement gap between privileged and non-privileged learners. In conclusion, Levin and Fullan (2008) sum up the task that lies ahead for all role-players most pertinently:

Large-scale, sustained improvement in student outcomes requires a sustained effort to change school and classroom practices, not just structures such as governance and accountability. The heart of improvement lies in changing teaching and learning practices in thousands and thousands of classrooms, and this requires focused and sustained effort by all parts of the education system and its partners. (p.291)

-∞-