CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English to non-mother tongue learners in developing countries has become a major problem that educators and learners have to cope with, not only in terms of achieving the outcomes specified by each curriculum, but also in terms of addressing the most appropriate learning interventions applicable to each grade or phase. In addressing such shortcomings in education, the South African educational landscape has witnessed the participation of various stakeholders, educational agencies and private enterprises meant to fix these problems. However, little is known about the value these agencies have been adding to classroom teaching in general, and this thesis investigates the participation of one such agency, viz. READ Educational Trust, with regard to its efforts to improve the teaching of English in South African schools.

This chapter contextualizes the study; covers the history and background of READ as a case study; and states the problem, aims of the research, and the research strategy.

More specifically, Chapter 1 comprises the following sections:
- Justification and scope of the study;
- Statement of the problem;
- Aims of the research;
- A theoretical framework;
- Clarification of concepts; and
- Research methodology.

1.2 THE HISTORY OF READ AS AN ORGANIZATION

READ Educational Trust is an independent professional South African organization that is funded by both the private sector and foreign donors. It is a Section 18A Trust and is governed by a Board of Directors who report to a Board of Trustees (READ Educational Trust, 2006:8). The organization was established in 1979 in response to community

concerns over the lack of reading and library facilities in very remote and disadvantaged communities. READ is one of the professional organizations that was established to address the inequalities in education that resulted from the policies of the apartheid regime. As a non-governmental organization that was formed in the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, and also in response to compelling community demands for improved access to library services, the organization works in collaboration with the national and provincial Departments of Education and is actively engaged in supporting the National Curriculum Statement, which requires a new approach to teaching and learning.

Since its inception, READ has focused its operations at the school level, particularly on schools that are situated in remote rural areas of South Africa. The school-based activities of the organization began in earnest in 1980, when READ developed and implemented a secondary school programme that was geared towards establishing effective central libraries. Since, then, the programme has been expanded to include a teacher development and resource provision programme for all levels of the formal education system.

The READ organization has 27 years of experience in pioneering outcomes-based teaching methodology in South Africa. Its experience in developing outcomes-based methodology in South Africa, together with far-reaching changes within the education system, which resulted in the introduction of the new National Curriculum Statement, have placed the organization at the forefront of whole school development, resource provision and in-service training provision in the learning area of Literacy, Language and Communication. READ provides these services through the following:

- The promotion of reading, writing and associated language and learning skills based on the principles of outcomes-based education (OBE), focusing on the implementation of the national curriculum at the pre-primary, primary and high school levels;
- A high school in-service training programme targeting the whole school culture of teaching and learning, in order to improve Grade 9 exit competences and Grade 12 pass rates;
- A pre-service training programme for student-teacher training;

- An induction management programme that provides support in generic management concepts for principals and school management teams; and

- National motivational campaigns like READATHON, which reaches over 27 000 schools nationwide, the Festival of Stories and the Festival of Books, which involve over 600 000 learners, as well as various other regional events.

The following is a discussion of the implementation of READ's language programmes.

(a)   The implementation of READ's language programmes

The implementation of READ's programmes follows a systematic, in-service training and delivery plan, namely consultation with the national and provincial education departments; selection of clusters of schools; selection of study material; regular monitoring; continuous assessment; independent evaluation; motivational and recognition events; and parental involvement.

Participating schools should be prepared to include READ project methodology and materials fully in their time-tables; allow project staff to monitor and mentor programmes in the schools; and work cooperatively with the school staff to ensure effective implementation of its programmes. Of particular note is the Learning for Living Project that is currently drawing to an end. The project takes READ's methodology, classroom resources, educators' training and mentoring into nearly 1000 schools around the country.

READ uses a model that has been previously evaluated as successful in several projects, developed over many years in cooperation with the South African educators and influenced by international practices in these projects. All its courses have been revised so that they can be used by relatively inexperienced trainers. Reading Matters, a Section 21 Company, was formed in 1997. A Section 21 Company is independent and is managed by its own management. The purpose of this company is to ensure an income stream for READ's long-term operations in financially disadvantaged communities. Reading Matters is now made up of two units, namely, Resource Matters, a distribution agency, and Media Matters, a materials development unit, which develops educational material that is not available from other publishers. Classroom materials have been selected from a full

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range of publishers by experienced education officials, mostly from the Department of Education. The materials have already been distributed to schools together with educators' handbooks and learner activity material to enable the educators to implement the curriculum more efficiently. Critical elements of the programme include the intensive training of all trainers by the National Training Centre staff; the guidance the trainers receive from mentors in the field on a daily basis; school-based training by trainers who continuously work with school staff in the classrooms at afternoon workshops; and the assessment system. This system consists of the assessment of learners' progress and peer assessment strategies, which are kept in READ's database and analyzed so that the organization can continuously take corrective action where necessary.

READ Educational Trust deals not only with the language skills of learners and their consequent general overall subject competence, but also with educator enthusiasm; school governance and management; and parent involvement. The organization's intervention programmes have already contributed to the improvement of teaching and learning and a subsequent considerable reduction in the failure rate in South African schools.

(b)   Evaluation

The internal formative assessment system was designed in consultation with the Department of Education, and with the assistance of two international experts on assessment from the USA. This system is intended to enhance the external summative evaluation being conducted by Eric Schollar & Associates (ESA).

The external evaluation is a long-term investigation into the overall impact of READ's work to determine whether, on completion, the particular project has achieved its aims. The results of the data collected by ESA from project and control schools in each province are cross-referenced with the internal evaluation data. Through the use of standardized assessment tools, the learning environment can be more accurately monitored by the project trainers. The results of the assessment will be fed into a database and analyzed so that corrective and developmental action can be taken.

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Selected trainers are trained in language assessment. Once the process has been fully tested in the sample of selected learners for the Living project schools, a separate set of tests for educators will be developed to benchmark learners' progress in reading, writing and comprehension. The computerized information system, which was developed for the Learning for Living project, has consolidated the information collected through the project, and is linked to the systems of the Department of Education. However, there is an urgent need for more experimental evaluations, preferably using random allocation of different pedagogical interventions (Brooks, 2005:87).

Finally, it is important to mention the fact that READ Educational Trust is only used as a case study in this investigation. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focuses on the skill of writing for Grade 4 learners, but with reference to teaching and learning in general. The researcher has decided to concentrate on the above-mentioned grade to depict problems in Grade 3, which is the last grade of the foundation phase, in order to make recommendations for proper implementation from Grade 5 to Grade 7 levels. Another reason for choosing Grade 4 learners as the target group is the fact that they have been receiving support for a period of four years, which will also impact on the validity and reliability of data in the investigation.

1.3   JUSTIFICATION AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Evaluation is a method of inquiry that attempts to document the formation, implementation and outcome of a service or programme (Jackson *et al*., 1996:1). Programme evaluation, on the other hand, focuses on the connections between evaluation ecology, methodology and stakeholders, especially if the programme being evaluated is educational in nature (Mello, 2005:235).

In the light of the above, one would say that this research seeks to determine Grade 4 educators' experiences with a READ Educational Trust training programme and its impact on their classroom practices and professional development. It also assesses the impact of a teaching and learning intervention programme offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners. The investigation is, therefore, geared towards establishing the merit and worth of READ's

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training programmes, as it assesses the impact of teaching and learning programmes offered by external service providers like READ on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners and on the classroom practices of educators involved in the application of the programmes. According to Glatthorn *et al.*, (2006:302), the concept of "worth" refers to the value of an entity in reference to a particular context or a specific application. The worth of the programme determines whether or not the programme should be continued. Merit, on the other hand, is established without reference to a context. The ultimate goal of this research is to learn, adjust and improve similar programmes (Jackson *et al.*, 1996:2). Jackson *et al.* (2006:2) further stipulate that programme evaluation is aimed at increasing knowledge about a particular facet, reaffirm benefits, point to improvements, guide decision-making, bring programme staff together to reshape or reaffirm goals, and create a dialogue among community participants. Belzer (2005:34) supports this view when postulating that it is important to do evaluations that can promote programme improvement and ensure programme accountability.

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Open-ended interviews and a questionnaire were used to determine Grade 4 language educators' experiences with a READ Educational Trust training programme and its impact on their classroom practices and professional development. Open-ended interviews were used to assess the impact of a teaching and learning intervention programme offered by service providers such as READ on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners. On the other hand, a questionnaire was used to gauge the perceptions of Grade 4 language educators on READ's training programmes. Current evaluation theory gives strong emphasis to such qualitative methods as interviews and observations in assessing curriculum impact (Glatthorn *et al.*, 2006:311). As a result, the impact of READ's training programmes on school effectiveness was also evaluated in this study. The school is the context within which READ's training programmes are implemented. The researcher used open-ended interviews as a qualitative method of data collection to achieve the above-mentioned goal as indicated in the preceeding paragraphs. READ staff, school managers and Grade 4 educators were interviewed during the research process. To ensure applicability and relevance, educational programme evaluation was integrated within the socially constructed context as part of the teaching and learning relationship (Mello, 2005:2353).

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It is important at this stage to point out that the underlying motive that actually prompted the researcher to assess the impact of READ's training programmes on language teaching and learning was to determine whether there is a linkage between education spending and learner performance and teacher training. Basically, the investigation was prompted by problems that emanated from the actual implementation of language programmes that are offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust.

1.4   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nowadays, schools and other organizations function in a complex environment wherein school managers must cope with a dynamic world of increased learner population, ill-qualified educators, shortages of resources, a mismatch between the acquired qualifications and today's market place, and an alarming need to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Like all other organizations in the 21st century, READ Educational Trust is faced with the challenge of enhancing quality at a lower cost. Van Fleet and Peterson (1994:481) purport that there is a close relationship between the improvement of quality and cost-effectiveness. The aim of this study is to determine Grade 4 educators' experiences with a READ Educational Trust training programme and its impact on their classroom practices and professional development. It also assesses the impact of a teaching and learning programme offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners.

According to Dr Peter Drucker, a world-renowned academic and management expert, the demands of the 21st century workplace are escalating and knowledge is becoming more important than it has been in the past (READ Educational Trust, 2006:1). He further stipulates that the world economy demands a new type of worker or a "knowledge worker" who possesses a high level of literacy that incorporates elements of thinking. According to this report, formal employment of semi-skilled and unskilled workers was increased by 19% (700 000 jobs) while employment of highly skilled professionals and managers was increased by 12% (80 000 jobs) between 1990 and 1998. In the light of the above, one would say that the demand for highly skilled employees has a direct impact on the South African economy.

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All these demands pose serious challenges for South African schools. As a matter of fact, schools need to prepare workers for lifelong learning. Current systems can no longer emphasize task-specific skills but must focus on developing decision-making and problem-solving skills and teaching learners how to learn on their own (READ Educational Trust, 2006:1).

In response to the above-mentioned problems, the national Department of Education in South Africa has established a number of campaigns that promote a collaborative approach towards the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in schools. For example, the "Tirisano campaign" was initiated by the former Minister of Education and the discipline of giving support to schools through educational interventions developed very rapidly in the new dispensation (Russel & Cook, 1993: 5). Consequently, the involvement of a myriad of service providers such as READ Educational Trust is more important than ever as in many countries of the world. Education systems are undergoing reforms that seek to improve the effectiveness and the standards obtained by the learners whom they serve.

Concurrent with the national Department of Education's continuous endeavour to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, there is an increasing involvement of many service providers at all levels of government, including schools. The failure of the education system to deliver equal access and educational success to the previously disadvantaged children remains a source of considerable tension in South Africa. The right to free education is not yet a reality to many South Africans, despite the fact that it is enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution. The high illiteracy rate in our country provides evidence to this fact.

Furthermore, educator expertise is regarded as one of the most important school factors influencing student achievement (Owings & Kaplan, 2003:263). Owings and Kaplan (2003) further recommend that, instead of attempting to address educator shortage with ill-conceived "emergency" licences for unprepared and under-prepared individuals, states, non-governmental organizations and schools can enact policies and practices to ensure more high-quality educators. The approaches include providing subsidies for high-quality educator preparation; competitive salaries; streamlining selection and proactive

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recruitment; mentoring and induction for beginning educators; high-quality professional development; and redesigning schools to support teaching and learning.

Fortunately, organizations like READ are currently working in partnership with the national Department of Education to focus more attention on strengthening classroom practices and helping educators learn and use approaches that bring all learners to higher achievement levels (Owings & Kaplan, 2003:263). Owings and Kaplan (2003:263) further contend that the ongoing professional development designed to change and sustain best teaching practices must include immediate classroom-relevant educator choices within prescribed requirements; real-world practice and feedback; peer observations and mentoring; frequent classroom observations; and conferencing. Of paramount importance is the fact that the educators themselves should actually become professional learners, as well as facilitators of others' learning, if schools are to achieve the purpose for which they exist. Owings and Kaplan (2003:267) further stipulate that schools of the 21st century must be able to prepare all students for economic viability, advanced education, and well-paying careers. To this end, intervention programmes like those offered by organizations such as READ Educational Trust can be powerful engines that drive student learning with heightened relevance and meaning.

Coupled with that, it is important to point out that the underlying motive that actually prompted the researcher to conduct this research is to determine Grade 4 educators' experiences with a READ Educational Trust training programme and the extent to which it has impacted on their classroom practices and professional development as indicated earlier on.   Basically, this particular study seeks to address the research problem which is: What is the impact of teaching and learning programmes offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners?

The question is, therefore, whether or not intervention programmes provided by service providers like READ Educational Trust, indeed advance both the strategic thrust of such organizations and schools, and in doing so, enhance their competitive advantage. These educational demands also compelled the Department of Education to rope in many service providers and yet there is still no guarantee that effective teaching and learning take place at classroom level. The issue of different environments and contexts in which the interventions are administered also encouraged the researcher to pursue this study. This goes hand in hand with a high expectancy of more or less the same outcomes of the

said interventions (Kearsley & Compton, 1981:467, in Van Dyk 2001:452). All these problems prompted the researcher to assess the impact of a teaching and learning intervention programme offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners, with the view to detect problems and make recommendations for areas that need to be improved. In a nutshell, the investigation seeks to determine the impact of training programmes offered by external service providers such as READ Educational Trust on classroom teaching and learning in general. It is anticipated that the results of this investigation will lead to the success of the same organizations in terms of the quality of the product or service they provide.

Having said that, the study problem may be formally stated as follows:

- The South African literacy level is high, at 85% according to UNESCO statistics, but the functional literacy in reading and writing skills of a nine year old is not enough for today's job market (READ Educational Trust, 2007:2). When one considers the fact that primary school education is expected to prepare the learners in such a way that they will cope with the demands of secondary education, where writing forms the basis of their examination performance, the implications are very serious;

- The results of an external summative evaluation conducted by Eric Schollar & Associates (ESA) in 2002, confirmed that the level of writing in nearly all project schools is still a problem area (READ Educational Trust, 2002:5). Moreover, the results of an evaluation of the Business Trust Learning for Living Project, show that from the baseline assessment project, learners in project schools have shown an increase in literacy and writing skills, far above that of learners in control schools. However, a worrying factor is that the level of writing for learners in READ's project schools only increased by 5%, which is not higher than the learners of the same grades at the control schools. More disturbing is the fact that the results are the same in nearly all the provinces. Primary school learners in the control schools write an average of over 15% of unintelligible sentences, while the corresponding figure for READ's project schools is just under 5%. Regrettably, the problem is still prevalent in almost all the READ project schools;

- Reports from the quality check committee, of which the author was a member, indicate that, in general, learners do not do enough writing. Writing skills are seriously below an acceptable level despite the fact that READ Educational Trust emphasizes the idea that the learners must write everyday for real and different

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purposes. The findings of the quality check committee showed that learners perform well in multiple-choice tasks, but performed poorly in tasks that required them to produce responses. According to the educators, writing scores were influenced by shortage of teaching and learning material. Indeed, it became evident that schools that had less learning material scored lower than learners in institutions that were adequately resourced (READ Educational Trust, 2007:2). Educators were, therefore, encouraged to display on classroom walls the texts the learners produce, so that classrooms become print-rich sites for learning. Unfortunately, all these strategies do not impact significantly on the development of writing as an important aspect of learning. This discrepancy was also detected by the management of READ Educational Trust and a strong stance was taken that the organization should actually work collaboratively with the Department of Education in 2001 and 2002, wherein greater emphasis was specifically placed on writing;

- The findings of a systematic evaluation that was conducted by the Department of Education on Grade 3 learners in 2003, clearly show that average scores achieved by the random 5% sample, from 54 000 learners, were as follows: Life Skills-54%, Listening and Comprehension- 68%, Reading and Writing-39%, Numeracy-30%. The scores indicate that Grade 3 learners had the greatest difficulty with numeracy. Nevertheless, literacy scores were higher and this was primarily due to higher scores obtained in the listening comprehension, rather than in reading and writing (READ Educational Trust, 2007:2). According to the findings of this study, literacy scores were influenced by aspects such as shortage of teaching and learning material where learners in schools that had less learning material scored lower than learners in schools that had adequate resources. Learners' involvement in classroom activities was found to be low, despite OBE's emphasis on learner participation. Other findings of the evaluation are that the national indicator for the availability of resources at home is about 31%. Fifty-seven comma one percent of households in the survey had access to television sets, 45,9% had access to a telephone, 23% had access to newspapers and magazines, 53% had fewer than ten books, 67.2% had access to a radio, 53% of pupils' families did not have any books in the home and that 27% of schools had libraries. It therefore became evident that learners attending schools that did not have adequate resources actually came from homes without education resources (READ Educational Trust, 2007:3);

- One of the problem indicators for poor writing skills that emerged from numerous formal and informal interviews with principals and educators is educator proficiency.

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Most educators confessed to a lack of confidence in their own English language proficiency, including those who teach English at Grade 4 level. They readily admit to trepidation when they are expected to mark/correct their learners' written work. During regular classroom support visits, the author personally came across many examples of learners' work that had not been marked at all, or which had been marked incorrectly. As a matter of fact, regular monitoring visits had always highlighted a desperate need for new strategies, methodologies and materials to improve the learners' written English;

▪ The problem also became evident in 2003, when the author was conducting an internal assessment in READ's project schools (Banyan Tree Project). The researcher came to realize that Grade 4 learners were still battling to construct meaningful phrases whenever they were asked to write short sentences. Another worrying factor is the fact that READ's book-based methods have been implemented in those schools as from 1998, when the project was kick-started. However, READ Educational Trust has been trying very hard to solve the problem and the following steps and strategies have been put in place:

▪ A considerable amount of time and money has been spent on retraining workshops for trainers, with a view to equipping them with writing skills. International experts were also involved in the retraining campaign to ensure that the trainers are in a position to impart effective writing skills to primary school educators, who will in turn impart the acquired knowledge to the learners at school level. Topics such as Teaching Writing, Shared Reading and Writing and Outcomes-based Writing Assessment were covered;

▪ Selected trainers were also trained in language assessment. These trainers were expected to work closely with language educators so as to benchmark learners' progress in reading, writing and comprehension;

▪ The USAID DDSP Box Library Project was implemented from 2001 to 2002 to address the problem of shortages of materials in schools. A total number of 345 970 books were delivered to all the project schools;

▪ A high school and youth programme was developed in 2002 to ensure continuity from Grade 7 to secondary school level. Word cards have been developed for the books in high school accelerated packs to aid learners in their reading and to build vital language skills such as writing. The focus is on language learning and life skills young people might need for life and work in a modern technological society;

▪ A leader-teacher programme has been developed and field-tested over a number of years. The main idea was that the leader teachers would be able to offer classroom-

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based support, afternoon workshops, and lesson demonstrations that are provided during the READ workshops;

- Developmental subject advisors (North West Province) have been trained in courses such as Teaching Writing, Independent Writing, Group Reading and Reading Assessment;

- Training of school managers was undertaken in courses such as Management of the Delivery of the Curriculum; School Administration; Financial Management; Human Resource Management; Communication and Conflict Management; and Management of the Delivery of the READ Curriculum. The majority of school managers reported that their enhanced management styles have already resulted in improved performance; and

- In order to ensure the quality of delivery to schools, structures that are meant for the implementation of the quality control process have been instituted and teams that will conduct the audits have already been selected. READ Educational Trust has always been assisted in the establishment of the assessment systems used for the evaluation of pupils' progress by Professor Hoffman of the University of Texas, Professor Pearson of the University of California and Professor Pat Smith of the University of Melbourne. The organization has also been involving experts such as Eric Schollar and Associates in the evaluation of its language programmes as was indicated earlier on.. In addition, more attention has been given to the mentoring of trainers during support visits, to ensure that the correct implementation skills were acquired during training.

Although READ Educational Trust has taken the above steps to improve the performance of learners, in terms of language development the external evaluation report and graphs show that the increase of Grade 4 learners' literacy, numeracy and writing skills is low as compared to that of other grades (Eric Schollar & Associates, 2002:2). According to the conclusions of the survey, there is a very high correlation between the learners' reading skills and their ability to write good English. The lesson is quite obvious, viz.that children who read well also write well. This is a good thing in the sense that the increase in literacy and writing skills normally leads to good mastery of numeracy skills as learners will be in a position to understand mathematical concepts and instructions. In other words, to improve writing skills, we need to improve reading skills as well (Eric Schollar & Associates, 2002:2).

The above-mentioned findings, as highlighted in the problem statement, provide compelling evidence in support of the researcher's focus on Grade 4 learners' writing skills as a problem area in this study. The results of an evaluation that was conducted by the Department of Education in 2003, show that Grade 3 learners had difficulty with writing (READ Educational Trust, 2007:2). This particular research will, therefore, be limited to an investigation of Grade 4 educators' experiences with a READ Educational Trust training programme and its impact on their classroom practices and professional development. It also assesses the impact of a teaching and learning intervention programme offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners.

1.5 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

1.5.1 General Aim

The general aim of this study is twofold. It attempts to give a better understanding of educators' experiences with and opinions of an intervention programme that has impacted on their daily classroom practices and it also assesses the impact of a teaching and learning intervention programme offered by external service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners. In a nutshell, the study aims at determining the impact of intervention programmes offered by service providers like READ Educational Trust on staff development and classroom teaching and learning.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives

In order to achieve the above aim, the specific objectives of this study are to:

(a) Determine the nature of intervention programmes offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust;

(b) Investigate the perceptions of educators towards intervention programmes such as those offered by organizations like READ Educational Trust;

(c) Determine how language programmes such as those offered by READ Educational Trust contribute to effective language teaching;

(d) Establish how methodologies employed by service providers such as READ Educational Trust advance staff development;

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(e) Gauge the extent to which intervention programmes offered by organizations such as READ impact on Grade 4 learners' writing skills;

(f) Determine how intervention programmes offered by organizatios such as READ impact on the level at which Grade 4 learners develop their language skills;

(g) Establish how intervention programmes offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust contribute to effective language teaching; and study the issues involved in productivity management with a view to ensuring that organizations like READ Educational Trust are capable of improving their productivity strategies in such a way that they adequately meet the needs of the target groups and the entire corporate market.

The above-mentioned objectives will be realized by means of a literature study and an empirical investigation.

1.5.3   Literature Study

A literature study was undertaken in three parts. The first one focuses on the concept of learning, and how intervention programmes offered by organizations such as READ Educational Trust can impact on the learners' writing skills. In order to arrive at valid conclusions, the various concepts, models and theories of learning were considered.

The second part attempts to establish which factors contribute to the type of outcomes that result from the roll-out of intervention programmes that are offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust. In order to do this, the general issues, such as organizational factors, human factors and motivation, as well as the effect of new trends on education, were reviewed.

The third part examines a variety of evaluation techniques in order to develop a measuring instrument that would be used to measure the impact of intervention programmes on learning experiences in general.

1.5.4   **Empirical Investigation**

The aim of the empirical investigation is as follows:

▪ To look at the relevance of theories and models to the whole concept of language teaching and learning;

▪ To determine the linkages between educational theories and models and READ's training model; and

▪ To establish which factors have an effect on the teaching and learning process in schools.

In a nutshell, this investigation is aimed at determining Grade 4 language educators' experiences with a READ Educational Trust training programme and the extent to which it has impacted on their classroom practices and professional development. It also seeks to assess the impact of a teaching and learning intervention programme offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners. It is anticipated that the research findings will empower the following stakeholders who have a pivotal role to play in the improvement of the quality of education in South Africa:

▪ Educators who are involved in the implementation of the programmes to develop language competencies of the learners; and

▪ Management of organizations such as READ Educational Trust to formulate a human resource development strategy and to review the curriculum and the mode of delivery as well as enabling trainers to detect their weaknesses and problems in terms of service delivery.

1.6   **HYPOTHESES**

1.6.1   **Purpose of the Hypotheses**

A hypothesis is a tentative explanation for certain behaviours, phenomena, or events that have occurred or will occur (Gay, 1992:66). The main purpose of a hypothesis is to state a researcher's expectations concerning the relationship between the variables in the research problem, which indicates what the researcher thinks the outcome of the study

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will be. According to Hoy and Miskel (1996: 6), hypotheses bridge the gap between theory and research and provide a means to test theory against observed reality. Kerlinger (1986: 23), in De Vos (1998: 117), views a hypothesis as one of the most powerful tools yet invented to achieve dependable knowledge. Basically, the researcher uses a hypothesis to observe a phenomenon and speculates on possible causes. Kerlinger (1986:23), in De Vos (1998:117), further postulates that hypotheses have power even when they are not confirmed. The power of a hypothesis lies in the fact that negative findings are sometimes as important as positive ones, since they cut down the total universe of ignorance and sometimes highlight fruitful hypotheses and lines of investigation (De Vos, 1998: 117). Borg and Gall (1989: 66) reiterate the purpose of a hypothesis when stipulating that a well-thought out set of hypotheses place clear and specific goals before the researcher and provide a basis for selecting relevant samples, dependent variables, and research procedures to meet those goals. Nonetheless, it is possible to conduct research without hypotheses, particularly in exploratory and qualitative investigations (De Vos, 1998).

However, for the purpose of this study, a set of hypotheses will be used as a framework within which to gather information, and seek answers for problems relating to intervention programmes, such as those offered by organizations like READ Educational Trust. Borg and Gall (1989: 67) support this view when purporting that the investigators need to focus their studies on solutions to or explanations of their problem, and then gather the information needed to see if a given explanation is correct or not. Of note is the fact that the researcher will hypothize a relationship between different variables outlined below.

The following hypotheses based on the findings of the quantitative investigation were formulated:

- Hypothesis 1: READ's language programme impacts on language teaching with expected correlations between its training method and the improvement of learners' language skills.

- Hypothesis 2: There is a correlation between READ's training programme, staff development and their professional growth. The classroom interventions therefore contribute significantly to educators' performance measured in terms of the

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development of their language teaching competences, classroom practices and professional skills.

- Hypothesis 3: Educators positively regard READ's language programme contributory to Grade 4 learners' language development in general and their ability to write and design text (writing skills).

- Hypothesis 4: Female and male educators have different opinions regarding the value of READ's training programme on the performance of primary school children with specific reference to the impact of the programme on children's writing competences.

- Hypothesis 5: READ Educational Trust's training programme have more significant impacts on language teaching and learning in rural schools than urban schools.

1.6.2   Locating a Theoretical Framework

This research is informed by the Return on Investment Model. The ROI model consists of various steps that are closely intertwined, namely planning, data collection, data analysis and reporting. The model provides a systematic approach to programme evaluation (Phillips, 2003:32). The author postulates that the ROI model suggests a step-by-step approach that keeps the evaluation process manageable so that users can address one aspect at a time. The four levels of evaluation, developed by Kirkpatrick (1975), offer the starting point of the ROI model. In fact, the conceptual framework selected for this study is a modification of Kirkpatrick's four levels and includes a fifth level, namely Return on Investment (ROI). The rationale behind the selection of this conceptual framework is that it shows clearly how data are collected, processed, analyzed, and reported to various stakeholders. According to Phillips (2003:33), the ROI model emphasizes adherence to operating standards and philosophy. A detailed discussion of the ROI model will be presented in the fifth chapter.

This study focuses on the impact of a teaching and learning programme intervention offered by external service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners and the influence it has had on the classroom practices and professional development of educators who were involved in the implementation of such programmes.. Therefore, when evaluating the effect of the above programmes,

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issues such as customer satisfaction, learning, behaviour, application skills and the results or business impact, are to be taken into consideration. All these aspects are discussed in an integrated manner due to the holistic nature of teaching and learning. For instance, the real measure of success during the implementation phase is largely determined by the quality of planning, data collection strategies, application/implementation skills and business impact.

To promote efficient learning, long-term retention and application of skills or actual information learned from the job situation, training programmes should incorporate principles of learning such as goal setting, meaningfulness of material, practice and feedback, especially when the focus is on learning facts (Casio, 1995:271). The whole process comprises not only aspects such as the involvement of all consumers, credibility, acceptable pupil responses and completeness, but also the accentuation of the following four factors:

- Continued contact with the learners and educators to give advice and help, as well as effecting contact with parents;
- Clear communication to illustrate roles, to explain terminology, to illustrate possible means of evaluation, and to supply answers to the well-known queries, i.e., Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why?
- Provision of a support service, for example, spelling out time scheduling, support by supplying material, setting one's own example, creating a climate of trust and security and encouragement of language educators; and
- Compensation, both external, such as financial, praise, acknowledgement, and also intrinsic aspects of compensation, including persons who regard successful application as sufficient compensation (Casio, 1995:271).

To determine the impact of intervention programmes such as those offered by organizations such as READ Educational Trust on Grade 4 learners' writing competencies as well as educators' experiences with and opinions of the intervention programmes, this study uses the ROI model as developed by Kirkpatrick (1975).

1.7 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.7.1 Assessment

"Assessment" is defined by Anthony (1999:526) as a process whereby the employee's performance and productivity are measured. According to Kreitner (1995:109), assessment of a commercial service entails watching a process unfold and measuring it against the consumer's judgement. In this case, the only completely valid standard of comparison is the customer's level of satisfaction. This is a perception, something more slippery to measure than the physical dimension of a product. For the purpose of this investigation, assessment can be perceived as a means of obtaining information that allows educators, learners and parents to make professional judgements about learners' progress (Pretorius, 1998:82-83). Basically, assessment is used in the sense of deciding to what extent outcomes have been achieved. It occurs when an educator weighs the final outcomes of the teaching and learning process, and judges the quality of the end product.

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning, not just a means of monitoring or auditing learners' performance (although it does serve this purpose as well). However, the ultimate purpose of assessment is to measure learning outcomes. The additional purposes are to improve the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum and conditions for learners' learning, and measuring knowledge, performance and attitudes as a data-gathering strategy. Within the context of this study, assessment would mean evaluating the impact of a teaching and learning intervention programme offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners. Ultimately, the data obtained through assessment would enable the researcher to determine the extent to which the above-mentioned programme impacts on Grade 4 learners' writing skills.

1.7.2 Impact

The word "impact" can also be understood as a force that brings about change or determines a course of action or behaviour (*Oxford Dictionary*). "Impact" is the ability to make someone or something change. It is the power indirectly affecting a person or a course of events. The word "impact" simply means to affect or alter (as behaviour) by indirect or intangible means or to have an effect on the condition or development with a
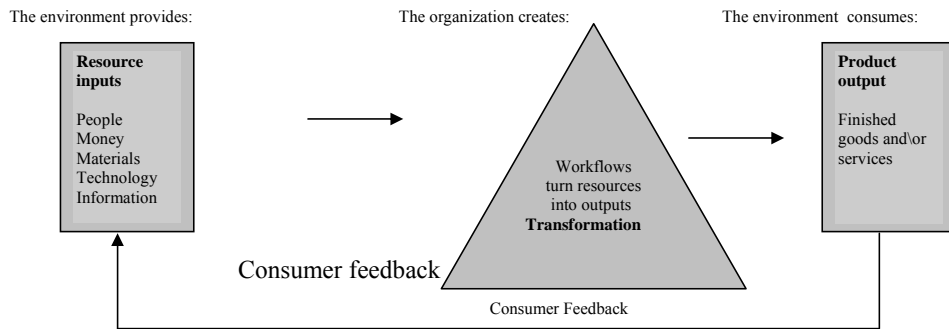
view to modifying something. Surprisingly, the word "impact" is very often used interchangeably with the word "influence" in the various texts. Some scholars purport that the word "impact" can be regarded as the ability to make someone or something change. For the purpose of this study, the word "impact" means the extent to which a teaching and learning intervention programme offered by sevice providers such as READ Educational Trust affects Grade 4 learners' writing competencies. It also refers to the extent to which the above programme influences the level of productivity and professional development of both the educators and trainers in this study.

1.7.3   Productivity

Many scholars view the concept of productivity as a very complex and slippery issue to define. For example, Van Niekerk (1992:5) maintains that before the concept of productivity itself is defined, a clear understanding should first be gained of the concept of output and input. However, more emphasis should be on the educational setting. According to Shafritz (1992:407), productivity is the input-output ratio with a time period and due consideration for quality. He further defines it as an effort to get improved performance out of allocated resources, which is achieved by means of efficiency and effectiveness controls. In simple terms, productivity can be defined as output per hour (Anthony *et al.*, 1999:450). Saunders (1997:407) perceives productivity as the extent to which improvements have been made by processes within their own contexts. It is also used to determine whether the firm or organisation has been successful or not.

In management terms, productivity is the ratio between output (what has been produced) and the input required to attain the results. For the purpose of this study, productivity is viewed by the researcher as one of the fundamental issues of organizational development. It is the ability of the individual employee, group and the organization as a whole to work at an expected pace and within the given time frame in order to achieve organizational goals.

Figure 1.1 Organizations as open systems.

The environment provides: The organization creates: The environment consumes:

Resource inputs

People
Money
Materials
Technology
Information

Workflows turn resources into outputs
Transformation

Product output

Finished goods and\or services

Consumer feedback

Consumer Feedback

(Adapted from Osborn *et al.,* 2000: 23)

Furthermore, productivity of the educators and trainers is determined by matching their outputs with standards or goals set by organizations such as READ Educational Trust. Similarly, Figure 1.1 clearly indicates the interaction between the environment and organizations as open systems. Logically, the environment provides resource inputs which are then transformed into product output as shown in Figure 1.1.

Having said that, it can be deduced that the success of any undertaking depends to a large extent on the quality of its management and its ability to meet market needs, i.e., its ability to do certain things customers value more than those of the competitors (Saunders, 1997: 407). It is against this background that the researcher perceives productivity as an important aspect that determines the success and growth of organizations, and that it may therefore be regarded as their cornerstone.

1.7.4   Training

Training is defined by Rothwell and Kazanas (1994:296) as an aspect of management that consists of organized learning activities capable of improving individual performance through changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences. It includes an intention to evoke new insights, update skills, and prepares people for career movement of any kind and to rectify knowledge or skill deficiencies. Traditionally, of all major functions of personnel, training has been the most neglected. It is, therefore, not surprising that scholars like Shafritz (1992:415) posit that it has always been perceived as a stepchild in

the personnel and human resource management family, and that has usually been one of the first areas to be sacrificed in terms of budget.

On the other hand, the concept of training is positively defined by Kroon (1995:316) as a methodical process that is aimed at attaining greater productivity of employees in their present positions and developing employees towards accepting more responsibilities. Lussies (1999:323) supports this view when defining training as a process which typically involves specific job skills and which applies more to operating employees. Training generally means teaching job skills, whereas development involves more general abilities. According to Robbins and Decenzo (1994:255), in Van Dyk *et al.,* (2001:467), training is a learning experience that seeks a relatively permanent change in an individual that will improve his or her ability to perform on the job. Similarly, Saunders (1997:268) views training as a management function that is geared towards cultivating people with desired capabilities through development programmes. Moreover, training is presented as an important weapon that is used to gain a competitive advantage (Casio, 1995:267). Logically, a key objective of any training programme, therefore, is to tie workforce training to business targets.
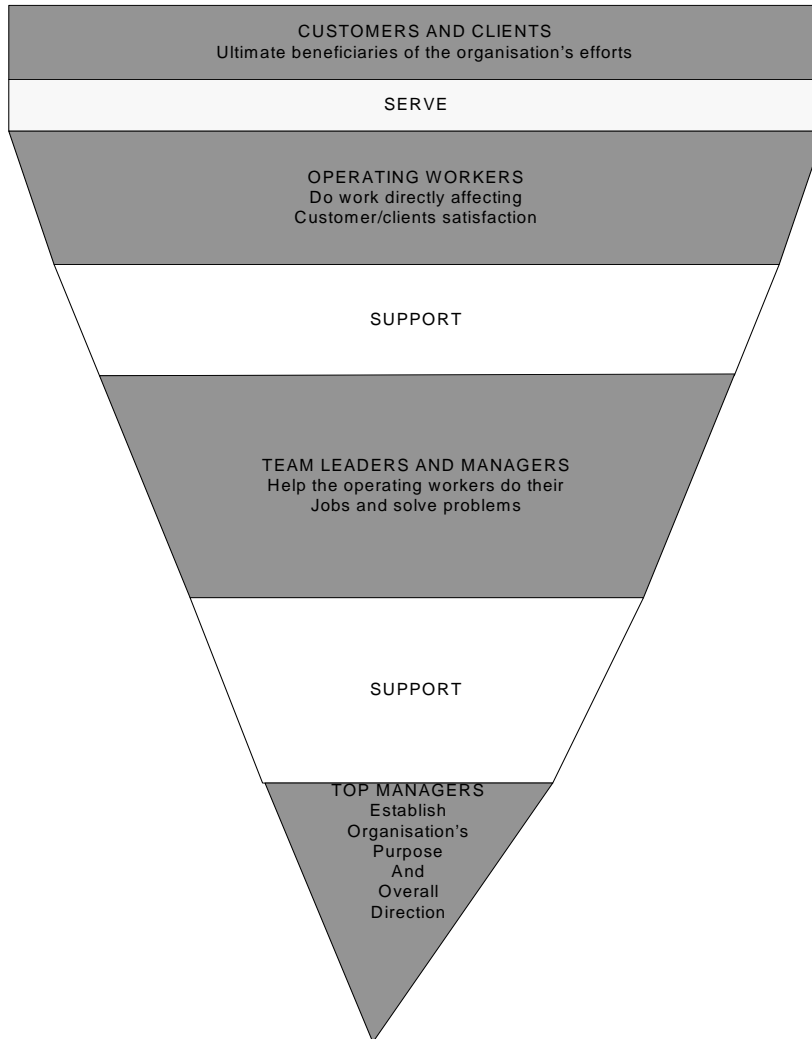
In the light of the above, one would conclude that training involves, amongst other things, the usage of corrective measures when current work standards drop, and this drop may be ascribed to a lack of knowledge, skills or poor attitudes amongst individual employees or groups within an organization. In this investigation, training refers to a tool for equipping educators and trainers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need in the implementation of READ methodologies and strategies. In this sense, it is a short-term instrument for change, geared to existing jobs and problems faced in the implementation of such methodologies.

1.7.5   READ Educational Trust

The READ Educational Trust is an independent, professional South African organization that is currently funded by the private sector and foreign donors. It was established in 1979 in response to community concerns over lack of reading and library facilities in disadvantaged communities. Thus, the underlying objective of READ as an organization is to eradicate the alarmingly high level of illiteracy found mainly in remote rural areas. The background of READ Educational Trust has been highlighted in Section 1.2. above.

Figure 1.2 below illustrates the upside-down pyramid view of the organization and its management.

Figure 1.2: The "upside–down pyramid/inverted" view of the organization and its management

CUSTOMERS AND CLIENTS
Ultimate beneficiaries of the organisation's efforts

SERVE

OPERATING WORKERS
Do work directly affecting
Customer/clients satisfaction

SUPPORT

TEAM LEADERS AND MANAGERS
Help the operating workers do their
Jobs and solve problems

SUPPORT

TOP MANAGERS
Establish
Organisation's
Purpose
And
Overall
Direction

(Adapted from Osborn *et al*., 2000: 23)

Finally, it is important to point out that the nature of the organization as well as its management determines, to a large extent, the success and sustainability of language programmes that are implemented in READ's project schools. Of note is the fact that

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organizations such as READ Educational Trust have already developed various strategies in support of project delivery and sustainability. From the preceeding discussion, READ Educational Trust can be understood to be a service provider that is committed to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, through the implementation of intervention programmes in selected schools.

1.7.6 Grade 4 Learners

Grade 4 learners are Intermediate Phase learners. The Intermediate Phase is the phase after the Foundation Phase with three learning programmes, namely, literacy, numeracy, and communication (Pretorius, 1998:57). Grade 4 learners fall within the "11 to 12" years age category. Grade 4 learners have been chosen as the main focus area as they have been receiving support throughout the Foundation Phase level. It was also anticipated that the researcher would be able to make recommendations based on the findings of the study. The said recommendations could be used to improve the quality of intervention programmes for Grade 5, 6 and 7 learners. Problem areas could also be addressed, especially in the lower grades, namely Grade 1-3 learners.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to Mouton (2002:160), most studies on outcomes or the impact of programmes are categorized under evaluation research, namely, experimental and quasi-experimental outcome studies that are quantitative in nature. The main aim of outcome or product evaluation studies is to establish whether or not the intended (and unintended) outcomes of the programmes have materialized. Therefore, this study suggests a theoretical (so-called "black box" evaluation) that is aimed at assessing whether the outcome has materialized or not (Mouton, 2002:159).

The following research questions have been formulated:

1. What is the impact of a teaching and learning programme interventions offered by external service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the performances of Grade 4 learners and what influence does it have on the classroom practices and professional development of educators involved in the application of such programmes?

1.1 How are supplemental language programmes structured in order to support and complement formal classroom teaching and learning environment?

1.2. What are the perceptions of Grade 4 language educators towards language programmes offered by organizations such as READ Educational Trust on the achievement of the curriculum outcomes?

1.3 How do language programmes such as those offered by READ Educational Trust contribute to effective language teaching?

1.4 How do the methodologies of service providers such as READ Educational Trust advance staff development?

1.5 To what extent does the READ Educational Trust's intervention programmes impact on Grade 4 learners' writing competencies?

1.6 How do intervention programmes offered by organizations such as READ Educational Trust impact on the level at which Grade 4 learners develop their language competencies?

1.7 How do intervention programmes offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust contribute to effective language teaching?

1.9 **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The Department of Education in Limpopo has signed a contract with READ Educational Trust as a service provider responsible for, amongst others, the assessment and implementation of language development programmes at primary school level.

The researcher has conducted a literature review in order to familiarize herself with the topic and to generate important ideas and themes that can be explored later in the research process. A literature review is an important step in the research process which aims at providing the researcher with a good understanding of the selected problem and help places the results in a historical perspective (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993:112). De Vos (1998: 65) concurs with this view and asserts that a literature study is of paramount importance in the sense that it provides the researcher with a substantially better insight into the dimensions and complexities of the problem, equips him/her with a complete justification for the subsequent steps, and also affords him/her the opportunity to choose whether to replicate a study or not.

The research suggests a quantitative-qualitative approach as it determines the impact of a teaching and learning intervention programmes offered by organizations such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners and the extent to which the programme has influenced the classroom practices and professional development of educators who were involved in the application or implementation of such programmes. Empirical research has been conducted using a structured questionnaire and open-ended interviews. The ultimate goal of the investigation is to give us a better understanding of educators' experiences with and opinions of an intervention programme that has impacted on their daily classroom practices and to assess the impact of training programmes offered by organizations such as READ Educational Trust on classroom teaching and learning in general.

Permission has been obtained from the Department of Education in Limpopo to conduct research in identified schools with Grade 4 classes. A variety of research strategies was used in this investigation. For instance, the researcher used a five-point scale to gauge the perceptions of educators who are involved in the implementation of intervention programmes offered by organizations such as READ Educational Trust as the service provider.

1.10   LIMITATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The main focus of the study is to determine Grade 4 educators' experiences with a READ Educational Trust training programme and its impact on their classroom practices and professional development. It also assesses the impact of a teaching and learning programme offered by external service providers such as READ Educational Trust on the writing performances of Grade 4 learners. However, the researcher could not have access to confidential reports on the rolling out of language intervention projects, as well as original agreements that were signed by READ Educational Trust and the national Department of Education. Other limitations of the investigation are highlighted in the last chapter.

1.11 PROGRAMME OF STUDY

This thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 contains the research problem, the aims of the investigation, the research methodology and the research programme. The problem is stated. The aims and objectives of the study are also stated, the methods of research are explained, the field of study is demarcated and, lastly, a description and definition of terms is provided.

Chapter 2 investigates the concept of learning in its totality. Theories and models that are related to this study are defined and their implications are considered. The relevance of educational theories to READ's training model and language teaching and learning is highlighted in the second chapter. Aspects such as second language acquisition and barriers that are caused by English as a medium of instruction are looked into.

Chapter 3 examines factors that may have an impact on the implementation of language programmes offered by service providers such as READ Educational Trust.

Chapter 4 presents the research background to READ's training model. The concept of writing is clearly defined. READ's approach to the teaching of writing is discussed. Educational implications of the READ model are considered and, lastly, the role of language in formal education is highlighted.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the empirical part of the study. Relevant research methodology is examined before describing the research methods applied in this study. Each method is discussed in terms of the data obtained.

Chapter 6 presents data analysis and a discussion of the findings from Grade 4 language educators' responses to a questionnaire survey. The findings of the qualitative research are also presented in the sixth chapter.

The final chapter of the thesis, Chapter 7, contains a summary and discussion of the main research findings and recommendations for action and further research.

1.12   CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the research study. It gives a background to the study by noting the disturbing problems in the implementation of language programmes, such as those offered by READ Educational Trust, which forms the case study for this investigation. The need to improve the quality of learning experiences is currently topical in South Africa, and needs to be pursued as a matter of great urgency, as the government is funding non-governmental organizations involved in the provision of intervention programmes in schools.   Basically, the search for quality in education has been described as a global phenomenon and a matter of urgency, particularly in developing countries like South Africa, as indicated above (Vedder, 1992:133).

This chapter also highlights the aims of the investigation. It provides an outline of chapters and offers basic clarification of the terms that form the cornerstone of the study. In the light of the foregoing, one would conclude that educational development is more and more determined by international trends and problems; the responses to these problems need also be conceived within an international and even global framework. Educational systems are also required to identify levels of success, both for individual learners and, increasingly, for the system as a whole.

In the next chapter, a literature review is conducted, with special emphasis on the concept of learning. For that reason, the various concepts, models and theories of learning are looked into.