

# **USING DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT TO GUIDE DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION OF READING COMPREHENSION**

**Bianka Henning**

**2015**



**USING DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT TO GUIDE DIFFERENTIATED  
INSTRUCTION OF READING COMPREHENSION**

by

**BIANKA HENNING**

A dissertation submitted in the fulfilment of the degree

**MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS**

(Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling)

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Department of Educational Psychology  
University of Pretoria

**SUPERVISOR**  
**Prof. A.C. Boucher**

PRETORIA  
NOVEMBER 2015



For Sebastian and Oliver

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

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I, Bianka Henning (student number 26459907), declare that the study titled: *Using dynamic assessment to guide differentiated instruction of reading comprehension* which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis in Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other University. All resources and citations from literature have been acknowledged in-text and referenced in full.



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Bianka Henning

November 2015

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[www.exclamationtranslations.co.za](http://www.exclamationtranslations.co.za)



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The author, whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's *Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research*.



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Bianka Henning

November 2015

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## SUMMARY

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### **Using dynamic assessment to guide differentiated instruction of reading comprehension**

by

**Bianka Henning**

**Supervisor:** Prof. AC Boucher

**Department:** Educational Psychology

**Degree:** Magister Educationis (Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling)

Many school going learners in South African schools face a daily challenge of reading and comprehending texts written in English – their first additional language (AL1). Learners need to develop their basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency to make sense of that which they are reading. Many South African learners lack basic comprehension skills and in general have low literacy rates.

If learners master basic reading comprehension skills they could possibly overcome many of the challenges they face. However all learners have unique learning needs, making it imperative to differentiate the instruction of reading comprehension. For this reason the study looked at the use of dynamic assessment to guide the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills.

The research was qualitative, conducted within a combination of constructivist, social-constructionist and social-constructivist paradigmatic perspectives. The study took the form of a case study at a predominantly Afrikaans school in a small town in South Africa. The Grade 7 learners were grouped into four bands according to their average reading comprehension performance. By means of a combination of convenience, purposive and random sampling strategies, sixteen participants were selected from the different bands. Observations, participants' answer sheets, individual discussions and a researcher's journal were used as data collection strategies.

Three reading comprehension tasks focusing on different text types were administered to all the classes. From the results obtained from the first and second tasks lessons on basic reading comprehension strategies were designed and

presented in class. The participants received mediation additionally during individual discussions subsequent to the first two reading comprehension tasks.

During the process of data analysis both *a priori* and emerging codes were utilised and combined to form five overall themes for further analysis, namely Vocabulary, Background knowledge, Knowledge of text organization, the Assessment experience and Principles of the zone of proximal development.

The findings revealed that five dynamic assessment strategies could possibly be successfully utilised in the Grade 7 classroom to inform the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills: 1) Dialogue between teachers and learners; 2) The careful construction of questions in an attempt to prevent the assessment instrument in itself from becoming a barrier to learning; 3) Phrasing questions in such a way that they guide learners to specific parts of text where answers can be found; 4) Including word explanations in the assessment instrument; and 5) Referring learners who lack basic reading skills for appropriate remedial programmes.

**Keywords:**

- Diversity
- Inclusive Education
- First Additional Language
- Reading
- Reading Comprehension
- Curriculum Differentiation
- Assessment
- Dynamic Assessment
- Zone of Proximal Development
- Scaffolding

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## OPSOMMING

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### **Die gebruik van dinamiese assessering om die differensiasie van onderrig in leesbegripvaardighede te rig deur**

**Bianka Henning**

**Studieleier:** Prof. AC Bouwer

**Departement:** Opvoedkundige Sielkunde

**Graad:** Magister Educationis (Leerondersteuning, Voorligting & Berading)

In Suid-Afrika ervaar heelwat skoolgaande leerders 'n daaglikse uitdaging om tekste in Engels – hulle eerste addisionele taal (AT1) - te lees met begrip. Indien leerders leesmateriaal met genoegsame begrip wil lees, moet hulle basiese interpersoonlike kommunikasievaardighede en kognitiewe akademiese taalvaardigheid ontwikkel word. Baie Suid-Afrikaanse leerders se basiese leesbegripvaardighede is ontoereikend en verder toon baie leerders ook in die algemeen 'n lae geletterdheidsvlak.

Baie van die uitdagings wat leerders ervaar kan moontlik oorbrug word indien hulle basiese leesbegripvaardighede bemeester. Tog het alle leerders unieke leerbehoefte en juis daarom is dit noodsaaklik om die onderrig van leesbegripvaardighede te differensieer. Juis daarom het die studie gefokus op die gebruik van dinamiese assessering om die gedifferensieerde onderrig van leesbegripvaardighede te rig.

Die navorsing was kwalitatief en uitgevoer binne 'n kombinasie van konstruktivistiese, sosiale-konstruktionistiese en sosiale-konstruktivistiese paradigmatiese raamwerke. Die studie het die vorm van 'n gevallestudie by 'n oorwegend Afrikaanse skool in 'n klein dorpie in Suid-Afrika aangeneem. Die Graad 7 leerders was volgens hulle gemiddelde leesbegrip prestasie in vier verskillende groepe verdeel. Deur middel van 'n kombinasie van gerieflikheids-, doelmatige-, en ewekansige steekproefopnames is sestien deelnemers geselekteer uit die verskillende groepe. Observasies, deelnemers se antwoordblaaie, individuele gesprekke en 'n navorsersjoernaal is gebruik as data-insamelingstegnieke.

Drie leesbegripopdragte, wat elk gefokus het op 'n ander tipe teks, is toegepas in al die Graad 7 klasse. Die resultate verkry van die eerste en tweede leesbegripopdragte is aangewend om lesse saam te stel wat ten doel gehad het om basiese leesbegrip-vaardighede te onderrig. Die deelnemers het verder ook addisionele mediëring ontvang gedurende individuele gesprekke wat op die eerste twee leesbegripopdragte gevolg het.

Gedurende die proses van data-analise is beide *a priori* kodering en kodes wat vanuit die data na vore gekom het gebruik en gekombineer om vyf finale temas vir verdere analise te vorm, naamlik Woordeskat, Agtergrondkennis, Kennis van teksorganisasie, die Assesserings-ervaring en Prinsipes van die terrein van naasliggende ontwikkeling.

Die bevindinge het getoon dat vyf dinamiese assesseringstrategieë moontlik suksesvol aangewend kan word in die Graad 7 klaskamer om besluite te neem in verband met die differensiasie van die onderrig van leesbegripvaardighede, naamlik 1) Dialoog tussen onderwysers en leerders; 2) Die versigtige bewoording van vrae, sodat die assesserings-instrument self nie 'n leerhindernis word nie; 3) Die formulering van vrae op so 'n wyse dat dit leerders lei na spesifieke dele in die teks waar die antwoorde gevind kan word; 4) Die insluiting van verduidelikings van woordeskat wat in die assesserings-instrument voorkom; en 5) Die verwysing van leerders wie se leesvermoë nie op standaard is nie na geskikte remediërende programme.

### **Sleutelwoorde:**

- Diversiteit
- Inklusiewe Onderwys
- Eerste Addisionele Taal
- Lees
- Leesbegrip
- Kurrikulum Differensiasie
- Assessering
- Dinamiese Assessering
- Terrein van Naasliggende Ontwikkeling
- Ondersteuning

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## Chapter 1

### Rationale behind the study and methodological outline

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#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the framework of the dissertation. The rationale of the study explains the background against which this study was conducted, and focuses on the need for good comprehension skills in school-going learners. It also focuses on the way in which results obtained from dynamic assessment (DA) could assist teachers to differentiate the curriculum for reading comprehension as a means to meet the needs of a class of diverse learners so that they could all develop the necessary comprehension skills. The rationale is followed by a discussion of the research question, as well as the aim and the significance of the study. Next, the methodology, including the research paradigm and design, strategies for selecting participants, collection of data and how the data were analysed, as well as ethical considerations pertaining to the study are discussed. This is followed by the clarification of key concepts relating to the study. Chapter 1 is concluded with an outline of the chapters to follow.

#### 1.2 THE RATIONALE OF THE RESEARCH

Reading, and especially comprehending what one is reading, is a vital skill to develop in order to communicate via any form of printed media. According to Cleary, Harran, Luck, Potgieter, Scheckle, Van der Merwe and Van Heerden (2005:7), good comprehension is a necessity for effective communication. Reading comprehension is not just a vital skill for effective communication, but it is also a powerful tool that will empower learners to be academically successful (UNESCO, 2004:5). Reading comprehension is moreover a fundamental skill for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Higgins and Edwards (2011:30) state that electronic access demands that readers possess the skills that are needed to navigate and comprehend online media and texts.

Although the need for effective communicative skills is required, it is, however, a reality that many learners in South African schools cannot effectively communicate in their First Additional Language (AL1) when entering the Senior Phase (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2011:8). Bharuthram (2012:206) reports that there are still low literacy rates among South African school-goers. In 2006, South Africa was one of 45 education systems worldwide that partook in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Bharuthram, 2012:207; Venter & Howie, 2006:17)

The aim of PIRLS 2006 was to test the literacy rate of Grade 4 learners, and not only did our learners score well below the fixed international score, South Africa also achieved the lowest score of all the education systems that took part in the study (Bharuthram, 2012:207; Howie & Venter, 2006:17). In 2011, the Department of Basic Education reported that the *Annual National Assessment (ANA)* results had declined gradually since testing in 2008 (Bharuthram, 2012:206). There is more research that illustrates South African school-goers' low literacy rate. A recent study conducted by *The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit* in rural and urban areas in South Africa identified that after five years of formal schooling, many learners still cannot manage to obtain a score higher than four out of 20 on a basic reading comprehension task (NEEDU, 2013:22).

The research findings mentioned above highlight the dilemma that the South African education system faces. South African school-goers lack basic reading comprehension skills, which then prevent them from communicating effectively in their AL1, and ultimately from achieving academic success. However, in defence of the South African educational system, it is fair to say that the South African school curriculum has always placed a high value on literacy and reading comprehension skills as this influences the country's economic well-being and gain. Furthermore, this has been emphasised to establish personal development in learners (Klapwijk, 2012:191-204). If the curriculum followed in South African schools places such an emphasis on effective reading comprehension skills, why then do research results show that South African school-goers have a low literacy rate? One contributing factor could be that many teachers lack the skills to design differentiated lesson plans to meet the diverse needs of all learners. However, to understand South Africa's current educational situation, we must look at its past.

According to Van Zyl (cited in Meier, 2005:170), segregation had in the past always been a part of South Africa's society and its education system, which resulted in an inequitable educational system. An example of this is that while education during the Apartheid era was free and compulsory for white learners, education for black learners was voluntary (Meier, 2005:170). Not only did the first democratic election change politics and society in South Africa, it also led to changes taking place in the country's educational system. From 1998, the old curriculum was replaced by Curriculum 2005, which was driven by Outcomes Based Education (Aldridge, Fraser & Sebela, 2004:245). Because of some shortcomings, Curriculum 2005 was revised in the year 2000 and again in 2009, and was eventually phased out and replaced by the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)* (DBE, 2011).

CAPS was implemented in three phases: Grade 10 and the Foundation Phase were implemented in January 2012; Grade 11 and the Intermediate Phase were implemented in January 2013; and Grade 12 and the Senior Phase were implemented in January 2014 (DBE, 2013:15). CAPS is made up of the following core values and aims: firstly, CAPS aims to redress the inequalities of the past by ensuring equal opportunities for all sections of the population; secondly, CAPS is designed to provide all learners, despite their diversity, with the needed skills to take part meaningfully in society; thirdly, CAPS is expected to produce learners that can communicate effectively using language in various modes; and lastly, CAPS aims to produce learners that qualify for higher education and eventually can successfully enter the world of work. For this reason, CAPS strives to provide quality education that will develop learners who will be actively involved in their learning, who will have high knowledge and skills, who can think critically and creatively, and who will be able to use science and technology for various reasons, one of these being reading and comprehending online texts (DBE, 2011:4-5).

Preparing learners for the world of work, where effective communicative skills are demanded, is a daunting task for teachers. Teachers' roles are made even more complex when considering learner diversity in terms of readiness to learn, language, economic background, culture, motivation, interests, and approach to learning (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014:1). So, when designing learning activities, teachers should keep each learner's unique situation in mind to ensure that he or she gets what is needed from every learning situation. It is for this reason that a basic premise of the current educational system is that of inclusivity as an answer to address diversity in classrooms. It is highlighted that inclusivity should become a central part of the functioning of each school in South Africa (DBE, 2011:5).

Inclusive education can be defined as a respect for diversity and accepting that all learners have different learning needs (DoE, 2001:16). Inclusivity goes a step further than simply respecting and accepting diversity. Inclusivity also aims to change attitudes, behaviour and the community, and restructure education systems and methodologies in such a way that they meet the needs of all learners (DBE, 2011:16). In the process, barriers to learning are not only identified and reduced, but learners are also empowered by the development of their individual strengths, maximising participation and leading them to be critically involved in their own learning (DoE, 2001:16).

Inclusivity is an internationally well-known term. In 1994, at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education, it was stated that for schools to adopt a policy of inclusivity would be the best way to do away with any form of discrimination, creating communities that value and welcome each other's individuality and ultimately ensuring quality education for all (UNESCO, 2004:6). In 2000, a document called *The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments* was presented at the Dakar World Education Forum. It maintained that all children must have access to an education of good quality that addresses their diverse needs (UNESCO, 2004:5).

White Paper 6 was released in 2001 and clearly outlined what inclusivity means in the South African school context. In this document, schools are implored to transform themselves to accommodate the full range of learning needs, and in the process, contribute to establishing a caring society (DoE, 2001:11). No longer is it the responsibility of the learner to change so that he or she can fit into the educational system, but the educational system must be flexible so that it can accommodate the specific needs of all the learners (DoE, 2001:17).

White Paper 6 also identified that different learning needs may arise due to different reasons, one of these being an inflexible curriculum (DoE, 2001:17-18). Some of the aspects of the curriculum from which barriers to learning may arise include: 1) the content; 2) the language of instruction; 3) how the classroom and instruction are organised; 4) the methods and processes used in teaching; 5) the pace of teaching and the time available to complete the curriculum; 6) the learning materials and equipment used, and 7) how the learning is assessed (DoE, 2001:19). Therefore, it must be the aim of all classroom teachers to make the curriculum more flexible across all bands of education so that it is accessible to all learners, irrespective of their learning needs (DoE, 2001:20). White Paper 6 also illuminates the fact that classroom teachers will be the primary resource for achieving the goal of an inclusive education system (DoE, 2001:18). However, research has shown that teachers in South Africa do not possess the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are needed to meet all the diverse learning needs of the children in our classrooms (Nel, 2011:169). This creates a problem, as teachers stand in the way of successful inclusion in the classroom. This is why the Department of Education demands that teachers improve their skills and knowledge and develop new ones (DoE, 2001:18). An essential skill that teachers must develop is the ability to apply curriculum differentiation in classrooms as a way to answer all the diverse needs of learners and, in the process, promote a policy of inclusivity in the classroom.



Curriculum differentiation is the process of modifying the curriculum by changing the content, methods of instruction, or the way the work is assessed so that it can correlate with the needs and abilities of the learners in the class (UNESCO, 2004:14). Differentiated instruction assumes that all children have different learning profiles and that it is the teacher's responsibility to be familiar with the learning profile of each learner and design lesson plans accordingly (Wright, 2010:82). The goal of curriculum differentiation is to ensure that each learner can actively and confidently be engaged in their own learning and that no learner is excluded from the learning process (Bartolo, 2010:114; UNESCO, 2004:14).

Unfortunately, theory on differentiation is not easily translated into action (Watson, 2002:11). There are probably many reasons for this, and, considering this from a teacher's point of view, these reasons could include teachers feeling that they do not have enough knowledge of curriculum differentiation to practise it confidently. Also, preparing differentiated lessons is very time consuming. In addition, some teachers have to teach AL1 to big classes with as many as 40 learners per class. Bornman and Rose (2010:7) state that some teachers have little or no previous training in curriculum differentiation. From the literature consulted, it became clear that teachers' knowledge and skills, or lack thereof, determine how a teacher will approach new strategies such as curriculum differentiation (Klapwijk, 2012:191-204; UNESCO, 2004:6). The literature also illustrates that other factors, such as class size, limited resources, and a lack of time, also prevent teachers from practising curriculum differentiation (Klapwijk, 2012:191-204; UNESCO, 2004:6, 17). Furthermore, a study conducted by Klapwijk (2012:191-204) showed that unless teachers are provided with sufficient evidence that new strategies will work with their learners, they are reluctant to try them in their own classes.

According to Tomlinson and Moon (2014:1), in a differentiated classroom, the generation and use of data to inform instruction, as well as to measure the effectiveness of instruction, is a core part of the instructional cycle. In light of the above discussion on teachers' hesitance to implement curriculum differentiation due to various factors, especially time constraints, it becomes evident that teachers must base their decisions regarding when and how to differentiate on a sound knowledge foundation. This is the case as they cannot afford to waste time on strategies that do not work for the learners in their class. In this study, it is proposed that the data used to inform and evaluate instruction, and on which decisions about differentiation should be based, should be obtained from assessment results.

Assessment can be defined as an ongoing, planned process of collecting information from learners and then interpreting this information, not only to make a judgement about the learner's performance, but also to identify any needs and barriers that the learner might have or experience. This information can then be used to inform and plan future learning (DBE, 2013:6; DBE, 2011:118; UNESCO, 2004:73). With regard to reading and viewing texts in the English AL1 class, CAPS outlines that it is important to not just assess learners' ability to recognise and decode words, but also to assess their understanding of what is being read (DBE, 2011:118). This places a strong emphasis on the quality of assessment tasks.

According to Bouwer (2016:79), the goal of assessment is to determine how learning support can best be provided for learners, taking into consideration factors such as their current level of performance, their strengths and their needs, as well as their unique social environment so that they can eventually actively and independently take part in their own learning. However, it then becomes clear that static assessment does not work towards the ultimate goal of assessment (Bouwer, 2016:85). The flaw of static assessment lies in that it simply gives a global mark that indicates what the learner can and cannot do at the moment of assessment. It does not give an accurate view of how learners approach a task, or any indication of factors such as learning style, social background, interest, or the needs of the learners, all factors that can influence the outcome of assessment results (UNESCO, 2004:73). Thus, the results obtained from static assessment tasks cannot provide the necessary information that is needed to make valid decisions about curriculum differentiation. This is why an alternative method of assessment is needed and dynamic assessment (DA) could possibly answer that need.

When DA was first researched in the 60s and 70s, a specific need in society was the driving force behind it (De Beer, 2006:8). The aim of that research was to determine whether DA could provide more culture-fair assessment, which does not simply assess that which has been learned, but also learning potential (De Beer, 2006:9). The growing interest in DA was born from dissatisfaction with static assessment (Tzuriel, 2000:386), but what is DA and what makes it significantly different from static assessment?

According to Lubbe (2004:318-319), DA can be defined as a flexible, process-orientated approach to assessment. During DA, the focus is not just on what the learner can and cannot do, but also on the skills and knowledge that the learner is still developing (Lubbe, 2004:318-319), whereas static assessment is past-orientated

and focuses on what the learner has learned up to the point of assessment; DA is therefore future-orientated. This means that a great emphasis is placed on the capacity of the learner to master, apply and reapply knowledge that is taught in the DA testing situation (De Beer, 2006:9). One of the characteristics of DA is that the assessment process includes a learning experience (De Beer, 2006:9). DA works on a pre-test – teach – post-test approach where the pre-test indicates the learner's present level of performance (De Beer, 2006:9). In the pre-test stage, DA is very similar to traditional static assessment (De Beer, 2006:9), but this is where DA goes one step further. DA strives to determine what those strengths are that helped the learner to achieve his or her current level of performance and to use those very strengths to overcome barriers to better performance in future learning.

What makes DA better than static assessment is that in static assessment the teacher is expected to keep a neutral position in an attempt to prevent any interference with the results, whereas in DA, teachers are encouraged to intervene during the assessment process so that it can provide another opportunity for learning (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004:54). In DA, some form of intervention actually takes place between the pre- and post-tests. One such DA strategy is that of *the learning test*, which was developed by Guthke and Stein (Tzuriel, 2000:391). Tzuriel (2000:391) defines the learning test as a diagnostic method in which teachers record to what extent learners are able to better their initial test performance if they are provided with different forms of support. These may include feedback, prompts, or even the teaching of new concepts and skills between the pre-test and post-tests. This concept of intervention relates closely to the goal of DA, which is to determine how a learner will and can change if he or she is provided with the necessary opportunity, guidance, and support (De Beer, 2006:9). DA also strives towards developing in learners a habit of being more reflective of their own learning as opposed to impulsively completing assessment tasks (Tzuriel, 2000:420).

One disadvantage of DA is that it is more time consuming than static assessments, but this disadvantage can easily be overlooked if one considers that DA provides the teacher with more in-depth, qualitative information about the learner that can guide future decisions about differentiation (Tzuriel, 2000:425).

DA finds its theoretical foundation in Vygotsky's theory of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (De Beer, 2006:10; Tzuriel, 2000:388). ZPD refers to the distance between the level of skills and knowledge a child can display independently, and the level of potential development when given assistance by a more capable

peer or teacher (Pearson & Thompson, 1996:72-73; Pressley & McCormick, 1995:182; Williams & Burden, 1997:40). Vygotsky (cited in Tzuriel, 2000:388), suggested that by using the ZPD concept, learners might perform above their current level of capability when they are supported by an experienced adult. The type and amount of support that each learner needs in order to solve a problem is then an indication of that learner's ZPD (Tzuriel, 2000:391). This support given to the learner is also known as *scaffolding*. Scaffolding can then be defined as any form of support, aid or guidance given to the learner by the teacher so that the learner can complete the tasks that he or she was not able to complete without help (Ackerman, 2001:107; Maree, 2004:401; Nel, 2011:178; Pass, 2004:116). This support is only temporary and as the learner masters the skills and strategies that were scaffolded for him or her by the teacher, the degree and quality of the support given changes, until the learner can complete the task independently (Pressley & McCormick, 1995:9; Tzuriel, 2000:391). A study conducted by Tzuriel (2000:400) showed that scaffolding is more effective with learners with a lower initial performance level.

### 1.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The study was guided by the following research question:

***In what way can dynamic assessment be practised by Grade 7 Senior Phase teachers to inform the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills in English as a First Additional Language?***

Based on a literature study, which is reported in Chapter 2, a number of dynamic assessment techniques suitable for assessing reading comprehension in the Senior Phase were identified for investigation. In order to answer the research question, the following secondary questions were then explored:

1. Which of the dynamic assessment techniques, identified in the literature study as probably suitable for reading comprehension in Grade 7, yield meaningful information for curriculum differentiation in the teaching of reading comprehension skills at the Grade 7 level?
2. Which of the dynamic assessment techniques, identified in the literature study as probably suitable for reading comprehension in Grade 7, are feasible in the classroom at this level?
3. How should dynamic assessment results be used in differentiating the curriculum for reading comprehension instruction at the Grade 7 level?

## **1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the study was to examine the viability of using the results obtained from dynamic assessment tasks to make decisions about differentiated instruction. Such differentiated instruction would meet learners' specific learning needs in order to guide them to reach their full academic potential in reading comprehension in their first additional language.

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study was designed to hopefully contribute to knowledge on how to make DA and curriculum differentiation an integral part of daily classroom practice. This is not only in terms of instruction and the assessment of reading comprehension in the AL1 at Grade 7 level, but also in other subjects, and perhaps at other grade levels.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1.6.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

The research conducted in this study was of a qualitative, constructivist nature since learners use their different language skills, past experiences and other strengths to actively construct their own knowledge or understanding of written texts. The decision for qualitative research within the constructivist paradigm is also in line with the tenets of DA. The cognitive viewpoint of Cognitive Constructivism was primarily adhered to. However, social-constructionist and social-constructivist theories also informed and directed the researcher's thinking in the sense that textual comprehension per se is essentially a communicative (i.e. social) act, and the teacher's role finds its form in (social) interaction. Details concerning the methodological considerations will be provided and discussed in Chapter 3.

### **1.6.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design followed was that of a composite case study. The case comprised the Grade 7 learners of one school, with one teacher instructing reading comprehension as part of the English-AL1-curriculum. The composite nature of the case was derived from the participants, who were selected from all of the Grade 7 classes, and were grouped into four bands representing different levels of achievement in reading comprehension. Within the case of the Grade 7 learners of one school with one teacher instructing reading comprehension, the focus was on individual learners within each achievement grouping (band). There was also focus

placed on each band, i.e. on those who constituted this composite case, and not all the learners generally.

### 1.6.3 PARTICIPANTS

The participants were selected from the five Grade 7 classes in one school. This was done through a combination of convenience and purposive sampling, followed by random selection. This was only carried out after obtaining informed consent from the parents. The results of a routine reading and comprehension test written by all the learners in Grade 7 (and therefore not yet part of the study) were divided into four bands: 39% or less, 40-59%, 60-79%, and 80% or more. Of those learners whose parents had given informed consent for them to take part in the study, five learners per band were randomly selected (the inclusion criteria thus being parental consent and achievement).

### 1.6.4 DATA COLLECTION

Discussions, primary documents such as participants' answer sheets, observations and a research journal were used to collect the necessary data.

According to Nieuwenhuis (2010a:87), "An interview is a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participant questions to collect data and to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviour of the participant." However, because of the age of the participants in this study, it was preferred to rather use the term *discussions* instead of *interviews*. Although the discussions were structured in the same way as an interview (they followed a predetermined structure that allowed for more probing on certain areas or topics), they were more informal than interviews. Semi-structured and open-ended discussions were combined. The goal of the semi-structured discussion was to keep the discussion on track. The open-ended quality of the semi-structured discussion allowed for probing of issues that came out in the semi-structured discussion, which might possibly influence achievement.

During the study, primary documents like participants' answer sheets related to reading comprehension were collected and analysed. This was done to determine how DA practices influenced the development and instruction of reading comprehension.

A third method of data collection was that of observation. Observation is the systematic process of recording the behaviour patterns of participants, objects and



occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:83-84). In this study, the role of the researcher was that of observer as participant. During the observations, the researcher focused on the following aspects: 1) How the participants approached reading comprehension assessment tasks, and how they came to produce the final product; 2) How the participants used their social interactions within the classroom context in order to construct comprehension; and 3) how the participants utilised their unique assets and strengths in order to assist them in the process of developing reading comprehension.

Finally, a personal research journal that contained the personal reflections of the researcher on the research process was used as an additional method of data collection.

### **1.6.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

The first step taken in the process of data analysis was to organise the data, to assign pseudonyms to all of the participants and to transcribe all discussions. The next step was to explore the data. This was done by reading and re-reading the data until the researcher was familiar with it (Foster, 1996:63). Only after the second step was concluded were the data coded by means of a hand analysis. This was done by marking segments of the data with symbols, descriptive words, and unique identifying names (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:105). During the analysis, both *a priori* and inductive coding was used. The reason for this being that codes had been identified from the literature that was consulted, but the researcher also wanted to be open to any other significant codes that might arise from the data. During the open coding process, the data were grouped under related themes. The data analysis process went one step further by exploring related themes in order to get a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. This is just a brief overview, and the data analysis process will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

### **1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In accordance with the literature regarding ethics in research, the following ethical principles were adhered to throughout the study: 1) Respect for persons, 2) Beneficence, 3) Justice, and 4) Professionalism.

In order to adhere to the principle of respect, the researcher recognised the autonomy of the individual (Orb, Eisenhower & Wynaden, 2001:95; University of

South Africa (UNISA), 2007:10; University of Pretoria, 2008, p.12). This was done by giving the participants the independence to decide whether they wanted to take part in the study or not. For this, a letter of consent had to be completed by both the participants and their parents. Part of the principle of respect is also respecting the participants' privacy. In order to respect the privacy of the participants, each one of them was assigned a pseudonym. In a further attempt to protect the privacy of the participants, the researcher also took care to write the dissertation in such a way that it would not lead to the identification of any participants. Neither the identity of the participants nor any detail about them was discussed with any colleagues or any other learner in the school.

The principle of beneficence was adhered to by weighing the benefits of the study with the risks of the study (Creswell, 2008:158). Before commencing with the study, the researcher could not foresee any physical or great emotional risks for any participant in this study. However, on closer reflection, it became evident to the researcher that the way in which the study was conducted and the results made public could possibly cause some harm to the learners if not treated with care. Therefore, the researcher aimed to respect the participants' identity and kept any personal detail they had shared with her private, so as to prevent them from feeling exposed. Another point that guided the writing of the dissertation was the fact that if the participants' privacy was not guarded, it could also expose them to a broader public and in that way cause emotional harm.

The principle of justice had implications for the dual role of researcher and teacher experienced in this study. The researcher had selected participants that she worked with, but the needs of all the students that she was teaching also had to be kept in mind. All of the learners, not just the participants, had to be treated fairly and the research had to contribute to all learners' learning and wellbeing (Creswell, 2008:158; Orb et al., 2001:95; UNISA, 2007:9; University of Pretoria, 2008, p.11).

The last principle, professionalism, was adhered to as a guideline in order to produce a study that was of quality, integrity and accountability (University of Pretoria, 2008, p. 12). To add to the professionalism of the study, permission was also obtained from other relevant parties, such as the school where the study was conducted, the relevant Department of Education, as well as the University.

All of the ethical principles stated above will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3.



## 1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

- a) **Cognitive Constructivism:** The cognitive constructivist approach places emphasis on learners' construction of knowledge by building on their prior knowledge and experiences, while being supported by more knowledgeable facilitators and guides (Bigge, Stump, Spagna & Silberman, 1999:295).
- b) **Curriculum differentiation:** The process of seeing the curriculum as other than a rigid programme or system with content that all learners must learn in the same way and at the same level. Curriculum differentiation rather takes into consideration each learner's unique profile and designs lessons to suit their strengths, needs and learning styles. In this way, teachers can modify the curriculum to create learning experiences that will help each learner in the class to reach his or her unique educational goals (Wang, 1992:4).
- c) **Diversity:** All the differences that a group of learners in a single classroom or school display in terms of their home environments, previous experiences, family set-up, culture, religion, physical appearance, academic history, strengths, abilities, the way in which they learn or any special needs they might have (Costa, 2000:41).
- d) **Dynamic Assessment (DA):** DA is a test – teach – retest process, i.e. incorporating the mediation of skills and content to determine not only the learner's current level of achievement, but especially the potential level of future achievement, and the ability of the learner to learn from interaction (Bouwer, 2016:85).
- e) **First Additional Language (AL1):** The CAPS document (DBE, 2011:8) defines a learner's AL1 as another language that is not the learner's mother tongue, but is used for various communicative reasons such as for social interaction or as a language of learning. The term *first* means that it is not necessarily the only additional language that is spoken, but that it is the language that is used most, besides that of the mother tongue.
- f) **Grade 7 learner:** The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act no. 84 of 1996) defines a grade as that part of the educational programme that must be completed in a year. In the South African educational system, a learner typically completes Grade 7 in the year that he or she turns 13.
- g) **Inclusive education:** The practice and process of involving all learners and meeting the diverse needs of all learners in supportive classrooms and

schools regardless of age, ability, socio-economic background, talent, gender, language, HIV status and cultural origin (Swart, 2004:231).

- h) **Reading Comprehension:** Reading comprehension is a process whereby the reader combines his or her prior knowledge and previous experiences, the information in the text, and his or her stance in relation to information in the text. This is done to make meaning of the written/printed message (Pardo, 2004:272).
- i) **Scaffolding:** Scaffolding is any form of support given to a learner during the act of learning in order to help the learner to achieve his goals. Scaffolding is a special kind of help, or temporary assistance, where learners are assisted to progress towards new skills, concepts and levels of understanding (Nel, 2011:178).
- j) **Senior phase:** This is the third phase of a learner's education and it consists of the Grades 7-9.
- k) **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD):** Pressley and McCormick (1995:182) define the ZPD as behaviours beyond a child's level of autonomous functioning, but within reach with assistance, and as such that reflect behaviours that are developing.

## 1.9 OUTLINE OF THE DOCUMENT

Chapter 1 has provided the framework in which the study was conducted. In the rationale, the pressing challenge that teachers face in order to create an inclusive environment in their classrooms was presented. This was discussed with specific reference to the diverse needs of all learners, which can be addressed by means of curriculum differentiation. It also emphasised the importance of developing effective reading comprehension skills and providing a possible solution to address the problem at hand.

The research questions that guided the study, and the aim and significance of the study were subsequently formulated. This was followed by an outline of the methodology used in this study, including the following: the research paradigm and design; the selection of the participants; how the data were collected and analysed; and the ethical principles that underpinned the study. The chapter was concluded with a list of definitions of all the key terms pertaining to the study.

A discussion of the literature study conducted will be presented in Chapter 2. The literature study will touch on the subjects of AL1, reading, and more specifically, reading comprehension, diversity, inclusivity, curriculum differentiation, assessment, DA, ZPD and scaffolding.

In Chapter 3, the methodology that was briefly outlined in Chapter 1 will be thoroughly explained and the research process will be described. This will be followed by a report of the research findings in Chapter 4. The document will be concluded with Chapter 5 that attempts to answer both the primary and secondary research questions. This chapter will also provide recommendations for future research and teaching practices.

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## Chapter 2

### Literature Study: Using DA to construct differentiated reading comprehension tasks in the English-as-AL classroom as a way to address diversity in learner needs

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#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the consulted literature pertaining to the study. Firstly, the importance of effective reading comprehension skills in the modern day, especially in English as a first additional language and the reality of South African learners' low literacy rates are presented. This is followed by a discussion of the diversity displayed by learners and how the challenge of diversity is addressed through a policy of inclusivity within the South African educational context. Next, curriculum differentiation, as a means of promoting inclusivity in classrooms, is examined. This is followed by considerations on how assessment results can be used to make decisions about curriculum differentiation. Some flaws related to static assessment are identified in light of the need for sufficient information on which to base valid decisions about curriculum differentiation. The proposal that DA could be an alternative way of assessment to possibly provide teachers with the information that is needed for curriculum differentiation is then explained. The literature study on DA concludes with a tentative, literature-based, explanation of how the results obtained from DA should be used to differentiate the curriculum for reading comprehension. As DA finds its conceptualisation in Vygotsky's ZPD, with scaffolding closely related to it, these two notions are also examined.

#### 2.2 READING COMPREHENSION

##### 2.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Language is the most important tool for communication. According to Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:2), learning a language is a natural process and human life would be very different without language-based communication. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2011:8) also highlights the importance of language learning by explicitly stating that learning a new language enables learners to express their identity, feelings and ideas while interacting with others. Although all learners use language to communicate, the linguistic situation in South African classrooms is very complex and it may happen that learners in a single classroom speak a variety of languages (Evans, Gauton, Kaschula, Prinsloo, Ramagoshi & Taljaard, 2007:1). A clear distinction between the terms *first language* and *AL* is necessary. The DBE

(2013:3) defines learners' first language as the language that they acquired first through immersion at home, and it is also viewed as the language in which an individual thinks. The first language is then usually the language spoken by the primary caregiver and there are ample opportunities for the learner to use the language in his or her immediate environment. The DBE (2013:2) continues to define an AL as any additional language learned in addition to the learner's first language. However, to be truly able to understand the complexity of the language situation within the South African school context, one should note information taken from several legislation documents and other policy documents created by the DBE.

The country's Constitution, Section 6.4 (Act No. 108, 1996) states that all official languages must be equally valued. Furthermore, Section 29 (2) (Act No. 108, 1996) explains that everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that language is reasonably practicable. The second document viewed is the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (DoE, 1997), which stipulates that all learners will be offered their language of choice for learning and teaching, as well as one approved AL as a subject from Grade 3 onwards. In addition to this, a third document, *The Incremental Introduction of African Languages in South African Schools* (DBE, 2013:4), states that as from 2015, starting with Grade 1, an African language will be introduced into the curriculum as a AL2. This process of introducing an African language as a second AL will end with Grade 12 learners in the year 2026 (DBE, 2013:4).

The last document taken into consideration here is the South African Schools Act (Act No. 84, 1996), which states in Section 6(2) that the governing body of a public school may determine the language of teaching and learning in accordance with the Constitution. However, all the ideals encapsulated in legislation and policies are not easily translated into practice, and it does not always happen that the language of instruction is the same as a learner's first language. In fact, according to Fleisch (cited in Nel, 2011:168), at the end of the Foundation Phase, the majority of learners in South African schools are taught and assessed in English, although less than one in every ten learners in the country speaks English as his or her first language. Furthermore, Adler (cited in Van Rooyen & Jordaan, 2009:272), as well as the DBE (2013:2), state that many learners in South African schools receive their teaching and learning in English, their AL, either by circumstances or by choice. What circumstances could possibly lead to learners receiving their teaching and learning in their AL? The DBE (2011:8) explains that many South African schools do not offer the first language of some or all of the enrolled learners, but rather have one or two

languages offered at Home Language level. Learners are furthermore often faced with a lack of good schools that are available in their immediate environment. This could lead to learners attending schools outside their community and as a result thereof being subjected to a language of teaching and learning other than their first language. The opposite can also be true. If learners moved from rural areas to urban and suburban areas, the only schools in their close proximity might not provide teaching and learning in their first language. The DBE (2011:8) sheds more light on this subject by explaining that within the South African school context, the labels *first language* and *AL* refer to proficiency levels at which the language is offered at school, and not necessarily the learner's first language that is spoken at home. It is then understandable that various circumstances can lead to learners being in schools where the language of teaching and learning does not match their home language, but why would parents deliberately choose that their children receive their education in a particular AL, like for instance English? English is often viewed as a language of empowerment (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014:11; Jordaan, 2011:519). People learn an AL, for instance English, as is the case in this study, because they think that being able to use the AL will help them to get a job, to communicate with native speakers of that language, to study and do research in that language, or simply to generally broaden their skills and knowledge (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:2). One thing that must be kept in mind, however, is that the language situation in South Africa does not place all learners in a disadvantageous situation. It also happens that learners do receive instruction in all their subjects in their first language, but that English is taught as an AL. However, learning a language under these circumstances presents its own kind of challenges, as Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:3) point out. According to these authors, the formal learning of an AL in a school situation is often accompanied by low motivation (2007:3). This is just one difference between learning a first language and an AL. Another difference highlighted by Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:3), as well as Nel (2011:169), is that with the learning of an AL, individual attention is not frequent, and outside the classroom situation the learner is not always provided with many opportunities to use the AL.

It is also necessary to distinguish between a learner's basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) as this answers the question of what it means to be truly proficient in a language (Nel, 2011:168). BICS, on the one hand, refers to the ability of the learner to communicate about everyday matters when talking to friends or family, and can take between two to four years to develop (Nel, 2011:168-169). CALP, on the other hand, can take the AL learner more than five years to develop (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2010:353 – 354). A

learner's CALP refers to his or her ability to use the AL in academic situations, such as reading where abstract tasks are involved, and the learner must use the language to make meaning in formal learning situations (Nel, 2011:169). A learner's CALP is the language skills that are needed for success in using the AL in the school situation (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2010:353-354). This shows why reading is regarded as one of the most important skills that learners need to learn at school (Ackerman, 2001:115; Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:177). In Chapter 1 it was illustrated that many learners in South African schools cannot communicate effectively in their first AL, lack basic comprehension skills, and in comparison with learners in other parts of the world, have low literacy rates (Bharuthram, 2012:206 -207; DBE, 2011:8; Venter & Howie, 2006:17). Reading problems at any age level should not be ignored as Santi and Francis (2014:132) state that learners do not simply outgrow their reading problems. As learners mature in their reading, and the focus shifts from learning to read in the Foundation Phase to reading to learn in the higher phases of schooling, effective reading skills become even more important (Santi & Francis, 2014:132).

## 2.2.2 READING

Reading can be defined as an interactive process between the reader and the text (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165). Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:165), as well as Cleary et al. (2005:60) describe reading as a process during which readers use complex skills to create their own meaning from the text. This set of skills includes their own prior knowledge on the topic, their knowledge of the text organisation and their knowledge of the language that the text is written in (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165). The set of skills described above somewhat relates to the five components of any reading task. These components are identified as 1) Phonemic awareness; 2) Phonics; 3) Fluency; 4) Vocabulary; and 5) Comprehension (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:174-177; DoE, 2008:11; Florida Centre for Reading Research, 2005:1; The National Reading Panel, cited in Learning Point Associates, 2004:1).

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, phonemic awareness relates to "*any one of the set of smallest units of speech in a language that distinguishes one word from another.*" According to The National Reading Panel, phonemics concerns all the different sounds that are represented in words (Learning Point Associates, 2004:6), for example, in English the /s/ in *seal* and the /z/ in *zeal* represent different phonemes. Phonemic awareness plays the central role in the bottom-up approach to reading instruction where the focus is on instructing learners to discriminate between different letter sounds in words (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:177). Phonemic



awareness is an essential component of any reading task as word recognition builds on a learner's knowledge of different letter sounds.

During the process of word recognition, learners combine different letter sounds to form words (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:175). In light of this, phonics can then be described as the component of any reading task where the reader combines sounds and letters to create words (Learning Point Associates, 2004:11). Bouwer and Dednam (2016:175) point out that phonological awareness plays an important role in word recognition and word decoding. Learners must make use of two skills, namely, visual perception and memory during the process of decoding words in a reading task. Visual perception is made use of when learners recognise the print symbols of words (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:175) and are then able to decode words as they come across them in the text. Some words cannot be decoded because of irregular sound symbols (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:175). Learners must learn these words, also known as sight words, and then rely on memory to be able to recognise these words in texts (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:175). However, just because learners are able to decode or recognise words in a text, it does not necessarily mean that they understand these specific words (DoE, 2008:13).

When learners can comfortably recognise and decode words, they will become more fluent readers. Fluency is the third component of any reading task, as listed above. In order to be successful at school, learners should learn to read fluently, effortlessly and smoothly at a normal reading rate and with proper expression. The fourth component of any reading task is vocabulary. Vocabulary refers to all the words a learner knows, even those that they do not use at the expressive level themselves during their communicative activities.

The final component of any reading task is that of comprehension. Comprehension relies on the learner's understanding of the words and ideas, as well as the message, of the text. It is important to note that the development of skills related to the other four components of a reading task, mentioned earlier, may affect a learner's comprehension. Difficulties in phonemic awareness lead to difficulties relating to phonics (Learning Point Associates, 2004:7). This then results in learners struggling to decode words, and in turn, this influences their reading fluency. A study conducted by Schatschneider, Buck, Torgensen, Wagner, Hassler, Hecht and Powell-Smith (2006) concludes that a dominant factor that influences the reading comprehension of Grade 3 learners is oral reading fluency. This supports the argument that oral reading skills can influence a learner's reading comprehension. Reading



comprehension can indeed be compromised if a learner spends too much time and effort on decoding words in a text. Furthermore, according to Leppanen et al. (cited in Woolley, 2011:24), there is a strong body of evidence that suggests that some students with reading comprehension difficulties have problems with word level processes such as phonological awareness, phonological encoding and naming speed. Woolley (2011:24) further makes the point that text conventions like full stops and commas help to organise text into relevant parts and aid in effective reading comprehension.

If learners then do not attend to the rules of reading punctuation, it can further affect their reading comprehension. It is not just reading fluency and a lack in effective oral reading skills that can influence a learner's comprehension of a text. Biemiller (cited in Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:176) states that there is a strong correlation between a learner's vocabulary size and his or her comprehension skills. When learners are presented with words that they are not familiar with, it can result in them experiencing the text as difficult and thus compromise their understanding of that text. In light of this, the DoE (2008:15) lists the increasing of vocabulary, the development of decoding skills and the development of fluency as possible strategies to improve learners' comprehension. Reading is regarded as the raw material of every other subject area, so unless learners comprehend what they are reading, meaningful learning cannot take place (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:179, 342) and the act of reading becomes fruitless. Reading without comprehension will then ultimately lead to learners failing in their learning (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:342).

### **2.2.3 READING COMPREHENSION**

#### **2.2.3.1 Introduction**

Reading comprehension can be defined as the process whereby a reader communicates with any form of written text and in the process of communication, constructs meaning by combining his or her own prior knowledge with the cues of the writer (Irwin, 2007:6,10), and is then able to respond in an appropriate way as intended by the author (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:92). Comprehension *per se* is regarded as the second level of thinking in Bloom's Taxonomy (Maker & Schiever, 2010:104). Each higher level of Bloom's Taxonomy builds on the one below it, so if a learner experiences any challenges with comprehension, that same learner can experience challenges with other thought processes that follow comprehension on Bloom's hierarchy of thinking processes. This could include challenges with

application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bornman & Rose, 2010:79; Maker & Schiever, 2010:104; Marzano & Kendall, 2007:5). In light of the importance of effective reading comprehension skills, and the negative picture of South African learners that is sketched by the results of recent studies, the question is then, how can teachers best support their learners to develop good reading comprehension skills? According to Fielding and Pearson (cited in Attaprechakul, 2013:83), as well as Adams (2010/2011:8), the answer is that reading comprehension skills can fortunately be taught explicitly.

Grabe (2004:44-69) identified nine skills that need to be developed in order for learners to have effective reading comprehension skills. These are: 1) Ensure word recognition fluency; 2) Emphasise vocabulary learning and create a vocabulary-rich environment; 3) Activate background knowledge in appropriate ways; 4) Ensure effective language knowledge and general comprehension skills; 5) Teach text structures and discourse organisation; 6) Promote strategic reading rather than teaching individual strategies; 7) Build reading fluency and rate; 8) Promote extensive reading; and 9) Develop intrinsic motivation for reading. Although the importance of all nine skills for effective reading comprehension is acknowledged, only three skills were selected to be explored more thoroughly in this study. The selected skills are: the emphasis on vocabulary learning and the creation of a vocabulary-rich environment, the appropriate activation of learners' background knowledge, and the direct teaching of text structures and discourse organisation. These skills were chosen as they seemed to be most feasible to measure in terms of attempts made to employ these in the classroom situation. The time constraints of the study were also a consideration in this selection. The selected skills are discussed below.

### **2.2.3.2 Emphasis on vocabulary learning and the creation of a vocabulary - rich environment**

According to Bouwer and Dednam (2016:174), a great hurdle that English AL learners encounter is vocabulary, and for this reason, vocabulary should be taught in order to improve comprehension. Research conducted in the field of first AL assessment shows a strong correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension (Grabe, 2004:49). Sweeny and Mason (2011:1) explain that the volume of learners' vocabulary when entering the school environment, as well as their ability to learn new words, are two of the most important contributors to academic success and reading comprehension. Readability research confirms

Sweeny and Mason's statement by indicating that word familiarity can affect comprehensibility (Irwin, 2007:9). It is believed that a person who knows a word well knows other words and ideas related to it (Irwin, 2007:149).

In light of this research, many authors promote the notion that word familiarity influences the effectiveness of readers' skills to comprehend what they are reading (Adams, 2010/2011:5; Attaprechakul, 2013:82; Bean, 2001:136; Cleary et al., 2005:62; Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2010:354; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165; Marulis & Neuman, 2010:300; Nel, 2011:179). In line with this notion, Cleary et al. (2005:62) state that unfamiliarity with a language, e.g. a restricted vocabulary, can obviously result in understanding being lost. If there are too many words in a single text that learners are unfamiliar with they will spend too much time trying to understand these unfamiliar words. In this way, the full meaning of the text can easily be lost (Pardo, 2004:274). In light of this relationship between vocabulary and comprehension, research has indicated that for effective reading comprehension to occur, a learner must understand at least 95% of the words used in a text (Adams, 2010/2011:5). According to Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:185), a wide receptive vocabulary is necessary for fluent reading. This means that learners must be able to recognise the meanings of words that they come across in a text, even if these words do not necessarily make up a part of the learners' personal vocabularies (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:185). Gargiulo and Metcalf (2010:353) agree that an extensive reading vocabulary is a prerequisite for reading achievement and comprehension. This then highlights the importance of teaching vocabulary to learners. However, before teaching vocabulary, the teacher must have a firm understanding of how a learner's vocabulary develops.

From when a baby is born, right through until adulthood, he or she is subjected to different kinds of social interaction in which vocabulary is developed. Biemiller (cited in Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2011:2) explains that from around the age of one, a child develops a small number of words, which are holistic and undifferentiated. Then, from around eighteen months, the number of words in a child's vocabulary increases sharply to around 3000 words at the pre-school level (Biemiller, cited in Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2011:2). The average child acquires many hundreds of word meanings each year during the first seven years of vocabulary acquisition (Marulis & Neuman, 2010:301). This is probably why research indicates that vocabulary growth is mostly determined by the way parents use language, especially before the learner reaches the age of seven (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCS&F], 2008:4).

According to Verhoeven and Perfetti (2011:2), it is estimated that by the end of Grade 2, learners' vocabularies contain some 6000 words.

Depending on the developing literacy skills of a learner, they can be expected to add up to 2000 word meanings per year to achieve a vocabulary size of about 15000 words by the end of elementary or primary school (Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2011:3). To teach learners 15 000 words seems like an impossible task, but Roskos et al. (cited in Marulis & Neuman, 2010:300) advocate the learning of new words as an essential component of early reading development. Furthermore, as according to the DCS&F (2008:4), learners who perform relatively well at reading comprehension tasks have an average of 4000 words more in their vocabulary, as opposed to the vocabulary size of learners that demonstrate relatively poor reading comprehension performance. The information stated above shows that learners can benefit from direct vocabulary teaching. However, to individually teach each word to learners is not feasible, which is why Sweeny and Mason (2011:5) suggest that teachers use methods in the classroom that will promote both incidental learning and direct teaching.

Adams (2010/2011:6) suggests two possible ways that teachers can help learners to master the many words they must know to understand different texts. The first way is to learn new words through extensive reading (Adams, 2010/2011:6). The second way is to build on learners' vocabulary through direct vocabulary teaching (Adams, 2010/2011:6). This study, however, suggests the use of four possible strategies to assist learners in the development of their vocabulary.

Firstly, teachers can directly teach learners unfamiliar words that might be found in reading tasks (Adams, 2010/2011:6). Before learners are expected to complete reading tasks, teachers can point out possible difficult or unfamiliar words and teach the meanings of those words to learners. These teaching situations should allow for opportunities for learners to use the newly taught words in different ways, for example, looking at the different forms of the words, including identifying synonyms and antonyms (Adams, 2010/2011:3).

Secondly, teachers can promote the use of dictionaries in the English-as-AL classroom. Bean (2001:148) encourages teachers to motivate their learners to get into the habit of using dictionaries. Attaprechakul (2013:83) goes as far as saying that using dictionaries is fundamental for the development of a learner's vocabulary. The DCS&F (2008:11) also states that learners must be encouraged to use dictionaries

not only in classroom activities, but also during independent reading activities as this will promote vocabulary growth. This requires that teachers must make available a selection of dictionaries to learners. It is important to remember that if teachers want learners to be comfortable and confident in using dictionaries, they must also teach learners the skill of how to use a dictionary.

Thirdly, teachers can create a print-rich environment in the English-as-AL classroom. Duke and Moses (cited in the DCS&F, 2008:6) maintain that learners must be motivated to read extensively as reading itself forms the basis for vocabulary growth. Duke and Moses are not alone in their ideas about extensive reading, as other authors agree that wide independent reading builds a learner's vocabulary (Sweeny & Mason, 2011:1; Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2011:3). This can be done by providing learners with more opportunities to read by having a wide array of printed media, such as books, newspapers and magazines available in the classroom. Teachers must be aware of the reading needs of learners and must provide texts that will comply with the different levels of reading ability as well as interests of learners in the English-as-AL classroom.

According to Duke and Moses (cited by the DCS&F, 2008:6), vocabulary will also grow by talking in the target language as much as possible. Verhoeven and Perfetti (2011:3) contradict the above statement by citing research that indicates that extensive reading is a greater contributor to vocabulary building than the amount of oral language practice. The research mentioned above might hold some truth, but it does not mean that speaking the target language in as many situations as possible does not hold some value. For this reason, frequent oral communication in the target AL is advocated as a fourth possible strategy to teach vocabulary. Learners must feel safe in using the AL in the classroom without the fear of possible ridicule from fellow learners or the teacher. In this way, possible gaps in learners' vocabulary can quickly be identified and rectified and these situations can also provide for learning opportunities for the whole class. The more able learners are in using the AL inside the classroom, the more confident they will become in using the AL outside of the classroom.

Just like Sweeny and Mason (2011:5), Marulis and Neuman (2010:318) advocate that vocabulary building is best supported when teachers combine direct teaching strategies with implicit methods for teaching vocabulary. In 2000, The National Reading Panel (cited by the DCS&F, 2008:6) listed explicit instruction, indirect instruction and capacity methods as possible approaches to the teaching of

vocabulary. These approaches correlate with the strategies of vocabulary teaching mentioned in this study.

### **2.2.3.3 Appropriate activation of learners' background knowledge**

To understand the importance of activating learners' background knowledge before commencing reading activities, one must first have a sound knowledge of what is constituted as background knowledge. Secondly, it must be clear why background knowledge must be activated to assist in a reader's comprehension. Thirdly, appropriate ways for activating a learner's background knowledge must be explored.

An individual's prior knowledge or background knowledge, as referred to in this study, is found in his or her life world. Kalantzis and Cope (2012:346) describe learners' life worlds as a place where knowing and meaning carry on all the time and where they intuitively know what belongs together. Learners' background knowledge can help them to interpret messages that are found in written or printed media. Anderson and Pearson (cited in Pressley & McCormick, 1995:238) also argue that learners often understand new material or information in terms of their background knowledge. An individual's background knowledge all comes together to form a schema, which ties a number of related concepts together (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:213). All these schemata then come together to form a learner's frame of reference that shapes his/her mind (Cleary et al., 2005:12). Cleary et al. (2005:12) describe learners' frame of references as the sum of their cultural and educational background, their attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as physical attributes and their age and gender. This shows that the act of reading comprehension is never exactly the same for two readers, as each individual brings his or her own meanings to the text during the process of interpretation (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:213). Giving meaning to texts enables readers to comprehend what they are reading (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:176). Reading for comprehension then concerns predicting from our past experiences (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:213). By linking information in new texts with information that has been learned from previous interactions with texts, learners can understand new information. The previous statements touch on the importance of background knowledge for efficient reading comprehension.

Bean (2001:136, 140-141), as well as Attaprechakul (2013:82), explain that when writing a text, the author assumes that the reader has specific background knowledge, so when the assumed background knowledge of the reader is lacking or the learners do not have access to the cultural codes of the specific text that they are



reading, it can cause reading difficulties and compromise their reading comprehension. Bean (2001) and Attaprechakul (2013) are not alone in their beliefs as other researchers agree that background knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension. It is well documented that readers comprehend texts better when texts are culturally familiar or when they relate to the well-developed subject-related knowledge of the reader (Grabe, 2004:50).

A second reason advocating the value of proper background knowledge is pointed out by Oakhill and Cain (2000:52). These authors mention that learners who display poor comprehension skills cannot easily incorporate information outside of the text, also known as general or background knowledge, with information in the text to fill in missing details. This shows that if learners' background knowledge correlates with the author's assumed reader background knowledge, their comprehension of that specific text will significantly improve. The important question to answer then is in what way a learner's background knowledge can be activated prior to reading texts.

Santi and Francis (2014:131–132) state that AL1 speakers can benefit from instructional activities that activate their background knowledge. This implies that teachers must use different methods of introducing learners to the topic so that they can build the needed background knowledge prior to reading the text. Pre-reading activities can include multimedia presentations, class discussions, and writing activities. In a study conducted by Tze-Ming Chou (2011:114), it was also concluded that extensive reading not only assists in the building of vocabulary, but also helps learners to build background knowledge on a wide variety of subjects. This implies that teachers should encourage extensive reading to build on learners' background or general knowledge. However, direct activation of background knowledge and the building of background knowledge through extensive reading practices are fruitless unless learners are sensitised to activating their background knowledge themselves when reading texts, as endorsed by Pressley and McCormick (1995:238). This implies that learners cannot be passive when reading texts. They must actively converse with the text in order to interpret the message carried through by the author so that it makes sense to them (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:179) within their own life world. It therefore rests on teachers to constantly make their learners aware of the fact that they must be sensitive of their own background knowledge and how it relates to information in the texts that they are reading. Reading material must be carefully selected so that information that can be found in classroom texts correlates with the background knowledge of learners, which is the desired outcome (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:167).

When selecting reading material teachers must keep in mind that to be able to understand what they are reading, most parts of the texts must be familiar to the learners (Bornman & Rose, 2010:243). On the flipside of the coin, teachers must also guard against selecting texts that are too easy as it will stunt learners' growth as readers (Oakhill & Cain, 2000:9). Another aspect to keep in mind when selecting suitable reading material is the interests of learners. Learners will be more willing and eager to read when they are provided with reading material that is fun and interesting to read (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:178).

According to Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:172), teachers are only beginning to realise that inadequate comprehension can also be the result of a gap in the learner's background knowledge. A study conducted in Bangkok, in which college students mentioned a lack of background knowledge as the main reason for text difficulty (Attaprechakul, 2013:82), confirms Kilfoil and Van der Walt's statement above. Although the study was conducted on college students, who were somewhat older than the target age of the participants of the current study, these results can still be viewed as relevant as the college students' lack of basic comprehension skills suggests a lack of proper instruction in their earlier education. Furthermore, it illustrates the value of the activation of background knowledge as a needed skill for efficient reading comprehension. Pursuing the issue, Chen and Graves (cited in Grabe, 2004:50) conclude that text previewing and the activation of background knowledge lead to significantly better reading comprehension.

#### **2.2.3.4 Text structures and discourse organisation**

A third skill explored in this study that must be developed in order to improve reading comprehension is the direct teaching of text structures and discourse organisation. Smith (cited in Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:214-215) states that there is no evidence that suggests that reading comprehension can improve by making text structures explicit. However, in this study, Attaprechakul's statement that the organisational pattern of texts can influence reading comprehension (2013:82) is upheld and centralised.

Every type of text, like for instance a poem, a newspaper report, a story, a set of instructions or a dialogue, to name just a few, is constructed differently. According to Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:165), a learner's understanding of a text's discourse structure, its socially accepted conventions, and its function can influence a learner's reading performance, including comprehension. When learners are aware of the different characteristics of each text genre, they can adjust their reading strategies



accordingly and eventually become better readers (Bean, 2001:137). Texts have numerous signalling systems that help a reader to interpret the information being presented. The organisational features of texts such as italics, underlining, headings and sub-headings, along with illustrations, figures, and graphs, can help learners to cognitively process, organise and eventually understand the content of any text (Kirby, as well as Anderson & Armbruster, cited in Woolley, 2011:25). This is why Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:176), along with Grabe (2004:52), propose that learners should be taught basic comprehension skills such as identifying topic sentences and main and supporting ideas, how to make inferences from the title of a text, to be aware of how words are used together to create coherence, and other features of a specific text.

This again shows that learners must actively interact with texts by being aware of choice of words, specific features, how the information correlates with their existing knowledge, and how all these factors are interrelated in assisting in reading comprehension. It is often believed that if readers read a text quite fast, they are better readers, but Bean (2001:134) states that good readers must struggle with texts and not only read texts once, but rather as many times as possible in order to grow as readers. Oakhill and Cain (2000:52) found in their study that learners who display different reading achievement scores differ in their skills of identifying the structure and main point of a text. This highlights the importance of teaching learners skills such as identifying headings, main and supporting ideas and other features of specific text types.

#### **2.2.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS ABOUT COMPREHENSION**

The question asked in this section is how teachers can assist learners in improving their reading comprehension skills. It was concluded that certain skills that will positively affect the reading comprehension of learners can be taught explicitly. The skills focused on in this study, namely, extending vocabulary, activating background knowledge and the teaching of specific text structures were then discussed. However, it is important to keep in mind that all learners are unique and bring their own level of skills, knowledge, cognitive development, culture, interests, and personal strengths and barriers to each reading comprehension task (Pardo, 2004:273). The diversity of learners in a single classroom is an issue that cannot be ignored if a teacher wants to design meaningful learning experiences.

## **2.3 DIVERSITY**

### **2.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Literature on diversity clearly illuminates the uniqueness of learners. According to Costa (2000:41), each of us has a different genetic structure, unique facial features, a distinguishing thumb print, a distinctive signature, diverse backgrounds of knowledge, experience and culture, and a preferred way of gathering, processing and expressing information and knowledge. As Kalantzis and Cope (2012:9) point out, schools worldwide are presently experiencing challenges incorporating inclusion, which shows that diversity is a social matter that affects any classroom situation. A valuable question to ask is what brought about this heightened appearance of diversity in the modern classroom. Kalantzis and Cope (2012:50) explain that the reason for this change can be attributed to the forces of globalisation, which lead to communities being more diverse as a result of mass migration. This migration has resulted in classroom environments where the differences between learners are more visible and insistent than ever (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:375).

Although it is acknowledged that learners differ in a vast number of ways, such as their physical, sensory and learning abilities, their cultural history, their home environments, their educational history, and their interests and hobbies, for the purpose of the literature study, this study narrowed its view on diversity, and focused on elements of diversity that include the background and culture of learners, each learner's individual support system, his/her academic proficiency and history, and learners' unique learning preferences. These elements of diversity were selected for closer inspection as it is posited in this study that they can have a great impact, whether positive or negative, on reading comprehension. Each of these will now be individually discussed.

### **2.3.2 THE BACKGROUND AND CULTURE OF THE LEARNER**

Learners exist in different social contexts and have different cultures that guide them through life. Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:173) define culture as a system of conventions, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviour, norms and traditions shared by a particular group of people. Learners' cultural beliefs contribute to what they bring to the learning setting (Kalantzis & Cope, 2002:385). If it is, for instance, the custom in a learner's culture to always be submissive to his/her elders, that learner might take the stance that the teacher is the only entity with knowledge. That learner will then not challenge the teacher's ideas and simply accept them as the sole truth. If a learner's

culture values the traditional roles of males and females in the community, it may contribute to girls not being as motivated as boys in their learning as they know that they will not have the opportunity to further their studies.

A learner's cultural beliefs may thus contribute to the kind of learner each child becomes through the influence of their family, local community and friends or peers (Kalantzis & Cope, 2002:385). Learners coming from a home environment that encourages reading and learning appear to be more motivated in their learning, whereas learners who come from a community with a great deal of social challenges, e.g. unemployment, gang activities or substance abuse, might not be as motivated in their learning as their community does not assign great value to a good education. This illustrates the significance of the influence of culture on the learning situation (Irwin, 2007:8; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:52-53). However, learners do not only come from different cultural backgrounds, they may also differ in their economic and social backgrounds (Green, 2001:5).

These socio-economic conditions can include the state of a learner's health, whether he/she is subjected to poverty, and also the learner's access to resources such as medical care, transport or education, and different sources of information (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:375). It is clear that the socio-economic conditions indicated above can have either a positive or a negative effect on a learner's performance, especially in the area of reading comprehension (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:375). If learners have more financial aid available to them, it could provide more opportunities for developing different skills and, in general, broaden their experiential framework. Learners who are exposed to many sources of printed media and other forms of communication, get more opportunities to expand their general knowledge and other skills that are needed for effective reading comprehension, whereas those learners who do not have access to a number of sources of printed media or who come from homes with illiterate parents obviously have fewer opportunities to expand their reading skills. These learners' limited reading skills could possibly create reading difficulties, including limited comprehension skills. Learners' health can also have a negative impact on their reading comprehension. When a learner suffers from a chronic illness, it might result in that learner being absent from school more often. Frequent absenteeism can possibly lead to gaps in a learner's vocabulary, background knowledge, or knowledge of how different types of texts are structurally organised, which can lead to reading comprehension being compromised. It is acknowledged that a fairly generalised viewpoint is stated above. One must,

however, keep in mind the uniqueness of each learner's life story and be aware of the fact that learners can still perform despite their limited means.

### **2.3.3 THE SUPPORT SYSTEM OF THE LEARNER**

The support available to the learners in their immediate environment is very closely linked to their economic, social and cultural background. No learners' home environments are the same, and therefore Ackerman (2001:115-116) states that home life and society play a major role in learners' cognitive development. If the learner's home environment discourages learning or fails to nurture it, it can influence learning, and especially reading comprehension, in a negative way. Ackerman (2001:115-116) points out that the limitation of resources such as books or other reading material, or even a lack of motivation to learn and read can hamper a learner's development. The opposite is also true if a learner is supported at home and motivated to learn new skills, and is also provided the necessary resources to accelerate their development. This then emphasises that learners' development is determined or greatly influenced by their interaction with the environmental systems surrounding them (Swart & Pettipher, 2011:10; Williams & Burden, 1997:189-190). Teachers therefore need to look closely at the abilities, resources, protective factors and needs of the learner within the broader home context (Bornman & Rose, 2010:13), and use this as a starting point for designing reading comprehension activities. For instance, if learners do not have books at home to use in reading activities, teachers can advise them to read the labels on packaging of food items that can be found in the home. The support that is available to learners at home should also influence the type of homework activities that teachers hand out, specifically in terms of reading comprehension. In light of this issue regarding support, learners' abilities must be kept in mind so that they will be able to complete the reading comprehension tasks given as homework without feeling frustrated.

### **2.3.4 THE ACADEMIC HISTORY AND ABILITY OF THE LEARNER**

Not all learners display the same academic ability. Some learners do exceptionally well, while others struggle, for various reasons, to achieve academic success.

On the one side of the spectrum, there are learners experiencing barriers that hinder their progress. In this study, the term *barriers* is used as opposed to the term *disability*. The term *learning disability* paints the picture that the learner is stuck with this problem and it cannot be overcome. The term *barriers* paints a more positive picture, namely, that with the right assistance, the problem can be overcome. It is

important to keep in mind that it is not only learners with special physical or learning needs that might experience barriers to learning. Bornman and Rose (2010:133) explain that learners with average or even above-average intelligence may experience problems with reading comprehension as a result of any barrier they might be experiencing. This shows that, in almost all classes, there could be learners experiencing barriers to learning (Bouwer, 2016:78).

Prinsloo (2011:29) defines learning barriers as obstacles or circumstances that prevent learners from achieving their optimal potential. Learning barriers could arise from different events or circumstances. Even something like sitting too far from the blackboard, or classrooms and lessons that are dull and uninteresting can create barriers to learning. The source of learning barriers can also be more complex. Difficult home environments, such as parents who are divorcing, or a new sibling, or constant exposure to various forms of abuse can also create a barrier and hamper a learner's learning. It must be remembered that barriers to learning do not disappear spontaneously, and if teachers do not address these barriers, the problem will only get bigger (Bornman & Rose, 2010:133). It is the role of the teacher to accompany learners in the fulfilment of their needs, and a lack of sufficient support, in itself, can act as an additional barrier to learning (Prinsloo, 2011:35).

However, on the other side of the spectrum, there are exceptionally talented or even gifted children. A lot of emphasis is placed on supporting learners who experience barriers, and not that much attention is given to learners who really excel exceptionally. According to Bearne (1996:120), provision for the full range of learners also includes catering to those learners who are very able in some or all curriculum areas as they have their own special needs that must be considered. It is important to clearly define 'giftedness'. The term *gifted* is widely used to describe learners of unusually high intellectual and cognitive ability (Lomofsky & Skuy, 2001:192). Freeman (cited in Lomofsky & Skuy, 2001:193) states that the top 20% of learners in any area of learning can be considered as potentially gifted or talented. According to Freeman (cited in Lomofsky & Skuy, 2001:193), as well as Moss and Brookhart (2009:61), gifted learners are able to learn more quickly as they know what is important to learn and how to learn it, understand more deeply, apply learning more creatively and work more independently.

Alternatively, one of the key characteristics of gifted learners is how quickly they become frustrated in the classroom as the work is not challenging enough (Lomofsky & Skuy, 2001:195; Maker & Schiever, 2010:139). Research conducted in the UK

illustrated that the needs of gifted learners are very similar to the needs of learners experiencing barriers to learning (Lomofsky & Skuy, 2001:196). Smith (cited in Kokot, 2011:510-511) also states that although gifted learners do not face the barriers to learning that some of their fellow learners do, they might be handicapped by teachers that do not challenge them. Gifted learners also run the risk of missing out on academic success as they may be stifled rather than encouraged to reach their full potential (Kokot, 2011:511; Watson, 2002:19). This shows that when learners display any sign of 'giftedness' or aptitude, their learning should be individualised so that it can address their specific needs. Teachers should be sensitive to the needs of the gifted learners in their classes and design opportunities for enrichment activities that can challenge these specific learners (Kokot, 2011:521).

This brings us to the third group of learners, the so-called middle achievers, which may be found in any given classroom. This large group of learners, who do not stand out as individuals in primary school, remains a problem (Kershner & Miles, 1996:33), and are therefore often neglected. The reason for this possible neglect is due to the fact that although they do not achieve exceptionally well, they also do not seem to struggle as they reach the standards set for learning in that specific lesson or subject. However, the fact that learners have reached a certain outcome does not guarantee that they are achieving at their optimal level, and they might show signs of underachievement. Underachievement can be defined as the failure to achieve at a level consistent with ability (Lomofsky & Skuy, 2001:194). It can happen that some learning difficulties are so inconspicuous that teachers are only vaguely aware of the fact that these learners should be able to do better.

There are many factors that can influence a learners' development, and ultimately their success in the learning situation. Whether a learner is experiencing serious barriers to learning, or is showing signs of aptitude, or is slightly underachieving, the curriculum should be differentiated – the learning of each must be designed in such a way that it can answer their specific needs.

### **2.3.5 THE LEARNING STYLE OF THE LEARNER**

A learning style can be described as the way in which a learner learns new knowledge the best (Llewellyn, 2011:54). Wilmot (2006:14) defines a learning style as the individual way in which learners interact with their environment, how learners take in information most easily, and how learners process that information. Learners do not all learn in the same way, which is why Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:6)



maintain that if teachers acknowledge the different learning styles of learners, it can influence the rate and direction of learning in a positive way. Lomofsky and Skuy (2001:190) rightfully state that there may be different paths to academic success, and creative teachers will use different ways to guide learners to reach their full academic capacity. In relation to this, Bornman and Rose (2010:56) emphasise that teachers should always be aware of learners' particular learning styles, and should capitalise on it. When designing reading activities that test comprehension, teachers can provide learners with a number of options for activities that can be associated with different forms of learning styles (Bigge et al., 1995:330. These activities can include: writing a song about the main idea of the text (musical awareness), creating a role-play that illustrates the main idea of the text (verbal/interpersonal awareness), making some kind of visual representation of the main idea in the text (visual/special awareness), or doing some kind of research project related to the main idea of the text (mathematical awareness) (Bigge et al., 1995:330). If learners are provided with opportunities to convey their skills and knowledge in ways that correlate with their personal learning styles, they could possibly become more motivated in their own learning

It is acknowledged that only a brief summary of learning styles has been given as this field was not the focus of the current study. However, the subject was touched on to note that when the curriculum is differentiated to be responsive to the individual needs of each learner, teaching will eventually nurture the diverse talents of all learners (Falk, 2009:71), even in developing reading comprehension skills.

### **2.3.6 CONCLUDING COMMENTS ON DIVERSITY**

This section outlined the vast array of ways in which diversity occurs in any given classroom in the South African school context. It showed that diversity presents special challenges for teachers (Human –Vogel & Bouwer, 2005:229-238) to not only accommodate, but especially to embrace diversity in their classrooms in order to provide each learner with a meaningful learning experience. This can only be done if teachers know the unique learning profile of each learner in their class. The question arises as to whether teachers take the diversity of learners into consideration when designing lesson plans. If students in a class differ in all these ways, even if they are of the same age or even grouped by their examination results, one cannot expect them to fit into a one-size-fits-all lesson (Bartolo, 2010:106). The diversity that is presented in modern day classrooms demands from teachers to change the way they look at learners and design learning.

When designing lessons focused on reading comprehension, teachers must embrace learners' individuality and use it during teaching to help shape learners into adults that can survive successfully and functionally in the world. The celebration of diversity is not just being aware of differences, but it is the practice of creating an inclusive environment where diversity is not seen as an obstacle to overcome, but rather an enriching opportunity for learning (Azzopardi, 2010:87-88). Bornman and Rose (2010:58) explain that all learners need to feel that they belong in the school environment, and as soon as teachers address diversity in a way that answers to the needs and learning preferences of all learners, and create inclusive classroom environments, this feeling will become a reality for all learners.

## **2.4 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

### **2.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

It is the goal of inclusion to create a community where every citizen feels valued for what he/she brings to the country. However, if one ultimately strives to create an inclusive community, an inclusive school climate and culture must first be established (Swart & Pettipher, 2001:32). Nevertheless, before one can truly grasp the impact that a policy of inclusive teaching could have on the educational system of South Africa, one must understand what the term *inclusive education* means.

Swart and Pettipher (2011:3) rightfully state that inclusion is a complex, multidimensional and controversial concept. It is a key factor to remember that inclusion is about realising equity. Kalantzis and Cope (2012:42) define equity as a value that requires equivalent opportunities to be available to all individuals. In addition to this, Bartolo (2010:106) states that inclusive education entails the equal valuing of each student as a person and as a learner. This explanation of equity correlates with the definition of inclusivity. To put it simply, inclusion can be defined as a broad term that describes all the efforts made by a school and teachers to make all learners feel welcome and to make sure that all learners take part in all school activities (Bornman & Rose, 2010:17). Swart (2004:231) provides a more detailed definition of inclusive education by stating that it is the practice and process of involving and meeting the diverse needs of all learners – regardless of age, ability, socio-economic background, talent, gender, language, HIV status and cultural origin – in supportive classrooms and schools. According to Eloff, Engelbrecht and Swart (2002:77-99), inclusion is considered to be much more than the physical placement of learners with disabilities in mainstream classes. Inclusion is the creation of a



learning environment that will respond to the needs of all learners in the classroom, whether they are considered as gifted or achieving under their potential (Eloff, Engelbrecht and Swart, 2002:77-99). According to Bartolo (2010:106), inclusivity calls for the creation of a supportive environment that enables each learner to participate actively and fully in the various activities presented in the classroom.

From the definitions for inclusion provided in this literature study, it is clear that inclusion means different things to different people (Dyson, cited in Green, 2001:4). However, according to Dyson (cited in Green, 2001:4), a commitment to building a more fair society and a more equitable education system are two commonalities in all definitions provided for inclusion. Inclusive education is a global term, but it is important to understand it within a South African context.

#### **2.4.2 INCLUSIVITY WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

The first democratic election in South Africa was held in 1994, which brought not only political changes and changes in the way citizens think and live, but also changes in the way teachers teach. The changes occurring in education after the fall of the Apartheid regime offered the ideal opportunity to propose a different paradigm and a new way of understanding education (Green, 2001:12). This paradigm shift resulted in the belief that when a learner experiences a barrier to learning, that it is then the responsibility of the teacher to change the learning situation in such a way that the barrier can be addressed, as opposed to being the responsibility of the learner to change so that he/she can fit into the learning situation (Swart & Pettipher, 2011:5). This paradigm shift also led to South Africa subscribing to a new constitution, which grounded its principles on democracy, equity and non-discrimination (Green, 2001:10). It also opened the door to the implementation of a new educational system that focused on inclusive education, which is described in White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001).

When one asks the question why inclusive education practices are so important, one will find many answers to this question in the literature on inclusion. Firstly, inclusive classrooms guide teachers to focus on the learner and not only on the barriers that they might be experiencing (Bornman & Rose, 2010:21). Secondly, inclusive education works towards a higher quality education system (Dyson 2001: Ainscow 2009, cited in Swart & Phettipher, 2011:4). Thirdly, inclusive education invites and embraces diversity in such a way that it provides learners with the opportunity to learn to live in a diverse democratic society where it becomes almost normal for differences to be accommodated rather than seeming exceptions (Green, 2001:6;

Swart, 2004:231; Swart & Phettipher, 2011:4). Lastly, inclusive environments enhance the quality of life for all individuals (Bornman & Rose, 2010:21). It is clear that creating inclusive classrooms can have a positive effect on learners' learning, but it is nonetheless a challenging task, especially for teachers.

White Paper 6 on Special Educational Needs (DoE, 2001:16) makes note of the fact that classroom teachers will be the primary resource for achieving the goal of an inclusive education and training system. Furthermore, the literature on inclusive education consulted for this study also supports the fact that it is the responsibility of teachers to create an inclusive learning environment by accommodating the learning needs of all learners and by eliminating any barriers experienced by learners, as they are in a direct relationship with learners on a daily basis (Green, 2001:5; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:40). The philosophy of inclusion urges teachers to regard inclusive education as an opportunity to reflect on how learning activities can be done differently, rather than additionally (Swart & Pettipher, 2001:41). It is clear that teachers cannot continue teaching in the way that they used to, ignoring diversity and expecting learners to fit into their way of teaching. Planning for inclusion means thinking about how the curriculum can be designed to match the needs and interests of the full range of learners (Rigby, 2009:128). One of the aims of inclusive education is that of providing quality and appropriate education, and, arguably, one strategy towards achieving this goal is through differentiated teaching (Bornman & Rose, 2010:242).

## **2.5 CURRICULUM DIFFERENTIATION**

### **2.5.1 INTRODUCTION**

As the curriculum provides the map for what should be taught in a subject, it becomes the core of the teaching and learning process (Bartolo, 2010:114; Verma & Mallick, 1999:19). For that reason, the curriculum can also become one of the most significant barriers to learning for learners (White Paper 6, DoE, 2001). According to White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), barriers to learning arise from different aspects of the curriculum such as 1) the content; 2) the language or medium of instruction; 3) how the classroom or lecture is organised and managed; 4) the pace of teaching and the time available to complete the curriculum; 5) the learning materials and equipment that are used, and 6) how learning is assessed. Therefore the curriculum must be made more flexible so that all learners can gain the knowledge and skills that are needed, irrespective of the specific learning needs they might have (White Paper 6,

DoE, 2001:20). In light of this, Bartolo (2010:111), as well as Putnam (2009:81), state that by differentiating learning activities, the curriculum can be made more accessible for all learners, and eventually lessen the effect of learning barriers on learners' academic success.

## **2.5.2 DEFINING CURRICULUM DIFFERENTIATION**

Several definitions from writers in the field of curriculum differentiation were used to create a working definition of curriculum differentiation for this study. Curriculum differentiation can be defined as a teaching strategy (Bornman & Rose, 2010:243) that teachers use to organise the teaching and learning situation by making certain changes, if needed, so that the different needs of all the learners in a single classroom are accommodated (Pearson & Thompson, 1996:64) in such a way that each learner can be enabled to reach his/her individual educational goals while still sharing in the same curriculum (Kershner & Miles, 1996:17; Pearson & Thompson, 1996:64). How then can changes be made to learning activities so that the curriculum becomes more accessible to learners?

Bornman and Rose (2010:73) explain that the three key elements of the curriculum that can be differentiated are the content, or what is taught; the process, or how it is taught; and the product, thus how the work will be assessed. Rigby (2009:132) adds to this list the dialogue that the teacher uses to guide the learner through the activities as another means of curriculum differentiation. Although the curriculum decides on the content that has to be taught, teachers decide how they will present the content to the learners and how they will support their learners according to their needs in order to develop the skills set out by the curriculum (Bornman & Rose, 2010:73). This is where differentiation comes into play. Curriculum differentiation does not just focus on the needs of learners who struggle to achieve their goals, but adapts the learning situation so that it can answer the need of all of the learners in a specific classroom. Curriculum differentiation challenges teachers to know their learners to such an extent that they know the specific needs, the personalities, interests, and strengths, as well as the learning styles of all the learners so that each individual can receive a learning experience that is meaningful to their own educational situation (Evans, 2009:40). Differentiated teaching provides teachers with the tools they need to create a feeling of inclusivity in the classroom as it guides learners to actively participate during regular classroom activities (Bartolo, 2010:10). However this 'tool' is not always easily integrated into actual classrooms, as Watson (2002:11) points out.

### 2.5.3 DISADVANTAGES AND ADVANTAGES RELATED TO CURRICULUM DIFFERENTIATION

Bornman and Rose (2010:7) list a lack of training in differentiated teaching as a first possible problem area that might prevent teachers from differentiating their own teaching. Secondly, curriculum differentiation can be regarded as more time consuming because instead of designing uniform lessons for all the learners in the class, teachers must now be more flexible in their approach to ensure the learning situation fits the needs of each individual learner (Bornman & Rose, 2010:73). This implies that teachers should design a standardised lesson, but add different variations to it so that all the different learning needs of learners presented in a single classroom are addressed during the lesson. It also means that teachers must set up different memorandums for all the different varieties of the standardised lesson. Furthermore, it also implies that the marking of worksheets will be more challenging and more labour intensive. Instead of just focusing on one list of aspects in all the worksheets, teachers now are faced with different criteria in different variations of a single lesson. While marking, teachers must also constantly evaluate the effectiveness of the different variations on the learners' learning. However, keeping the above-mentioned drawbacks of curriculum differentiation in mind, the literature on this subject clearly shows that the advantages of curriculum differentiation outweigh the disadvantages thereof.

The advantages of practising curriculum differentiation in the AL language classroom are at least fourfold. Firstly, differentiated teaching ensures that all learners, those who are experiencing barriers to learning as well as those who are regarded as gifted in some way, can reach their individual educational goals. In this way, differentiated teaching aims to give all learners access to learning (Bartolo, 2010:107). Secondly, differentiated teaching works towards dismantling any barriers that learners might be experiencing on their road to achieving their individual educational goals (Bornman & Rose, 2010:25). Thirdly, differentiated teaching gives the opportunity to all learners to experience success and a feeling of achievement, which boosts learners' motivation to work harder and to do better. According to Llewellyn (2011:60), the better teachers understand the influences of motivation and choice, the better they will be able to explain why differentiated teaching improves learners' academic success. Fourthly, the different range of differentiated teaching practices simply constitutes good classroom practice (Rigby, 2009:131-132). In light of the previous statement, Swart and Pettipher (2001:41) state that although certain decisions about differentiation are made with the needs of specific learners in mind, those very same actions might

enhance the learning of several other learners in the classroom. This shows that curriculum differentiation is beneficial for all learners.

#### **2.5.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS ON CURRICULUM DIFFERENTIATION**

A possible lack of training, as well as time constraints were identified as problem areas that result in the absence of differentiated teaching in classrooms. Although both of these problem areas are acknowledged, the focus of this study is on the latter problem area. Because designing a single lesson with different varieties is more time consuming than designing a uniform lesson, teachers do not want to waste their time on differentiating strategies that do not succeed in answering in learners' needs. Therefore, teachers must base all the decisions they make regarding differentiation in their lessons on a clear and reliable knowledge foundation. By studying the results of assessment tasks, teachers can create a clear picture of their learners' strengths and difficulties, and in which areas of the curriculum they need more guidance to develop the desired skills or to obtain the desired knowledge required for them to be successful in their learning. For this reason, this study proposes that teachers must make use of assessment results in order to make valid decisions about differentiation. In this way, the time constraint of designing differentiated lessons and activities would be bridged. Tomlinson and Moon (2014:1) support this notion by stating that in a differentiated classroom, a core part of the teaching cycle is the generation and use of data to inform how to design teaching in such a way that it accommodates the needs of all learners.

## **2.6 ASSESSMENT**

### **2.6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Assessment is part of the daily routine of any classroom. Van der Horst and McDonald (2001:181) define assessment as a strategy for testing learners' knowledge, behaviour, performance, values, or attitudes. Within the school context, assessment can be defined as an ongoing (Engelbrecht, 2010:138), organised process of gathering information about each learner's performance (Bornman & Rose, 2010:37). This information obtained is then used to determine where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there. In any assessment situation there are three critical elements: the learner, his/her assessment journey, and then in what form the assessment will be executed (Bornman & Rose, 2010:38). Assessment also involves four major steps. Engelbrecht (2010:134) describes these steps as follows: firstly, teachers must

gather evidence of learners' achievement; secondly, teachers must determine if learners were successful in the learning task; thirdly, all the findings of this assessment task must be recorded, and then finally the findings of this assessment task must be used to guide further teaching and future assessment. The final step touches on the main goal of assessment.

According to Brookhart (2014:17), the aim of conducting assessment is to eventually improve learners' achievement during future assessment tasks. It is also the aim of assessment to determine what each learner knows, understands, and can do and then also to determine how much support must be given to each learner and what form that support must take so that each learner becomes independent in reaching individual learning goals (Bouwer, 2016:79; Tomlinson & Moon, 2014:4). Assessment should not only provide information about learners' learning situation, but should also assist teachers to identify those learners who are struggling because of one or more learning barriers that they are experiencing (Santi & Francis, 2014:132). Furthermore, the results obtained from assessment should also provide teachers with information about what types of assessment tasks to carry out and what tasks must be done in class in order to develop learners' skills and knowledge (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014:3). The goal of assessment is not only focused on learners' achievement but also gives teachers the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness and success of their own teaching (Nel, 2011:172). From the results obtained from assessment tasks, teachers can adjust their own teaching methods so that their teaching becomes more effective and not just another barrier to learning (Higgins, 2014:11; Tomlinson & Moon, 2014:3). However, just because assessment happens on a regular basis, it does not necessarily mean that it is meeting its goal.

## **2.6.2 A PARADIGM SHIFT IN ASSESSMENT**

Over recent years, a paradigm shift has taken place in the field of assessment. In the literature on assessment, the emphasis has generally shifted from assessment *of the learner*, via assessment *of learning*, to assessment *for learning* (Bartolo, 2010:113; Bouwer, 2016:76; Moss & Brookhart, 2009:6). Higgins (2014:12) explains the term *assessment for learning* as any assessment task of which the main purpose is to better learners' learning. However, if an assessment task is aimed at improving learning, it cannot be ignorant of the holistic situation of each learner and what he/she knows or can do (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:179). Assessing learners' achievement in various ways must be an integral part of any teaching cycle (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:324). However, does assessment truly happen in ways that



afford opportunities for learning, for both the teacher and the learners? From the literature consulted it became clear that the way that assessment is conducted has some flaws.

### **2.6.3 STATIC ASSESSMENT AND THE FLAWS IN PRACTISING STATIC ASSESSMENT**

An important fact to remember is that assessment and instruction are not separate from each other. Nonetheless, sometimes it happens that assessment determines the way that teachers instruct when assessment should actually be subservient to instruction (Frowe, 1996:211). According to Wortham (2008:31), if the goal is that learners should benefit from assessment, all assessment tasks must be linked to learning experiences and teaching. Another flaw in assessment practices is the fact that some teachers rely on static assessment to guide their teaching.

During static assessment, learners are presented with assessment tasks and then expected to complete these tasks without any intervention from the teacher to improve the learner's achievement (Tzuriel, 2001:1). For this reason, static assessment can be regarded as an unreliable source of information about a learner's true academic situation as it focuses simply on what a learner can or cannot do (Bearne, 1996:59; Bigge et al., 1995:182; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:286). Static assessment does not take into account problems such as the learners' health; their ability to remember work; physical conditions, such as the layout of the classroom or the effect of the weather on the learning situation; the emotional well-being of the learners; or any other factors that could lead to learners not achieving in the way they potentially could (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:292). Static assessment also gives no information about how the teacher can provide suitable learning support to learners (Bouwer, 2016:85).

Another drawback of current assessment practices is that they create a feeling of fear and anxiety within learners. Learners do not view assessment tasks as opportunities for learning, but rather see them as situations where judgement is cast upon them. In fact, during the assessment situation, some learners – even learners with good learning potential - feel anxious, threatened, embarrassed, disempowered or even unable to complete the task (Bouwer, 2016:75). Teachers must rather assess in ways that will leave learners with a positive feeling about themselves and the assessment situation.

For assessment to reach its goal, it needs to take place in a safe environment. Learners must be able to ask for help without the fear of being ridiculed and they

must regard errors as opportunities for learning (Herritage, 2014:37). Assessment must be an opportunity for the teacher to be provided with a valid and reliable picture of what the student is or is not able to do, and should also provide insight as to how he/she arrived at certain answers. Bouwer (2016:85) argues that if teachers want to use assessment results effectively to decide on the support learners need in future learning, they have to make a summary of all their findings. These findings should include positive experiences in the learning situation, the challenges both the learners and teacher faced, plus any other relevant information that will help the teacher in guiding future teaching and assessment. Without valid and reliable assessment procedures, teachers will simply not know whether, and to what extent they have been successful in their teaching and instruction, and learners will not know whether they have learnt well (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:178). Up to now, the focus has been on how teachers should not assess, but how then should they assess? What types of assessment can be regarded as valid and reliable?

If teachers really want to address diversity in their classrooms, they should use multiple methods of assessment. Brookhart (2014:17) suggests that by using multiple methods of assessment, the reliability of assessment practices may be improved. It also provides greater opportunities for learners to demonstrate, and for teachers to assess, their skills, insights, understanding, knowledge and attitudes (Landsberg, 2011:77; Wilson, 1996:223). One should also remember that each assessment strategy has its strengths and limitations, which is why a variety of assessment strategies should be used to provide a comprehensive picture of the child's learning and development (Feld & Bergon, cited in Wortham, 2008:21). When teachers obtain information from an assessment task that assists them to compile a comprehensive picture of how a learner approaches an assessment task, how he/she thinks, and what a learner knows or does not know, only then does assessment become effective (Bornman & Rose, 2010:244).

#### **2.6.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS ON ASSESSMENT**

Teachers must remember that they can be an agent of change in any learner's future and that they have the responsibility to guard against practises that will serve neither the interests of the learners, nor themselves as teachers (Frowe, cited in Bearne, 1996:198; Tomlinson & Moon, 2014:4). Assessment strategies must be designed to ensure equal opportunity for success, regardless of the individual learner's unique background and situation (Vandeyar & Killen, 2003). Ysseldyke (cited in Bouwer, 2016:92) stated that we should work to have all assessment practices make a



difference in learners' lives rather than be a prediction of their lives. When teachers implement assessment with their learners in mind, then its promise as an enabler rather than an evaluator of learning can be realised (Herritage, 2014:35).

In terms of differentiation, the assessment of, and for, learning and also the relationship between assessment and lesson planning are important in considering how best to offer a curriculum that will offer diverse experiences for a diversity of learners (Bearne, 1996:196). According to Tomlinson and Moon (2014:1), the collection and use of data to support differentiation happens in the following three stages: 1) Planning for teaching; 2) Implementing teaching; and 3) Evaluating teaching. Firstly, by studying assessment results, teachers can identify the teaching strategies that work best for their learners. Secondly, the identified teaching strategies must then be employed in classrooms in order to support the learners' learning (Bornman & Rose, 2010:245). Thirdly, the effectiveness of the teaching strategies must be evaluated to determine if the strategies used really contributed positively to learners' learning. If teachers are to use the results of assessment to make decisions about differentiation, assessment needs to be more individualised and focused on learners' unique learning situation (Frowe, 1996:209). Dynamic assessment may provide all the information a teacher needs to make well thought through decisions about how to design teaching in such a way that it accommodates the individual needs of all learners.

## **2.7 DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT**

### **2.7.1 INTRODUCTION**

In studying the characteristics of dynamic assessment (DA), a definition for this method of assessment will be constructed. The first key characteristic of DA is that it combines assessment and intervention (Schneider & Ganschow, 2000:73; Stringer, 2009:128 -129). DA takes on a test – teach/intervention – test model. Teachers conduct a test with learners, observe the results and then make some modifications to their teaching, or adapt assessment tasks according to the new information obtained. Then, teachers administer a post-test to determine if the intervention or changes made were successful. By combining assessment with intervention, learners can learn more effectively (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002:40; Stringer, 2009:128-129,136). A second key characteristic of DA is that a strong focus is placed on the process during assessment, and not just on the final product delivered by the learner (Lidz, 2003:113). DA recognises all the actions a learner takes in order to arrive at the final product, and how the strengths and difficulties each learner brings

to the learning situation influences the learning process (Bouwer, 2016:85). A third characteristic of DA is that it rests on the principle of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004:50).

In light of the characteristics of DA listed above, DA can then be viewed as a way of assessment where the focus is not just on the final product delivered by the learner, but rather on the whole process and all the steps a learner takes to arrive at the final product, as well as any external or internal influences on the learner's learning. According to Grigorenko (2009:12), DA fundamentally concerns growth and change. Schneider and Ganschow (2000:72) define DA as an ongoing diagnostic approach to teaching. Not only can a study of the characteristics of DA provide a clear definition thereof, it also helps one to understand what makes DA different from static assessment.

The focus of static assessment is to determine what the learner can and cannot do independently at the time of assessment (Tzuriel, 2001:13). Results are recorded and learners are labelled according to their assessment results without any form of intervention from the teacher. The fact that no intervention takes place from the teacher's side points to the strong focus placed on the learners' final product during static assessment. However, unlike static tests that simply test what has been learnt, DA provides an additional opportunity for learning. DA invites learners on an interactive journey where they can actively take part in their own learning (Stringer, 2009:129). From the assessment situation, teachers learn more about their learners' needs and preferences, and actually use what they have learnt to improve learning, which might of course include curriculum differentiation. This shows that DA not only focuses on learners' current level of development, but is also interested in learners' potential level of development (Bouwer, 2016:85.; Tzuriel, 2001:13). Just like DA, ZPD also focuses on potential development.

### **2.7.2 THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT**

*Louisa is a talented baker and owns a well renowned bakery in the city. As she is busy decorating a three-tiered chocolate cake for a client, she thinks back to her first attempt at baking a cake. As a young toddler she took her first bite of cake and although at the time she was not aware of what she was eating, she was immediately aware of its smooth texture and sweet taste. Later she came to learn that this delicious treat was known as cake and that it came in different shapes and flavours. One day, when she was at home all by herself, she decided to bake her own cake. She had watched her mother bake cakes ample times before and had tasted and*

*seen many cakes before, so had a fair idea of what it should look like. Her first attempt was disastrous. Her mother realised that although Louisa's first attempt at baking a cake was not very successful, it did not mean that she did not have the potential to be a great baker. That weekend, she helped Louisa to bake another cake. With the help and guidance of her mother, Louisa's second attempt at baking a cake was more successful. With each cake that she attempted to bake, she relied less on her mother's guidance and at the age of 13 she started her own business baking cupcakes for pocket money.*

Louisa's story is not unique. Just like outside the classroom, inside the classroom learners also learn through social interactions with more capable people, in this case the teacher, guiding them through completing tasks by any form of assistance (Putnam, 2009:87). The teacher's assistance encourages learners to process assessment tasks in appropriate ways so that, ultimately, they can perform the task independently (Pressley & McCormick, 1995:182; Putnam, 2009:87). The specific learning phase in which a learner can benefit from assistance or help is known as the ZPD (Maree, 2004:401).

ZPD refers to the distance between the level of skills and knowledge a learner can display independently, and the level of the learner's potential development when he/she is given assistance by a teacher or any other more capable person (Pearson & Thompson, 1996:72-73; Pressley & McCormick, 1995:182; Williams & Burden, 1997:40). ZPD relies on the assumption that social interaction can lead to an improved development of knowledge and skills in learners. Both Vygotsky (cited in Warham, 2009:99) and Putnam (2009:87) believe that children learn through mutual interactions with more experienced others, for example, teachers, and therefore argue that by working together it could improve learners' learning. However, to really grasp the essence of ZPD, one must understand where a learner's ZPD lies.

A learner's ZPD lies in that area between the actual level of development where the learner can complete tasks successfully without any assistance, and the level of potential development where the learner can complete tasks with the assistance of the teacher (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:334-335). The aim of teacher mediation is to close the gap between the learner's current level of understanding and the shared learning target (Moss & Brookhart, 2009:8), which provides opportunity for the next ZPD. The idea of a learner's ZPD provides a positive message of how teachers can adapt their teaching to aid learners' development from his/her current level of understanding or skills to his/her potential level of understanding and skill (Moss &

Brookhart, 2009:8; Williams & Burden, 1997:65-66). ZPD suggests that teachers should design learning in such a way that the tasks that learners must complete are just above the level at which they are currently capable of functioning independently. Teachers should then also teach learners the principles that will help them to make the next step unassisted (Williams & Burden, 1997:65-66). This mediation will help learners to become actively involved in their own learning, and will promote independence and a sense of pride that, while their learning challenges them, they do not feel incapable. According to Ackerman (2001:107), teachers can mediate learning by means of any form of scaffolding.

### **2.7.3 SCAFFOLDING**

Diversity, and more importantly, how to address diversity responsibly and effectively in the classroom, has been the common golden thread guiding this study. Because learners are so diverse and have different needs, teachers need to be sensitive to the level and amount of support each learner needs throughout the process of developing their skills and knowledge (Bartolo, 2010:112). This support given by teachers to learners during the learning process is known as scaffolding.

Within the classroom situation, scaffolding can be defined as any form of support, guidance or assistance given to a learner by the teacher (Ackerman, 2001:107). Scaffolding may also include any other steps taken by the teacher to ensure that each learner can complete tasks successfully that they were not able to complete independently previously (Maree, 2004:401). Nel (2011:178) emphasises the temporary nature of scaffolding. While teachers assist learners in completing tasks, the learners are said to internalise the processes that are scaffolded for them by the teacher (Pressley & McCormick, 1995:9). When learners then complete future assessment tasks, they use the principles that they have internalised to complete the tasks successfully without any assistance from their teacher. This touches on the aim of providing scaffolding to learners.

According to Ackerman (2001:107), the aim of scaffolding is to enhance learners' independence in completing tasks, and to make them take responsibility for their own learning. Furthermore, scaffolding aims to guide learners through different levels of knowledge and development (Williams & Burden, 1997:40). By means of scaffolding, teachers can provide support and guidance to learners that will help them to move beyond their present level of development and understanding to the next layer of conceptual development and understanding (Doddington, 1996:41; Llewellyn,

2011:56-57). In order to guide learners in climbing the ladder of development and conceptual understanding, teachers should design support plans that will help learners to most effectively take the next step (Doddington, 1996:41). The methods or strategies used to scaffold learning can vary.

Bornman and Rose (2010:81-81) list the amount of work given to each learner, breaking the work into smaller steps, time awarded to learners for completing tasks, the use of themes that relate to and interest learners, and also the type of task that must be completed as different strategies that might be used by teachers to provide scaffolding to learners. It can also be argued that any form of social interaction between the teacher and learners can be viewed as a form of scaffolding. Ackerman (2001:115) emphasises that teachers should not underestimate their role as mediators and that they should view learning as not only a cognitive, but also a social process. Research conducted in the field of both scaffolding and cooperative learning has shown that when learners interact with their teachers or even fellow learners, their learning has improved (Ackerman, 2001:115; Bornman & Rose, 2010:19-20; Santi & Francis, 2014:132). In sharing the learning experience with a teacher, the learner is able to take ownership of his/her new knowledge and also form a foundation for future learning (Reynolds, 1996:169).

#### **2.7.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS ON DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT**

If DA, with its focus on ZPD and scaffolding, had been easy to implement in the classroom, all teachers would be practising it. However, theory is not always easily implemented in the real classroom situation and DA does not come without its challenges.

One of the challenges of DA is that it is more time consuming than static assessment (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:207). According to Grigorenko (2009:18), a third of teachers in the UK are familiar with DA but do not use it due to time constraints. Designing DA tasks also requires more resources, something that not all teachers might have enough of (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:207). However, alternatively, DA can also be advantageous.

The most noticeable advantage of DA, in terms of this study, is that it is a valuable tool for responding to learners' diversity that includes varying abilities, learning styles and life worlds (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:202-203). Another advantage of DA is that it also gives learners the opportunity to be actively involved in their own learning (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:202-203; Wilson, 1996:216). Thirdly, DA

motivates learners as they are presented with tasks that are more meaningful to their own individual learning situation (Van der Horst & McDonald, 2001:202-203). Lastly, DA is not limited to only improving learner achievement, it also helps teachers to improve their teaching skills (Moss & Brookhart, 2009:1).

## **2.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter took a closer look at the issue of diversity in South Africa and how it influences not only the country's educational system, but also the daily decisions of teachers in their classrooms. Inclusivity is one of the key principles on which South Africa's educational system is based as it ensures that all learners receive an equitable education. One way in which inclusivity can be guaranteed in classrooms is by means of curriculum differentiation.

However, although accommodating diversity in any classroom is a necessity, it is not an easy task, with a lack of time being one of the key factors that prevents teachers from effectively differentiating in their classrooms. It is for this reason that it is proposed in the study that teachers use results obtained from assessment to make calculated decisions about how, when and to what extent to differentiate in order to assist each learner in their classrooms to achieve according to their true potential. It was also clearly explained that static assessment simply does not provide teachers with the correct information that they need to make decisions about differentiation. This is why it was proposed that teachers rather use DA, as well as why DA was examined empirically in the study as a means to inform curriculum differentiation.

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## Chapter 3

### Research methodology

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#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Dawling and Brown (2010:6) define research as an investigation carried out to understand a specific phenomenon or activity more clearly. The aim of the researcher in the field, according to Delamont (2004:218), is to create a picture of how the participants perceive the world that they exist in. However, because of the dual role as both teacher and researcher, the researcher had to reflect on what research meant in this context and what she wished to achieve through the study. Mason (2002:21) urges researchers to create a clear understanding of their own answers to the questions stated above. The study was conducted for two reasons. Firstly, the researcher wanted to become a better teacher, to broaden her own knowledge, and develop skills in order to be better equipped to address the diversity of students in her classes, and to guide them on a meaningful educational journey. Secondly, in disseminating the findings of the study, it could hopefully inspire teachers generally to equip themselves with more knowledge to use differentiated teaching more often in their own classroom practice.

However, when one conducts research in the field of education, it is important to remember that the research usually focuses on learners (Dawling & Brown, 2010:33), who are a less experienced and less articulate section of any population. In order to prevent the study from lacking trustworthiness, decisions about the methodology were made carefully. Chapter 3 starts off with a discussion on the value of constructivist, social-constructionist and social-constructivist theories in guiding the study. This is then followed by an explanation of the chosen methodological course, qualitative research, as well as the reason for this choice. Next, a case study as research design is explained. A discussion on the research process, including information about the research site and how the participants were selected, then follows. The research process will furthermore be explained in terms of how observations, discussions and primary documents, such as learners' answer sheets, were used to collect data. The data analysis process will then be briefly explained. This is followed by a discussion of the dual role of being both a teacher and researcher in the study, and any effects it may have had on the study. Finally, the steps taken to ensure the quality of the study are discussed. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations adhered to during the study.

## **3.2 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

### **3.2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Hammersley (2012:2) defines a research paradigm as the philosophical assumptions that researchers make about how the situation that they are studying can be understood. A paradigm can then be explained as the lens through which a researcher views the world and relates to the epistemology of a study. According to Mason (2002:16), epistemology helps researchers to create an understanding and an explanation of their experiences of the situation that they are studying. In the research situation, epistemology can be viewed as the theory that determines how the knowledge is uncovered or found, and through which a researcher sees and understands the world (Mason, 2002:16), and the situation under study.

Jansen (2004:375) lists three roles of theory: 1) Theory as the opposite of practice. This means that theory determines how a person thinks and reflects on certain issues; 2) Theory as a hypothesis that must be tested; and 3) Theory as an explanation. This means that a specific theory is used to explain the phenomenon under study. In this study, the latter role of theory was focused on. In order to explain the phenomenon of how the results of dynamic assessment (DA) can be understood and then eventually be utilised by the teacher to differentiate instruction, the study took three main theories into consideration. These comprised Piaget's constructivism, Papert's social-constructionism, and Vygotsky's social-constructivism.

### **3.2.2 CONSTRUCTIVISM AS RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Constructivist Theory offers a window into the interests of learners and also what they are able to achieve during different developmental stages (Ackerman, 2001:1). In this way, constructivism sheds light on how learners arrive at answers – both those which are correct and incorrect. DA can be viewed as constructivist in nature as it emphasises teachers mediating the assessment process by implementing different forms of scaffolding so that learners can firstly understand questions, and secondly be enabled to arrive at the correct answers. During the process of mediation, teachers also reflect on the effectiveness of the strategies used for scaffolding. With this knowledge, teachers then may be able to identify areas of concern in learners' learning and then differentiate their teaching accordingly. According to Piaget, learners are only able to achieve certain skills within certain stages of development, which are age related. Piaget's well-known classification of the stages of cognitive development in learners is the sensorimotor stage, the pre-operational stage, the



concrete-operational stage, and the formal-operational stage (Maree, 2004:400). According to this classification, children gradually develop from concrete thinking to more abstract thinking from about eleven to twelve years up to adulthood, which implies that when learners are in Grade 7, i.e. with ages ranging between 12 and 14, they start to think more abstractly.

According to Williams and Burden (1997:22), Piaget viewed a child's cognitive development as a process of maturation where the learner's mind is constantly seeking a balance between new information and what is already known. As new information is obtained, it is fitted into existing knowledge by means of assimilation, which leads to the eventual accommodation of the new information (Maree, 2004:399-400). This implies that learners' schemata of their existing knowledge are always developing, changing, and becoming more complex, and eventually form the building blocks of future learning (Maree, 2004:399). As soon as assimilation and accommodation are in a state of balance, this leads to equilibration (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006:339; Maree, 2004:400). If learners show difficulties in accommodating new information, teachers can use the results obtained from DA to differentiate teaching to answer the specific needs of learners.

Within a constructivist theoretical framework, knowledge and intelligence are believed to be actively constructed during the interaction between the learner and his/her environment (Maree, 2004:400). During these social interactions, factors such as the learners' age, their social experiences, the activity they are concentrating on and a state of equilibration influence changes in their thinking (Piaget, and Woolfolk, cited in Maree, 2004:399). Learners gather information through their experiences and actions, and by activating their senses in their life world (Maree, 2004:399). Still, Ackerman (2001:4) points out that constructivism tends to overlook the role of context, the use of media, and the value of a learner's preference for a particular learning style. However, despite some criticism, the Constructivist Theory is still valued by some teachers to guide their thinking. This is why Ackerman (2001:3) lists two implications of Constructivist Theory for the way learners learn, and ultimately, for the way teachers should teach. Firstly, learners interpret what they learn in the light of their own knowledge and experience. Secondly, knowledge is experience that is gained through interaction with the world, people and things. The relevance of constructivism in this research is that learners' reading comprehension is influenced by their ability to accommodate the new information that they come across when reading texts in their existing store of knowledge.

### **3.2.3 SOCIAL–CONSTRUCTIONISM AS RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Within a social-constructionist theoretical framework, the focus is generally on how learners engage in inner conversation with learning materials, and how these conversations ultimately lead to the learners actively constructing new knowledge (Ackerman, 2001:1). To Papert (cited in Ackerman, 2001:5), knowledge remains rooted in the contexts in which it is constructed and is shaped by the use of external supports. Mediating is thus important in order for learners to reach their potential level of development. DA takes on a constructionist viewpoint as teachers use different forms of scaffolding during the teaching and evaluating process so that the assessment task in itself can also lead to an opportunity for learning. The role that discourse plays in helping the learner construct an experience of the world and of what happens within it is viewed as one of the key characteristics of social-constructionism (Hammersley, 2012:4). For this reason, social-constructionism demands from learners that they be actively involved in the learning situation as this will lead to gaining a better understanding of the work (Ackerman, 2001:8). In this sense, social-constructionism shows an interest in the dynamics of change (Ackerman, 2001:8). Researchers and teachers who support a social-constructionist theoretical framework believe that the study of intelligence must always be carried out in learners' real social contexts, and must also be sensitive to any variations in the learner's environment (Ackerman, 2001:8). This implies that social-constructionism acknowledges that learners' cognitive processes and intelligence can possibly be influenced by their environment. The implication that the social-constructionist theory held for this study was that external support, such as providing a word list explaining possible difficult words, activating learners' knowledge about the content of a text prior to reading, or teaching learners the organisation of different types of texts, could all possibly contribute to improved reading comprehension. Furthermore, DA tends to place a strong focus on learners becoming active participants in their own learning. During DA, learners are then encouraged to reflect on the information they are reading in texts, to question it, and to think about how it fits into their existing schemata of knowledge.

### **3.2.4 SOCIAL-CONSTRUCTIVISM AS RESEARCH PARADIGM**

According to Butler-Kisber (2010:5), social-constructivism is based on the idea that learners' lived experiences are constructed in their social interactions with others within a specific context, and are furthermore influenced by the shared historical and cultural experiences of the individuals involved in this social setting. Vygotsky (cited

in Gouvan, 2001:35) explains that a child's higher mental functions are formed in his/her social interactions with more experienced adults, such as parents or teachers, as is the case in the formal learning situation. With the help of their teachers, learners can actively solve problems during the learning situation (Gouvan, 2001:35).

According to Maree (2004:401), Vygotsky places emphasis on the influence that social learning has on development, and furthermore points out that learning directs development, rather than follows it. This implies that teachers must direct their teaching towards the learners' potential level of development, as opposed to their actual level of development. Vygotsky, in fact, states that good instruction must always be aimed not so much at the developed, but rather the developing of functions (Shayer, cited in Turuk, 2008:250). This means that activities conducted in the classroom must be just above the learner's current level of development, meaning that such tasks must be a little bit more difficult than those the learner can complete independently. Learners first succeed in performing a new task with the help of the teacher, and then internalise the task so that they can perform it on their own (Turuk, 2008:248). In this way, social interaction is used to scaffold learning (Turuk, 2008:248). The focus is then on learning taking place in a learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD allows teachers to determine learners' future learning, keeping in mind not only those skills which have already been achieved, but also those which are still developing (Vygotsky, 1997:33). Furthermore, Vygotsky (1997:35) explain that the developmental processes lag behind the learning process. This sequence then results in the ZPD. Vygotsky (1997:35) state that within a social-constructivist theoretical framework, learning is not development, however, properly organised learning can lead to mental developmental processes that would not be possible without learning. Socio-constructivism implies that texts selected for reading comprehension tasks must challenge learners, in such a way that their skills and knowledge can be expanded while still being able to complete tasks with little or no assistance from teachers. During the process of DA of reading comprehension, teacher dialogue, as a form of scaffolding, can break down questions as an attempt to assist learners in comprehending and completing the task.

### **3.2.5 UTILISING CONSTRUCTIVIST/SOCIAL-CONSTRUCTIONIST/SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVIST VIEWPOINTS IN THE STUDY**

In this study, these three relevant theoretical frameworks have been utilised as guidelines, instead of fully accepting only one of them. Piaget's notion that learners adjust and adapt their thinking in a process of assimilation and accommodation in

order to create a state of equilibration between new information and known information (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006:339) is useful in trying to understand how learners comprehend information in the texts that they read. However, Piaget's explanation of learning as gradually relying less on one's concrete environment and becoming more able to manipulate symbolic objects in order to construct meaning (Ackerman, 2001:8) has not been systematically applied.

Instead, the process of data collection and analysis rests on the social-constructionist belief that learners' success in the learning setting is also influenced by the immediate environment in which they exist and in which learning takes place. This implies that learning is not just a case of internal stability (Ackerman, 2001:8), but also an external process where the learners construct knowledge through interactions with their environment. During the process of data analysis, different forms of scaffolding were evaluated for their effectiveness in supporting learners through the completion of reading comprehension tasks. Furthermore, during the process of DA, factors in the learners' environment, such as their parents, hobbies or the activities they busied themselves with, were also scrutinised for their possible effectiveness in assisting learners in successfully completing reading comprehension tasks.

This study, however, goes one step further by acknowledging that meaning is not constructed only through a process of interaction with the environment and inner discourse, but also during a process of social interactions between a learner and other people in his/her environment (Ellis, cited in Turuk, 2008:245) and that more competent persons, such as teachers, can mediate learners through the learning process so that they can move beyond their actual level of achievement to their potential level of achievement. Discussions between the researcher and the participants during the data collection processes also served as an additional learning opportunity for learners. During these discussions, the researcher helped her learners by means of scaffolding certain strategies that could be applied by learners in future reading comprehension tasks.

What implications do these three theoretical approaches hold for research? Researchers subscribing to any one of these tend to place themselves in the situation under study, and develop close relationships with the participants so that they can be able to develop a better understanding of how the participants experience the situation under study (Butler-Kisber, 2010:5). In somewhat different ways, the theories place a strong emphasis on how learners experience and

understand the world, and consequently on how they learn. It is therefore proposed that a qualitative research approach is the best methodology to attempt to collect rich, descriptive data. Such data will paint a clear picture (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a:50) of how the DA of reading comprehension tasks could possibly yield information for differentiating teaching so that the Grade 7 learner in the English-as-AL classroom's reading comprehension skills and achievement may be improved.

### **3.3 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Methodology can be defined as the strategies a researcher uses in order to study any phenomenon (Silverman, 2000:79). The chosen methodology for this study is qualitative research. According to Nieuwenhuis (2010a:60), qualitative research is typically known as an umbrella term used for a wide range of research approaches, including naturalistic, subjective, interpretivist, and constructivist research. However, before attempting a definition of qualitative research, one must first understand the history thereof. In this section, a brief overview of the development of qualitative research as methodology is supplied. This is followed by a definition of qualitative research against the backdrop of the terms *ontology* and *epistemology*. The section is concluded with an explanation of the challenges and strengths of conducting qualitative research.

#### **3.3.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Nieuwenhuis (2010a:48), as well as Creswell (2008:46) explain that during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the world-view through which research was conducted was dominantly of a positivistic nature. The single dominant approach during this time was quantitative research. It was believed that a single fixed reality existed and the best way to find the truth was by means of scientific experimentation (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:48). However, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some researchers started to question the notion of a single fixed reality or truth, as it became clear to them that multiple and diverse correlations could be found from data collected in studies (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:48). Two other major events during this time resulted in a new paradigm, which guided research coming to the forefront. These events included social studies being able to predict human behaviour, and new theories being developed on how to understand the world (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:49), one of which is constructivism (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:50). These emerging theories suggested that social phenomena were simply too complex to understand through a simple explanation of

cause and effect (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:49). During the 1960s, many researchers in the field of education called for an alternative approach to research as they felt that quantitative research relied too much on how the researcher experienced the social phenomenon under study, and too little emphasis was placed on participants' experiences thereof (Creswell, 2008:49). Hammersley (2012:2-3) states that Thomas Kuhn played a major role in overturning the beliefs related to research that prevailed for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those researchers who supported an alternative approach to quantitative research also favoured that research should be conducted in participants' natural environment (Creswell, 2008:50). Because of the influence that Kuhn's work had, and the other developments in the 1960s and '70s, a paradigm shift occurred in the field of research (Hammersley, 2012:2-3). The new emerging paradigm for research acknowledged the complexity and interrelatedness of social phenomena (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:49), as well as the fact that different participants could experience a single social phenomenon differently. This new emerging paradigm illuminated the need that existed for an alternative to the quantitative research approach, and ultimately led to the 'birth' of qualitative research as methodology.

### **3.3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DEFINED AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY**

Qualitative research can be defined as research that aims to collect rich and descriptive data (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:50) in order to conceptualise a clear and detailed understanding of participants' experiences in a specific social context. Creswell (2008:46) defines qualitative research as a type of educational research in which the researcher bases his/her findings and understanding of the situation under study on the experiences of the participants. Others define qualitative research as an approach that aims to understand a social situation better by gathering evidence that explains the experiences, feelings, and views of the participants taking part in the study (Verma & Mallick, 1999:27; Wiersma, 1993:14). However, to stay clear from a superficial definition of qualitative research, one must consider what qualitative research means against the backdrop of ontology and epistemology.

Ontology refers to that which is or can be known (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:53). The view that qualitative research takes regarding ontology correlates with the Constructivist Theory. According to Adams, Collair, Oswald and Perold (2004:401), researchers working in the constructivist paradigm acknowledge that participants' realities are socially constructed and differ from each other. In light of this, qualitative researchers



believe that participants existing within a specific social phenomenon under study construct their own knowledge through their social interactions with their environment, as well as with each other. As the implication is that human life can only be understood from within, qualitative researchers accept that they cannot be separated from the research (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:54). Furthermore, it is believed that qualitative researchers create their findings, as opposed to discovering them (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:54).

Where ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, epistemology relates to how the truth can be discovered or known (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:55). Where researchers working within a quantitative paradigm believe that the truth can be discovered by means of 'scientific' methods, qualitative researchers take on the assumption that the truth can only be known by exploring the experiences of participants regarding a specific social phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:55).

Qualitative research can generally be characterised by the following factors: 1) Qualitative research is conducted in the participants' natural environment (Golafshani, 2003:600; Wiersma, 1993:82); 2) Qualitative research focuses on the uniqueness of each social phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:51); 3) Qualitative research focuses on understanding participants' perceptions of the world, and more specifically, the situation under study and for that reason they seek insight rather than statistical analysis (Bell, 1993:6); and 4) Qualitative researchers acknowledge the interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants (Golafshani, 2003:600; Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:55). However, although the literature illustrates the need for and the rise of an alternative research paradigm, qualitative research receives a great deal of criticism, as indicated in the section below.

### **3.3.4 THE CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Mason (2002:1) states that criticism of qualitative research includes that it is at best just illustrative and is conducted in informal and unorganised ways. This implies that qualitative research cannot produce a valid representation of the truth. In light of this, Stenbacka (cited in Golafshani, 2003:601) actually states that the term *research* is irrelevant in qualitative research as research concerns scientific measurements. The National Research Council supports Stenbacka's sentiments (Denzin, 2009:143). This group believes that for research to be of a high quality, it must be 'scientific' and empirical, and findings must be obtained through experimental designs (Denzin, 2009:143). The fact that qualitative researchers usually form close relationships with

participants results in another source of criticism. Denzin (2009:150) believes that the qualitative researcher's perspective can influence his/her collection of data, and can eventually lead to a lack of trust in the findings of the study. However, when qualitative research is carefully designed and conducted, its strengths can overcome the criticism thereof.

The first strength of qualitative research relates to the design thereof. Silverman (2000:108) believes that one of the strengths of qualitative research design is that it often allows for greater flexibility than in most quantitative research designs. The second strength of qualitative research lies in that, by creating close relationships with their participants, researchers are better able to create rich and descriptive data that will describe and explain the social phenomenon under study more clearly. Therefore, qualitative research has a great deal of potential as it provides researchers with a tool through which a wide array of dimensions of participants' everyday lives can be explored (Mason, 2002:1).

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this section, case study as a research design is first discussed. This discussion is followed by an explanation of other methodological considerations pertaining to the study, including the selection of the participants, data collection strategies and the strategies for analysing the data.

#### **3.4.2 CASE STUDY AS RESEARCH DESIGN**

Bromley (cited in Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:75) defines case study research as a systematic inquiry into an event that is rooted in a specific social context, and aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest. In light of this definition, Verma and Mallick (1999:81), as well as Creswell (2008:476), state that a case study focuses on an in-depth exploration of a social phenomenon instead of the breadth thereof. This shows that case study can be classified as descriptive research (Verma & Mallick, 1999:79). Furthermore, case study is also known by the fact that it is a bounded system (Merriman, cited in Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:75). The term *bounded* means that the case is separated for research in terms of either time or place, or in terms of some physical boundary (Creswell, 2008:476), for example, learners in a specific classroom or school. A typical characteristic of case studies as a research design is that it works towards creating a comprehensive understanding of how



participants who co-exist in a specific situation relate and interact with each other, and how they construct their own meaning of the phenomenon under study (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:75).

Case study as a research design was chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, Bell (1993:8) explains that it is an appropriate design for individual researchers who work in a limited time scale, but still wish to study a specific problem in some depth. Dynamic assessment played a key role in this study. As intervention is an essential part of DA, this created a second reason for selecting this specific research design, as case study is typically the method of choice for studying interventions or innovations (Lancy, 2001:107). According to Verma and Mallick (1999:82), the greatest advantage of a case study is that it aims to understand the whole individual in relation to his/her environment. Flyvbjerg (2004:428) points out that another advantage of case study research is that it can focus closely on real-life situations and test participants' views directly in relation to the phenomenon under study as it unfolds in practice.

Although a case study was viewed as the best research design to utilise in this study, the disadvantages of using this research design were not ignored. Just as is the case with qualitative research, case study design is often accused of being too subjective and less rigorous than quantitative methods (Flyvbjerg, 2004:428). However, Flyvbjerg (2004:422) comments on this criticism by stating that researchers should sometimes explore individual cases to learn something and not necessarily in the hope of proving something.

The nature of the study was that of a composite case study. The case study consisted of all of the Grade 7 learners of one school, with one teacher instructing reading comprehension as part of the English-as-AL1 curriculum. The participants were selected from all the Grade 7 classes and then grouped into four different bands representing different levels of achievement in reading comprehension. The result was a single case composed of four sub-ordinate cases, which were the four different bands of reading comprehension achievement. These gave this case study its composite nature.

### **3.4.3 PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING**

#### **3.4.3.1 The research context**

As it is the belief held by this study that factors such as culture, socio-economic status, social structure and social interactions with others can influence a participant's view of his/her reality, the context or setting in which the participants live and in which the phenomenon under study occurs is a valuable concern in any qualitative research study (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004:297 & 299). It can also be said that certain social phenomena are often a result of the specific context in which they occur. For this reason, qualitative researchers may argue that the relationship between the context and the phenomenon under study is an illustrative one (Mason, 2002:126). For sampling purposes, it is vital to think carefully about how a setting can provide data to help the researcher answer their research questions (Mason, 2002:130). In this study, the setting was pre-classified (Mason, 2002:130) as it was conducted in the Grade 7 English AL1 classroom of a specific school. This also then supplied the population from which the participants were selected. The Grade 7 learners who participated in this study had the common characteristic that they came from an Afrikaans school in a small town in South Africa, and took English as an AL1.

According to Sawell (2001:55), researchers describe their participants and their setting in qualitative studies in as much detail as possible by describing the setting and the population from which the participants were selected. The selected participants are also described to some extent. Although it is the desire to provide readers of the research report with a thick description of the setting, population and participants, it must also be done carefully so as to not provide any information that could lead to a disclosure of the setting or identification of any of the participants.

#### **3.4.3.2 Description of research site and participants**

The research site was that of a predominantly Afrikaans primary school in a small town in South Africa. However, because of the lack of a good English primary school in the area, some of the learners in the school are English Home Language speakers. All correspondence from the school to the parents is in Afrikaans. The medium of instruction is the home language of the majority of the learners, Afrikaans.

The town exists around a primary employment provider, which plays a major role in the school, as well as the community. Looking at the socio-economic status of the school population, one finds a broad spectrum. A small percentage of learners in the

school are subsidised and also form part of the school's feeding scheme. A large percentage of the learners come from very affluent families, some of them having lived abroad for some time during their schooling career. The biggest percentage of learners is from middle-class families. There are approximately 900 learners in the school, the majority being white South Africans. The school provides education opportunities from Grades 00 to Grade 7. The participants of this study were selected from the Grade 7 learners of 2014.

### **3.4.3.3 Selection of participants**

Before the process of selecting participants for the study commenced, the researcher first discussed the intent of the study with all her classes and invited learners to be part of the study. Learners were assured that they did not have to take part in the study, and that it was completely voluntary. The learners were then informed that data collection would sometimes take place during break times and may even be in the afternoons after the end of the school day. Furthermore, it was also clearly stated that no learner would receive any form of reward - whether it was money, extra marks or anything else - for their participation in the study. Learners were also informed that they and their parents had to give their consent, and if they refused to participate, their decision would be accepted and respected. Learners were also given the option to leave the study if they did not like participating in it. The learners were informed that even if their parents gave their consent for participation, it would not necessarily mean that they would be selected for the study as only a limited number of participants were needed. Only learners who returned their letters would have the opportunity to be selected as possible participants for the study.

Letters were then sent to the parents and guardians of all 115 Grade 7 learners asking their permission for their children to take part in the study (Appendix A). This letter contained information on the aim of the study, and what participation would entail. It was further stated that if parents were willing for their children to participate in the study, they had to complete the form to give their written consent and send it back to the school.

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling strategies was applied to select the participants for the study. It comprised convenience sampling in the sense that the researcher had to work with the participants who were available in the school at which she taught – the first inclusion criterion being those learners whose parents/guardians had given their written consent. This approach to sampling is the

most popular and is usually used by teachers who conduct research in their own classrooms. In addition to this, a purposive sampling strategy was also used. Purposive sampling means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristic that makes them the holders of the data needed for the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:79). In the case of this study, the defining characteristic was particular levels of reading comprehension achievement. According to Silverman (2000:104), purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process which he/she is interested in researching. As it is the purpose of qualitative research studies to create an in-depth explanation of a phenomenon, qualitative researchers tend to use purposive sampling strategies to select research sites and participants as these are believed to provide rich data that will answer their research questions (Creswell, 2008:213; Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:79; Sawell, 2001:52).

The purposive sampling strategy focused on in this study was that of *maximal variation*. The aim of maximal variation sampling is to develop many perspectives (Creswell, 2008:215) of a single phenomenon. According to the learners' average of general reading comprehension achievement in the previous term, all the learners from whom signed letters had been received were divided into four different bands: low (39% or less), low-middle (40–59%), middle-high (60–79%) and high achievers (80% or more). Within the different bands, the name of each learner whose parents/guardians had given written consent was written on a list with a corresponding number. On separate small pieces of papers, the same numbers were written and these were placed into a bantex bag. The intention was to randomly select five participants from each band, giving a total of 20 participants. It is, however, acknowledged that random sampling can lead to learners being selected as participants who are shy or lack the verbal skills to clearly and completely express their experiences (Shenton, 2004:65). This was found to be the case in the current study, in addition to regular absenteeism of some of the randomly selected participants, which also challenged the data collection process. However, random sampling was chosen as a means of preventing the researcher's preconceived ideas and feelings about certain learners from influencing the selection of participants, and eventually the findings of the study, in any way.

A number of 20 participants was initially decided on as it was the researcher's belief that it would be able to provide enough evidence to answer the research questions, yet be small enough to be manageable. However, learners falling in the lowest band did not bring back their letters as anticipated. Only two learners from this band

brought back their letters and were then automatically selected as participants. The participants from the rest of the bands were randomly selected by an outsider drawing numbers for each of the three bands. A total of 17 participants were selected. During the process of data collection one of the participants left the school, leaving the final total of participants at 16. It was admittedly not a very big sample size, but the literature consulted points out that samples may be small in qualitative studies (Mason, 2002:134; Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:79; Sawell, 2001:52). Verma and Mallick (1999:81) also point out that case study as a research design is not easily practicable with a very large sample. According to Sawell (2001:52), as well as Mason (2002:136), the number of participants chosen must still be adequate to provide reliable, consistent data.

To protect the identities of the selected participants, not much information about them can be disclosed. The participants' socio-economic status ranged between financially struggling and very affluent. Some of the participants were well-travelled children and some had even lived abroad for some time. The participants' first language was predominantly Afrikaans, with only a few exceptions. All of the participants were first time Grade 7 learners. The participants also displayed different interests and hobbies. Some were sports stars, while others had more artistic temperaments. No two participants shared a similar home environment, which confirms the uniqueness of each participant's situation.

### **3.4.4 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES**

#### **3.4.4.1 Introduction**

There is no single strategy for data collection that will leave a researcher with an absolutely clear understanding of the phenomenon under study, and for that reason, qualitative research can include many different strategies for data collection (Dawling & Brown, 2010:7; Delamont, 2004:218). As it was the aim of the researcher to obtain first-hand data (Dawling & Brown, 2010:43), it was decided to use observation and discussions as data collection strategies. These strategies were chosen as they are most frequently used in case study research (Bell, 1993:8; Shenton, 2004:65). In addition, primary documents such as the learners' reading comprehension answer sheets and the researcher's journal were used.

### 3.4.4.2 Observation as data collection strategy

Creswell (2008:221) defines observation as a process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing the participants' actions and interactions at the research site. These observations are done in a way that does not disturb the natural flow of events or change the course of interactions. As a qualitative data collection strategy, observation is used to enable the researcher to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:84).

According to Creswell (2008:221-222), the advantages of observation include that: 1) It gives the researcher the opportunity to record information as it happens in a setting; 2) It gives the researcher the opportunity to study participants' actual behaviour and; 3) It gives the researcher the opportunity to study individuals who have difficulty verbalising their thoughts and views on a certain subject. However, alternatively, Nieuwenhuis (2010b:84) explains that the risk of observation as a data collection strategy lies in that it tends to be highly selective and subjective. Researchers often focus on a specific event or on specific participants within the whole, and seldom observe the whole of a situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:84). Another disadvantage or challenge related to observations is that the researcher must be continuously aware of his/her own biases (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:84). Creswell (2008:222) adds good listening skills and a careful attention to visual detail to the list of challenges related to using observations as a trustworthy data collection strategy.

There are four types of observation in qualitative research: the complete observer, the observer as participant, the participant as observer and the complete participant, which entails that the researcher always adopts a particular role as an observer (Creswell, 2008:222; Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:84-85). In this study, the researcher took on the role of a participating observer as she took part in the activities that were being observed (Creswell, 2008:222). This implies that while the researcher took part in activities, she also recorded information. What makes this observational role so favourable is that it provides the researcher with opportunities to see how participants understand the situation, which allows the researcher to gain a so called insider-perspective of the setting (Creswell, 2008:222; Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:85). According to Sawell (2001:68), in this type of observation, the researcher is counted as a friend and a member of the group. It is acknowledged that this type of observation is more difficult to conduct as it is not easy to take notes while participating (Creswell, 2008:222). It may happen that these observers may need to wait to write down their



observations until after they have left the research site (Creswell, 2008:222). Because of this restriction in the participant observer role, it was further decided to use structured observation (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:85). What this implied in this study is that the researcher designed an observation schedule (Dawling & Brown, 2010:57) with a checklist of categories that needed to be observed (Appendix B). This was also done to prevent the observations from being unfocused and vague (Mason, 2002:89).

During the observations, the researcher focused on three main aspects. Firstly, the researcher observed how participants approached the reading comprehension assessment task, and how they came to produce the final product. This included paying attention to how long it took for participants to start with the assessment task, what their emotional state seemed to be at the starting point, and how long it took them to complete the task. Secondly, the researcher observed how the participants used their social interactions within the classroom context in order to construct comprehension of texts. This included paying attention to how the participants seemed to experience the environment around them, as well as the test situation. Close attention was also paid to participants showing any signs of internal conversations. Thirdly, the researcher observed how the participants utilised their unique assets and strengths in order to assist them in the process of developing reading comprehension. This included paying attention to the strategies that the participants used to help them complete the task.

#### **3.4.4.3 Discussions as data collecting strategy**

Interviews are probably the most commonly used method in qualitative research (Mason, 2002:62), and during this study it was also identified as a suitable strategy for data collection. The only difference was that, instead of referring to interviewing, the term *discussions* was preferred and will be used, except when mentioning authors' specific statements on interviews. Because of the young age of the participants participating in the study, the researcher feared that they might feel intimidated by a formal qualitative interview, hence the choice of consciously using informal discussions at child level as a data collection strategy. Sawell (2001:69) explains that interviews can be tailored to particular settings and can indeed include informal discussions. According to Mason (2002:63), researchers choose to use interviews as a data collection strategy because they are interested in participants' perception of the phenomenon under study. Creswell (2008:225) defines a qualitative interview as researchers asking one or more participants general, open-ended

questions and recording their answers, which the researcher then later transcribes for analysis. By truly conversing with participants, a researcher will be better able to collect evidence about how participants really experience, view and understand not only the phenomenon under study, but the broader social context that they exist in.

Conducting interviews, especially on a one-on-one basis, can be very time consuming as they require a great deal of planning (Mason, 2002:67), and furthermore take a great deal of time to conduct. Recording a discussion, in any form, must be done in a meticulous manner (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:89), and this adds to the workload. After the discussion, the audio tapes must be transcribed carefully to preserve all verbal information, and as much non-verbal information as can be retrieved (Sawell, 2001:145). Another limitation, in addition to the aspect of time, is that there is always the danger of bias creeping into discussions (Bell, 1993:95). Creswell (2008:226) further cautions that interviews only provide information that has been 'filtered' through the views of the interviewer. However, using discussions as a data collection strategy also has its merits. A major advantage of discussion is its adaptability (Bell, 1993:91), which means that researchers can design it in such a way that it will provide the information that is needed to answer the research question(s). The way that a participant answers a question (for example his/her tone of voice and facial expressions) can also provide information that a written response would not (Bell, 1993:91). For this reason, discussions enable the researcher to explore a phenomenon in more detail that can provide him/her with useful information, which can be analysed in order to answer a specific research question (Creswell, 2008:226; Dawling & Brown, 2010:78). The aim of the discussions in this study was to obtain rich descriptive data (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b:87). This was done to reach an understanding of how learners approach reading comprehension tasks and which factors, internal and external, are utilised in completing the task – whether successful or not.

Semi-structured discussions (See Appendix C) were selected as Nieuwenhuis (2010b:87) points out that this type of discussion requires the participant to answer a set of predetermined questions, however, it still allows for the probing and clarification of answers. After the completion of a reading comprehension assessment task, the answer sheet was then marked. The researcher then 'discussed' the execution of each participant's task with him/her in a meditative vein in accordance with the DA model. Each discussion consisted of three main questions and mediation. These focused on the strategies that the participants used to complete those comprehension questions that were answered correctly, the



strategies they used to complete those questions that were answered incorrectly, and their reasons for not completing certain questions. The discussions further included two secondary questions and mediation dealing with some participants' hesitation to commence with the task, as well as why participants failed to complete the task on time. The discussions were set up in such a way that they allowed the researcher to ask additional questions if the need arose. A further dimension was added to the discussion as it also served as another opportunity for learning for the participants, since the researcher guided participants through mediated prompts to arrive at the correct answers in the case of questions answered incorrectly or not at all.

One-on-one discussions are typically regarded as the most time consuming data collecting strategy (Creswell, 2008:226). Nevertheless, the researcher held the assumption that speaking to one participant at a time would allow her to reach a deep understanding of how each participant approached each reading task. It also provided insight into which questions they experienced as challenging or easy, as well as any other difficulties that they experienced during the completion of the reading comprehension task.

#### **3.4.4.4 Primary documents as data collecting strategy**

Creswell (2008:230) and Nieuwenhuis (2010b:82) are in agreement that collecting and analysing documents in a qualitative study could provide the researcher with valuable information about the phenomenon under study. The participants' answer sheets for reading comprehension assessment tasks served as primary documents from which to collect data. Nieuwenhuis (2010b:83) advises researchers to be clear about their intent in analysing selected documents, as well as how these relate to their study. In addition to enabling a profile score analysis of each question, as well as the total score within bands and across the entire group, the answer sheets determined the course of each discussion. After marking and evaluating them, the researcher had a clearer idea of which predetermined questions to focus on during the discussion with each participant. Furthermore, the answer sheets were also analysed for clues such as answers scratched out, and steps taken to arrive at a certain answer as it was believed that this could yield information about how the participant had experienced the assessment task. For instance, it was necessary to probe for an explanation when a participant scratched out an answer and then wrote down the same or a different answer. Analysing the participants' answer sheets for this information emphasised the identification of any difficulties that learners had experienced during the completion of tasks, including the strategies that the learners

had used to complete tasks successfully. This information will also eventually be used to guide future teaching, learning, and assessment activities.

#### **3.4.4.5 Researcher's journal as data collecting strategy**

Throughout the study, the researcher reflected on the study in a researcher's journal. According to Creswell (2008:265), researchers cannot make interpretations about data without their personal ideas influencing their thoughts. He therefore suggests that researchers should write down reflective comments of what the data they have collected mean to them. During these reflections, the researcher wrote down or reflected on her own biases, values and assumptions related to the study. The journal also included reflections about anything that struck the researcher as interesting that came up during observations, discussions or any other classroom activities. The research journal was kept in an attempt to continuously remind the researcher of her own preconceived ideas and opinions, and of any biases that she might have had. However, it was the belief of the researcher that these reflective comments could possibly also yield additional data that would aid in understanding the phenomenon under study better.

#### **3.4.4.6 Process of data collection**

The data were collected over two terms of an academic school year. After the participants were selected, they performed their first comprehension task, *Signalling for a stop, shouting for a drop: Thumbs up for South African taxis* (Appendix D). The main focus of this text was instructional in nature. While participants completed the reading comprehension task, they were observed by the researcher. The answer sheets were marked and then the researcher conducted a one-on-one discussion with each participant who had completed the task.

From the observations and discussions (to be reported on in Chapter 4), it was determined that many of the participants displayed virtually no knowledge of specific reading comprehension skills or strategies that focus on how to approach a reading comprehension task. For this reason, the researcher intervened and used a few periods to teach learners basic reading comprehension strategies. This was followed by a second reading comprehension task on an extract from a drama called *Off sick* (Appendix E). The observation was again followed by a discussion with each learner. From the previous round of data collection, it had been concluded that many of the participants struggled to understand questions because of unfamiliar words found in

the questions. For this reason, as a means of scaffolding, learners were provided with an explanation of a possible difficult term in this task.

The text read during the third round was a newspaper report titled *Sports facilities makes a difference* (Appendix F). Before expecting learners to complete this task, one period was used to activate the learners' background knowledge regarding the text organisation of newspapers, for example, analysing headings of articles. During this reading comprehension task, learners were again provided with a word list explaining possible difficult or unfamiliar words. The analysis of data happened throughout the process of data collection.

### **3.4.5 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

During the analysis of qualitative data, the researcher aims to establish how participants understand the specific phenomenon under study by analysing their knowledge, understanding, perceptions, values, feelings and experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:99). Qualitative data analysis tends to be an ongoing and iterative process, implying that data collection, processing, analysis and reporting happens alongside each other (Creswell, 2008:245; Foster, 1996:62-63; Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:99). Nieuwenhuis (2010c:100) points out that the aim of qualitative data analysis is not necessarily to measure, but rather to interpret and to try and make sense of the data collected. During this study, the analysis of the data occurred through the completion of several steps.

The first step taken in analysing all of the data that were collected was to organise it. This was done, as Creswell (2008:245) regards the organisation of data as a critical step in qualitative research because of the great volumes of information collected during a study. All the sets of data (observation sheets, transcriptions of discussions, and participants' answer sheets pertaining to each reading comprehension task) were marked clearly and filed separately (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:104). The research journal was kept separate from the other data and entries were marked clearly. This was done so that during the data analysis, each reflective comment could be matched to the particular observation, discussion or situation it related to. The researcher transcribed the verbal data personally. Dawling and Brown (2010:82) suggest that researchers should transcribe their discussions themselves as this will lead to them becoming more acquainted with the interview text, and also being able to make notes of the nuances of the interaction. During the process of organising the data, the researcher assigned a pseudonym to each participant.

The second step taken was to explore the data (Creswell, 2008:250). Creswell (2008:250) explains that researchers must acquaint themselves with their data in order to get a general idea thereof. This can be done by reading the data many times. Foster (1996:63) also advises that during the process of exploring the data, researchers must reflect on the data in their personal journals. For this reason, the researcher recorded all the insights gained (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:105) and all the questions that arose as the data analysis progressed.

The third step taken in the data analysis involved coding the data. It was decided to make use of a hand analysis of the qualitative data collected. Creswell (2008:246-247) lists two reasons why a hand analysis may be preferred: 1) When the database is relatively small, or 2) When the researcher is not comfortable using computers or has not learned a qualitative computer software program. While the first reason indeed applies, a further reason was that processing data as collected in DA can most appropriately be analysed by hand. Although it is acknowledged that a hand analysis of data is time consuming, it was also the belief of the researcher that a hand analysis could provide the opportunity to get closer to the data (Creswell, 2008:251).

As the aim of the coding process was to narrow down data into a few themes (Creswell, 2008:251), the researcher used different symbols, descriptive words and unique identifying names (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:105) to divide the data into different segments. Prior to the start of the actual coding process, some researchers develop a set of codes based on their knowledge of the phenomenon, the research questions, or the literature (Sawell, 2001:148). These are known as *a priori codes* (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:107). As opposed to using *a priori codes*, many qualitative researchers prefer to develop codes as they code the data and to leave the door open for codes to emerge as they study the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:107; Sawell, 2001:148); these are called *inductive codes* (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:107). For this study, the researcher decided to combine *a priori* and inductive coding strategies since the researcher had identified possible codes from the literature, but also wanted to be open to any significant codes that might emerge from the data during the analysis thereof.

The data were first analysed through a process known as open coding. During open coding, researchers attempt to label each incident, idea or event that relates to certain themes (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:105; Sawell, 2001:148) identified from the literature or to the phenomenon under study in general. Open coding helps

researchers to summarise the major concepts or themes embodied in their data (Sawell, 2001:149). During the open coding process, the researcher followed Nieuwenhuis' (2010c:105) suggestion of keeping a master list on which to record all the codes used in the research study. This master list of codes was compiled in the researcher's journal.

The fourth step that researchers take in analysing data is to study all the codes and then group those with common features into themes (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:108; Sawell, 2001:148), which was done in this study. Creswell (2008:108) suggests reducing the list of codes to get five to seven themes. The reason for the small number of themes is that it is best to write a qualitative report providing detailed information about a few themes, rather than general information about many themes (Creswell, 2008:252).

During the fifth step, the researcher made a list of all the identified themes, as suggested by Sawell (2001:148-149). During this stage of the coding process, themes are also compared with each other to see how they relate. Sawell (2001:146, 147- 148) is of the opinion that this second round of coding is necessary as it leaves the researcher with fewer, but richer themes with greater explanatory power than those obtained during the process of open coding. As the researcher aimed to convey the complexity of the phenomenon under study, the data were analysed for multiple perspectives. By doing this, the researcher was able to provide several points of view from the different participants (Creswell, 2008:251), about specific themes. For this same reason, the researcher also acknowledged that a realistic presentation of information does not present only one side or the other. This is why the data were also analysed for contrary evidence (Creswell, 2008:257). Contrary evidence is information that does not support or confirm the themes, and provides contradictory information about a theme (Creswell, 2008:149). Dawling and Brown (2010:85) rightly state that the analysis of qualitative data is not easy and, in terms of intellect and inspiration, is very demanding. However, it is the belief of the researcher that by conducting the data analysis by means of the steps listed above, it proved to yield the best information possible. This information, in turn, not only answered the research questions, but also provided a clearer understanding of the phenomenon under study. The data analysis process will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

### **3.4.6 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

As it is the purpose of qualitative researchers to understand a specific social phenomenon, they become closely associated with not only all the processes involved, but also with the participants in the study (Sawell, 2001:8). In this study, the researcher had a dual role of being the participants' teacher as well as the researcher conducting the study. Dawling and Brown (2010:52) highlight that there are limits placed on the possibility and the desirability of being a complete participant, as is the case in this study. According to Foster (1996:115), researchers playing participant roles often find it difficult to function in both roles. There is always the possibility that participant researchers may become too subjective or withdrawn, the latter for fear of being accused of bias or malpractice (Foster, 1996:115). However, having the role of a participant as well as a researcher in a research study has some advantages. As the participants' teacher, the researcher had already gained their trust, which enabled them to be more forthcoming with sharing their experiences and feelings. Secondly, as the participants' teacher, the researcher could immediately accumulate valued information about each participant that could, in effect, help the researcher to understand the participant's experience better.

A dual role of both teacher and researcher also presents some challenges for both parties. It firstly presents some ethical challenges. As a researcher, steps are taken to ensure the quality of the findings, however, the University of Minnesota (2003:20) indicates that the teacher's obligations towards learners in the classroom must at all times be considered above the obligations of the research study. Honest self-reflection is an important part of being a good teacher so that one can evaluate the effectiveness of one's own practice (Bornman & Rose, 2010:69). As a researcher, self-reflection is just as important. This means that researchers should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process, and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their 'data' (Mason, 2002:7). This is why the researcher in this study reflected on every step taken, every decision made and every conclusion made throughout the course of the study to ensure that it was trustworthy.

### **3.4.7 QUALITY CRITERIA OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.4.7.1 Introduction**

Researchers have a responsibility to produce good quality research. According to Golafshani (2003:60), the most important test of a qualitative research study comes



down to its quality. The quality of qualitative research has often been questioned (Denzin, 2009:143; Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2004:407; Shenton, 2004:63). Validity and reliability are terms that are often associated with quantitative research (Dawling & Brown, 2010:149). Validity refers to the extent to which researchers observe what they set out to observe, whereas reliability involves the accuracy of research methods and techniques, and thus of the results (Mason, 2002:38-39). Many qualitative researchers argue that validity is not applicable to qualitative research, and therefore should be redefined so that it can fit into qualitative research (Golafshani, 2004:602).

Denzin (2009:140) argues that qualitative researchers should move away from quantitative driven guidelines and use more flexible guidelines to guide them in the quality of their studies. Therefore, qualitative researchers aim to create alternatives to reliability and validity. Golafshani (2003:400) proposes that qualitative researchers make use of the terms *trustworthiness*, *dependability*, *transparency* and *transferability* to guide them in assuring the quality of their studies, as these encompass both validity and reliability. Shenton (2004:71) adds to Golafshani's list of terms *credibility* and *confirmability*. Guba (cited in Shenton, 2004:63) proposes that if qualitative researchers aim at conducting studies that are trustworthy, they must place a strong emphasis on the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of their studies. These terms will now be individually explored. This exploration will be concluded with a summary of how these terms were adhered to during the current study to eventually enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

#### **3.4.7.2 Credibility**

The qualitative term *credibility* answers the question of how the findings of the study are in line with reality (Shenton, 2004:64). This implies that the findings of a study must present a true reflection of the reality of the phenomenon under study, and the participants' experience thereof. Shenton (2004:64) proposes six strategies that qualitative researchers can employ to enhance the credibility of their studies:

- a) *Researchers should use methods that were used in other studies that have been proved successful.* This implies that researchers should stay clear from unfamiliar strategies of which their effectiveness must still be evaluated as methods for data collection and analysis in their studies. If the effectiveness of a utilised method in a study is questioned by the reader of the research report, it can seriously influence the credibility of that study.



- b) *Researchers should familiarise themselves with the culture of the research site and participants before commencing with data collection.* The longer researchers spend time in the research field, the better an understanding they can obtain of the phenomenon under study itself, as well as the participants' reality of that phenomenon (Shenton, 2004:64).
- c) *Researchers must make use of random sampling strategies to select the participants for their studies.* According to Shenton (2004:64), random sampling can eliminate any accusations of researcher bias in the selection of participants. Random sampling strategies are believed to provide researchers with participants that are more representative of the population under study (Shenton, 2004:64).
- d) *Researchers should make use of triangulation to enhance the credibility of their studies.* This implies that researchers should use more than one data source for data collection (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:113). Creswell (2008:266) describes triangulation as the process of combining evidence from different individual participants, types of data, or strategies for data collection in order to create clearer descriptions of the phenomenon in qualitative research. By using different data collection strategies, the shortcomings of each of these strategies could be bridged by the others. Furthermore, if the data from these different sources point to the same conclusions, the researcher will be left with more confidence in his/her results and the trustworthiness thereof (Foster, 1996:113; Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:113). However, Mason (2002:190) criticises the idea of triangulation by arguing that different data sources are likely to throw light onto different social or ontological phenomena or research questions. The researcher of this study rejected the above statement as it is her belief that at the end of the study, it is possible to have attained a clearer picture and understanding of the phenomenon under study, as opposed to using a single strategy for data collection. Silverman (2000:50) also points out that multiple strategies for data collection can leave the researcher with a fuller picture.
- e) *Researchers must make use of reflective researcher journals.* Throughout the study, researchers must make a point of reflecting on the decisions made and steps taken during processes of the research. Nieuwenhuis (2010c:113) also encourages researchers to take notes regarding all of their decisions. These reflections should further include researchers' views on the specific theories they support, how this affected their thoughts and

decisions, and any bias or difficulties they may have experienced throughout the study.

- f) *Researchers should include thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study, as well as the participants, in their final reports.* This implies that researchers should describe the phenomenon under study, the research site, as well as the population and participants to such an extent that readers reading the research report can clearly understand the phenomenon under study and are not left with any ambiguity or misunderstanding that could lead them to make incorrect inferences.

### **3.4.7.3 Transferability**

Mason (2002:39) defines the generalisability of a study as the extent to which researchers can make some form of a wider claim on the basis of their research and analysis. Put in other words, when a researcher claims that the findings of his/her study are generalisable, it means that the findings of that study would most probably be true for other learners in different populations. Generalisability is however typically a term associated with quantitative research. Stenbacko (cited in Golafshani, 2003:603) states that the generalisability of results provides the structure for doing research of a high quality. However, in an answer to this, Maxwell (cited in Golafshani, 2003:603) observes that the extent to which research findings can be generalised is usually what distinguishes quantitative research from qualitative research.

Shenton (2004:68) explains that the findings of a qualitative study are typically related to a small number of specific individuals and, for that reason, it is almost impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions of a study are applicable to other situations and populations. Qualitative research rather seeks to create an understanding of a specific phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:115). Bassey (cited in Bell, 1993:9) states that the 'relatability' of a case study is more important than its generalisability. And for that reason, qualitative researchers prefer to use the term *transferability*.

This implies that qualitative researchers do not make absolute statements, for example, 'because something was true for this specific case, in this specific setting, in this specific study, it will be exactly the same for other participants in other studies'. Qualitative researchers rather state that if the study was to be conducted in another similar setting, the same findings *might* be true for those participants. However,

qualitative researchers should work towards providing thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study so that readers are able not only to understand it clearly but also to compare it with their own situations (Shenton, 2004:70).

#### **3.4.7.4 Dependability**

The dependability of a qualitative research study correlates with the quantitative term *reliability* (Golafshani, 2003:601). The reliability of a study can be described as the practice that would ensure that similar results would be obtained if the study should be repeated in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants (Shenton, 2004:70). However, Fidel, as well as Marshall and Rossman (cited in Shenton, 2004:70) explain that the changing nature of qualitative studies prevents researchers from gaining the same results should their studies be repeated. Shenton (2004:70) then advises that, to enhance the dependability of a qualitative study, researchers should report extensively on every detail of the study so that the reader can repeat the work, even if their intentions are not to obtain similar results.

#### **3.4.7.5 Confirmability**

In order to enhance the confirmability of a qualitative study, researchers should work towards ensuring that the findings presented are truly reflective of the participants' experiences and thoughts regarding the phenomenon under study (Shenton, 2004:71), and not just what the researcher wanted the findings to represent. An audit trail can help in creating a sense of trust in the reader. According to Shenton (2004:71), an audit trail allows the reader to trace the course of the research step by step through all the decisions made and procedures described. An audit trail also enhances the transparency of a study. Transparency relates to how the findings of a qualitative research study can be trusted.

According to Denzin (2009:149), trust is a major issue in qualitative research. When reading a study, the reader must have a clear understanding of the setting in which the research was conducted, how the participants were selected, how and when data collection happened, and how the data were organised, analysed and interpreted. Only then will the reader be able to decide whether the findings of the study can be trusted. Silverman (2000:188) advocates the practice of showing the reader all the procedures used to ensure that methods were reliable and the conclusions of the study valid.

### 3.4.7.6 Trustworthiness

When a study can provide a clear, coherent and transparent picture of all the steps taken and decisions made during the research, the trustworthiness of that study is enhanced (Butler-Kisber, 2010:14). According to Nieuwenhuis (2010c:113), as well as Golafshani (2003:60), trustworthiness is of the utmost importance in qualitative research. Several steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the current study.

The first step taken was using methods that were also used in previous studies by different researchers, which had proved to be effective. The methods used for data collection were the answer sheets of learners as primary documents, observations, individual discussions, as well as the researcher's reflective journal as an additional source of data collection, all of which are commonly used strategies for data collection in qualitative research studies. Furthermore, the use of multiple methods for data collection created a state of triangulation. By using different strategies for data collection, a more detailed and clearer picture of learners' experience of the phenomenon could be created.

Secondly, as a result of the dual-role of being both the teacher and the researcher, it helped the researcher to become familiar with the phenomenon and the participants. In the role of teacher, the researcher had familiarised herself with the participants long before the data collection. The dual role of teacher/researcher assisted in building a relationship of trust between the researcher and participants, which lead to participants being more relaxed in sharing their experiences, ideas, thoughts and feelings during the individual discussions.

The third step taken was to combine convenience and purposive sampling strategies with a random sampling strategy to select the participants for this study. Fourthly, throughout the study, the researcher reflected on all the steps taken in the study, the reasons behind decisions, actions and beliefs, as well as her own personal thoughts. Nieuwenhuis (2010c:115) explains that by keeping a reflective researcher's journal, others who read the research will be able to follow the researcher's reasoning and this will guide them in understanding how the researcher arrived at their interpretations.

The fifth step taken was to provide an audit trail (see Chapter 4) to record all the steps taken during the processes of data collection and analysis. Shenton (2004:71) explains that an audit trail provides information about the beliefs that directed a

researcher's actions and decisions during the study, the reasons why a researcher adopted certain methods. The weaknesses of the employed methods are also acknowledged in this process.

A final step taken to enhance the overall trustworthiness of the study was to provide as 'thick' a description as possible of the phenomenon under study, the research site, and the participants. Verma and Mallick (1999:82) highlight that a shortcoming of case study research is that the participating individuals who make up the research cases may not be representative or typical. This is why generalisations will not be valid. Although the findings of this study cannot be generalised, a clear description of the details of the study can enhance the transferability thereof. In fact, according to Nieuwenhuis (2010c:113), by avoiding generalising the findings of a qualitative study, the trustworthiness thereof can be enhanced. By implementing the steps listed above, the credibility, transferability, dependability and the confirmability of the study were enhanced, which ultimately heightened the overall trustworthiness of the study.

### **3.4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **3.4.8.1 Introduction**

In the preceding section, all of the steps taken to ensure the quality of the current study were discussed. Another way in which a research project must be assessed is in terms of the morality of the procedures used to conduct the study (Foster, 1996:100). Mason (2002:41) points out that qualitative researchers should be just as concerned with producing a research study that is ethical as they are with producing a study that is intellectually coherent and compelling. According to Creswell (2008:13), ethics should be a primary consideration rather than an afterthought. Hesse, and Bieber and Leavy (cited in Creswell, 2008:13) state that ethics should at all times be at the forefront of the researcher's agenda. The Belmont Report identifies respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as the three unifying ethical principles of research (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007:401). These ethical principles were adhered to during the study with the addition of professionalism as a fourth principle of ethical research.

#### **3.4.8.2 Respect for persons**

According to Nolen and Vander Putten (2007:402), respect for persons has three applications during the planning and conducting of a research study. The first application thereof is in respecting the autonomy of participants. Learners must be

given the choice to freely decide if they want to be part of a research study or not. Participation must be voluntary, and no learner must be manipulated (University of Minnesota, 2003:35), or his/her decision to participate influenced by any external factors, especially those created by the researcher. In the field of educational research in particular, learners should feel no pressure to participate in a research study (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007:403).

In order to ease learners' decision making, it was clearly stated that participation was voluntary and that should they decide to participate, no learner would be placed in an advantageous position over those learners who decided not to participate. This was done in a discussion with all the Grade 7 learners, and was also clearly stated in the letter of consent handed out to the parents. Furthermore, learners' decisions as to whether they wanted to be part of the study or not were respected (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007:403). After all the letters were received back, there was no discussion with the learners about who gave consent to take part and who did not. It was also clearly stated that if any participant no longer wanted to participate in the study, he/she could withdraw from the study at any time (Ryen, 2004:231).

Furthermore, the participants were not paid any form of inducement, as this could have been interpreted as unreasonable persuasion and, in a sense, could have inhibited their freedom in terms of voluntary participation (Dawling & Brown, 2010:38). The researcher did, however, after the completion of the study give each participant a card and a small gift as a token of appreciation.

The second application for respect of persons is informed consent. The University of Minnesota (2003:35) defines informed consent as a way to ensure that research involving human subjects allows for voluntary participation by subjects who understand what participation entails. The idea of informed consent is that all potential participants are provided with all of the information that they need to make a decision as to whether they want to be part of a research study or not (Foster, 1996:105). The Belmont Report of 1979 (cited in the University of Minnesota, 2004:35) outlines that before subjects give their consent to participate in a study, they must be fully aware of all the relevant details pertaining to the study. Furthermore, the Belmont Report of 1979 also emphasises that subjects must fully comprehend what they are giving consent to. For this reason, the letter of consent used in this particular study was written in the participants' first language, which is Afrikaans. The letter included information about the reason behind the study and what participation would entail. The letter also clearly stated that participation was



voluntary, that no learner would be penalised for refusing to take part in the study, and that no learner would be put in a privileged position, receiving extra marks or a financial reward, should they take part in the study. Not only was all the required information relayed in Afrikaans, it was also done in a very simplistic register.

This was done as a method to ensure that the learners and their parents truly understood what participation would entail. In the case of educational research, the consent of parents must be obtained if participants are still minors (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007:402). Due to the age of the participants in this study, it was first required to obtain the written consent of their parents or caregivers. Mason (2002:80-81) raises the argument regarding the appropriateness of a third party, like a parent, giving consent on behalf of their child. As the researcher wanted to avoid a situation where a learner participating in the study did not actually want to or feel comfortable doing so, the selected participants also gave written consent (Appendix G) before commencing with the study.

The third application of respect for persons is the protection of confidentiality of the participants. Part of the principle of respect is also respecting the privacy of the participants. The University of Minnesota (2004:35) illuminates that during the process of data collection, participants often disclose personal information that would not necessarily be made public if it was not for the study. For this reason, the identities of participants must be protected. Even if learners are provided with pseudonyms, and vague descriptions of the setting and participants are provided, learners' identities can still be made public as some factors could easily trace back to the research site (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007:403). As a researcher, you are obliged to protect the participants' identity, and the location of the research (Ryen, 2004:233). Foster (1996:113) suggests that researchers can preserve the anonymity of participants by removing any identifying labels from the data, and should use pseudonyms for institutions, places and participants. One threat that endangers the anonymity of participants is that sometimes institutions or even participants can be recognised from the descriptions of the cases given in reports and data (Foster, 1996:113).

#### **3.4.8.3 Beneficence**

According to Creswell (2008:158), the benefits of a study must always be weighed against the risks thereof. The term *beneficence* relates to the idea of what "good" there is in conducting a study (University of Minnesota, 2003:36). This refers to how



the participants and the general public benefit from the findings produced by the research study. At the onset of the study, the researcher could not foresee any possible risks pertaining to the study that could cause participants any physical harm. However, during the process of data collection, it became evident that because there was a relationship of trust created between the researcher and the participants, some of the participants disclosed personal information. It was decided not to include personal details that were irrelevant to the study in the final report. As part of a step to enhance the quality of the research study, as thick a description as possible was given to describe the phenomenon under study, the research site, as well as the participants. However, this description had to be carefully formulated so as to not give away the identities of the research site or participants, and in this way cause emotional harm to the participants.

It is furthermore the belief of the researcher that participants, as well as the rest of the population, benefited from the study. The participants, as well as learners who did not participate in the study, learnt valuable reading comprehension strategies that could be applied in their future educational journey. The aim of the study was to better the researcher's own teaching practices, which means that knowledge gained in the study could be applied to future teaching situations with different learners. It was also the aim of the study to motivate other teachers to experiment with curriculum differentiation in their own classrooms to ultimately improve the educational journeys of their learners. If this study can prove that it is valuable to utilise curriculum differentiation in the English-as-AL classroom, it might motivate teachers in different subject areas to also employ these strategies.

#### **3.4.8.4 Justice**

The principle of *justice* relates to the idea that no one should be exploited during the study (University of Minnesota, 2003:36). At a research site, such as a school or even a classroom, and with the dual role of teacher/researcher kept in mind, researchers must make sure that their study improves the lives of all of the learners in the classroom, and not just the lives of the participants. One of the conditions for consent for conducting the study was that the learners in the class who were not part of the study were to receive the same interventions provided to the participants. During the study, this condition was adhered to. Furthermore, the individual one-on-one discussions with learners were done during spare time, breaks, and after school. In this way, valuable educational time was not wasted by taking pupils from their normal lessons (Foster, 1996:112).

### **3.4.8.5 Professionalism**

In order to ensure the quality of the study and that the results could be trusted, certain ethical principles related to professionalism were adhered to. Firstly, the necessary permission to conduct the research study was obtained from the relevant parties, including the Ethical Committee of the University of Pretoria, the relevant Department of Education (Appendix H) and the particular school where the research was conducted. In another attempt to enhance the professionalism of the study, plagiarism was avoided at all costs, and authors were acknowledged for their ideas and thoughts where necessary. It is not only during field work that a researcher is faced with ethical challenges, but also during the stages of writing up the report (Ryen, 2004:231). Therefore, to enhance the ethical stance of the study related to professionalism, the research findings were reported truthfully and honestly.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter started off by explaining how constructivism, social-constructivism and social-constructionism were used as theories to guide this study. This was followed by discussions justifying the use of a qualitative research paradigm and case study as the research design. The chapter also elaborated on how participants were selected for the study. This was followed by a detailed description of observations, discussions, answer sheets of the learners, as well as a reflective researcher's journal as methods of data collection. The data analysis process was then briefly described. Next, the principles of credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability as measures to enhance the trustworthiness and overall quality of the research study were thoroughly discussed. The chapter was concluded with a discussion on ethical principles, including respect for participants, beneficence, justice, and professionalism, which were adhered to throughout the different stages of the study.

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## Chapter 4

### The research results and findings

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#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

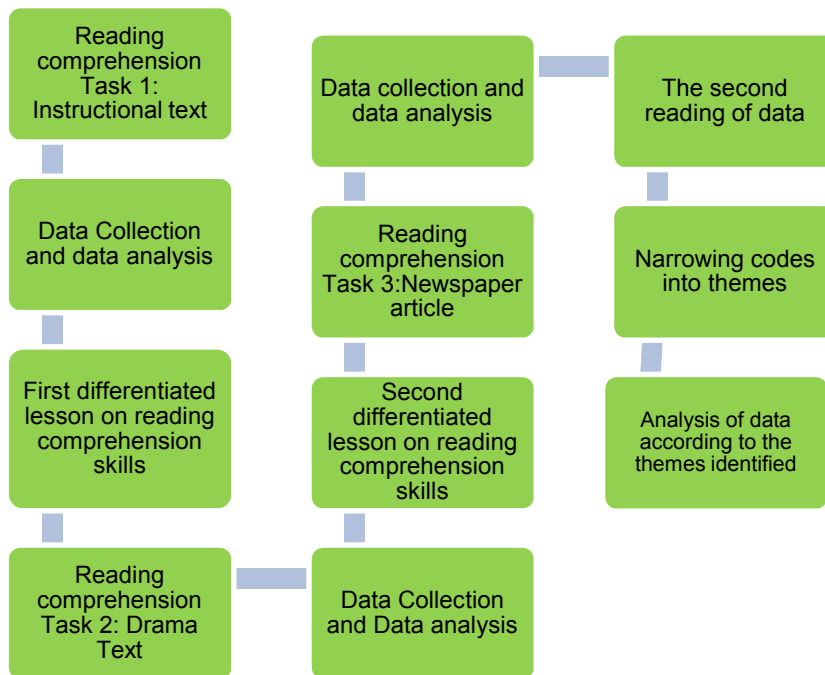
The aim of the study was to determine in what way the results of DA could be used to inform the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills. The data obtained were analysed for any answers to the primary question, *“In what way can dynamic assessment be practised by Grade 7 Senior Phase teachers to inform the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills in English as a First Additional Language?”* Chapter 4 reports on the results and the findings of the study.

Firstly, the processes of data collection and analysis are briefly reviewed to provide the setting for the chapter. The results and findings that follow consist of a profile of the participants’ reading comprehension performance, a thematic analysis of the data, and a brief discussion per sub-theme that considers the relevant aspects from the literature study in Chapter 2 as well as taking note of possible relevance for differentiated instruction. The chapter is concluded by situating the data in the literature consulted for the study. All the analyses referred to in this chapter are contained in the CD included as Appendix I.

#### 4.2 THE PROCESSES OF DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

##### 4.2.1 INTRODUCTION

A visual representation of the data collection and analysis processes is shown in Figure 4.1. The data collection and the first round of data analysis were performed in tandem, and for this reason, both processes are encapsulated in the figure. Some of the information presented in Chapter 3 is therefore briefly repeated in the overview, although with an emphasis on the analysis of the data.



**Figure 4.1: The data collection and analysis**

#### 4.2.2 READING COMPREHENSION TASK 1: AN INSTRUCTIONAL TEXT

The text, “*Signalling for a stop, shouting for a drop: thumbs up for South African taxis*”, was selected from the prescribed textbook used in the class. The original reading comprehension task was adapted (see Appendix D for both versions).

#### 4.2.3 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The participants’ answer sheets, the researcher’s observations, the individual discussions with the participants and the researcher’s reflective journal entries were used as data. When the data were analysed for the first time, the focus was on marking the participants’ answer sheets and analysing the results. The information obtained from this analysis was used to design the follow-up lessons and the questions for Task 2, and more specifically, to determine the direction of the individual discussions with each participant. The CD (Appendix I) contains examples of all the answer sheets used in the study.

#### 4.2.4 FIRST DIFFERENTIATED LESSON ON READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

During the researcher’s observations of the first round of data collection, it became apparent that most learners, including those who were participating in the study, did not apply basic reading strategies in approaching reading comprehension tasks.

Many, for instance, immediately started answering the questions without first reading the text. The lesson following the first round of data collection was therefore used to teach a basic reading strategy that could be used in future reading comprehension tasks. The lesson started with all of the participants receiving the following notes on reading comprehension skills:

- Start by reading the text first to get a general idea thereof.
- Next, read the questions.
- This must be followed by reading the text a second time, highlighting or underlining the first and second paragraphs, as well as the topic sentences of the rest of the paragraphs.
- Then, read the questions again and underline the key words in each question.
- Finally, answer the questions in writing.

The notes were first read and discussed with each class. Then, the participants received a text and, with the guidance of the teacher, followed the strategy step by step. Although this lesson was planned with the needs of the participants that had become apparent in mind, it was conducted with the full class in accordance with the prerequisites of the Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education, as stated in their permission for the study to be conducted (see Appendix H). If the lesson had been conducted aimed at individual levels of performance and needs of both the participants and learners in the class, the standard lesson described above would have been presented with different variations in order to answer the different needs of the learners. This is how the lesson would have been differentiated:

- One group of learners (those who did utilise the reading strategy taught in this lesson during the completion of reading comprehension task 1) would have been given enrichment activities to complete.
- A second group of learners would have been given the notes and the text for reading comprehension to complete the activity independently.
- A third group would have received the standard lesson as described initially.
- After the standard lesson, just after the third group had left to complete the reading comprehension task, a fourth group would have had to go through the notes for a second time before also completing the reading comprehension task with the step-by-step assistance of the teacher. During

the individual discussions with each participant, the researcher made use of individual mediation to meet the needs of each participant. This mediation took the form of using prompts to guide the participants to the correct answers, reading certain parts of the text to the participants or even teaching the participants strategies that he/she could use in future tasks, and filling gaps in his/her knowledge base where necessary. These attempts to mediate counted as a form of differentiated teaching. The standard lesson as described initially was followed by the second reading comprehension task.

#### **4.2.5 READING COMPREHENSION TASK 2: A DRAMA TEXT**

The participants had to read an excerpt of a drama called “*Off sick*” that was taken from the prescribed textbook used in the class and adapted for the purpose of the study (see Appendix E for both versions). From the observations, answer sheets and discussions conducted in Task 1, it came to light that a few participants were challenged by unfamiliar words used in the text or questions. For this reason, the second reading comprehension task included an ‘explanation block’ explaining ‘negotiate’ as a possibly difficult or unfamiliar term.

#### **4.2.6 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

The participants’ answer sheets, the researcher’s observations, the discussions with the participants and the researcher’s reflective journal entries were used as data. During the analysis of the data collected from Task 2, as with Task 1, the focus was on marking the answer sheets of the participants and analysing the results. The obtained information was used to design a follow up lesson and the questions for Task 3. The information was also used to direct the individual discussion with each participant. After Task 2, the researcher again made use of individual mediation during the discussions as a form of differentiated teaching. This mediation happened in the same way as the procedures that were used following Task 1.

#### **4.2.7 SECOND DIFFERENTIATED LESSON ON READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS**

During the first stage of data analysis on Task 1, it had become apparent that some participants had not been able to process the full title of the first reading comprehension text (*Signalling for a stop, shouting for a drop: thumbs up for South African Taxis*). For this reason, and in preparation for the third reading comprehension task, a lesson was planned to teach participants the basic organisation of newspaper articles. The lesson was started off by writing the

headings of various newspaper articles on the board. Participants then had to predict what each article was about. After that, the participants were shown copies of the articles and were given the opportunity to self-assess their predictions against the contents of the articles. This was followed by discussing a photograph with its caption and columns as key features of a newspaper article. As follow-up activities to this lesson, participants had to complete a reading comprehension task that was based on a newspaper article and a writing task in which they had to write their own news report on one of the events that took place in their book, *Black Beauty*, which they were reading at that time. If this lesson were to be conducted aimed at the individual levels of performance and the needs of participants and learners, it would have taken on the form of a standard lesson with variations. The lesson would have been differentiated as follows:

- A first group of learners would have taken part in the standard lesson and then have been given enrichment activities to complete.
- A second group of learners would have taken part in and completed the standard lesson independently.
- A third group would have taken part in the standard lesson and then completed the reading comprehension and writing activities with the assistance of the teacher.

#### **4.2.8 READING COMPREHENSION TASK 3: A NEWSPAPER TEXT**

The third and final text read by the learners was a newspaper article by the name of “*Sports facilities make a difference*” that was taken from the prescribed textbook used in the class and adapted for the purpose of this study (see Appendix F for both versions). A wordlist was again included to explain possibly difficult or unfamiliar words used in the questions.

#### **4.2.9 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

As in the previous cycles of data collection, the participants’ answer sheets, the researcher’s observations, the discussions with the participants and the researcher’s reflective journal entries were used as data. As was done in the previous tasks, the analysis focused on marking the participants’ answer sheets to obtain information to design future lessons. The information was also used to direct the individual discussions with each participant. The same procedures for mediation used in the previous task were again utilised.



#### 4.2.10 THE SECOND STAGE OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

After the completion of all three tasks, the data were analysed for a second time and the analysis thereof taken to the next level. This time, the data were analysed according to three codes that had been selected before the analysis was started. The codes selected were *vocabulary*, *background knowledge* and *the knowledge of text organisation*, in accordance with the decision made as informed by the literature study (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3.1). When researchers develop codes for analysis prior to the analysis process, this is known as *a priori* coding (Nieuwenhuis, 2010c:107; Sawell, 2001:148). The CD (Appendix I) contains examples of how the data were analysed according to the three codes identified above. The CD also includes the researcher's journal entry in which the symbols for the three codes are explained.

During this stage of the analysis, it became apparent, however, that the three codes decided upon during the literature study could not adequately cover all aspects in the data that were deemed relevant to differentiated teaching. For this reason, the researcher decided to analyse the data again, this time placing a strong focus on emerging codes.

Upon completion of this stage of the analysis the researcher was left with a master list of 26 codes (see reflective journal pp.34 -35, on the CD in Appendix I for the symbols of the codes), including the initial three codes decided upon. Some codes in the list admittedly share similarities. However, at the stage of the third round of analysis, this was the researcher's view of the data.

The list was as follows:

1. Vocabulary (*participants' knowledge of words and their meanings*).
2. Background knowledge (*participants' knowledge of content pertaining to texts*).
3. Knowledge of text organisation (*participants' knowledge of how texts are structured*)
4. Negative emotions (*as experienced by the participants*).
5. Reading strategies (*for example, all the steps taken by participants to complete the reading comprehension tasks*).
6. Noise (*sounds outside and inside the classroom*).
7. Concentration (*things that distracted the participants*).

8. Time (*how long it took the participants to complete tasks, and their experience of time*).
9. Positive emotions (*as experienced by the participants*).
10. Home environment (*influence of parents on the development of reading comprehension*).
11. Tools/scaffolding (*those strategies used by participants and teachers to assist in completing the comprehension task successfully*).
12. Reading skills or difficulties (*for example, by using a ruler to read, could they read the text to find specific information*).
13. Memory (*could learners remember the things they already knew?*)
14. Spelling (*any spelling mistakes*).
15. Comprehension questions (*how the formulation of the questions contributed to experiences of challenge/support in performing the task*).
16. Not elaborating on answers/guessing answers (*participants wrote down incomplete answers/guessed their answers*).
17. Problems/advantages of tests (*for example the design/layout of the answer sheet or how questions were formulated*).
18. Comprehension (*to what extent did participants understand the content of the texts/ questions*).
19. The classroom environment (*interactions among participants and other learners or other distractions*).
20. Knowledge vs. Application (*participants had the knowledge but could/could not apply this knowledge in the context of the reading comprehension task*).
21. Life world (*of the participants – their experiences, e.g. playing sports, communication on social media platforms, and watching television*).
22. Home Language (*Afrikaans – used to complete task*).
23. Mistakes (*'silly' mistakes made during the test like forgetting to answer a question/writing down the wrong number*).
24. Positive qualities/characteristics of participants (*for example how they make use of specific sayings or expressions to remember things*).
25. Active participation/non-active participation (*participants understand why they have chosen certain answers*).
26. Teacher/student relationship (*good/bad relationship between the teacher/researcher and the participants*)

#### **4.2.11 NARROWING CODES INTO THEMES**

After analysing the data for a third time, the researcher realised that many of the codes used for the analysis shared some similarities. As stated in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.4.5), it is more desirable to explain fewer themes in more depth and detail than a great number of codes in less detail. Therefore, the researcher decided on a process of reduction, which meant that the researcher analysed the data again, this time focusing on comparing the different codes for similarities. Similar and related codes were then grouped together to form themes. It was only code 14 that was made redundant as after careful reflection the researcher concluded that the spelling mistakes made by participants were not relevant to reading comprehension, which was the focus of the study. After careful consideration, all the codes listed above were assigned to five overall themes (reflective journal, p. 39, on the CD, Appendix I). The themes identified, alongside the various codes they comprised, were as follows:

1. Vocabulary (code 1).
2. Background knowledge (codes 2, 10, 13, 20, and 21).
3. Knowledge of text organisation (codes 3, 5, and 12).
4. The assessment experience (codes 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26).
5. Principles of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (codes 11 and 18).

#### **4.2.12 THE FINAL STAGE OF DATA ANALYSIS**

After the final five themes for analysis were identified, the researcher analysed the data one last time. During this stage of the data analysis, the data were analysed according to the five themes listed above. Additionally, the researcher paid close attention to how the themes related to each other, to the presence of any contradictions in the data, and to the implications of the findings for differentiated teaching.

### **4.3 THE RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

#### **4.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section begins with the participants' reading comprehension performance across the four bands. Next, a description of each theme is provided, followed by the results and findings relating to the theme.

#### 4.3.2 READING COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE ACROSS THE FOUR BANDS

This section outlines the reading comprehension performance of the individual participants within the four different bands in Table 4.1 below. Differences will be observed only as tendencies since the study was qualitative, and a sample of 12-16 (depending on whether the researcher omitted the four participants who had failed to perform all the tasks or not, and with each cell then containing only 2-5 participants) was also too small to determine statistically significant differences.

**Table 4.1: Reading comprehension performance of participants (expressed in percentage)**

Participants	Beginning score	Reading comprehension Task 1	Reading comprehension Task 2	Reading comprehension Task 3
<b>Band 1 (<math>\leq 39\%</math>)</b>				
1	32	20	31	19
2	28	49	56	54
<b>Band 2 (40 – 59%)</b>				
3	59	60	69	67
5	41	20	50	33
6	54	46	67	71
7	54	37	53	58
<b>Band 3 (60 – 79%)</b>				
8	66	50	58	-
9	63	-	-	96
10	75	61	97	75
11	77	-	89	92
12	71	51	72	48
<b>Band 4 (<math>\geq 80\%</math>)</b>				
13	88	89	78	92
14	92	88	83	90
15	86	73	75	94
16	85	89	83	96
17	80	-	72	79

Table 4.1 shows considerable inconsistency. Only three participants' reading performance scores suggest great and steady improvement across the three reading comprehension tasks:

- Participant 6, Band 2: 46% - 67% - 71%.

- Participant 7, Band 2: 37% - 53% - 58%.
- Participant 15, Band 4: 73% - 75% - 94%.

Six participants showed improved performance in the second reading comprehension task, but their performance declined in Task 3. However, four of these (Participants 2, 3, 5, and 10) still succeeded in showing overall improvement in obtaining markedly higher scores in Tasks 2 and 3 than in Task 1:

- Participant 1, Band 1: 20% - 31% - 19%.
- Participant 2, Band 1: 49% - 56% - 54%.
- Participant 3, Band 2: 60% - 69% - 67%.
- Participant 5, Band 2: 20% - 50% - 33%.
- Participant 10, Band 3: 61% - 97% - 75%.
- Participant 12, Band 3: 51% - 72% - 48%.

In contrast with the above pattern, three participants performed more poorly in the second reading comprehension task, but then showed an improved performance in Task 3, which also topped their scores for Task 1:

- Participant 13, Band 4: 89% - 78% - 92%.
- Participant 14, Band 4: 88% - 83% - 90%.
- Participant 16, Band 4: 89% - 83% - 96%.

Possible reasons for the last two performance profiles above could be sought in the participants' utilisation of the mediation received during the individual discussions following Tasks 1 and 2, and/or the obligatory group mediation during Tasks 2 and 3 (which could in fact also be viewed as having amounted to differentiated instruction).

Only two participants ended with a lower reading comprehension performance in Task 3 than in Task 1:

- Participant 1, Band 1: 20% - 33% - 19%.
- Participant 12, Band 3: 51% - 52% - 48%.

However, DA is a complex and highly individualised approach to assessment, as pointed out in the literature study in Chapter 2. One should therefore focus on the individual journey of each participant rather than on specific scores denoted on a record sheet. There were many factors that could possibly have influenced the scores of each participant in reading comprehension tasks 1-3. The thematic analysis presented in the next section will analyse the factors of vocabulary, background knowledge, knowledge of text organisation, the context in which the task was

completed, and the task itself, which all influenced the learners' reading comprehension. Although the scores from the reading comprehension may yield some information about the participants' learning, the results should be considered in the context of the assessment process, where so many different factors, as stated above, can possibly influence a reader's final score. All such factors need to be considered when seeking to differentiate instruction effectively.

### **4.3.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

The themes that guided the analysis will now be explained, each followed by a presentation of the sub-themes as derived from the data and commented on in the literature study. In the conclusion of each sub-theme, the implications for differentiated teaching will be briefly contemplated.

#### **4.3.3.1 Vocabulary**

##### **(1) Description of the theme**

After an exploration of the literature on reading comprehension, vocabulary was selected as a theme for data analysis prior to beginning with the process of data analysis. The researcher took the stance that a wide and in-depth knowledge of vocabulary could enhance a learner's reading comprehension performance. This theme focused on the participants' knowledge of the vocabulary used in the texts and assessment tasks. The participants' familiarity with these words and their understanding, or lack thereof, and more specifically how this influenced their reading comprehension achievement were reflected on.

##### **(2) Sub-themes emerging from the data**

###### **a. *Words used in questions are not understood***

It was found that sometimes participants answered questions incorrectly or even left questions unanswered as they did not understand what was being asked due to an unfamiliar word in the question. P1<sup>1</sup>, for instance, failed to answer T1-Q6<sup>2</sup> as he did not understand the word 'indicate' in the question. During the discussion session with P1, the researcher replaced the word with "show" and this change enabled him to answer the question. Another example of an unclear word in a question was 'elsewhere' (T1-Q7b), not understood by P3, who therefore failed to look in a different

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<sup>1</sup> "P" representing "participant".

<sup>2</sup> "T" representing the task (1,2 or 3) and "Q" representing the question (followed by the number).

part of the text in order to find the answer. Some participants did not understand words that referred to the knowledge being tested. P5 and P7 experienced difficulty in answering T1-Q11 and T1-Q12 as they did not understand the words “opinion”, “instruction” and “formal language” and therefore could not find examples thereof in the text. From the answer sheets and discussions with regard to Task 1, it was concluded that the questions in Task 2 should be formulated with greater awareness of possible obstacles in their wording. Consequently, it was decided to introduce the use of a wordlist to explain terms that might be unfamiliar to some of the learners. With Task 2, an explanation block explaining the word ‘negotiate’ was included. P1, P6 and P11 were unfamiliar with the word ‘negotiate’ in T2-Q10. The strategies that they used to answer the question, however, differed. P6 made use of the word explanation block provided as an aid in Task 2, and was then able to answer correctly, whereas P1 and P11 did not make use of the wordlist, guessed the meaning and failed to answer the question correctly. In Task 3, a wordlist was again provided. The word ‘superlative’ (T3-Q3, not included in the wordlist) was unfamiliar to P5 and P6 and therefore they were unable to make the connection of degrees of comparison between the question and the text. The words ‘bias’ and ‘stereotype’ (T3-Q7c and 7d, both included in the wordlist) posed a challenge to six participants. P2, P5, P10, P11, P12 and P17 did not understand one or both of the words, but they approached this challenge in different ways. P2 and P5 answered incorrectly as they did not make use of the wordlist.

P11 and P12 made use of the wordlist, but still answered one question (T3-Q7d) incorrectly. P10 made use of the wordlist to explain ‘bias’, but not ‘stereotype’, and consequently omitted T3-Q7d. P17 was the only participant who made use of the wordlist successfully and answered both questions correctly.

The above findings call for careful consideration in terms of the question complexity related to the vocabulary used in formulating questions. The distribution of vocabulary-related errors and difficulties across Bands 1–4 indicates that the participants in the lower bands were challenged more severely. By implication, learners could be prevented from fully demonstrating their understanding of a text because they were unable to understand some of the questions. The results of research presented in the literature study (Chapter 2) illustrate that learners’ knowledge and understanding of words used in a text have a definite influence on their reading comprehension (Adams, 2010/2011:5; Attaprechakul, 2013:82; Bean, 2001:136; Cleary et al., 2005:62; Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2010:354; Grabe, 2004:49; Irwin, 2007:149; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165; Marulis & Neuman, 2010:300; Nel,



2011:179;). However, the literature consulted did not mention that not only can the vocabulary found in the texts used for reading comprehension tasks possibly influence learners' reading comprehension performance, but also the vocabulary used in the formulation of the questions.

The individual discussions with each participant that followed the completion of each task as a means of DA further sensitised the researcher to this sub-theme. Therefore, in developing Tasks 2 and 3, the researcher first carefully considered the vocabulary used in the formulation of the questions. Secondly, the researcher included a wordlist explaining possible challenging or unfamiliar words (in either the text or questions) as a form of differentiated mediation to be utilised by those learners who needed the assistance. Participants in the higher bands faced less challenges regarding vocabulary and therefore did not really require the inclusion of a wordlist. However, the wordlists were included to answer the specific needs of those participants who did face severe challenges in terms of vocabulary.

**b. *Words used in questions are understood***

Alternatively, the positive effect a wordlist has on participants' ability to answer a question correctly when they understand the terms used in a question was also noted. One example is the word 'quote' (T1- Q13), which P14 understood as requiring her to look for examples in the text. P13 actually explained that he "*knew that vocabulary means the choice of words*" and for that reason, answered T1-Q13 correctly. P8, P13 and P14 were all familiar with the word 'bias' (T3-Q7c) as they had read it or learnt about it in the English class. P9, P13, P15 and P16 were familiar with the word 'stereotype' (T3-Q7d) as some of them recalled learning about this word in their Afrikaans class.

The finding presented above again confirms the literature consulted, which indicates that learners' knowledge or understanding of words supports their comprehension of texts (Adams, 2010/2011:5; Attaprechakul, 2013:82; Bean, 2001:136; Cleary et al., 2005:62; Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2010:354; Grabe, 2004:49; Irwin, 2007:9; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165; Marulis & Neuman, 2010:300; Nel, 2011:179). This implies that teachers should be aware of learners' level of vocabulary development and should formulate questions in such a way that they are to be understood and will not present an additional barrier to improved reading comprehension performance.

**c. Words are understood but not in the context in which they are used**

In some cases, the participants did understand words, but not in the context in which they were used in the question or text. T1- Q12 required participants to rewrite a sentence in more formal language. P1 did not attempt to answer this question as the word 'formal' was understood to mean "*a better outfit*" and the question thus did not make sense to him. This is a correct meaning of the word, but not as it was used in the context of the question. P1 also literally translated the term "work parties" (T3 - Q6a), as "*werkspartytjies*", which refers to social occasions at the workplace. P5 also understood the word 'party', but not as referring to a group of people working together. P5 explained the answer he had given as follows; "*I think they are listening to music while they are cleaning*".

It is argued that knowledge of homonyms (the multiple meanings of words depending on their context) is a fairly advanced form of vocabulary development. The literature consulted, however, did not explicitly mention this occurrence of word-misunderstanding as a specific challenge in reading comprehension. Adams (2010/2011:6) suggests that vocabulary can be taught directly, and this is certainly necessary for homonyms. Teachers can also make use of a wordlist to draw attention to the different meanings of homonyms occurring in a text. However, the data revealed that not all of the participants were able to successfully utilise the word explanations given in Task 2 and Task 3. Differentiated instruction therefore seems to be required in this regard.

**d. Words are misunderstood**

The participants sometimes felt certain that they understood a specific word. However, the meaning assigned was incorrect and steered their answer in the wrong direction. P2 and P6, for instance, thought that an 'opinion' (T1-Q11) was a 'command'. Although the latter participant came to realise her mistake, and remembered that opinions are "*what somebody thinks*", she still wrote an example of a command as her answer. P1 and P2 misread the word 'caption' (T3-Q2) as 'captain' and then explained it accordingly. P7 believed that the word 'stereotype' (T3-Q7d) meant "*a radio channel*".

The literature consulted did not explicitly mention the misinterpretation of words as a factor influencing reading comprehension, thereby seeming to view such errors as an issue of vocabulary *per se*. It is suggested that the direct teaching of vocabulary items prior to reading a text and/or the inclusion of a wordlist that explains possibly

unknown or difficult words could be used as forms of differentiated support for anticipated obstacles.

**e. *Meanings of words are inferred from the context they are used in***

The data revealed that, with the exception of three participants (P1, P5, P7), all of the participants were able to infer the meaning of the term 'work parties' (T3-Q6a) from the context it was used in. The participants who were able to make sense of the term correctly as it was used in the text all gave different reasons for their answers. P11 mentioned that she once watched a movie in which a search party had to look for a missing person, which is how she came to understand this meaning of 'party'. This supports the notion that a print-rich environment can enhance vocabulary (DCS&F, 2008:6; Sweeny & Mason, 2011:1, Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2011:3), although in reference to a different medium. For this reason, the researcher proposes that, in accordance with their different levels of performance, interests and specific needs or challenges experienced, learners should be presented with different forms of media in the target language, which could include a DVD, a library, and also different books, newspapers and magazines. In this way, learners' vocabulary can be enhanced indirectly and differentially on the basis of individual appeal.

**f. *Words in the text and/or questions influence the difficulty of tasks***

The data reflected that the amount of unfamiliar words in either the text or the questions may have had an influence on how difficult or easy some of the participants perceived the task to be. After completing the first reading comprehension task, P1 explained that the "*big and funny words that we do not use every day*" provided a challenge for him. P12 stated that the "*difficult word*" used in T1-Q4 made it difficult to answer correctly. According to P6, she could not understand T1-Q12 as she did not understand the words 'formal register' used in the question. P5 mentioned that T3-Q6e was challenging as he did not understand the word 'generous'.

It is pointed out by Adams (2010/ 2011:5) that for effective reading comprehension to occur, a learner must understand at least 95% of the words used in the text. The above finding seems to confirm the literature in this regard. The implication this has is that teachers should teach possibly difficult words in such a way that the specific needs of learners, with regard to their current vocabulary, can be addressed prior to reading texts and completing reading comprehension tasks.

**g. Words are understood but questions are still answered incorrectly**

Sometimes the participants could understand all the words in a question but still answered the question incorrectly. Although P3, P7, P10, P12 and P14 understood the words ‘opinion’ and ‘instruction’ (T1-Q11), they were still unable to answer the question correctly, which suggests they were challenged by the question or the text *per se*.

Before commencing the data collection process, the researcher upheld the belief that, should a participant not understand the words used in a text or question, it would have a negative impact on his/her reading comprehension performance. The opposite was also believed to be true – should a learner understand the words used in a text or question, he/she would be able to answer the questions correctly. However, the finding presented above contradicts the assumption made based on the literature reported in Chapter 2. Vocabulary knowledge appears to not guarantee that learners will be able to answer comprehension questions correctly. This confirms that other factors, besides vocabulary, may also have an influence on reading comprehension performance.

Therefore, this finding further confirms that DA (or other measures) should be used to determine the specific needs and strengths of each learner. This information should then be used by teachers to design their teaching accordingly so that other factors besides vocabulary, which could possibly influence reading comprehension, can be addressed differentially.

#### **4.3.3.2 Background knowledge**

**(1) Description of the theme**

The viewpoint that the researcher took was that the learners’ background knowledge is shaped by the work they do in class, their home environment, and also their experiences in their life world. However, during reading comprehension tasks, learners must activate their background knowledge by “remembering” that which they already know and then apply this knowledge in the current situation to complete the task.

**(2) Sub-themes emerging from data**

**a. *Learners' background knowledge is created by exposure and experience in their home environment***

P1 and P15 were able to answer T1-Q5 as a result of the influence of their home environment on the creation of their background knowledge. P1 remembered that his mother always told him that the correct way to talk was “*he/she is*” and not “*she’s/he’s*”, and P15 mentioned that as a family, they spoke a lot of English at home and therefore she knew the correct way to talk was “*he will*”.

According to the literature, learners' background knowledge of different subjects is created in their 'life world' (Cleary et al., 2005:12; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:346). The finding presented above confirms this statement. As the researcher played a dual role of both researcher and teacher, it was possible to know the participants on a more personal level. This personal information about the participants included knowledge of the different dynamics in their home environments. The amount and quality of time that the participants spent socially interacting with parents or caregivers and other family members played an important part in their creation of background knowledge. This endorsed numerous statements that the better the quality of interactions within the home environment, the better learners' reading comprehension skills would possibly be (Ackerman, 2001:115-116; Swart & Pettipher, 2011:10; Williams & Burden, 1997:189-190).

If learners within their home environment are furthermore surrounded by different sources of printed media, social interactions and motivation to learn new skills, it will have a positive effect on their development (Ackerman, 2001:115-116; Swart & Pettipher, 2011:10; Williams & Burden, 1997:189-190), which could of course include the development of reading comprehension skills. The participants in the study all came from different home environments, some of which had a more positive effect on reading comprehension performance than others. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should create classroom environments that are rich in different forms of printed media and social interactions in the target language to answer to the individual learning needs of learners. In this way, learning can also be supported in such a way that it can ultimately lead to motivating learners, especially those with limited stimulation at home, to develop their own interests and knowledge, which could also contribute to the enhancement of reading comprehension skills.

**b. *Learners' background knowledge is created through their experiences in their life world***

P2 utilised personal experiences of communication on social media platforms to assist him in answering T1-Q4 about the use of 'italics' in writing. P7, P10 and P14 drew on their own life experiences to guide them in answering T1-Q10 about what they thought would be the most difficult step, as described in the text, for them to complete. P13 and P16 used experiences from their life worlds to answer T2- Q2 about the setting of the 'drama' that was read. According to P13, "*you are not allowed to speak in class*" and that is how he inferred the setting from what he read in the text. P16 mentioned that as the "*children (were) standing around*" he knew that the setting could not have been the classroom. P5 stated that because he watched a great deal of television, he was able to answer T2- Q5. Nine participants understood the words 'friendly match' (T2-Q6) from their own life experiences of playing sports. P9 and P12 - P16 all used their experiences from their life worlds to understand and answer T3-Q6d about the reasons why they thought the learners did not ask businesses for money, and T3-Q7a about why they thought some businesses did agree to help the learners by becoming sponsors.

Just as the home environment forms a part of learners' life world, so do their experiences on the playground and their interactions with friends, other people or even different forms of media. Anderson and Pearson (cited in Pressley & McCormick, 1995:238) mention that learners usually understand new information in terms of their background knowledge. The finding above confirms this as it illustrates how participants answered certain questions by drawing from their past experiences.

The implication for differentiated teaching of reading comprehension skills is that teachers must be aware of learners' collective fields of background knowledge and use this as a point of departure in choosing texts.

**c. *Learners' background knowledge is created in the classroom situation***

During the completion of all three reading comprehension tasks, the participants drew from their background knowledge created in the English class to answer questions: P5, P6, P10, P12, P13, P14 and P16 in answering T1-Q1 (about figures of speech) and T1-Q5 (about contractions); P3, P5, P6, P7, P9 and P12 in answering T2-Q1 (about the organisation of dialogues); T2-Q2 (about what the setting of a story is) and T2-Q12 (about the rules of the present simple tense); P11 and P13 in answering T3-Q1 (about the headings of newspaper articles); and P2, P11, P13, P15



and P16 in answering T3-Q6e (about synonyms and antonyms). The participants' background knowledge was, however, not created only in the environment of the English classroom, but also in other subjects. P7, P13, P15 and P16 were able to complete T1-Q8b as they relied on their background knowledge gained in the maths classroom. P13 and P16 knew the meaning of the word 'stereotype' (T3-Q7d) as they had learnt about it in their Afrikaans class.

The finding above confirms the literature (Anderson & Pearson, cited in Pressley & McCormick, 1995:238; Attaprechakul, 2013:82; Bean, 2001:136, 140-141; Grabe, 2004:50) as it illustrates how participants used the knowledge gained, not only in the English classroom, but also in other subjects, to interpret and understand the information presented in the texts and the questions asked. As learners spend a great deal of time in a school environment, it forms an important part of their life world. By means of a DA approach, teachers are able to determine the content in texts that is not yet a part of learners' background knowledge, and then adapt their instruction goals accordingly.

**d. *Background knowledge is not sufficient***

P3, P5 and P10 had some knowledge of 'figures of speech' (T1-Q1), but not at the level that was needed to answer the question about identifying and naming the two figures of speech found in the title. The participants generally struggled in answering T1-Q1, whereupon the researcher briefly revised figures of speech with the class, as well as with some of the participants individually. P1, P3, P5, P7 and P17 had insufficient knowledge to answer question T2-Q4 about the use of dots in a text to create a pause in dramatic dialogue. P3's background knowledge on degrees of comparison was insufficient to answer T3-Q3. She even argued with the researcher about the correct answer, saying 'proudest' "*just doesn't sound right*". Despite the revision of figures of speech after the first task, P3, P8, P10, P14, P15, P16 and P17 still failed to answer T3-Q5c correctly. In this question, the participants were given a figure of speech taken from the text that they had to name. Because the individual discussions with participants after Task 1 had revealed that the meaning of the term 'figures of speech' was often forgotten, a few examples of figures of speech were given in brackets in T3-Q5c in an attempt to refresh participants' background knowledge. However, six of the seven participants named above simply wrote down one of the examples given in brackets, even though it was not the correct answer. It is not clear whether these participants did not understand the question, or maybe still lacked the required background knowledge on figures of speech.



Bouwer and Dednam (2016:178) point out that by drawing on their existing background knowledge, learners are able to comprehend the information in texts. Furthermore, Attaprechakul (2013:82) and Bean (2001:136, 140-141) explain that when writing a text, writers make the assumption that readers possess certain background knowledge that is needed to understand the text. When the assumed background knowledge does not exist, it can and possibly will prevent the reader from comprehending what is being read. However, the finding stated above has brought to the fore an issue that has not been pointed out in the literature consulted for this study. This finding suggests that not only does limited background knowledge concerning the information in texts impede reading comprehension, but limited background knowledge of these concepts, which teachers focus on in their questions, also has a negative effect on learners' performance in reading comprehension tasks.

**e. *Background knowledge is not activated***

During the discussion with P2, it became evident that some background knowledge regarding figures of speech (T1-Q1) existed, but the participant could not apply his knowledge in completing the task. P12 also had some knowledge of figures of speech but said, "*I just cannot remember anymore*". P1 answered T3-Q2 about a caption incorrectly. However, during the discussion, when his knowledge regarding the word 'caption' was activated, he was fully able to identify and explain the use of the caption.

This finding again shows that not only background knowledge of the content in the text, but also background knowledge of those concepts assessed in the questions is important. In the literature study, it was clearly stated that in order to effectively assist in reading comprehension, background knowledge must be activated (Oakhill & Cain, 2000:52; Pressley & McCormick, 1995:238; Santi & Francis, 2014:131-132). It was further suggested that teachers must activate learners' background knowledge prior to reading the text, but that learners must also get into the habit of activating their background knowledge themselves (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:179).

**f. *Background knowledge is activated but application fails***

Participants might have the background knowledge required for certain questions, but be unable to apply it in a new context. In discussion, P12 displayed a thorough understanding of the concept of writing in formal language (T1-Q12), but still applied this knowledge incorrectly in answering the question. During the discussions with P2

and P12, they displayed a sound knowledge of the degrees of comparison (T3-Q3) but they were unable to answer the question. P6, P8, P12 and P14 understood the notion of antonyms and synonyms (T3-Q6e) but were unable to apply their knowledge to the words addressed in the context of the reading comprehension task.

This issue, illuminated in the finding above, was not covered in the literature consulted for this study. Should teachers find that learners appear to have the background knowledge needed to answer certain questions correctly, but still make errors in their answering, they have to keep looking for alternative factors that might contribute to the problem. One possibility could then be the challenge of applying knowledge in a novel situation. If DA were to bring this factor to light, differential instruction could lie in exposing learners to different ways of presenting questions. In this way, learners would not be presented with new situations only during assessment.

***g. Sometimes there is a barrier that prevents the application of background knowledge***

As P6, P7 and P15 neglected to process the full title of the text in Task 1, it created a barrier that prevented them from applying their background knowledge on 'figures of speech' in the second part of T1-Q1. As P1, P5, P6 and P8 did not understand the word 'superlative' (T3-Q3), they were unable to activate their background knowledge on degrees of comparison. P1, P5 and P10 had background knowledge on synonyms and antonyms (T3-Q6e), but as they did not understand – or remember – the meaning of the word 'generous', it created a barrier that prevented them from applying their knowledge.

The literature study strongly emphasised background knowledge in successfully comprehending texts (Attaprechakul, 2013:82; Bean, 2001:136; Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:182; Cleary et al., 2015:12; Grabe, 2004:50; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:213), but did not mention that there might be other barriers preventing learners from successfully answering certain questions in reading comprehension tasks. The finding above demonstrates that participants' knowledge of the terminology of language structures or other unknown key concepts used in questions prevented them from activating their background knowledge. The finding above also confirms the value of DA in giving an indication of the areas in their learning where learners still need special teaching in the form of differentiation.

### 4.3.3.3 Knowledge of text organization

#### (1) Description of the theme

The theme deals with the participants' knowledge of how different types of text are organised differently, for instance, an instructional text is not written in the same way as a drama text or a text written for a newspaper. The theme also deals with how the participants approached each text in terms of the reading comprehension strategies that they applied, and their level of skills in identifying the main idea and other elements in different types of texts.

#### (2) Sub-themes emerging from data

##### a. *Ways of approaching text differ*

During the first reading comprehension task, it was observed that only nine participants (P5, P6, P8, P10 and P12 - P16) read the text first to get an overall view thereof before starting to answer the questions. During the discussion session with P5, he declared that he had read the text twice before answering the questions. However, the researcher had not observed that he read the text prior to answering the questions. This could suggest that P5 had some knowledge of how to approach a reading comprehension task, although it was not utilised.

Task 1 was followed by a lesson on a reading strategy to apply during reading comprehension tasks. The strategy taught to participants included information on how to identify the different parts of each text, like the title, introduction and conclusion. By reading the different parts of the text, they should then be able to determine the main idea of the text. During the completion of Task 2, only four participants (P8, P11, P14 and P17) were observed to follow the strategy. Before participants started with Task 3, they were explicitly reminded of the reading comprehension strategy that they had been taught. This time, 10 participants (P2, P3, P6, P7, P10, P12 and P14-P17) were observed reading the text before starting on the questions. P7, however, did not practice silent reading and read the text aloud softly. P6 immediately started answering T3-Q1, but thereafter first read the text before carrying on with the rest of the questions. It was also noted that, while being two of only four who had practiced the reading strategy during Task 2, P8 and P11 did not utilise the strategy during the completion of Task 3, despite the researcher's reminder. P12 and P16 not only read the text, but also underlined the topic sentences in the text. A comparison between their performance in the question,

however, reveals different outcomes: P12 did notably worse in Task 3 than Task 2, whereas P16 showed good improvement.

The literature illustrated that a learner's knowledge of text organisation includes his/her knowledge of how text is structured, of how to identify the title of the text, of the main and supporting ideas of the text, and of other techniques writers use in order to present their message clearly (Attaprechakul, 2013:82; Bean, 2001:137; Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:182; Grabe, 2004:52; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165). The finding described above suggests that participants were hesitant to utilise the reading comprehension strategy taught in the first lesson that followed Task 1.

The individual discussions with the learners, including some who had not participated in the study (and therefore were not recorded in the transcripts, Appendix I) revealed that many learners had hesitated to use the reading comprehension strategy because they feared it might take too much time. Although time spent on overall scanning of a text is not a direct element of text organisation, their hesitation might have had an effect on their reading comprehension in that it prevented them from utilising the reading strategy that had been taught in order to assist them in determining the organisation of a text. Another possible reason for the participants' reluctance in using the newly acquired reading comprehension strategy is that it did not answer to the individual needs of the participants.

#### **b. *Learners' knowledge of text organisation influences their comprehension***

Three participants failed to give the full title of the text in Task 1 (T1-Q1). Ten participants (P3, P6, P7, P8, P10, P12, P13, P14, P15 and P16) were able to answer T1-Q6, which assessed participants' knowledge of the use of italics in the text. P13 explained that he was able to answer the question as he knows that "*writers use italics to emphasise things*". Eleven participants (P1-P3, P5, P6, P9, P11, P13, P15, P16, and P17) knew that in a dialogue "*all the names of the characters are written on the side of the text*" (T2-Q1). Five participants were aware that writers can use dots (...), otherwise known as ellipsis, to create a pause in dramatic dialogue (T2-Q4). All the participants, except P1, P2 and P5, were able to identify both the heading and the caption that accompanied the photograph (T3-Q1 and T3-Q2) as key features of the newspaper article. According to P13, he was able to identify the heading and caption as he reads "*a lot of newspapers*". P1 mentioned that the heading could be identified as he knew that the heading "*is the part that tells you what the story is*

*about*". P2 also stated that he knew that the heading is "*written at the top of an article*". P1 and P2 had the lowest reading comprehension performance scores at the onset of data collection, possibly succeeded in the question on the heading of the newspaper article due to the lesson on the organisation of a newspaper article given prior to the completion of Task 3. However, both P1 and P2 were unable to identify the caption asked for in Q2-T3.

Smith (cited in Kalantzis & Cope, 2012:214-215), is of the opinion that there is no evidence to suggest that knowledge of text organisation can enhance a reader's comprehension. However, the finding described above confirms Kilfoil and Van der Walt's (2007:165) statement that if learners have a sound understanding of how different texts are organised, it will enhance their abilities in reading comprehensions. This finding further implies that, if text organisation is differentially taught according to learners' needs, it could possibly improve reading comprehension performance.

**c. *Learners' reading skills pertaining to all components of reading have an influence on their reading comprehension performance***

When looking for the answer to T1-Q9, P2 did the following; "*I quickly read through the story and I found a paragraph that begins with the words "what about getting off a taxi?"*" Thus, after scanning the text, he then focused on the appropriate paragraph to find the answer to the question. P6 and P14 struggled to find the answer to T1-Q7b as they had not registered reading the word 'elsewhere' in the question. However, P14 realised that she had not noted 'elsewhere' when she read the question the first time and then corrected the oversight by directing her attention to paragraph 5, as the question specified. Six participants (P3, P5, P6, P9, P11 and P12) were able to answer contextual questions (T2-Q2, T2-Q5 and T2-Q10) by finding the relevant sections in the text. Eleven participants (P3, P6, P7, P9, P10-P14, P16 and P17) successfully processed the main idea of the text (T3-Q4). It seemed as if P5 was able to identify the main idea of the text, but during the one-on-one discussion with him it came to light that he had simply guessed the answer.

Several authors, including Bean (2001:137), Bouwer and Dednam (2016:182), Grabe (2004:52), Kilfoil and Van der Walt (2007:176) and Woolley (2011:25), have pointed out that teachers should teach learners basic strategies such as recognising the main idea of the text and the use of italics, which writers use to organise their message, in an attempt to enhance learners' understanding of text organisation. The results

mentioned above support the literature as they confirm the value of teaching key features and the organisation of different texts prior to reading comprehension tasks.

#### 4.3.3.4 The assessment experience

##### (1) Description of the theme

This theme considers how participants, the context in which the task was completed, and the task itself could possibly have influenced reading comprehension performance. Factors relating to the participants included: 1) The emotions, both positive and negative, they experienced during the completion of the tasks; 2) Their ability to keep their attention focused on the task; 3) Apparent active engagement in completing the task *versus* simply answering questions ‘blindly’, or leaving them unanswered; and 4) Characteristics displayed that appeared to have had either a positive or negative effect on their performance. Factors related to the context in which the task was completed included: 1) The classroom set-up; and 2) Noise and other distractions, both inside and outside of the classroom. Factors related to the task itself included: 1) Phrasing of the questions; 2) The layout of the answer sheet; and 3) The time allowed for completing each task.

##### (2) Sub-themes emerging from the data

###### a. *Factors relating to participants may influence their reading comprehension performance*

It actually took P5 ten minutes to engage with Task 1 as he was busy colouring his pen with a permanent marker and only started working when the researcher reprimanded him. Although T1-Q10 counted two marks, he only wrote down the word ‘trust’ as an answer. However, when he explained his answer during the discussion session, the researcher actually viewed it as a very good answer. P12 experienced problems with the same question, focusing on “getting into the taxi”, whereas the question focused on “getting *out of* the taxi”. Some participants appeared to struggle to stay focused on the task at hand. Halfway through the task, P1 stared out in front of him and P10 rested her head on her arms. P8 had a runny nose, which distracted him throughout the task. Both P6 and P7 mentioned that throughout the task they had been worried about the time running out. This is what P7 had to say, “*Teacher I always feel very anxious during tests. I am always scared that I might run out of time*”. Before answering a single question from Task 2, P1 looked around and said out loud; “*Jissie dit is moeilik*” (It is difficult). He experienced the task as difficult even



before starting on it, and took a long time before starting, playing around with some stationery. During Task 3, it took him 10 minutes just to answer T3-Q1. On each of the three occasions, after completing the reading comprehension task, P14 used the last minutes of the allocated time to check her answers.

The aim of assessment is stated to be threefold: firstly, to create a clear picture of each learner's true academic situation with regard to the skills being assessed (Bouwer, 2016:77; Tomlinson & Moon, 2014:4; Santi & Francis, 2014:132); secondly, to assist teachers in designing teaching in such a way that it will answer in the needs of learners (Higgins, 2014:11; Nel, 2011:172); and thirdly, to improve performance in future assessment tasks (Brookhart, 2014:17). However, when it comes to assessment situations, learners are often confronted with feelings of fear and anxiety (Bouwer, 2016:75), as demonstrated by the behaviour of P1, P5 and P10, which may then explain their reluctance in approaching tasks and may contribute to depressed scores.

Differentiated teaching could be used to address specific needs associated with assessment anxiety. Although the focus of the study was to determine in what way, if any, the results of DA can be used to inform the differentiated teaching of reading comprehension skills, the results also suggest that DA could possibly be used to also inform differentiated assessment. If learners, such as P1 and P5, are given assessment tasks that are focused within their ZPD (i.e. just beyond their current level of skills and knowledge), it could contribute to a more positive experience of assessments. This could, in turn, build their confidence and gradually contribute to the development of their skills. The fear of running out of time expressed by P6 and P7 appeared to affect their reading comprehension performance in that they did not read the texts attentively in order to answer the questions. A fear of running out of time in the completion of tasks was not found in the literature consulted.

**b. *Factors relating to the context in which the task is completed may influence learners' reading comprehension performance***

Noise outside the classroom distracted P2, P6 and P15 during the completion of Task 1. During Task 3, P3 was distracted by the learner sitting next to her who was playing around and not doing the work. During Task 3, P17 was also distracted by learners talking outside the classroom. As these participants were not in the same class, it illustrates that participants were affected by noise or distractions as a result of different causes.



The findings above are not specifically supported by the literature consulted for this study. Distractions can obviously occur in any situation. However, if learners are set tasks that are designed according to their learning needs, they will possibly at least not be a distraction to other learners around them.

**c. *Factors related to the text itself may have an influence on learners' reading comprehension performance***

P3, P6 and P14 mentioned during the discussion sessions that they had found T1-Q1, which consisted of three different sections, overwhelming because of its length. The layout of the answer sheet for Task 1 also created some problems. P2 and P7 were able to process the full title of the text (T1-Q1), but could not write it down on their answer sheets as there was not enough space to write. This also hampered them in answering the rest of the question. Eight participants (P2, P9 and P12-P17) understood T2-Q8 incorrectly in thinking it was about who made Pieter change his mind, instead of which of the two between Pieter and Mpho changed their minds about girls playing soccer, which implies that the question was unclear. Participants were given 40 minutes to complete each task and for most participants this was more than enough time, although use of time varied greatly. After taking 10 minutes to begin with Task 1, P5 finished the task in 16 minutes. Both P6 and P7 were worried that they might not finish in time, but finished in 27 to 30 minutes. P16 worked very slowly and finished just on time, at exactly 40 minutes. P13 completed Task 2 in 15 minutes, whereas P12 finished just on time at exactly 40 minutes. During Task 3, P10 worked very slowly and managed to finish just on time at 40 minutes.

The literature studied did not contain information about how the design of answer sheets and the formulation of questions in reading comprehension tasks influence learners' performance. The finding presented above shows that teachers should carefully consider how questions should be formulated to avoid adding an extra barrier that could prevent learners from achieving success.

#### **4.3.3.5 Principles of the zone of proximal development (ZPD)**

##### **(1) Description of the theme**

In constructing this theme, the codes *tools/scaffolding* and *comprehension* were combined. This theme shows how different forms of scaffolding could be employed in order to assist participants in the completion of each reading comprehension task. The effectiveness of each form of scaffolding used was reflected on, helping the

researcher to recognise what participants easily understood, what they were able to do with some guidance, and what they were unable to do or understand even with the guidance of the teacher, or other forms of scaffolding.

## (2) Sub-themes emerging from the data

### a. *Reading difficulties have an impact on learners' reading comprehension performance*

T1-Q3, T1-Q6, T1-Q7 and T1-Q9 were all examples of contextual questions, meaning that the answers to these questions could be found in the text, and that all learners capable of accessing the information should have succeeded in giving the correct answers. P1 left these questions either totally or partially unanswered. In the discussion session, he stated that he had read the text but could still not find the answers. It came to light that he struggled to find answers by means of reading, and for that reason, often guessed answers. Backed by this statement, his exceedingly low scores and lack of progress (Table 4.1) suggest a reciprocal effect between severe challenges in terms of decoding skills, and the comprehension of text and questions above his level of proficiency. This therefore suggests a clear need for a specialised reading assessment. In terms of Task 2, the discussion with P1 further confirmed his reading difficulties, for instance, he had no idea that the setting of the drama-text was at a school, although this fact was both stated and implied in the text, which meant that he was unable to create a comprehensive overview of the text. T3-Q5a explicitly stated that participants must read the paragraph titled "Identifying a need" to find the answer. P1 and P2 were both only able to answer the question partially as they did consult the right paragraph, but did not read the whole paragraph as instructed. P2 used his fingers to follow the text, suggesting difficulties that might have contributed to his poor scores (Table 4.1). The researcher observed that at the start of Task 1, P3 used a ruler to follow the lines and it took her eight minutes to read the whole text, whereas most participants who read the text prior to answering questions took four minutes at most to do so. During the discussion following Task 3, P3 stated that she had generally struggled to understand the text, saying, "*It did not make sense to me*". Further questioning revealed that the participant had not read the text in chronological order.

In the literature study, the five components of reading, namely phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension were briefly discussed (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:174-177.; DoE, 2008:11; Florida Centre for Reading Research,

2005:1; The National Reading Panel cited in Learning Point Associates, 2004:1). Although the research question that guided the study is focused on comprehension as a component of reading comprehension, the importance of all the components required for successful reading is acknowledged. The development of the skills pertaining to the other reading components affects learners' reading comprehension (Bouwer & Dednam, 2016:174-177; Leppanen et al., cited in Woolley, 2011:24). The results related to the difficulties P1, P2 and P3 experienced seem strongly to confirm these facts.

**b. *Teacher-learner dialogue is employed as a form of scaffolding***

Teacher-learner dialogue was used in different ways and with different levels of success during the discussion sessions that followed each task. One of the techniques used by the researcher was pointing out to learners where in the text they should read to find answers to specific questions. This technique was used with great success with P1, P3, P6, P12 and P15 following Task 1.

A second technique was actually reading relevant paragraphs aloud and then asking the participant to answer the question. This technique was especially used with P1 as he appeared to experience severe reading difficulties. When doing so, P1 was, for instance, immediately able to explain the meaning of the word "work parties" (T3-Q6a) as it was used in the context. When the first technique did not succeed with P5, the researcher also made successful use of this technique.

A third technique was to ask participants a series of questions as prompts to not only guide them through the questions being asked, but also through their own understanding of those questions. This technique was mostly unsuccessful with seven participants (P1, P3, P5, P6 and P12-P14). However, it still held value as the results gave evidence of the participants' current levels of knowledge regarding the subject matter tested, thereby paving the way for effective differentiated instruction in subsequent lessons. During the discussion sessions following Task 3, the technique was successfully employed with P2 (T3-Q2, about the caption that accompanies the photograph of a newspaper article) and P7 (T3-Q6d, about why the participant thought the learners in the text asked businesses for sponsorships and not money, as well as T3-Q7a, about the reasons for businesses to agree to help the learners with sponsorships).

A fourth technique was breaking T1-Q1 up into smaller components. This technique was employed with P6, as she mentioned that she usually struggles with long

questions, and was successful in guiding her to apply her knowledge on figures of speech correctly.

These teacher-learner dialogue techniques also shed some light on areas in the participants' knowledge or understanding of language conventions that still needed more instruction or revision and other needs they might have experienced. The information obtained could then be used to inform the differentiation of future instruction.

The literature stated that as each learner's academic situation is unique, teachers should be sensitive to and aware of the different forms and levels of support each individual learner needs (Bartolo, 2010:112). The results above illustrate that different learners will benefit from different forms of scaffolding (Bornman & Rose, 2010:81-82; Doddington, 1996:41; Llewellyn, 2011:56-57), thus necessitating differentiated instruction.

**c. *Questions are asked in such a way that it serves as a form of scaffolding***

The fact that T1-Q7a clearly instructed learners to read paragraph 5 to find the answer was viewed as a helpful technique by most of the participants. It was generally viewed as a means of guiding their reading. T1-Q8b was also formulated in such a way that it guided participants through the different steps. Concerning this technique, both P3 and P16 stated that it made it "*easier*" as "*the way you must do it was given to you*". However, P15 stated that she would have been able to answer the question without the scaffolding. T3-Q5 was also phrased in such a way that the participants knew they had to read the part about "identifying a need" to find the information required to answer the question. Eleven participants (P6, P7, P8, P9, and P11- P17) viewed the instruction positively as it helped them to focus their reading. However, P1 and P2 did not read the full paragraph, and P10 listed only one reason, and therefore these participants failed to use this form of scaffolding to their advantage.

The results above again confirm that different learners will benefit from different types and levels of scaffolding (Bornman & Rose, 2010:81-82; Doddington, 1996:41; Llewellyn, 2011:56-57).

**d. Word explanations might be used as a form of scaffolding**

Task 2 contained an explanation of the meaning of the word “negotiate” (T2-Q10). The results of T2-10 are shown in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Utilisation of word explanations (Task 2)**

Criteria	Participants	Reason offered
Explanation utilised effectively	P6	Did not understand the word ‘negotiate’, therefore the participant used the explanation given.
Explanation not utilized	P12, P15- P17.	Familiar with the word ‘negotiate’.
	P1 and P2.	“Not aware” ( <i>sic</i> ) that there was a word explanation.

A wordlist explaining the words ‘bias’ and ‘stereotype’ (T3-7c+d) accompanied Task 3. The results of T3- 7 are shown in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Utilisation of word explanations (Task 3)**

Criteria	Participants		Reason
	‘bias’	‘stereotype’	
Wordlist used effectively	8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16.	8, 9, 10, 14, 16.	To learn and to confirm own understanding.
Wordlist used, but answer still incorrect.	—	1, 5, 8, 12.	Possibly did not understand the explanation given in the wordlist.
Wordlist not used.	6, 7, 13.		“Not aware” ( <i>sic</i> ) that there was a wordlist or that an explanation of a specific word was provided.

The results shown in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 illustrate that not all learners utilised the inclusion of word explanations as a form of scaffolding to their advantage. Possible reasons could be that this form of differentiation did not answer to the specific learning needs of all the learners and/or was not appropriate to their level of skill.

#### 4.4 REVISITING THE LITERATURE

When learning an AL, learners must develop both their BICS and CALP (Nel, 2011:168). Learners who are in the process of learning an AL use their BICS to

communicate during every day social interactions (Nel, 2011:168-169), and their CALP during academic situations (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2010:353-354), which includes reading comprehension activities. Reading is an interactive process where readers make use of their vocabulary, their background knowledge of the content and their knowledge of how texts are organised to interpret and understand the information in texts (Cleary et al., 2005:60; Grabe, 2004:44-69; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165). The data obtained in the study however both support and contradict the previous statement.

The data give strong support to the literature on the influence of knowledge of vocabulary on reading comprehension achievement (Adams, 2010/2011:5; Attaprechakul, 2013:82; Bean, 2001:136; Cleary et al., 2005:62; Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2010:354; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165; Marulis & Neuman, 2010:300; Nel, 2011:179). The data highlight that, when learners are familiar with words in texts as well as questions, they have a better ability to understand the texts and answer questions correctly. In some aspects, the data related to the theme of vocabulary, however, seem to question the literature and even to suggest completely new findings. The first reservation is that sometimes learners are still able to answer questions correctly by inferring the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context in which it was used. The second is that an understanding of words used in texts and questions does not necessarily guarantee accurate comprehension of text. This implies that factors other than vocabulary knowledge possibly also influence reading comprehension performance. Although it was not the focus of this study, the data also support literature that states that extensive reading can enhance learners' vocabulary (Sweeny & Mason, 2011:1) and background knowledge (Tze-Ming Chou, 2011:114).

In order for learners to benefit from their background knowledge, they must activate it so that new information found in texts being read can be understood within this frame of existing knowledge (Pressley & McCormick, 1995:238). The data analysis confirmed that the participants' background knowledge was created by their interactions with people and different forms of media, as well as their experiences in their life world, and that this background knowledge can have a positive effect on their ability to interpret and understand information in texts. It was also demonstrated that, although learners might have the required background knowledge, they do not always activate this.

The data furthermore support the literature in that some knowledge of how texts are organised, for instance being able to identify the titles of texts, differentiating between the main and supporting ideas in texts, and knowledge of the use of italics and other strategies used by writers, can enhance overall reading comprehension performance (Bean, 2001:137; Bower & Dednam, 2016:182; Grabe, 2004:52; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 2007:165). However, although learners were taught basic reading comprehension skills in a differentiated lesson, the data do not clearly support the success of these strategies.

The data also confirm, in accordance with the literature, that basic reading skills, such as decoding and fluency, may have a great influence on reading comprehension performance (DoE, 2008:15).

The data furthermore illustrate that the assessment task itself can create a barrier that hinders reading comprehension performance. Texts must be carefully selected and question sheets carefully formulated and designed. The data also support the literature declaring that no two learners are the same and learners vary in a vast amount of ways (Costa, 2000:41). Inclusive education requires teachers to ensure that the individual needs of all learners are addressed in not only the English-as-additional language classroom, but in all classrooms across the curriculum.

This is why DA was implemented in the study to find out more about the participants' skills and knowledge, but also in which areas of their learning there is a need for support. Different forms of scaffolding techniques were employed in the study and the data obtained from this illustrate that some techniques were more successful than others. The data imply that learners do not always benefit from the same techniques for scaffolding. The ultimate goal of collecting all the data from the DA assessments was to determine if it could yield the information needed to make valid decisions about curriculum differentiation. The focus of the study, however, did not extend to the actual differentiation of lessons – it only aimed to determine whether results obtained from DA could give the information that is needed to design efficient differentiated instruction. In the chapter that follows, the answer to this question will be contemplated.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter started off with an explanation of the data collection and analysis processes. Next, the reading achievement scores of the individual participants and the four bands were presented. This explanation was followed by an exploration of all



the results and how they related to the different themes of the data analysis. The chapter was concluded by situating the data obtained in the literature consulted for this study.

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## Chapter 5

### Conclusion and recommendations

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#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The study was guided by the following research question: *“In what way can dynamic assessment be practised by Grade 7 Senior Phase teachers to inform the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills in English as a First Additional Language?”* Furthermore, in order to answer the primary research question, the following secondary research questions were explored:

1. Which of the dynamic assessment techniques, identified in the literature study as probably suitable for reading comprehension in Grade 7, yield meaningful information for curriculum differentiation in the teaching of reading comprehension skills at the Grade 7 level?
2. Which of the dynamic assessment techniques, identified in the literature study as probably suitable for reading comprehension in Grade 7, are feasible in the classroom at this level?
3. How should dynamic assessment results be used in differentiating the curriculum for reading comprehension instruction at the Grade 7 level?

The aim of the study was to examine the viability of using the results obtained from dynamic assessment (DA) tasks to make decisions about differentiated instruction. It was hypothesised that this would meet learners’ specific learning needs in order to guide them to reach their full academic potential in reading comprehension in their first additional language.

The data for the study were obtained from 16 Grade 7 learners from a predominantly Afrikaans primary school in a small town in South Africa. The medium of instruction was the home language of the majority of the learners, Afrikaans. The participants came from a broad spectrum of socio-economic statuses and ranged from affluent, middle-class individuals to those who are part of the school’s feeding programme.

The participants were selected by means of a combination of convenience, purposive and random sampling. The participants completed three reading comprehension tasks in which DA was practiced. Primary documents, namely, the participants’ answer sheets from the reading comprehension tasks, observations, discussions with

individual participants, and the researcher's journal were used as strategies for data collection.

The first stage of data analysis consisted of marking participants' answer sheets in order to guide the direction of the individual discussions, and also to design the following assessment task according to the participants' learning needs. During the second stage of data analysis, the researcher made use of *a priori* coding by analysing the data according to three pre-determined codes, namely, Knowledge of vocabulary, Background knowledge, and Knowledge of text organisation. As the researcher realised that the three codes were not sufficiently explaining the data, she implemented a third stage of data analysis in which the data were analysed for emerging codes. During this stage of data analysis, 26 codes emerged from the data. The identified codes were compared for similarities and combined into five different themes that guided the final stage of data analysis. The five final themes were Vocabulary, Background knowledge, Knowledge of text organisation, the Assessment experience, and Principles of the zone of proximal development.

This chapter commences by reflecting on the cognitive theories that guided the researcher's understanding of the findings of the study, and proceeds to answer the secondary and primary research questions. Next, the strengths and limitations of the study are reflected on, followed by a discussion of the recommendations of this study for both future research and teaching practice. The chapter is concluded with final comments on the research journey.

## **5.2 COGNITIVE VIEWPOINTS THAT GUIDED THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE FINDINGS**

The findings of the study were understood within the frameworks of the Constructivist, Social-constructionist and Social-constructivist Theories. Within the Constructivist Theory, it is believed that learners actively construct knowledge by interacting with their environment (Maree, 2004:400). By means of a process of assimilation and accommodation, new knowledge is interpreted and understood within learners' existing body of knowledge (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006:339; Maree, 2004:400).

The second cognitive viewpoint that guided the study was that of the Social-constructionist Theory. To Papert (cited in Ackerman, 2001:5), knowledge remains rooted in the contexts in which it is constructed and is shaped by the use of external supports and mediation is thus important in order for learners to reach their potential

level of development. The role that discourse plays in helping the learner construct an experience of the world and of what happens within it is viewed as one of the key characteristics of the Social-constructionist Theory (Hammersley, 2012:4). For this reason, the Social-constructionist Theory demands that learners be actively involved in the learning situation as this will lead to gaining a better understanding of the work (Ackerman, 2001:8). The third cognitive viewpoint that guided the study was the Social-constructivist Theory. As in the case of the Social-constructionist Theory, the Social-constructivist Theory also places emphasis on scaffolding, but more so in the form of discussion between the learner and the teacher. According to Butler-Kisber (2010:5), the Social-constructivist Theory is based on the idea that learners' lived experiences are constructed in their social interactions with others, within a specific context, and are furthermore influenced by the shared historical and cultural experiences of the individuals involved in this social setting. Vygotsky (cited in Gouvan, 2001:35) explains that a child's higher mental functions are formed in his/her social interactions with more experienced adults, such as parents or teachers, as is the case in the formal learning situation. With the help of their teachers, learners can actively solve problems during the learning situation (Gouvan, 2001:35). These three cognitive viewpoints were used as guidelines to construct an understanding of how DA could possibly yield the information that is needed for efficient curriculum differentiation.

The way in which learners understand new information by means of a process of assimilation and accommodation, as described by the Constructivist Theory, guided the researcher's understanding of how the participants had used their existing background knowledge to interpret and eventually understand the information that was presented in the texts used for the reading comprehension tasks. The social-constructionist viewpoint guided the researcher to understand how different techniques of scaffolding, e.g. explanation of words/wordlists, and the way questions are phrased, influenced participants' ability to complete reading comprehension tasks. The data obtained also shed light on which of the techniques used during the study were the most effective. The social-constructivist viewpoint guided the researcher's understanding of how interactions during contact time in the classroom between the teacher and learners could also be used as a technique of scaffolding that could lead to improved reading comprehension.

In order to answer the primary research question that guided the study, three secondary questions were explored.

## 5.3 ADDRESSING THE SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 5.3.1 ORIENTATION

After consulting the literature regarding reading comprehension, the researcher narrowed her focus onto three identified skills (Grabe, 2004:44-69) that appeared pivotal to the enhancement of reading comprehension. These skills are: 1) The development of a wide vocabulary; 2) The activation of background knowledge so that new information read about in texts can be interpreted and understood; and 3) Developing knowledge of how texts are organised and of the strategies that writers use to convey meaning. During the study, the researcher made use of DA, including different forms of scaffolding, to first assess participants' existing skills in approaching reading comprehension tasks, and secondly to assist them in developing the skills stated above that are needed for efficient reading comprehension.

### 5.3.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 1

**Which of the dynamic assessment techniques, identified in the literature study as probably suitable for reading comprehension in Grade 7, yield meaningful information for curriculum differentiation in the teaching of reading comprehension skills at the Grade 7 level?**

The following DA techniques or strategies proved to be successful in mediating the completion of reading comprehension tasks:

- Social interaction by means of individual discussions between the researcher and participants following each task yielded the most information that is needed to design curriculum differentiation in the instruction of reading comprehension skills. These discussions took on the form of mediation and were conducted after the answer sheets of each task were marked by the researcher. The mediating discussions had two aims in mind. Firstly, this method was used to collect information about participants' thought processes and other factors that had influenced their answers, irrespective of whether they were right or wrong. Secondly, it was used to revisit those questions answered incorrectly, and then by means of guided prompts given by the researcher, to mediate the learning process in order to guide participants in constructing the correct answers. The discussions thus revealed the participants' ineffectual thought processes or gaps in their background knowledge or vocabulary. It especially offered information about

the knowledge or skills pertaining to reading comprehension that had to be taught afresh.

- One of the most valuable findings that the study offered was the importance of participants' comprehension of questions asked in the assessment instrument, even before their comprehension of the text could be evaluated. By means of practicing DA, the researcher was enabled to determine which words used in the questions were above the level of vocabulary development of some of the participants. The questions in the following tasks could then be adapted according to the information gained from the previous task. In this way, questions could be phrased in such a way that they were clearly understandable, and would not become a further barrier that could prevent learners from successfully completing reading comprehension tasks.
- After the completion of Task 1, during which DA was practiced, it was determined that some participants felt overwhelmed by the large amount of text that had to be read in order to find the answer to some of the questions. Therefore, it was decided in the subsequent tasks to specify in the questions which part of the text must be read in order to find a specific answer. In phrasing the question in this way, the learners' reading was focused on the relevant part of the text and they were better able to answer the question.
- The explanation of possibly unfamiliar words that accompanied Tasks 2 and 3 appears to have enhanced the reading comprehension performance of most of the participants. By providing learners with such explanations, they were challenged to function at a level just beyond their current level of performance, as they were required to utilise the word explanations to guide their understanding of specific questions. By practicing DA, the researcher gained an understanding of the range of vocabulary development of the individual participants. The researcher was then better equipped to identify possibly difficult and unfamiliar words, and to include those in word explanations to accompany the comprehension tasks.
- During the informal discussion of the answer sheets, it was found that the participants who had struggled to answer certain questions were able to easily answer the questions when specific parts of the texts were read to them. The participants who benefitted from this technique of scaffolding were suspected of experiencing difficulties in basic reading skills, which

would then indicate a need for specialised assessment and highly individualised reading instruction.

### 5.3.3 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 2

**Which of the dynamic assessment techniques, identified in the literature study as probably suitable for reading comprehension in Grade 7, are feasible in the classroom at this level?**

Of the DA techniques or strategies discussed in 5.3.2 that were used to guide the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills, the following proved to be feasible in the Grade 7 English-as-AL classroom:

- The DA strategy of individual discussions between the researcher and participants offered the most information on differentiated teaching as a means to mediate the completion of reading comprehension tasks. However, it would not be feasible to continue with the strategy to the extent it was utilised within the research setting. To conduct conversations on a regular basis following every reading comprehension task completed in the classroom with 120 learners or more is unfortunately not feasible.
- The careful construction of questions so that they are clear and easy to comprehend was found to be a DA strategy that is feasible in the Grade 7 classroom.
- Phrasing questions in such a way that they focus the readers' attention on specific parts in the text where the answers can be found was found to be feasible in the Grade 7 classroom.
- Providing explanations of possibly unfamiliar or difficult words found in the texts, as a DA strategy to enhance reading comprehension performance, was found to be feasible in the Grade 7 classroom.
- Although the participants in the lower bands of reading comprehension performance appeared to benefit from being read certain parts of the text as a DA strategy, which mediated their completion of reading comprehension tasks, this DA strategy was not found to be feasible in the Grade 7 classroom. The participants who benefitted from this technique of scaffolding were suspected of experiencing difficulties in basic reading skills. However, in the long run, it is not feasible to read texts for all of those learners who are not on the level that they should be on regarding their basic reading skills. It



is rather suggested that these learners must receive highly specialised and individualised reading instruction in order to develop their basic reading skills. Then only can differentiated instruction be utilised to develop their reading comprehension skills in regular lessons.

#### **5.3.4 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

##### **How should dynamic assessment results be used in differentiating the curriculum for reading comprehension instruction at the Grade 7 level?**

In this study, it was the aim of the researcher to use the results of DA to make decisions about how to differentiate the curriculum. This would be done to develop those skills focused on in the study and mentioned previously, which are needed to enhance reading comprehension performance. By practicing DA, the results obtained from three reading comprehension tasks offered information on specific skills and knowledge that would need to be presented differentially in the further instruction of reading comprehension. The DA results obtained from Task 1 revealed the participants' lack of a basic reading comprehension strategy in the completion of the task. Therefore, Task 1 was followed up with a lesson on a basic reading comprehension strategy that could be utilised in subsequent tasks. Furthermore, because of the DA results obtained from Task 1, Tasks 2 and 3 were provided with explanations of possibly difficult or unfamiliar words. The DA results obtained from Task 2 revealed the participants' low level of knowledge regarding basic text organisation. Therefore, in preparation for Task 3, a second lesson was designed to teach participants the text organisation of a newspaper article. In the differentiation of instructing reading comprehension skills, DA results could be used as follows:

- DA results must be used to identify those skills and knowledge which have not yet developed, and then to teach those identified skills afresh in appropriate differentiated ways in order to answer to the individual needs of learners.
- DA results must be used to identify the interests, strengths and other unique characteristics of learners and then to capitalise on this in order to create more individualised learning opportunities.
- DA results must be used to identify barriers or difficulties learners may be experiencing so that these can be addressed in appropriately differentiated ways.

- DA results must be used to evaluate those strategies used by teachers to mediate learners in their learning and to identify those that are the most efficient in enhancing reading comprehension performance.

#### 5.4 ADDRESSING THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

This study was guided by the following primary research question; ***“In what way can dynamic assessment be practised by Grade 7 Senior Phase teachers to inform the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills in English as a First Additional Language?”*** The findings of the study revealed that five DA techniques or strategies could be possibly successfully utilised by teachers in the Grade 7 classroom to inform the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills.

- The first DA strategy that can be practiced by senior phase teachers in the Grade 7 English-as-AL classroom is dialogue between them and individual learners. These discussions can be used by teachers to collect information about learners’ thought processes and other factors that influence their answers, irrespective of whether they were right or wrong. This information can then be used to differentiate the instruction of reading comprehension skills in accordance to the individual needs of the learners. These discussions can also be used as a means of mediating learning by a series of guided prompts. However, this strategy holds some challenges in terms of feasibility when having to teach a large group of learners in each class. However, as individual discussion proved to offer the most valuable information regarding the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills, it is suggested that its extent be adjusted. One possibility would be to focus on a feasible proportion of learners per reading comprehension activity. The information gathered from these discussions can then be used to design differentiated teaching collectively. In this way, all learners can benefit from the individual discussions. A second possibility would be to draw up a standard questionnaire of no more than three to five questions that learners can fill in after the completion of a reading comprehension activity. The questions asked in such a questionnaire can focus on the challenges and success experienced by learners during the completion of the reading comprehension activity. Once again, teachers can randomly select some of the completed questionnaires, if time does not allow them to study all, for information that could guide the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills.

- The second DA strategy that can be utilised by the Grade 7 teacher in teaching reading comprehension skills in the English-as-AL is that of carefully constructing the questions in assessment instruments to prevent the assessment instrument creating a barrier that hinders reading comprehension performance.
- The third DA strategy that can be utilised by the Grade 7 teacher of reading comprehension skills in the English-as-AL classroom is that of phrasing questions in such a way that they guide the learners' reading towards certain parts of the text where specific answers can be found.
- Including explanations of possibly unfamiliar words in the assessment instrument is a fourth DA strategy that can be utilised by the Grade 7 teacher. By focusing on the explanations that the learners use, the teacher may be left with some information regarding the learners' level of vocabulary development. The finding related to this aspect suggests that this strategy must be conducted more differentially. It appears that only providing an explanation of possibly difficult or unfamiliar words was not the most efficient technique used in order to answer to the needs of all learners. Therefore, it is suggested that possibly difficult or unfamiliar words must be instructed in differentiated ways prior to the completion of a specific reading comprehension activity.
- A fifth DA strategy is to read certain parts of the text to learners where answers can be found, especially to those who are experiencing severe challenges in their basic reading skills. However, the feasibility of this strategy is again questioned in terms of limited teaching time available. The alternative could be to refer such learners for specialised assessment and an extramural reading programme in order to develop their basic reading skills.

After a careful reflection on the findings of the study, it is then suggested that DA must be practised by the Grade 7 English-as-AL teacher to differentiate the instruction of reading comprehension skills: 1) DA results must be used to identify those skills and knowledge that have not yet developed. These identified skills and knowledge must then be taught in new ways so that they can answer to the individual needs of learners; 2) DA results must be used to identify the strengths, interests and other unique characteristics of learners and to use that information to design the instruction of reading comprehension skills in such a way that more individualised

learning opportunities are created; 3) DA results must be used to identify barriers or difficulties that individual learners might be experiencing so that such barriers can be addressed in appropriately differentiated ways; and 4) DA results must be used by teachers to evaluate all the strategies that they have used to mediate learning, and to identify those that are the most efficient in enhancing reading comprehension performance. The DA results can also be used by teachers to identify those less successful strategies and adjust them according to the individual and specific learning needs of their learners.

## **5.5 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The greatest strength of this study lies in the qualitative nature of the study. Qualitative research provides the researcher the opportunity to understand a certain phenomenon in more detail (Nieuwenhuis, 2010a:50; Verma & Mallick, 1999:27; Wiersma, 1993:14). The fact that the researcher established a relationship with the participants as their teacher prior to conducting the study added to the participants disclosing their feelings and experiences more willingly. This, in turn, assisted the researcher to gather more information to answer the research question more thoroughly. For this reason, the data obtained offered valuable findings in the field of DA, which can be practiced by teachers in designing the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills.

Other methodological considerations that guided the study also added to the strength thereof. As different data collection strategies were utilised, the researcher was able to more confidently present the findings of the study. Even more so as the data obtained from the different sources of data supported each other. A second methodological aspect that added to the strength of the study was that the researcher utilised a hand analysis of the data. This provided her with the opportunity to get closer to the data (Creswell, 2008:251) and to better understand the implications it held for the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills. However, this study is not without limitations.

As the study was conducted with an admittedly small number of only 16 participants, it prevented any claims to generalise the findings thereof, which is a prerequisite of research of high quality, as stated by Golafshani (2003:603). However, to answer to this limitation, the researcher focused on the transferability of the findings of the study. This implies that the researcher does not make any absolute statements. It is only stated that if the suggestions made in the study are utilised by other teachers in

similar situations, these could possibly enhance the reading comprehension performance of their learners.

Another limitation of the study is that it was conducted within a fairly short time frame, consisting of two school terms and three iterations. If the study had been conducted over a longer length of time, with opportunity for more iterations, it would possibly have offered more information on how DA results can be utilised to inform the differentiated instruction of reading comprehension skills. A third limitation of the study is the silences in the data regarding participants' reluctance to utilise the reading comprehension strategy that was taught during the first intervention lesson. This could not be more thoroughly explored due to the time constraint.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND TEACHING PRACTICE**

The researcher is excited about the findings of the study, although she acknowledges that it only briefly touched the tip of the iceberg. The following recommendations for future research and teaching practice could then be put forward:

More research should be conducted on the value of teaching learners skills on how to approach reading comprehension tasks. During the first intervention lesson, the researcher taught learners basic skills that could be employed when approaching reading comprehension tasks. It was then observed that participants were hesitant in actually utilising these skills, and only used them once they were reminded to. Further exploration by means of a general discussion, in which all the participants took part, revealed a fear of running out of time as a possible explanation for participants' reluctance to use this reading strategy. However, other reasons for participants' reluctance in using these skills during research comprehension tasks were not further explored in the study, and these should be researched further.

The study focused on how DA can be used by teachers to inform the differentiated teaching of basic reading comprehension skills. It could be valuable to take the study one step further by extending the focus to using the results of DA to actually differentiate instruction of reading comprehension skills. This could happen in the format of a standard lesson instructing the skill that must be taught, followed by differentiated activities and worksheets. The effectiveness of these differentiated lessons should then be evaluated in further research.

Although the study focused on using DA for informing differentiated teaching of reading comprehension skills in the English-as-AL classroom, curriculum

differentiation can be utilised in different subjects across the curriculum. Teachers are also encouraged to take the time and effort to get to know their learners. It is suggested that teachers must collect information about learners' hobbies, interests, strengths, needs and life worlds. This will aid in designing instruction in such a way that it will answer to the individual needs of learners.

## **5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

At the end of this research journey, as the researcher, I am left with a great sense of gratitude and pride. I am thankful for being awarded the opportunity to conduct the study, as I grew as both a student and a teacher. By carrying out this study, I have gained a vast amount of knowledge and also developed my own skills as a researcher, although I must admit that it is still a work in progress. The findings of the study also inspired me as a teacher to do more research, not necessarily in an academic situation, to further develop my skills as a teacher. My personal vision is to be a teacher that inspires and motivates learning by designing teaching in such a way that it will answer to the individual needs of learners. It is also my goal that learners will be left with a positive feeling about their future. This study attempted to add to the existing body of knowledge available, and more importantly, inspire fellow teachers in their own teaching.

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## Appendices

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Letter of parental consent

10 April 2014

Geagte Graad 7-ouer/voog

**VERSOEK DAT U KIND AAN 'N NAVORSINGSPROJEK MAG DEELNEEM**

Ek is die skool se Gr. 7-onderwyseres in Engels en is tans besig met my Meestersgraad aan die Universiteit van Pretoria. My studie handel oor Assessering vir Kurrikulum-differensiasie in die Onderrig van Leesbegrip in Engels.

Ek versoek vriendelik u toestemming dat u kind aan die studie mag deelneem indien hy/sy geselekteer sou word. Al die leerders sal volgens die resultate van 'n roetine leesbegrip-toets in vier groepe verdeel word. Vyf leerders met hul ouers se toestemming sal per groep ewekansig geselekteer word om aan die studie deel te neem. Weens praktiese oorwegings kan ek nie meer as 20 deelnemers by die studie betrek nie. Dus, al gee u toestemming vir u kind se deelname aan die studie, kan dit ongelukkig nie waarborg dat u kind wel aan die studie sal kan deelneem nie.

Tydens die studie sal die deelnemers van tyd tot tyd gevra word om ekstra aktiwiteite of werkskaarte in klastyd te voltooi (nooit as huiswerk nie) en enkele deelnemers sal by 'n individuele gesprek oor dié aktiwiteit / werkskaart betrek word tydens 'n pouse, maar dit sal nooit meer as 10 minute van die pouse in beslag neem nie. Daar sal egter nooit van 'n deelnemer verwag word om 'n vraag te beantwoord wat hom / haar ongemaklik kan laat voel nie. Soms sal aktiwiteite na skoolure plaasvind, maar afsprake sal gereël word, in oorweging met u kind se buitemuurse aktiwiteite.

Deelname aan die studie is vrywillig en sal duur tot Oktober 2014. Sou u kind egter na 'n paar weke voel dit is nie vir hom / haar lekker nie, mag hy / sy enige tyd onttrek van die studie. Geen leerder sal finansiële vergoeding of ekstra punte ontvang vir hulle deelname aan die studie nie.

Die resultate van die studie gaan gepubliseer word, maar ek kan u die versekering gee dat u kind se identiteit nooit geopenbaar sal word nie.

Ek sal u toestemming vir u kind se deelname hoog op prys stel. U kan hierdie toestemming gee deur die afskeur-strokie in te vul en terug te stuur skool toe. Indien u kind by die studie betrek word, sal ek die navorsingsprosedure vooraf breedvoerig aan hom / haar verduidelik en seker maak dat hy / sy self ook instem om aan die studie deel te neem.

Vriendelike groete

**(ME) B HENNING  
NAVORSTER  
(073 1706 594)**



Observation Sheet

Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Study codename: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of observation: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How does the learner approach the task?

CRITERIA:	OBSERVATION:
Learner approached the task immediately and with ease.	
Learner approached the task with hesitation but later seemed to have relaxed.	
Learner approached the task with hesitation and never really showed confidence in completing the task.	
Learner did not seem to approach the task with confidence and delayed completing the task	

2. Facial expressions and behaviour:

CRITERIA:	OBSERVATION:
Smiling	
Laughing	
Looking around	
Frequently looking at the teacher	
Scratching head	
Touching nose, ears or other parts of face.	
Frowning	
Shaking head.	
Sighing	
Day dreaming/staring/losing concentration	



3. **Mood:**

<b>CRITERIA:</b>	<b>OBSERVATION:</b>
Relaxed	
Stressed?	
Engaged	
Confident	
Hesitant	
Discouraged	
Confused	

4. **Time it took to complete task:**

<b>CRITERIA:</b>	<b>OBSERVATION:</b>
Less than 10 minutes	
Between 10 and 20 minutes	
Between 20 and 30 minutes	
Between 30 and 35 minutes	
40 minutes (on time)	
More than 40 minutes ( over time – did not complete 1 or 2 questions)	
More than 40 minutes ( over time – did not complete more than 2 questions)	



Semi-structured discussion sheet

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Possible questions that can be asked after completion of task

Assessment No: \_\_\_\_\_ Name/Code: \_\_\_\_\_

<b><u>QUESTION:</u></b>	<b><u>RESPONSE</u></b>	<b><u>FIELD NOTES</u></b>	<b><u>ANALISES</u></b>
<p><b>1. For each question answered correctly:</b></p> <p>Please explain/describe how you arrived at this answer / what made you answer this question on this way.</p>			
<p><b>2. For each question answered incorrectly:</b></p> <p>Please explain/describe how you arrived at this answer / what made you answer this question in this way.</p>			
<p><b>3. For each question not answered:</b></p> <p>Let us see whether you can find the answer now (then, proceed with graduated prompting):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• read/repeat the question</li> <li>• read/repeat the question with emphasis on keywords (question words, keys to content)</li> <li>• explain the question</li> <li>• indicate the line/ sentence containing the answer</li> <li>• explain the line/question (vocabulary/poetic technique)</li> </ul>			
<p><b>4. Why did you delay starting or completing the task?</b></p>			
<p><b>5. You did not finish on time. Why, do you think, did you run out of time?</b></p>			



Reading text (Task 1)

**Signalling for a stop, shouting for a drop:  
Thumbs up for South African taxis**

1 Many South Africans rely on minibus taxis to get around, but unless you have a good understanding of taxi sign language and the various routes drivers travel, don't expect them to stop for you. What do you need to know to catch, use and stop a taxi?

a question about the task that is going to be explained

2 The easiest way to flag down the right taxi is to ask someone to show you the correct hand gesture. For example to get to the township of Thembisa, east of Johannesburg, make a "T" by putting one hand horizontally and the other vertically underneath it.

3 Once you know the signal, stand on the edge of the road and do your signal. Note, there is no need to be flashy about it – most people do it only half-heartedly.

action verb  
precise language explains exactly what to do

4 As a taxi gets closer, the driver will toot his hooter. Smile and nod at him, still making your signal, and he'll stop by the side of the road to let you in.

action verbs

5 Before you get in, check with someone where the taxi is going and how much it will cost.

use of imperatives (commands)

6 Next, find a seat. Note that if you sit in the front you may be expected to handle the money.

use of time words and expressions

7 Once you have sat down pass your money to the front. Don't panic if you need change, it will be handed back to you.

use of imperatives (commands)

8 What about getting off? Although you can get off just about anywhere along the route, it's important to know what to say and how and when to say it. As you get close to your destination look for landmarks you could name. For example, shout "after robot" or "right stop sign" before the robot or the sign, and the driver will make a plan. How you say these phrases is important: your voice must be loud enough to make sure the driver hears you. Don't wait until the eleventh hour to shout out but also remember that he who hesitates is lost. Either way, chances are you'll miss your drop-off point.

the steps are written in the order that they need to happen so there is a logical sequence of instructions

9 Stay cool, follow these easy steps and you'll get there safely, with no panic.

A  
W  
H:  
of  
wl  
th

**reading** Work alone to answer the questions below.

How does the taxi driver indicate that he has seen you and will stop?

List the three things you need to keep in mind when you want to get off a taxi.

The passage suggests two things that you should do to make sure that you get onto a taxi that is going where you want to go. What are these two things?

The text offers explanations, opinions (a personal view on something) and instructions.

1. Quote an example of an opinion from the text.

2. Quote an example of an instruction from the text.

What do you think might happen if someone who was not very good at maths was sitting in the front of the taxi?

Explain what the word "landmarks" in paragraph 8 means.

Paragraph 8 makes use of two idioms, "don't wait until the eleventh hour" and "he who hesitates is lost". Explain in your own words what each of these means. Use the context of the passage to work out the answers.

Rewrite the last paragraph of the passage in a more formal register and tone.

What do you think would be the most difficult step to follow in the instructions? Give a reason for your answer.

Look at the writer's use of vocabulary and informal writing style. How does he create a friendly and informal text?

Quote from the passage to support your answer.

Consider the text you have read. Is it easy to follow the instructions? Provide a reason for your answer.



### Activity 2: Support: Recognise command words

Underline all the command words in the following text.

Spot the taxi as soon as you see it. Queue up at the edge of the road. Check with the driver that he or she is going where you want to go. Sit down quickly so you don't hold up the taxi. Get out of the taxi as soon as it stops.



## **SIGNALLING FOR A STOP, SHOUTING FOR A DROP:**

### **THUMBS UP FOR SOUTH AFRICAN TAXIS**

Many South Africans rely on minibus taxis to get around, but you need a good understanding of taxi sign language and the various routes drivers travel. What do you need to know if you want to catch, use or stop a taxi?

The easiest way to flag down the right taxi is to ask someone to show you the correct hand gesture. For example to get to the township of Thembisa, east of Johannesburg, make a "T" by putting one hand horizontally and the other hand vertically underneath it.

Once you know your signal, stand on the edge of the road and do your signal. Note, there is *no need to be flashy about it* – most people do it only half-heartedly.

As a taxi gets closer to people standing at the edge of the road, the driver will hoot his hooter. Smile and nod at him, still making your signal, and he'll stop by the side of the road to let you in.

Before you get in, check with someone where the taxi is going and how much it will cost. Next, find a seat. Note that if you sit in the front, the driver may expect you to handle the passengers' money.

Once you have sat down pass your money to the front. *Don't panic if you need change*, it will be handed back to you.

What about getting off? Although you can get off just about anywhere along the route, it's important to know what to say and how and when to say it. As you get close to your destination look for landmarks that you could name. For example, shout "After robot!" or "At the stop sign!" before the robot and the sign and the driver will make a plan. How you say these phrases is important: your voice must be loud enough to make sure the driver hears you. Don't wait until the eleventh hour to shout out, but also remember he who hesitates is lost. Either way, chances are you will miss your drop-off point.

Stay cool, follow these easy steps and you'll get there safely, with no panic.



**ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE**

**FA**

**GRADE 7**

**READING COMPREHENSION: READING A DRAMA**

**AFTER READING QUESTIONS:**

1. Name four of the characters who take part in this drama. (2)
2. Describe the place where this drama/conversation happened (1)
3. How many players in the team were sick that day? (1)
4. Look at this line: "Just a minute... Don't you play soccer, Mary?" If you played Mrs Mkize's role, how would you say this line? What does the dots tell you tell you? (1)
5. Look at this line: "Has anybody seen Kusele?" Mrs Mkize says this in a worried tone of voice. Why do you think does she sound worried? (1)
6. Explain, in your own words, a "friendly match". (2)
7. Why does Mrs Mkize want to see Kusele? (1)
8. Pieter and Mpho don't agree. Who changes his attitude? (1)
9. How do we know that Pieter doesn't really want girls on the team? (2)
10. How does Thandi try to negotiate\* for her friend Mary? (2)
11. Do you agree with Mpho's statement "a team with girls is better than no team at all"? Give a reason for your answer. (2)
12. Use the singular or the plural form of the noun "team" to write this sentence correctly: *The under 16 (team) are playing in a competition this afternoon.* (1)
13. Explain what the word "immediately" means. (1)

TOTAL: 18

## Word list

- **NEGOTIATE\*** - To negotiate with someone is to talk to them about something that you might want and then to agree on getting that thing.



Reading text (Task 2)

Off sick

*Mrs Mkize walks out into the school grounds in a hurry and walks up to a group of learners.*

MRS MKIZE: (*sounding annoyed*) Has anybody seen Kusele? Tell him I need to see him immediately.

MARY: He went home at break, Mrs Mkize.

MRS MKIZE: What? Why didn't he tell me? He needs to play in the match this afternoon.

MPHO: He said he wasn't feeling well, ma'am.

MRS MKIZE: But this is a match that we have to win! I know it's only a friendly match but he is our best striker! He can't be sick!

THANDI: Don't you have any reserve players, ma'am?

MRS MKIZE: (*impatiently*) Yes, we do, but there are five players who are off sick today.

*Mrs Mkize starts to walk away angrily. She takes out her phone and then stops when Mary walks after her.*

MARY: Do you need more players then, ma'am?

MRS MKIZE: Well, of course we do, but where am I going to find them now? Just a minute ... Don't you play soccer, Mary? Wouldn't you like to play today? Because it's a friendly match I think we can have girls and boys in the team.

PIETER: Eish! Girls in the team? No, I don't think that .... We can't ....

THANDI: So you are a boy who thinks that girls can't play, Pieter! Well, Mary plays better than you do!

PIETER: What do you know about soccer, Thandi? Mary is your friend, so you think that she can play well ...

MPHO: (*softly*) Well, I know of some girls who play quite well, but ...

MARY: Uhm, actually Thandi also plays well.

MRS MKIZE: Know what ... I think this is a great idea. You can both play. Come, let's find you some shirts ...

MPHO: Well, maybe a team with girls is better than no team at all ....

PIETER: Ag ja. I guess, you're right. But really ....

*Mrs Mkize marches off, followed by Thandi and Mary. Mpho smiles a bit sheepishly and Pieter shakes his head and walks off.*





**After reading** Work alone and write your answers to these questions.  
Your teacher may record your marks for formal assessment.

- 1 Name four of the characters who take part in this drama. (2)
- 2 State the setting where you think the drama takes place. (1)
- 3 How many players in the team are off sick that day? (1)
- 4 Refer to this sentence: "Just a minute ... Don't you play soccer, Mary?" How would you read this sentence? (What does the ... tell you?) (1)
- 5 Refer to this question: "Has anybody seen Kusele?"
  - a. With what tone of voice does Mrs Mkize say these words? (1)
  - b. Why does she use this tone of voice? (1)
- 6 Explain in your own words what a "friendly match" is. (2)
- 7 Explain why Mrs Mkize wants to see Kusele. (2)
- 8 Compare Pieter's attitude with Mpho's attitude in this dialogue.
  - a. Do they agree? (1)
  - b. Who changes his attitude during the dialogue? (1)
- 9 Explain how we know that Pieter really doesn't want girls on the team? (2)
- 10 Explain how Thandi tries to negotiate for her friend Mary. (2)
- 11 Do you agree with Mpho's statement that "a team with girls is better than no team at all"? Give a reason for your answer. (2)
- 12 Use the singular or the plural form of the noun "team" to write this sentence correctly: *The Under 16 (team) are playing in a competition this afternoon.* (1)
- 13 Give a synonym for the word "immediately". (1)
- 14 Refer to this sentence in indirect speech: "MPHO: He said he wasn't feeling well, ma'am." Rewrite what he said in direct speech. Begin like this: *He said, "I ..."* (2) [23]





**ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE**  
**GRADE 7**  
**READING COMPREHENSION – READING A DRAMA**  
**ANSWER SHEET**

**Name and Surname:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Class:** A B C D E

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ (2)
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_ (2)
- 7. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- 9. \_\_\_\_\_ (2)
- 10. \_\_\_\_\_ (2)
- 11. **YES/ NO (Make a circle around your answer) Reason:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (2)
- 12. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- 13. \_\_\_\_\_ (1)

**TOTAL: [18]**

Reading text (Task 3)

## Sports facilities make a difference



*The teams at the school now have good equipment and a nice field to play on.*

The learners, staff and parents of Groenberg Combined High School in the Northern Cape are very proud of themselves. And soon they may be even prouder! Two years ago, they had a meeting to decide how the school could provide better sports facilities for the learners. Today the school has 10 sports teams and the teams compete regularly in matches against other school teams. So, how did they do it? Did they get help? Did they do it themselves?

### Identifying a need

The learners at Groenberg were the first to realise they needed better facilities. They wanted to play soccer, netball and hockey and have a place where they could train for athletics events. The first problem was to find a safe place to practise.

The principal of the school helped and got permission to use a field next to the school. The only problem was that the field looked like a rubbish dump!

The second problem was to get basic sports equipment for learners. Many of the learners could not afford to buy shoes and T-shirts. But did these problems put the learners off? No!

### Finding solutions

The school community organised work parties to clean up the field. Learners, parents and teachers worked in teams after school and over the weekends. They put all the rubbish into big bags. After only a few months the field was ready to use.

The learners then formed a committee and wrote letters to a few local businesses to ask them for sponsorships. They drafted a letter and checked it. They sent the letter to 15 different businesses. The businesses included banks, restaurants, and shops. In the letter they explained that they needed sports equipment like shoes, T-shirts and sports bags. They did not ask for money.

The learners received replies from eight of the businesses. Two of them offered to help. One business sponsored T-shirt and caps for all the team players and the other business was generous and bought sports shoes for 50 learners. So why does everyone at the school want to play sport now?





**After reading** Work alone and complete this comprehension.

- 1 Write down the name of the school mentioned in the article. (1)
- 2 Explain in one sentence what this article is about. (1)
- 3 State the need that the learners at the school realised. (1)
- 4 Refer to this sentence: "And soon they may be even prouder."
  - a. Why does the writer use the comparative form here? (1)
  - b. Give the superlative form of the word "proud". (1)
- 5 Name two things that the school community did to meet their needs. (2)
- 6 Refer to this sentence: "The school community organised work parties to clean up the field." From the context, explain the meaning of "work parties". (2)
- 7 Give a synonym and an antonym for the word "generous". (2)
- 8 Refer to this sentence: "The field looked like a rubbish dump!"
  - a. What figure of speech is used in this sentence? (1)
  - b. Explain the **figurative meaning** of this sentence. (2)
- 9 What was the attitude of the school staff to the need that the learners had realised? (2)
- 10 Why do you think the learners did not ask businesses to give them money? (2)
- 11 Why do you think some businesses agreed to help the school with sports equipment? Give two reasons. (2)
- 12 What do you think about what this school has achieved? Give a reason for your answer. (2)
- 13 Do you think the writer shows any bias towards this school? Give a reason for your answer. (2)
- 14 What **stereotype** might have been used to describe the learners in the newspaper article? (1) [25]

#### Glossary

**figurative meaning:** the imaginative meaning, the opposite of the literal (direct) meaning

**bias:** an unfair, strong feeling of support for a person or idea

**stereotype:** a fixed set of ideas about what something or someone is like

### Language structures and conventions: Sentence level work

Newspaper articles provide information about events. An article usually consists of several paragraphs. You are going to find out more about how to write paragraphs for newspaper articles.

**ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE**  
**GRADE 7**  
**READING COMPREHENSION – NEWSPAPER ARTICLES**

**After reading the questions**

1. Write down the heading of the newspaper article (1)

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2. Look at the photograph and then answer the following two questions

- a. What is the purpose of the caption? (1)

---

---

- b. Write down the caption for the photograph in this news paper article (1)

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3. Look at the following sentence; “And soon they may be even prouder!”

- a) The word “proud” is used in the comparative form in the above sentence. Now rewrite the word “proud” in its superlative form. (1)

---

4. Choose the best answer from the given possibilities to explain in one sentence what this article is about. (Draw a circle around your answer) (1)

- a) It is about how Groenberg Combined High School’s sport has improved over the last two years.  
b) It is about how the learners and the staff of Groenberg Combined High School’s learners and staff are very proud of themselves.  
c) It is about how the Groenberg Combined school community worked together in order to get better sport facilities and opportunities to compete, for the learners.  
d) It is about businesses helping Groenberg Combined Highschool to improve their sport facilities

5. Read the following paragraph “**Identifying a need**” and then answer the following questions.

- a) After the learners realised that they needed better facilities, name two problems that they have identified. (2)

•

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• \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) Look at the following sentence; “The field looked like a rubbish dump!” What figure of speech is used in this sentence? (e.g. Mataphor, Idiom etc) (1)

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Read the following paragraph “**Finding Solutions**” and then answer the following questions:

a) Look at the following sentence; “The school community organised work parties to clean up the field.” From the context, explain the meaning of “work parties.” (2)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) How long did it take them to clean up the field? (1)

\_\_\_\_\_

c) After cleaning up the field, what was the next step they took? (2)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d) Why do you think the learners did not ask businesses to give them money? (2)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e) Give a synonym and antonym for the word “generous”. (2)

• \_\_\_\_\_  
• \_\_\_\_\_

7. Think a little!

a) Why do you think some businesses agreed to help the school with sport equipment? Give two reasons. (2)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) What do you think about what this school has achieved? Give a reason for your answer. (2)

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---

---

c) Do you think the writer shows any **bias** towards this school? Give a reason for your answer. (2)

---

---

---

d) What **stereotype** might have been used to describe the learners in the newspaper article? (1)

---

---

TOTAL (24)

## WORDLIST:

- **SYNONYM** – A word with the same meaning.
- **ANTONYM** – A word with the opposite meaning.
- **BIAS** – An unfair, strong feeling of support for a person or idea.
- **STEREOTYPE** – A fixed set of ideas about what something or someone is like.



Letter of consent (Participants)

Beste \_\_\_\_\_

**DEELNAME AAN 'N LEESPROJEK**

Ek moet 'n groot projek doen en ek gaan jou hulp nodig hê. Die doel van hierdie projek is om te bepaal hoe ek as 'n onderwyser leerlinge kan help om met meer begrip Engels te kan lees.

As jy inwillig om my te help, moet jy die volgende weet:

1. Jy gaan soms 'n ekstra werkkaart of aktiwiteit in die klas moet doen, maar dit sal nooit vir huiswerk wees nie.
2. Ons sal miskien partykeer in 'n pouse aan die projek moet werk, maar dit sal nooit meer as 10 minute van jou pouse wees nie.
3. Soms gaan ek jou 'n paar vragies vra oor jou werk en dan gaan ons sommer lekker gesels oor jou antwoorde.

Maar jy hoef nie bekommerd te wees dat ander mense gaan weet wat jou punte was in Engels of wat jy alles gesê het nie, want ek gaan vir jou 'n skuilnaam gee wanneer ek my projek gaan skryf. Ek sal ook glad nie die dinge wat ons bespreek vir enige ander personeelid of kind vertel nie – dit bly net ons geheim.

Niemand word verplig om aan die projek deel te neem nie – jy gaan nie ekstra punte kry nie en gaan ook nie betaal word vir jou hulp nie. So dit is heeltemal jou eie keuse of jy wil help of nie. As jy oor 'n paar weke voel dat dit nie vir jou lekker is nie, kan jy enige tyd besluit om my nie meer te help nie. Ek sal glad nie kwaad wees vir jou nie, jy moet asseblief net kom vertel daarvan.

Vul asseblief die vormple in en gee dit vir my terug.

**Juffrou Bianka**

\_\_\_\_\_

Ek \_\_\_\_\_ in Gr. 7 \_\_\_\_\_ wil juffrou graag help met die leesprojek.



Department of Education (Permission letter)



**education**  
DEPARTMENT: EDUCATION  
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Private Bag X 11341  
Nelspruit 1200  
Government Boulevard  
Riverside Park  
Building 5  
Mpumalanga Province  
Republic of South Africa

*Litiko laTsimfundo Umyango weFundo Departement van Onderwys Umyango wezeMfundo*  
Enquiries: A.H Baloyi (013) 766 5476

MRS BIANKA HENNING.  
P.O. BOX 5340  
SECUNDA  
2302

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR BIANKA HENNING.**

Your application (submitted on the 19 August 2013) to conduct research was received on the 19 August 2013. The title of your study reads: **How assessment, especially dynamic assessment techniques, can be utilized to provide information required in order to differentiate the curriculum appropriately in the teaching of Reading Comprehension in the First Additional Language Classroom.** The objectives of your study are consistent with the department's school improvement strategy especially curriculum delivery and learner attainment. Your request is approved subject to you observing the content of the departmental research manual which is attached. You are also requested to adhere to your University's ethics as spelt out in your research ethics document.

In terms of the attached manual (2.2. bullet number 4 & 6) data or any research activity can only be conducted after school hours as per appointment. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of department.

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5476 or [a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za](mailto:a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za).

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