

**Factors influencing learners' reading ability in English at Bulawayo Central  
District high schools in Zimbabwe**

**by**

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**Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree**

**Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics**

**in the Unit for Academic Literacy**

**Faculty of Humanities**

**University of Pretoria**

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**2018**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS**

AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANOVA:	Analysis of Variance
CORI:	Concept of Reading Instruction
ECD:	Early Childhood Development
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
ERI:	Early Reading Initiative
ESL:	English as a Second Language
GBHS:	Government boys' high school
GGHS:	Government girls' high school
GPE:	Global Partnership for Education
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
L1:	First Language
L2:	Second Language
MOPSE:	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
NCLB:	No Child Left Behind
PBHS:	Private Boys' High School
PGHS:	Private Girls' High School
PIRLS:	Progress International Reading Literacy Study
PLAP:	Performance Lag Address Programme
SES:	Socio-Economic Status



SVR: Simple View of Reading

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would never have been able to complete my dissertation without the guidance and support of the following people, academic supervisors, friends, family and my husband.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my academic supervisor, Dr Naomi Boakye, for accepting me in her group. During my tenure she contributed so much guidance through her warm and understanding support. Her guidance allowed me to grow as a research enthusiast and I am proud to say I now view research as a panacea for educational development. All the fears I had about research are gone as she demystified research by offering tremendous, yet firm support. I have not only grown as an academic but also as an independent writer as she afforded me the opportunity to explore all avenues as a writer. The skills that she has taught me are immeasurable owing to her meticulous, yet patient supervision. I am truly grateful.

Furthermore, my sincere gratitude goes to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, especially to Janine White who handled my admission. I am so grateful to her for accepting me at this institution of higher learning. Her guidance was warmly felt and I am much indebted.

The entire Research Ethics Committee cannot go unmentioned. Their commitment to and support for my success became evident when they deliberated my research proposal. I would be remiss if I did not thank Sithole Vincent, Andrew Tracey and their entire team who became my channel of communication throughout the entire period. They also deserve credit for providing much needed support from administrative tasks.

I would like to acknowledge the statistician who helped me in compiling data, coding it and finally helping with analysis. I would also accord the editor who worked on my research much honour.

My gratitude goes to the University as an institution. The entire institution has proven to be one of the best in terms of credibility. I salute the credibility of learning that I have gained to date. I am proud to be a product of this institution and it would hardly be surprising if I choose the same institution when enrolling for my doctorate.

Hillside Teachers' college library staff could not go unnoticed as they rendered maximum support while I was accessing information. I am truly grateful to Munashe Muungani and his entire team.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my friends and family who supported me throughout this journey. First and foremost, I would like to thank my mother, Winnie, for her unwavering support. I would like to extend sincere gratitude to my husband, Ndaba Gumede, who patiently took care of my children when I was away from home. I am also grateful to my children, Nesisa, Lande, Bongekile, Gugu and Asemahle, as well as to my sisters, brothers, nephews, nieces and all my in-laws. I am truly indebted to you all.

God bless you.

## **ABSTRACT**

Reading proficiency is a critical endeavour as it transcends and includes all learning. This study set out to establish the reading comprehension level of Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe, and to find out what factors determine the reading proficiency level of the same learners. These learners were thought to have been previously disadvantaged during Zimbabwe's economic downturn of 2006 to 2008. The researcher used quantitative and qualitative methods to gather information to answer the research questions. Forty-eight and 22 learners from government and private schools respectively, voluntarily wrote a comprehension test to answer the first research question, completed a questionnaire to answer the second research question on factors that influenced their reading proficiency and wrote narratives on their reading development. Twelve and nine teachers from government and private schools respectively, voluntarily completed questionnaires to provide answers to the second research question. The comprehension test revealed differences in the reading comprehension level of the learners. The mean performance of private school learners stood at 91.64% compared to 36.63% for learners from government schools. Findings revealed that the reading comprehension level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners at government schools is below that for Grade 4 (Zimbabwe and South Africa) yet the learners were in Form 2 (Grade 9). The t-test on learner questionnaires showed statistical significance of the home environment, socio-economic status (SES), and motivation as factors influencing reading practices. Private school teachers also indicated that home environment, SES, and motivation were factors in reading (ability and comprehension), unlike teachers in government schools who disagreed. Private school learners wrote strong narratives compared to those of government school learners, which were flawed with grammatical and spelling errors. The study hence revealed that reading performance lags behind in government school learners. Re-introduction of special classes, revival of public libraries and exchange and network programmes are recommended if learners at government schools are to be brought abreast of learners at private schools.

**Keywords:** Reading comprehension, reading ability, factors influencing reading, government schools, private schools

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Reading is an interactive skill involving the reader and the text. It forms the basis of all areas of learning and is a fundamental skill that needs to be acquired by every learner in school. Learners have to acquire it not only for the purpose of language and literature study, but also for learning other subjects in the school curriculum (Geske & Ozola, 2008). Learners who are competent in reading are able to learn on their own, both inside and outside the classroom.

Furthermore, as the foundation for other learning activities in the classroom, reading has taken centre stage in most nations (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). It is argued that the basis of reading, which is comprehension, does not develop naturally; learners need well-planned and deliberate patterns of reading to achieve comprehension. Many studies reveal that close monitoring, adequate pacing, classroom management, clarity of presentation, and well-structured lessons on reading have a positive impact on learners' achievement (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). Children who fail to access such tutorial environments might fail to learn to read during the first grades and become handicapped readers in later grades (ibid). It is imperative that children learn to read with understanding within the first few years of their schooling. Though learners do not develop reading skills at exactly the same rate, equipping them with the necessary reading skills from birth to Grade 1 would promote reading achievement in later years. According to Rock et al. (2008) this early exposure to reading is described as Stage 0. At this stage, learners rely heavily on pictures in the text. From Stage 0, the reader graduates to Stage 1 (which is at the beginning of Grade 1), becomes aware of sound relationships and attempts to figure out words (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). These early stages of reading are crucial for later reading development.

A number of learners in Zimbabwe may have skipped the above stages during the country's economic turmoil from 2006 to 2008 when the education sector experienced massive disruptions. Learners at elementary level were adversely affected due to absenteeism of both teachers and learners, a lack of resources and other teaching materials, as well parents being absent from home. In view of these disturbing learning conditions, learners taking part in the study could present poor reading qualities that would require intervention.

The purpose of the study was to establish the reading proficiency level of Form 2 (Grade 9)<sup>1</sup> learners at Bulawayo Central District in both government and private schools and to determine the factors that influence the reading proficiency level of the same learners. In this chapter, the background and rationale of the study, as well as the factors that might influence the reading proficiency of Form 2 learners in the abovementioned district will be discussed. The aims and research questions of the study will be outlined. Chapter 1 ends with a brief conclusion and the chapter outline.

## **1.2 Background and rationale**

Tamrackitkun (2010) asserts that reading in the classroom is usually controlled by teachers and not by learners; that is, teachers will tell learners what, when and how to read. This is the nature of learning to read in the Zimbabwean education system. The teacher is the one who is mostly in control of the learners although the home and society also plays a role. Moorman and Ram (1994:64) in Alyousef (2005) enunciate that although much research has been carried out on teaching reading, “no theories exist which sufficiently describe and explain how people accomplish the complete task of reading real-world texts.”

According to Grabe and Stoller (2011), the ability to read requires the reader to draw information from a text and combine it with information and expectations that the reader already has. Perfetti (2007:357) argues that reading ability is “a recurring cognitive activity of identification of words.” Some learners in Form 2 (Grade 9) in government high schools can identify words but still encounter reading challenges. Of particular concern are challenges such as hesitation while reading and failure to draw inferences from texts. In Form 2 (Grade 9), learners are expected to pay attention to words and their meanings simultaneously (Good & Brophy, 2008). They are also expected to be reading with comprehension and with minimal help from teachers as they interact with quite a number of subjects that require the skill of reading for comprehension. Learners at

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<sup>1</sup> This researcher is writing for a Zimbabwean audience where the school system is structured from Grade 0 to 7 at Primary level and Forms 1 to 6 at Secondary level. Consequently, ‘Form’ is used to denote the various educational levels of learners. However, since she is doing her master's at the University of Pretoria, a South African (SA) university, it is useful to indicate that Form 2 in Zimbabwe is the same as Grade 9 in South Africa and Grades 0-7 in Zimbabwe and Grade R-7 in South Africa. Typically, learners in Form 2 or Grade 9 are aged between 13 and 15 years.

this level are envisaged to possess the ability to monitor and repair meaning when it is lost. Pardo (2004) argues that knowing what is understood and what is not understood while reading and retrieving the meaning, is vital to comprehension. Good readers most of the times are said to monitor their reading to check if what they are reading makes sense (ibid).

In addition, reading comprehension involves readers' constructing meanings by interacting with the text through utilising prior knowledge and previous experience. Reading itself operates from mastering set skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (i.e. where readers decode from sounded letters, whether single letter-sounding or letter-sounding patterns involving more than one letter and more than one sound (phonics) National Reading Panel (2000). Gove and Cvelich (2011) emphasises that with practice, readers recognise letters more quickly and in small clusters, and link the clusters to form words. They train their minds to visually identify word patterns and as a result they begin to pay attention to spelling and pronunciation, as well as the meaning of the word (Gove & Cvelich, 2011).

The operation in reading lessons of the learners under study might have been beset with reading and writing deficiencies. Brown (2005:26) purports that "reading is treated as one or more interrelated skills that deal with the related listening, speaking and writing skills." It can be assumed that learners in government schools might have had inadequate tuition in decoding fluency skills. According to Chard, Pikulski and Templeton (2000:10), "decoding fluency is of cardinal importance in that it unlocks the world of reading." This may imply that learners with reading deficiencies could also have writing and spelling deficiencies. The reading challenges of the learners in this study will be discussed in detail later in this section.

### **1.3 Possible causes of reading challenges in Bulawayo Central District**

Zimbabwe's economic downturn had numerous implications for the social and educational spheres. Families and schools were grossly affected as the economy dwindled and socio-economic status deteriorated. The causes of reading challenges experienced in Bulawayo Central District schools are described below.

### **1.3.1 Causes of Zimbabwe's economic depression**

From 2000 to 2006 the Zimbabwean economy underwent a significant recession. A report by the African Development Bank (2007: IV) summarises the economic situation in Zimbabwe as being characterised by “hyperinflation, multiple exchange rates, persistent fiscal deficit, low foreign exchange reserves, falling international terms of trade, negative interest rates and a build-up in external debt arrears.” Coltart (2008:2) argues that “every sector of the Zimbabwean economy, for example, agriculture, health and education, was destroyed.” The unemployment rate stood at over 80%, affecting all the important sectors, including health, agriculture and education. Episodes of hyperinflation and the depreciation of the Zimbabwean dollar had a significant effect on human capital, especially in the education sector as teachers left to seek employment in South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and Mozambique. Most teachers became cross-border traders (Munangagwa, 2009).

Apart from the problem of human capital in schools, the shortage of physical cash in banks affected the acquisition of teaching materials and the learner-to-textbook ratio increased. In 2003, the learner-to-textbook ratio at primary school was said to be 8:1 nationally in government schools. This implied that eight learners shared one textbook. In 2009, studies revealed that 20% of urban primary schools had a textbook ratio of 9:1 nationally, while 8% had no textbooks at all (Millennium Development Goals of 2010).

The high learner-to-textbook ratios may have inhibited effective reading development. Greenall and Swan (1986:2) contend that “effective reading means being able to read accurately and efficiently and to understand as much of the passage as you need to achieve your purpose.” The sharing of textbooks in groups as large as eight would not yield the above goals. The fact that individual learners have different reading paces makes the sharing of textbooks problematic as it would be limiting for the fast readers and frustrating for the slower readers. It would not facilitate effective reading comprehension for some learners. In addition, this situation does not promote independent reading. Independent reading is defined as voluntary reading (Krashen, 1993; Morrow, 1991; Short, 1995), leisure reading (Greaney, 1980), spare time reading, (Searls, 1985) recreational reading (Manzo & Manzo, 1995), and reading outside school (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 2010), in Cullinan, (2012). It is imperative for learners to practise independent reading as they usually choose material at a level of difficulty that they can read fluently and understand



what they are reading. Reading regularly and for sustained periods of time is likely to improve the learner's reading proficiency (Snowball, 2009).

In light of the inadequacy of reading material available, regular reading could have been a challenge not to mention reading for sustained periods of time. Many learners are unable to undertake the different types of reading mentioned above. Learners have to share the few texts available and specifically request them from the group leader or teacher. The learners are often reluctant to face the bureaucracy associated with borrowing books. Cooperative learning is the most common instructional method, with learners working together to share the reading responsibilities. This does not give learners enough exposure to print, and as a result, those from public schools may not achieve the necessary reading skills. On the other hand, the availability of reading materials to learners in private schools promotes independent reading, builds fluency, increases vocabulary and builds background knowledge (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 2010).

### **1.3.2 Causes related to learners' social environment**

The economic crises in Zimbabwe had negative effects on the social status of learners. Most families were reduced to low social status and increasing HIV/AIDS related deaths, as people did not adhere to balanced diets or have money for medication. A number of families were headed by children, especially females (Kanyenze, Kondo, Chitambara & Martens, 2011). There was also an increase in absenteeism in schools as some children became vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and eventually succumbed to the disease, while some had to divide their attention between school and making money to survive (DIDSHSZ, 2011).

With the demise of parents and caregivers succumbing to HIV/AIDS the supervision of homework for learners became minimal. Learners mostly affected had to forgo education in order to look after other family members. Those who continued with school had little or no supervision at home and lacked reading material. According to Close (2001), the amount of reading material in the home is related to the social class of the family and is linked to reading achievement and cognition level. A number of learners lacked reading material at home as their parents were either in the diaspora or had succumbed to HIV/AIDS. With no parents or guardians to provide reading material or model good reading behaviour, learners might have been greatly compromised in their reading development. It is argued that parents who read to their children model fluent reading, which

motivates them to continue reading in later years (Kennedy and Throng, 2010). It is possible that many learners in Form 2 (Grade 9) did not develop a love of reading, which may have hindered their reading development.

The government's 'Operation Murambatsvina' or 'Operation Restore Order' of 2005, which demolished some structures in towns and cities, further contributed to the crises. During the operation, it was reported that nearly 700 000 people in the cities across the country lost their homes, their sources of livelihood, or both (Kanyenze, et al., 2011). Thousands of people became homeless and had no food, water, sanitation or health support systems. This culminated in high school drop-outs and painted a bleak future for learners at government schools. UNICEF (2005) reported that, in urban areas alone, an estimated 30 000 children dropped out of school as a direct result of Operation Murambatsvina. The displaced children were forced to transfer to other schools, which disturbed their learning patterns.

The environment and conditions that the learners were subjected to may have been detrimental to them and would have affected what Vygotsky (1978) described as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Thompson (2012), reiterating Vygotsky views, explains the ZPD as the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving, and the level of potential development as determined by problem-solving under adult supervision or in collaboration with capable peers.

Vygotsky (1978) holds that the most powerful forms of learning take place when learners are kept in their own ZPDs as often as possible, and work together with a more competent peer, teacher or adult to finish the task. The premise is that the learners complete tasks jointly so that in future similar tasks can be completed without collaboration. This collaboration with others promotes imitation, which Vygotsky identifies as maturing psychological functions that are inadequate for independent performance. The absence of teachers at school and parents at home may have hampered imitation and collaboration.

### **1.3.3 Challenges in the Zimbabwean education system from 2006 to 2008**

Zimbabwe's education system was reported to be in disarray in 2008 as 8 000 schools had closed and an estimated 20 000 teachers had left their posts. Learning materials were in short supply

(UNICEF, 2009). With the deepening of Zimbabwe's economic crisis, the physical infrastructure at schools was near collapse. The brain drain, coupled with the inability of the public sector to deliver basic social services, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the cholera outbreaks, negatively affected the well-being of children in schools (UNICEF, 2008). These multiple crises eroded the livelihoods of children, and as a result, education was devastated at all levels. Non-governmental organisations and the United Nations Agencies confirm that 2008 was an irrecoverable year in terms of learning and represented huge gaps in the education of Zimbabwe (UNICEF, 2008).

Kanyenze et al. (2011) agree that the year 2008 was a wasted academic year. They argue that the subdued teaching and regressed learning between 2006 and 2008 resulted in low pass rates at both primary and secondary levels (Nkoma, Zirima, Chimunhu & Nyanga, 2013). The effect at public secondary school level was more obvious. UNICEF-SNV (2009) reports that in 2008 Grade 6 (Zimbabwe and South Africa) learner dropouts were as high as 19.1% and Grade 3 (Zimbabwe and South Africa) dropouts were at 13.6%. The implication is that the older learners found no reason to continue with education, as they were doing nothing most of the time.

A previous programme of withdrawing learners who experienced challenges with reading from the mainstream language and mathematics classes was discarded (Mutepfa, Mpofu & Chataika, 2007). During these disruptive years, learners were left to struggle in the mainstream language and mathematics classes. Teachers would treat the entire class as being at the same level although some learners operated at different cognitive levels and needed extra support to learn (Nkoma, 2011). Furthermore, struggling learners had to use the same reading materials and follow the same course of study as those with greater abilities.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE) froze staff of posts and promotions. This put the teaching staff under great stress as they had to work under strenuous conditions due to unreasonably high workloads. The quality of work was compromised as teachers had to put up with difficult learner behaviour and bureaucratic management concerns. Schools were often run without substantive heads, and teachers had to liaise with the district supervisors (Chireshe & Shumba, 2011). School heads interviewed in 2008 revealed that, generally, learners may have attended school for only half of the academic year at public secondary schools. Of the teachers

interviewed in urban public schools, 91.7% indicated that there was no meaningful teaching and learning in 2008 (UNICEF-SNV, 2009).

It seems that the social and economic challenges in education during Zimbabwe's economic crises resulted in learners, particularly those in government schools, being disadvantaged in their reading development. The reading proficiency of learners who were in Grade 0 (Zimbabwe) or R (South Africa) at the time may have been compromised. It is argued that learners with poor decoding skills are not motivated to read and their failure to read limits the development of their reading skills and achievement. It is also true that if decoding skills are affected at an early stage, this affects learners' reading proficiency and success at school (Kennedy & Trong, 2010).

Thus, learners who were in Grade 0 or R in 2008 might still be experiencing reading and learning difficulties due to the academic challenges experienced at the time.

#### **1.4. Responses to learners' reading challenges**

The Zimbabwe Ministry of Education attempted to redress the perceived reading performance lag using interventions such as the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) and the Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP) described below.

##### **1.4.1 Intervention programmes**

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE) in conjunction with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) introduced the Early Reading Initiative (ERI) programme (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2012). The ERI was to address the challenges teachers experience in the teaching of pre-reading skills at Early Childhood Development (ECD) A and B levels (equivalent to Grade 0 or Grade R). The ERI programme was initiated due to the learning gaps perceived to have affected the results of Grade 7 and ordinary-level examinations. The incompetence in reading shown by the learners was perceived to have been inherited from early grades. Supervisors and some teachers were trained in the implementation of the programme. The ERI implementation was intended to equip teachers and supervisors at infant schools with strategies for the effective teaching, supervision and assessment of pre-reading and pre-writing skills for ECD A and B learners.

Interventions at secondary level started in 2012 in Manicaland Province when supervisors and teachers selected from provinces were seconded for training. Seminars on the Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP) were conducted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The PLAP was to address the achievement gaps mainly caused by the regressed learning and subdued teaching between 2006 and 2008 (Nkoma, 2014). The programme required that the last point of success of the learner be established through the administration of achievement tests. After the assessment, the learners were assigned different grade levels within the class for instructional purposes (Muzawazi & Nkoma, 2011). This implies that the teachers had different grade levels within the classes they taught. Hence, the described interventions were beset with implementation challenges, some of which are discussed below.

#### **1.4.2 Limitations of the intervention programmes**

The PLAP's success was hindered by a number of issues, such as the attitude of learners, teachers and parents. The learners suffered from low self-esteem as they were ashamed of being included in PLAP levels that were below their current level of learning.

Administratively, the programme was beset with challenges as administrators left the programme in the hands of the teachers. Teachers who were not inducted in the programme developed cold feet and resisted its implementation, arguing that they did not have the skills necessary to implement the programme (Mukoko & Mdlongwa, 2014).

Furthermore, parents of the learners who were included in the lower levels of learning showed their unhappiness by accusing school heads of disadvantaging their children by preventing them from taking part in sports, even when they had paid sports levies (Dube, 2015). The programme took place in the afternoons when all learners were supposed to be engaging in sporting activities.

Some of these concerns were understandable. For example, with teachers having been absent from duty for quite a while without any form of in-service training, it was quite challenging for them to modify instruction. In addition, having individual instruction in large classes would be futile as the teacher would have had to prepare learners for public examinations that did not take cognisance of individual abilities. This explains why the programme, which was pioneered in Mutare (Nkoma, 2014), was met with resistance from both teachers and parents.

Furthermore, the PLAP slowed down due to a lack of funding by the MOPSE, without having any substantial influence or impact on the learners' reading abilities. The challenges that the learners may have faced might still be present. Moreover, these learners are soon to write their Ordinary-level examinations. This would mean that learners would write the examinations without any intervention to make up for the lost learning and teaching time. Thus, there needs to be an investigation into their reading proficiency to ascertain the exact levels and to advocate for vigorous performance redress.

### **1.5 Preliminary overview of the reading process**

This section provides a glimpse of the literature review and briefly describes reading together with factors that influence its proficiency. A detailed discussion is undertaken in Chapter 2.

Tamrackitkun (2010:14) asserts that “the earliest definition of reading can be traced back to Huey (1908).” Huey’s focus was on the process used to gain information from printed material and also on the means by which the mind takes note of printed words. Huey’s definition can be compared to that of Thorndike (1917), who asserts that reading is characterised by reasoning, and that it is an active process similar to problem-solving (Tamrackitkun, 2010). The definitions above are concerned with the interpretation of the written word, yet it has been discovered that there are many issues at play when one is reading. The definitions therefore have shortcomings, which have given rise to models that find reading to involve more than interpreting written symbols.

Goodman (1971) characterises the reading process as one of sampling, predicting, testing and confirming, which he refers to as a ‘psycholinguistic guessing game’. In this ‘game’ the reader reconstructs, as best as he/she can, a message which has been encoded by a writer. According to Grabe and Stoller (2011) the reader uses the written symbols together with other skills/abilities to comprehend a text. Some learners in the schools in this study may not be applying these skills. They may fail to interpret, predict and confirm the meanings of what they are reading. They may fail to apply background knowledge or they may read parts of the texts and ignore difficult words. As a result, their interpretation of the text may be distorted.

Later definitions, such as that provided by the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) state that reading is mastering a set of skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and

comprehension. These definitions are concerned with the reader's ability to sound letters, whether single-letter sounding or letter-sounding patterns involving more than one letter and more than one sound (phonics). In addition, it is concerned with readers being able to distinguish separate sounds in words (phonemic awareness). For example, the word *car* has three sounds, though one hears two sounds, those of /k/ and /ar/ (Weaver, 2000). In this case, readers should be aware of phonics and phonemes in order to sound the written words.

Furthermore, the NRP definition requires readers to be fluent; fluency being defined as accurate reading characterised by conversational and expressional features (Roxanne et al., 2005). It is argued that poor readers are likely not to understand the author's intended message, resulting in misinterpretation of the text. Learners who had inadequate tuition during the economic crises are likely to be inaccurate readers as some of them were not properly guided during the time. They are likely to have challenges with the last component of the definition under discussion, which is comprehension of what is read.

According to Pardo (2004) and Grabe and Stoller (2011), comprehension is the process whereby readers construct meanings by interacting with the text. They also contend that comprehension occurs when there is a transaction between the reader and the text whereby the reader brings to the text world knowledge and background knowledge to make sense of what s/he reads. If learners are faced with a text on a subject about which they have no background knowledge, comprehension is difficult. For example, when learners who live in a landlocked country and have no knowledge of the ocean are subjected to passages that deal with the ocean and sea mammals, they will have challenges in inferencing.

In addition, the process of comprehension is said to take place through a series of networkable connections known as schema (Narvaez, 2002). In schema theory, individuals organise known knowledge into categories and systems that is accessed as required (ibid). That is, connections are linked with what is read and what is known to create meaning. Furthermore, comprehension is said to be influenced by the purpose of reading which a reader brings to the text. Readers who are motivated to read are likely to work harder to build meanings of what they read. On the other hand, it is argued that readers who are less motivated are not as likely to work hard to build meanings of what they read (Boakye, 2012; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Pardo, 2004). This study is concerned

with readers who were disturbed by instability at home and in schools due to the economic climate. Such readers could have had their spirits dampened by the situation at the time and as a result could have been less motivated at school, let alone to read without the assistance of the teacher. Such learners may experience challenges in comprehension.

The definitions highlighted above indicate that decoding of written material, gathering what has been read, regarding it as valuable, reconstructing it, making sense of what it is, and relating it to one's background knowledge are all part of the reading process. The definitions further denote that reading is not only making meaning of written codes but also a process by which an individual is consciously aware of the target language and its grammatical structure (MacArthur, 1992). However, successful reading depends on a number of fundamental dynamics, including the reader's motivation and attitude.

It is argued that children entering school will differ greatly in their readiness to learn to read due to various socio-economic factors. Reading readiness is not only affected by the child's mental or cognitive age, but also by his/her general background, willingness to be part of a group, ability to listen, skill in talking and general level of all-round maturity (Kennedy & Trong, 2010). Learners in Zimbabwe's government schools are likely to have been affected negatively due to the home and school situation among other factors. Their reading ability could have been hindered by lack of resources, such as books and human capital.

## **1.6 Call for holistic intervention**

According to Boakye (2012), improvement in reading requires an integrated approach that encompasses cognitive, social and affective factors. Since reading is a cognitive skill that involves vision and cognition it is imperative that learners are taught how to conceptualise the words or symbols they identify (Geske & Ozola, 2008). Some learners under study might be able to see the printed words but fail to associate meanings with the words that they read, while others might fail to articulate the symbols or words they see.

It is argued that little is known about interventions for older reading learners with reading difficulties, and most researchers are focusing on readers at elementary level (Robert, 2013). Vaughn et al. (2000) give reading interventions for Grade 3 (Zimbabwe and South Africa) readers



and not Form 2 (Grade 9) readers. Robert (2013) outlines a corrective reading programme for Grades 3 (Zimbabwe and South Africa) to Form 5 (Grade 12) that targets learners who are reading one or more years below their grade level. Additionally, he finds poor readers lacking motivation and meaningful reading experiences and requiring a holistic intervention to correct the reading inadequacy (ibid).

## **1.7 Gaps in existing research**

The ability to read with comprehension has received much attention in literature. Most research focuses on linguistic processes for reading comprehension. Grabe and Stoller (2011:13) describe reading ability as being ‘complex [and] depending on tasks, motivations, goals and language abilities’. Their arguments are based on normal reading lessons and do not address problems peculiar to this study. Most research is on problems with readers operating at Grade 3 to 12 levels (Robert, 2013). The study focuses on learners that skipped Grade 1 (Zimbabwe and South Africa) and were automatically promoted each year despite the reading and learning gap this caused.

It is argued that learners who practise independent reading or are motivated to read, or have teachers to assist in their reading, have minimal challenges in their reading achievement (National Reading Panel, 2000). The learners in the study lacked the teachers’ orientation and guidance, which Tamrackitkun (2010) contends is crucial in guiding readers to gain vocabulary, knowledge and fluency. Vaughn et al. (2000) describe a weak reader as one who reads slowly, does not enjoy reading and does not read much. They mostly address issues of learning disabilities such as dyslexia. Readers in this study have no disabilities but skipped some aspects of their reading development. The experiences of the learners in the study are peculiar in that no group of learners had undergone the experience and educational upheaval that these learners went through and therefore they need to be investigated in their specific context.

The aim of this study is therefore to determine the reading proficiency of learners in Bulawayo Central District and the factors that influence their reading development in order to suggest appropriate redress strategies for the reading challenges. The main objectives set for the study are:

1. to determine the reading proficiency level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe,

2. to find out what factors influence the reading proficiency level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe.

The following questions were posed for the study:

Research question 1: What is the reading comprehension level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe?

Research question 2: What are the factors that determine the reading proficiency level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe?

## **1.8 Hypotheses**

The researcher has formulated the following hypotheses for the study:

1. Form 2 (Grade 9) learners are reading far below their cognitive level at government high schools in Bulawayo Central District in Zimbabwe.
2. Form 2 (Grade 9) learners are reading above their cognitive level at private high schools in Bulawayo Central District in Zimbabwe.
3. There are specific factors that influence the reading proficiency of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners at Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe.

## **1.9 Methodology**

A brief exposition of the research methodology, including the research design, population and participants, research instrument, data collection and data analysis are outlined in this section.

### **1.9.1 Research design**

A mixed-method research design was chosen, as the research incorporated questionnaires, tests and narratives as data collection tools. Quantitative aspects of the study might help establish the specific proficiency levels of learners, while qualitative data might offer themes to gain more insight.

Participants were drawn from four schools: two girls-only schools (one private and one government) and two boys-only schools (also one private and one government). The choice of the

schools was determined by the nature of the set-up. These schools were all single-sex schools offering single-session tuition, unlike other government schools, which offer double sessions. The researcher sampled 48 learners and 12 teachers from government schools and 22 learners and 9 teachers from the private schools.

The quantitative approach entailed collecting numerical information through the use of questionnaires that were meant to answer the second research question. Both teachers and learners were given questionnaires that consisted of a five-point Likert scale. The quantitative comprehension test was administered to learners from both government and private schools as a means to answer the first research question, which sought to establish the reading comprehension level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners. The qualitative approach took the form of narratives which were used to gather further insight into the information gathered from questionnaires.

Questionnaires were self-administered, as were the tests and the narratives. The researcher worked together with the teachers to collect the data. Data were analysed using t-tests for the comprehension test; questionnaires were analysed using the analysis of variance (AVOVA) and narratives were analysed using content analysis.

The methodology will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

## **1.10 Clarification of terms**

### **1.10.1 Ordinary Level**

This is the stage where learners that have had tuition for four years at secondary school sit for examinations to proceed to Advanced Level (A Level) before proceeding to tertiary level.

### **1.10.2 Single session tuition**

This is tuition given to learners from morning up to end of day, for instance, having academic tutorials from morning to afternoon and a session where they do sports in the afternoon and study sessions. The learners have eight hours of tuition per day.

### **1.10.3 Double session tuition**

A session where learners share resources, with the first group of learners having tutorials from morning up to midday and a second group coming from mid-day up to evening. Learners in this programme have reduced hours, six hours of tuition per day in each session.

### **1.10.4 Halo effect**

Cognitive bias in which the overall impression of a person influences how one feels and thinks about his or her character.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the reading challenges of learners who were in Grade 1 (Zimbabwe and South Africa) in 2008 and are currently in Form 2 (Grade 9). The research problem of learners' reading proficiency in Bulawayo Central District was influenced by the Zimbabwean economic recession of 2006 to 2008. Interventions that were administered by the MOPSE were outlined and their limitations discussed. Research aims, hypotheses, and the research questions regarding the reading proficiency level and factors that determine the reading proficiency level in Form 2 (Grade 9), were also outlined.

## **1.12 Organisation of the research**

The dissertation is divided into five chapters.

**Chapter 1** has provided a brief introduction to the topic, and the background to the study supported by the literature review concerning it. The problem statement, research aims and objectives, research methods and designs, as well as data collection and analysis were briefly discussed, and the chapter was concluded with a summary of the chapters.

**Chapter 2** presents a review of the literature relevant to the research. The definition of reading and the expected reading level of the learners are discussed. Some international perspectives on reading ability are discussed in comparison with Zimbabwean schools.' Factors that might influence reading proficiency are discussed. Models and theories on reading are also presented.

**Chapter 3** presents a detailed exploration of the research design of the study, together with research methodology, population and sampling techniques, as well as methods of data collection and analysis. Information pertaining to ethical considerations is provided.

**Chapter 4** presents the data and the findings of the study. The findings from the questionnaires, t-tests and narratives are presented with associated graphs and tables. The data are also interpreted and discussed in this chapter.

**Chapter 5** provides a summary of the study, limitations, as well as recommendations and concluding remarks.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter introduced the thesis by providing the background to the study, the problem statement, a brief literature review that highlights the challenges that learners face when reading in English, as well as some possible causes of these reading challenges. In addition, the methodology aspects and the aims and objectives of the study were briefly presented. This chapter focuses on related literature and discusses the concepts of reading and reading ability, theories of reading and the factors that determine learners' reading proficiency level in relation to the study. The theoretical framework underpinning the study is also presented.

### **2.2 The concept of reading**

The concept of reading has proven to be one of the most extensively researched language concepts in recent times. However, reading cannot be easily and simply defined. Most researchers have observed that reading is remarkably complex and involves many processes. The researcher would endeavour to present definitions of this multidimensional and complex phenomenon.

In defining the reading concept, focus will be placed on reading of English as a second language (ESL). It is imperative to acknowledge that the ability to read proficiently in the second language (L2) is influenced by the reader's first language (L1) reading proficiency. If "a reader's L1 proficiency falls far below a certain level, then the transfer of these skills and strategies to the L2 is prevented, even though the reader is a fluent reader in the L1" (Hellekjaer 2009: 200). Both L1 reading ability and L2 language proficiency are factors that affect L2 reading ability. A good L1 reading ability can only be transferred to L2 reading after readers have acquired a certain minimum level of L2 language proficiency (Byram, 2011). Traditionally, reading was viewed as a passive process in which readers decode the written symbols without bringing their own knowledge to interact with the text (Wu, 2005). This definition of reading had nothing to do with the use of one's own knowledge. Tamrakitkun (2010:14) asserts that "the earliest definition of reading can be traced back to Huey (1908), whose focus was on the process used to gain information from printed material and the means by which the mind takes note of these printed words." A similar definition was proposed by Walcutt (1967), who argued that reading is the ability to decode symbols and

comprehend printed material. Walcutt's definition takes into account engagement with reading material and motivation to read (Golden & Wilson, 2015). Furthermore, the above definitions advocate for phonics, seeing reading as becoming aware of sounds and grouping of sounds into what is referred to as phonological awareness (Denton & Otaiba, 2011). Phonemic awareness, a sub-category of phonological awareness, was seen as the recognition of individual sounds or phonemes (ibid).

Other traditional researchers, on the other hand, view reading as a concept that cannot occur without comprehension. According to Gough and Tunmer's (1967) simple view of reading (SVR), reading is defined as a product of decoding and comprehension (Randi, Newman & Grigorenko, 2010). Gough and Tunmer (1967) argue that successful reading requires proficiency in both decoding and comprehension. If one of these components is lacking, the reader is unable to comprehend the text (Eun Young Kang, 2015). Lack of comprehension skills will result in hyperlexia and readers with poor decoding and poor comprehension skills, which would in turn result in what Gough and Tunmer (1967) term "garden variety disability" (Eun Young Kang, 2015).

Researchers like Anderson and Pearson (1984) concur with the assertion that reading could not occur without comprehension. Panigrahi (2010), a contemporary researcher also viewed reading as a skill that involves construction of meaning from text. Similarly, Grabe and Stoller (2011: 3) define reading as "the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately." While Pollard et al. (2014) also accentuate reading not only as decoding of letters and words but drawing meaning from texts. Hence, for the reading process to be complete readers ought to understand what they read.

Another definition that extends from those mentioned above is proffered by the Michigan definition of reading (2000), which outlines the process of construction of meaning as a phenomenon that begins as soon as one is born, where one begins to use the five senses in a quest to understand the world. Drawing from Smith (1978), a cognitivist who founded a new school of thought on reading, the definition further posits that the ability to understand is innate, yet the ability to read text is not. Hence, constructing meaning involves accessing what the reader already knows, predicting what is coming and adjusting the predictions based on new information (ibid). Predictions are made once the reader has knowledge of phonics, vocabulary and syntax, as well as

information organisation, narrative structure and other text structures, such as the topic of the text, which would facilitate understanding of what is read. Reading is then viewed as an interaction with the reader's existing knowledge and the context of the reading situation (Patterson, 2016). This view is also held by Smith (1978:87), who argues that the basis of "comprehension is prediction and prediction is achieved by making use of what we already know about the world, by making use of the theory of the world in the head."

The above definitions are an attempt to explain the complex concept of reading. However, the definitions are insufficient for understanding the nature of reading as whole as they do not account for the variety of ways readers engage in order to read accurately. Neither do the definitions explain the many abilities readers should display as they read, such as the ability to make inferences and interpretations on what they read. The definitions are mainly concerned with the interpretation of written words, which has given rise to different theories that attempt to explain the concept.

## **2.3 Theories of reading**

There are various theories that attempt to explain what is meant by reading. However, I focus on the main theories that explain reading in terms of learning to read. The main theories are bottom-up, top-down, and interactive models.

### **2.3.1 The bottom-up model of reading**

The bottom-up model of reading, referred to as data-driven processing (Sheridan, 2015), the part-to-whole model (Stringer et al., 2011), or the phonics model (Chall, 1989), is considered to be the traditional theory of reading as was propounded by Flesch (1955), Gough (1955) and LaBerge and Samuels (1985). Its proponents argue that reading is driven by the text where the reader strictly processes reading serially, in a letter by letter form, leading to the recognition of every word through what is called phonemic encoding (Gough, 1971). Phonemic encoding is considered a key element of reading, where readers simply recognise and manipulate the phonemes (or individual sounds) that makes up a language (Anderson, 2002). Activities that are used to teach phonemic awareness include blending constituent sounds, where individual sounds are combined to make words, for example, /t/ + /e/ + /l/ = tell. Segmenting is also used as an activity of phonemic awareness where words are separated into constituent sounds, for example, /ʃ/ + /eɪ/ + /p/ = shape



(Kruidenier, 2002). These activities help learners to master sounds, which then make it easier for them to map graphemes onto these sounds in reading (Kruidenier, 2002).

A similar instructional programme that incorporates several bottom-up principles is that which emphasises the ability to decode or put into sound what is seen in a text (phonics). This is the part of reading which is concerned with the relationship between the sounds in spoken words and the letters used to represent them. Pardede (2010) describes phonics as the model that emphasises repetition and drills, like the audio-lingual method of teaching. On the other hand, Abraham (2002) argues that a stronger emphasis on phonics results in better word recognition at Grade 1 than a weaker emphasis on phonics. The argument is that a stronger emphasis on phonics produces better results in both word recognition and comprehension at Grade 2. Gough (1972) views phonics as the best predictor of progress for beginning readers as it links reading (decoding) to writing (spelling) and speaking (pronunciation) even if learners do not know the meaning of the text (Dambacher, 2010). In their paper Maddox and Feng (2013) indicate that results from their study showed that phonics instruction helped learners decode words more efficiently as they used the knowledge of phonics to understand how to read unfamiliar words. Hence, Maddox and Feng advocate for a literacy approach that incorporates phonics.

### **2.3.2 Implication and application of the bottom-up model**

Reading was previously considered to follow a mechanical pattern in which a reader creates a piece-by-piece mental translation of information in a text (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Skinner (2012) concurs, arguing that learning to read follows a developmental sequence where learners have to be able to learn the symbols that stand for spoken words. The learners' awareness of these sounds (phonemic awareness) contributes to their learning to read and write, as they learn to sound the letters and the words and become familiar with their spelling and pronunciation (Kruidenier, 2002). Extra teaching in breaking words up into their constituent sounds and connecting them to alphabetic letters and sequences of alphabetic letters improves learners' reading (ibid). Kruidenier also posits that children who are slow to learn to read are often also particularly insensitive to the sounds in words.

Overall, several studies indicate that the phonics approach is the most effective for word decoding and that it should be considered as a first choice in planning educational programmes (Marinelli,

Agelelli, Notarnicola & Luzzatti, 2011). Stringer et al. (2011) contend that early reading programmes that teach phonics systematically and in a challenging manner (not too easy or too difficult) produce better reading scores at age nine and that these improved scores tend to be maintained when the learner reaches ages 13 and 17. However, achievement gains are said to depend on the teachers' effectiveness and in particular on teachers' education and experience. Teachers who were not taught using the phonics approach are said to ignore the teaching of phonics as it is observed that teachers teach the way they were taught (Stringer et al., 2011). Furthermore, the teacher's closeness to the learner plays a fundamental role in achievement gains, especially if the child's parents do not have strong parenting attitudes (Marinelli et.al., 2011). There is also the argument that teaching effectiveness is much greater if phonics is taught in small classes in low socio-economic status (SES) schools (Abbeduto & Symons, 2008).

The bottom-up model is beset with criticism. It has been criticised for being insufficient and defective as it relies on formal features of the language, mainly words and structure. It is seen to result in reading that is rigid, linear and mechanical, yet reading is perceived to involve more than word perceptions (Kruidenier, 2002). The model has also been challenged for hindering readers' comprehension of larger units of the language as they focus on the sound of the words only. The readers' main task is to identify graphemes (symbols) and convert them into phonemes (smallest unit of speech sound) with the result that they are regarded as passive recipients of information (Pardede, 2010) who do not interrogate meanings but regard meaning as residing in the text (Langer & Flihan, 2000). Byram (2011) argues that readers do not depend on text information through bottom-up processing only.

To counteract the over-reliance on the bottom-up model of reading, a new dispensation emerged in the 1960s from the cognitive sciences, known as the top-down model.

### **2.3.3 The top-down model of reading**

The top-down model revolutionized the concept of reading. It emphasises what the reader brings to the text. Reading is meaning-driven and moves from whole to part. Hence, the model is also known as whole-language model (Stringer et al., 2011; Tamrackitkun, 2010). From this perspective, readers identify letters and words only to confirm their assumptions about the meaning of the text (Dechant, 1991; Goodman, 1967; Gove, 1983).

The top-down model was propounded by Goodman (1971) and confirmed by Smith (1978), both of whom view reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game. The model makes a distinction between meaningful learning and rote learning. The latter is described as the memorising of lists of isolated words or rules in a new language, where information becomes temporary and subject to loss (Ausubel, 1968 in De Debat, 2006). According to Goodman, the goal of reading is to construct meaning in response to the text. He argues that meaningful learning occurs when new information is presented in a relevant context and is related to what the reader already knows (Stringer et al., 2011). Goodman (1981), De Debat (2006) and Boakye (2012) all agree that at top-down level, the focus of the reading process is on the knowledge that a reader possesses. In other words, the reader is at the centre of the reading process. These authors further contend that reading requires interactive grapho-phonetic, syntactic and semantic cues to construct meaning. Readers sample the text for information and contrast it with their world knowledge, and in so doing make sense of what is written. Marinelli (2011) concurs with Goodman, stating that reading begins with the hypotheses and predictions (guesses), then attempts to verify the guesses by working down to the printed word. Having predicted what is being read, the reader uses prior knowledge to confirm, correct and come to some meaning. Marinelli (2011) also confirms Goodman's proposed five processes: recognition, prediction, confirmation, correction and termination. The reader interacts with lexical, syntactical and semantic knowledge of the language to understand what he/she is reading (Sanford, 2015). The reader does not only read the word but must quickly access his/her background knowledge about the word and apply the correct meaning depending on the context of what is being read (Kintsch 2009 in Sanford, 2015). Reading is said to be context-driven, allowing the reader to filter through the appropriate word meanings that fit the context while restraining meanings that do not fit (Smith, 2004).

Like Goodman, Smith (1994) questions whether the identification of meaning is immediate when reading. Smith argues that reading is bringing meaning to print and not extracting meaning from text. His premise is that the reader interacts with the text by bringing his/her background knowledge of the subject as well as knowledge of and expectations about how language works to the content of the text (Boakye, 2012; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Nunan, 1991). The proponents of top-down processing further assert that meaning does not lie solely in the print itself but interacts with the cognitive structure or schemata already present in the reader's mind (Sheridan, 2002). Before they begin their schooling, readers are said to have schemata (units of knowledge) on

concepts, objects, relationships, events, situations, actions and sequences of actions (Fontanini, 2004). Background knowledge is therefore used in reading comprehension and explains why readers without this capacity find it difficult to decipher a text.

#### **2.3.4 Implication and application of the top-down model**

Given the explanations on the top-down approach to reading, teachers can take advantage of the most useful methodologies associated with this approach. The proponents of the top-down model view learners' world knowledge and world view as important factors in interpreting the text. Learners can achieve this if teachers help them to recognise the knowledge that they already have about the topic of the text (Abraham, 2002). According to Doggett (2002) the teacher could provide learners with pictures and titles to illustrate the main idea of what is to be read. This will help interrogate the learners' background knowledge and thereby improve comprehension. Guided reading is also suggested as it will ensure sequencing of teaching that follows a phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension order, especially with learners at primary level (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). Learners need to be systematically introduced to print reading at elementary level, which Salah (2014) argues follows a carefully planned programme with fidelity, reinforcing and building on previous learning to secure learners' progress. A haphazard manner would not promote mastery of reading skills.

Though this model is thought to be an improvement on the bottom-up model, it is also beset with inadequacies as it centres on the premise that good readers bypass the letter-sound correspondence when reading. Instead good readers could also attend to letters or sounds whenever they are reading content about which they are uncertain (Marinelli et al., 2011). Marinelli et al. (2011) consider whole-word reading to include learning the grapheme-phoneme correspondence, where readers are said occasionally to use the bottom-up, data-driven approach to unlock words even if they are using the top-down model.

In light of the limitations of the top-down view of reading, Rumelhart (1972 in Liu 2010) proposed the interactive model that recognises the interaction of bottom-up and top-down processes of reading simultaneously throughout the reading process.

### **2.3.5 The interactive model of reading**

Propounded by Rumelhart (1972), Bar, Sadow and Blachowicz (1990) and Ruddel and Speaker (1985), the interactive model suggests that the reader constructs meaning by selective use of information from all sources of meaning (graphemic, phonemic, morphemic, syntactic, semantic – letter-sound-word-sentence-meaning levels) without adhering to a set order (Stringer et al., 2011). According to Rumelhart (1972), reading is at once a perceptual and a cognitive process which bridges and blurs the two traditional distinctions of reading. Grabe and Stoller (2011) concur that the interactive model of reading combines the key ideas of the bottom-up model with the views of the top-down model. Readers make predictions based on the text and verify them against what they know, thereby confirming or disconfirming their guesses.

Nevertheless, this reading theory has been challenged for its failure to propose operational justifications for the process of unconscious inference-making during reading (Davoudi & Moghadam, 2015). Similarly, it seems useful only where readers are competent in both phonics and background knowledge application and is silent on readers who are poor at phonics and syntactic or semantic knowledge.

The interactive view of reading was modified by Stanovich (1980, 2000), who added a feature to it. Stanovich (2000 in Liu 2010: 155) contends that “interactive models assume that a pattern is synthesised based on information provided simultaneously from several knowledge sources.” The proposal of the interactive-compensatory model was made to accommodate the gaps in the interactive model. Grabe and Stoller (2011:26) assert that in the interactive-compensatory model: “a) efficient reading processes are developed; b) less-automatic processes interact regularly; c) automatic processes operate relatively independently; and d) reading difficulties lead to increased interaction and compensation, even among processes that would otherwise be more automatic.”

The interactive-compensatory theory of reading implies that when readers encounter deficiency in any knowledge source, they would rely heavily on other sources. For example, readers who are poor at phonics-based reading might rely heavily on syntactic or semantic knowledge. Similarly, a reader who is poor at syntactic or semantic knowledge could compensate by using the approach of processing letters to sounds, to words, to meanings (Liu, 2010).

### **2.3.6 Implications of the theories for reading development**

Research indicates that learners do not often choose to read on their own, especially at elementary level (Cullinan, 2000). The models discussed above reveal that there is very little that learners at primary level can do on their own. Similar sentiments are held by Morrow and Weinstein (1986) in Cullinan (2000), who assert that very few pre-school and primary-school children choose to look at books during free-choice time at school. Yet children who engage in reading before starting school are considered to have more knowledge about the world (Byram, 2011). Such learners are envisaged to perform well academically at the end of elementary school (ibid).

Since reading is an interactive process, Gove and Cvelich (2011) opine that it should be taught systematically at elementary grades. A report by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2012) suggests that learners would master reading skills gradually, starting from simple skills and working up to complex skills. Moreover, explicit instruction in reading skills can make a difference (Grabe, 2009). The teacher can teach reading using the five elements of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) suggested by the National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel, 2000). Fielding and Pearson (1994), and Harding, Alderson and Brunfaut (2015) summarised reading instruction in a more synthesised manner, proposing the following strategies to be used in teaching reading comprehension:

- (i) Activating background knowledge
- (ii) Predicting
- (iii) Generating visual images
- (iv) Summarising
- (v) Self-questioning
- (vi) Analysing text for grammar (or story structure) elements (including narrative story parts such as character or events as well as the ways that content-area texts are organised)
- (vii) Making inferences
- (viii) Distinguishing important information
- (ix) Synthesising
- (x) Monitoring
- (xi) Learning to repair meaning

The primary years of learning are considered crucial for learners. Salah (2014) argues that learners who lack access to print at the elementary level are likely to experience a lasting negative effect on all their learning. Elementary school teachers ought to tailor their reading lessons to meet the learners' cognitive ability for success in reading. Furthermore, interaction with others (both adults and peers) in a wide variety of settings is considered an essential part of learners' language and literacy development (Biddulph, 2000; Verenikina, 2008). Consequently, as Edmonds et al. (2010) maintain, readers that lack interaction with adults and peers in their learning fail to construct appropriate meaning in texts. In their research, Edmonds et al. (2010) found that readers benefit from modelling and thinking aloud and that learners model their teacher, either by asking themselves questions in order to reflect on what is being read or by reading aloud what their teacher has read. Readers then use features like background knowledge to make inferences about what they have read. If afforded the opportunity to read a variety of texts, particularly books of their choice, learners are likely to be excited to read and develop a rich background knowledge that might assist in constructing meaning from texts (Moore, 2011).

## **2.4 Reading comprehension**

The construct of reading comprehension has been defined by Cotter (2012:21) who acknowledges ideas by Bellinger and DiPerna (2011). He asserts that "today reading comprehension is thought to be an active and intentional practice versus a passive practice as it was years ago." The pioneers of reading comprehension research believed that reading comprehension was a matter of mastering skills such as identifying the main idea of the story. However, recent research views reading comprehension as interactive (Grant, Golden & Wilson, 2015; Weaver, 2000). Garcia, Sampson and Linek (2014: 52) state that "the history of reading comprehension has run the gamut from oral reading to silent reading, from hornbooks and primers to basals and scripted curricula." The proponents further contend that reading comprehension before 1970s was merely for identification of the main ideas and distinguishing facts from opinion.

More recent research, like that conducted by the National Reading Panel (2000), defines reading comprehension as the mastering of set skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. In their study, Geva and Massey-Garrison (2012) argue that readers with poor decoding or comprehension challenges are likely to fail to understand the

author's intended message, resulting in misinterpretation of the text. This implies that readers who have difficulty with fluency might also have difficulty understanding the text.

Cotter (2012), on the other hand, views reading comprehension as a complex process of integrating information, making inferences and constructing meaning. This definition, though it acknowledges that the concept of reading comprehension is complex, does not outline the complexity of the concept, nor does it explain the decoding skills required to arrive at the sounds and meaning of the written symbols. A comprehensive explanation of reading comprehension is adopted from Grabe and Stoller (2011) and Harding, Alderson and Brunfaut (2015). These authors show the complexity of reading comprehension, which operates at two levels, the lower level and higher level. Reading at the lower level involves word recognition, where readers link written symbols to sound symbols. From sound symbols, readers work out meanings at word and sentence level using working memory. At the higher level, reading involves topic and world knowledge, inferencing, and building mental models on what is read (ibid). Readers also monitor what they read by checking whether it has been understood and finally synthesise and evaluate what they read. Reading comprehension becomes an active process rather than being a passive idea of working main ideas.

Pardo (2004) and Grabe and Stoller (2011) further acknowledge that in order for the reader to gain comprehension he/she poses questions throughout the reading process in order to monitor meaning. They contend that reading comprehension involves a transaction between the reader and the text in which the reader brings to the text world knowledge to confirm what is read and monitor meaning so that it is not lost. Young learners might not achieve this on their own without the assistance of the teacher. The teacher ought to be a stakeholder in the reading process to provide a stimulating learning environment consisting of a variety of print resources and artwork (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005).

The definitions given above strengthen the idea of interactivity in reading, where readers not only decode words but also display several skills. These reading skills do not develop naturally; the reader has to adapt the part of his/her brain that recognises images to be able to recognise written words (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five basic skills required for teaching reading comprehension: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Evanchan (2015) indicates that a learner's inability to perform any of these reading skills might lead to difficulties with the entire reading process in subsequent years, while



the opposite could be true of learners with a solid background in each of the sub-skills (Byram, 2011).

How teachers teach the five sub-skills of reading comprehension would ultimately have an impact on the learners' reading achievement. In their findings, Vesay and Gischlar (2013:294) claim that "the greatest impact on teaching children to read is the quality and skill of the teacher who is implementing the curriculum." However, from the results of the study, Vesay et al., 2013 reveal that teachers are most likely to have training in one or two of the sub-skills, not all of them.

Besides the five basic skills, reading comprehension is also influenced by the purpose for reading, which the reader brings to the text. The initial purpose might change depending on what the reader encounters as he/she reads and could be influenced by whether the reading is for studying for a particular examination or skimming to get the gist of the text (Snow, 2002). Readers' purposes may vary and as such, criteria for reading comprehension might also vary. Studies conducted on the purpose of reading indicate that the subject matter may impede the learner's reading if the learner finds it difficult to understand due to limited prior knowledge (Ness, 2009). Unless the teachers build upon the subject matter to unlock what is unknown to the readers, they might lose interest in what they are reading (Knoll, 2000). On the other hand, Richardson (2010) argues that learners are to be taught reading comprehension using the three-phase approach, where readers are guided in pre-reading, reading and post-reading strategies that would also promote sessions of interrogation of background knowledge, vocabulary and comprehension skills. Ness (2009) indicates that readers lose interest in what they are reading not because of text difficulty but because the instruction given by educators is narrow. Some educators teach reading comprehension as "discussing the text, answering the questions about the text and assessing learners to determine whether they understood the text" (Ness, 2009:74). Once readers become less motivated to read, they are likely not to work on building meanings of what they read (Boakye, 2012; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Pardo, 2004).

In addition, text features such as wording have a large impact on comprehension. Readers might fail to respond to questions from the text not because they have limited language or lack concentration but because their experiences to date have not yet enabled them to develop the particular forms of expertise required (Biddulph, 2002). Verenikina (2008) refers to Vygotsky, who had previously argued that the Zone of Proximal Development includes texts that are within

the cognitive level of the reader. Comprehension is attainable if the text chosen for the learners, has genre, vocabulary, word choice and surface features within the cognitive level of learners (Chaiklin, 2012).

Ebe (2011) consolidates the preceding views on text selection by asserting that the choice of texts should be within the learner's culture. She further contends that while it might be difficult to identify books that are relevant for the reader in all areas, finding books with some cultural relevance to the learners is important as it would help learners engage in reading comprehension. Reading comprehension comprises not only making meaning of written codes but a number of other factors should be incorporated to arrive at desired meanings.

Successful readers depend on numerous directions other than making meanings from written codes. Proficient readers use persistence of voluntary, goal-oriented actions (Buelens et al., 2011). On the other hand, Mwamwenda (2004) argues that the behaviour of a model will be imitated depending on factors such as reinforcement, which serves as motivation for learners. The premise is that for behaviour to be imitated or modelled, the learner has to be motivated; if learners do not see the value in the reinforcement of the activity, the behaviour is avoided. In the studies conducted by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) and their colleagues on the concept of reading instruction (CORI), it was established that learners who participated in CORI (instruction that focuses on enhancing motivation, self-efficacy, autonomy, value of reading, collaboration in reading) performed better than the control class. The results showed that learners using CORI had higher reading motivation and engagement than those in strategy instruction-only conditions (Wigfield, Gladstone & Turci, 2016). The assertion resonates with Dörnyei and Csizer's (2002) Ten commandments for motivating language learners. In one of the commandments they propose that teachers should promote learner autonomy in reading. The teacher becomes the facilitator and encourages peer teaching, group presentations and collaboration. Learners are encouraged to assess themselves on the attainment of goals they set for themselves. Medina (2014) also showed in her study that learners under CORI were motivated to read.

Reading comprehension as a constructive process is directly related to several other variables, such as the reader's prior knowledge, interest and motivation, and the strategies employed by the teacher. Moreover, teachers ought to be facilitators and help learners arrive at meanings for what they read by using the five basic skills of reading proposed by researchers (National Reading Panel,

2000). In addition to the comprehension issues discussed above, other factors such as home environment, SES and school environment might influence learners' reading development and reading ability.

## **2.5 Factors affecting reading ability**

Reading, as a complex process, is influenced by various factors such as home environment, SES and school environment. These factors can either facilitate or hinder reading ability of learners.

### **2.5.1 Home environment**

Studies have repeatedly shown that investment by the family in the form of home learning has a positive bearing on the child's early linguistic and cognitive development, and also leads to school success in reading (Matvichuk, 2015). It is also premised that environments that are rich in reading materials such as books and other printed materials, and where parents engage their children in age-appropriate learning opportunities, contribute positively to a child's reading prowess and behavioural regulation (Hartas, 2011). The argument here is that children grow to become competent readers in their teens (Antilla, 2013) if their parents and caregivers read to them at home and engage them in activities such as recitation of rhymes and songs (Senechal, 2012) and telling of stories and teaching of alphabet numbers and letters at primary and elementary level. Reynolds et al. (2008) and Colarocco (2012) also found that parental involvement in supporting children's learning at ages three and four is significantly correlated with higher reading and maths achievement at age 12. The results of the studies conducted by Colarocco (2012) further reveal that the more parents are involved in their children's academic activities, the more successful the children are likely to be in pre-kindergarten programmes. He further asserts that parents of successful children engage them in activities outside school, including frequent visits to the library, shared storybook reading and colouring activities. These activities set their children up for successful reading even at secondary-school level.

An earlier study by Cunningham (2009) described three types of home literacy environment: limiting, passive and active. He argues that in the limiting home literacy environment, the parent's level of education, school experiences or household income correlates with the child's literacy and language development, and there is a high likelihood in these families that the children will have reading difficulties as their parents have low literacy levels. In the passive home literacy

environment, he posits that the environment correlates with the parent's reading behaviours, such as reading for personal enjoyment. He argues that children in homes where parents read and write regularly might engage in discussions with them as they read to find out what the parents are reading, and they acquire rich vocabulary from these interactions. In the active home literacy environment, Cunningham (2009) posits that the parents make efforts to engage their children in activities designed to foster literacy and language development, where joint book reading is done frequently. Other studies conducted on home literacy environment indicate that books and book reading that expose children to words and ideas outside their daily experiences were among the most influential tools for expanding the reader's vocabulary (Hindman & Morrison, 2012).

The argument presented in this subsection indicates that the home has a great impact on the reading achievement of the learner. Children whose parents are highly involved in their exposure to reading are likely to achieve positive gains in their reading development. However, studies also indicate that the socio-economic status of the family could have a negative or positive impact on the learners' reading development.

### **2.5.2 Socio-economic status (SES)**

Several studies indicate that the family income seems to have an influence on literacy materials as well as behaviour and relationships in the home.

According to Noble, Farah and McCandliss (2006), there is a strong association between socio-economic status (SES) and childhood cognitive and academic achievement, including functional literacy. Another facet mentioned by Ngorosho (2011) is that SES is measured in terms of class and position, where class relates to social groups that arise from interdependent economic, social and legal relationships among a group of people. He further describes socio-economic position as the various components of economic and social well-being of an individual that differentiates him/her from different social classes. Wealth and income are the dimensions of socio-economic position, and in developing countries such as Zimbabwe, societies are organised on the basis of social position (Ngorosho, 2011).

The amount of money, time and energy parents spend on their children is considered an investment that has the potential to enhance children's cognitive and linguistic skills (Gershoff et al., 2007). Financial capital is regarded then as affecting reading prowess as parents with greater financial

means have better access to cognitively stimulating educational materials and activities that support literacy engagement (Hartas, 2011). The investment model also argues that there is a link between SES and disadvantaged children's behaviour (Forster et al., 2005). Less advantaged parents are thought to be less likely to recognise the low phonological awareness (the ability to recognise, combine and manipulate the different sounds of spoken words) or be able to provide the resources necessary to overcome challenges in phonological awareness (Noble, Farah & McCandliss, 2006).

SES is said to be strongly associated with many measures of childhood cognitive and academic achievement, including the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) which indicates a child's development in comparison to other children of the same age (Dexter, 2013). Hindman and Morrison (2012) acknowledge that the reading gaps at kindergarten level were mostly associated with a child's level of poverty. Children from lower SES homes are envisaged as having less reading practice before they begin their schooling (ibid). Similar views are held by Hoff (2013) who postulates that children from lower SES homes frequently have lower levels of language skills that the schools require due to less speaking and reading with parents. These children also tend to be more direct and less conversational in speech functions, and they tend to use a more restricted vocabulary and range of grammatical structures (ibid). This premise resonates with Bernstein's (1959) concept of public language, which he later referred to as the restricted code as it was typical of 'unskilled and semi-skilled strata' (Bolander, Brook, Watts & Richard, 2009: 164). According to Bernstein, people of lower class are somewhat limited in their use of adjectives and adverbs and tend not to finish sentences. In the study conducted by Capel, Leask and Turner (2005), there is evidence to signal the relationship between culturally rich homes and learners' achievement. In their study they found that well-educated, middle-class parents had a better understanding of the school system, (where to get information from, how best to support their children's schooling), and stand a better chance of maximising the opportunities afforded by the new educational markets. Class and poverty remain the main factors disadvantaging learners in their learning. However, arguments by Hoff (2013) propose that schools should welcome and respect all children and that extra support should begin early and be sustained so long as the children's skill levels place them at risk.

It would therefore not be surprising to find that learners from low SES backgrounds exhibit low reading proficiency levels, as their parents do not have the means to access opportunities that are available in educational markets.

### **2.5.3 The school environment**

There seems to be a close relationship between the school environment and reading achievement. This section will discuss the link between the school environment and reading achievement and evaluate the effects of the schools' cultural capital and climate, as well the effect of classroom management and library provision.

Importantly, findings by Costa and Araujo (2017) indicate that the higher the SES composition of a school, the higher the learners' reading achievement. Rich schools' cultural capital provides their learners with varied reading resources and as a result, promotes interest in reading (ibid). Research also indicates that schools with higher socio-economic resources might also bridge the gap between more or less advantaged peers as learners' cultural capital accounts for a greater part of reading score differences between government and private schools (ibid). Learners might have equal access to reading materials because of availability of reading resources at schools (European Commission, 2012). The school effectiveness research also suggests that school climate is another factor that explains variance in learners' reading achievement (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Drucker, 2012). The way teachers handle learners in a reading environment has a great impact on reading achievement. Sherblom, Marshall and Sherblom (2006) underscore an environment of support, encouragement, warmth and acceptance where learners are valued and have a sense of belonging. In other words, teachers have a great influence on reading achievement. Learners might be motivated or demotivated by the learning conditions in the classroom, which are influenced by factors such as staff turnover (Chapman, 2010). Thus, to improve reading achievement, stability of teachers and classroom management should be positive.

Classroom management is defined by Sowell (2013: 5), who acknowledges a definition by McCreary (2010), who views it as "the methods and strategies an educator uses to maintain a classroom environment that is conducive to learners' success and learning." Martins and Sass (2010: 122), on the other hand, define classroom management as an "umbrella of definitions that include learning interactions and behaviour of learners." More specifically, Sherblom, Marshall

and Sherblom (2006) assert that classroom management ought to eliminate disruptive behaviour to allow a greater educational focus that fosters academic achievement.

Excessively large classes and overcrowding can affect both the social and the instructional aspects of the classroom environment. Hannah (2013) contends that classrooms which have set up corners with various learning activities (such as theatre, where learners could act out sections from various plays they have read) would encourage learners to be hands-on with the activities. Real-world activities such as those highlighted above are said to instil motivation and promote reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). On the other hand, Stoller, Anderson, Grabe and Komiyana (2013) recommend that teachers should make age-appropriate print materials available to learners to borrow and read for pleasure. Donald, Lazarus and Moolla (2014) also propose that access to teaching materials such as textbooks, workbooks, handouts and reference books should be readily available to learners.

The principal sources of books for supplementary instructional resources and voluntary reading are in the library. A well-resourced and well-organised school library can fulfil many functions, including providing the teacher with sets of books as well as audio-visual and other electronic resources (Wyse & Jones, 2001). Learners can pursue their own independent reading if offered guidance on the organisational structure of the library by a trained librarian. Anina, Ogunbeni & Adigun (2011) point out that the use of a library is associated with reading for pleasure and motivates learners to read and develop good reading habits.

A study undertaken in the United Kingdom, whose slogan was 'Book Start', gave children a head-start in reading (Chidiebere et al., 2013). In the programme, every nine-month-old baby was given a book when visiting a health centre with their mothers. Children in the pilot school outperformed their peers in their baseline assessment tests, and later, in the key Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) reading assessment, Chidiebere et al., (2013). Another study by Ware-Brazier (2009) determined that kindergarten children taken to libraries by their parents could locate the front of a book and knew where to begin when reading, unlike those who never visited the library.

There is a correlation between library and reading performance, learners who accessed the library regularly scored higher in their subjects than those who did not (Fasola, 2015). Learners who miss the opportunity of getting in touch with books in their early years find it hard to acquire good

reading habits later in life, and their reading performance remains lower than that of those who accessed libraries (Owusu-Achew, 2014).

Finally, the school environment, school cultural capital, school climate, staff turnover, classroom management and the library are considered factors that can promote or inhibit learner achievement.

#### **2.5.4 Affective factors**

Affective factors such as motivation, self-efficacy and attitudes have been known to greatly influence reading development in learners (Boakye, 2014).

##### **2.5.4.1 Motivation**

Motivation can be generally defined as the enthusiasm one has for accomplishing a goal. In a learning environment, some learners are highly motivated readers who read to improve their reading ability, and others have low motivation and do not enjoy reading (Torres, 2010). The motivation construct is defined as the learner's eagerness and willingness to learn. Deci and Ryan (2000) in their self-determination theory, opine that innate psychological needs such as competence, autonomy and relatedness enhance self-motivation, and when thwarted, learners experience diminished motivation and well-being. The theory also acknowledges that people can be motivated because they value the activity or because there is strong external coercion, such as rewards.

Marinak et al. (2010: 503), on the other hand, define motivated readers as “engaged, curious to talk about what they are reading and able to read several texts at the same time; [they] look forward to new challenges, and value text choices and time to engage with print.” Mata (2011) sees motivation as goals or reasons for reading, and the reasons might be associated with task value, expectancies and self-efficacy. Vogel (2013) proposed four steps to motivate learners; these were attention strategies, interest and motives of the learner, confidence strategies that develop a learner's positive belief in a successful outcome and satisfaction strategies that reinforce extrinsic and intrinsic levels of effort.

The literature on reading suggests that motivation and self-efficacy are critical reading constructs that are likely to determine factors of overall reading achievement and lifelong application



(Applegate & Applegate, 2010). Boakye et al. (2014) describes how motivation and self-efficacy are best predictors of reading achievement among other affective factors.

#### **2.5.4.2 Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy, a theory proposed by Bandura (1997), is believed to play a key role in one's belief about one's ability to succeed in a specific situation (Nuttall, 2016). Amundson (2015) perceives it to be a personal belief about one's ability to learn or perform tasks at designated levels successfully. Similarly, Hedges and Gable (2016) define self-efficacy as one's perceived ability to complete a task successfully. These authors further contend that learners who identify themselves as skilled readers are likely to value the reading process, and practice regularly out of enjoyment. However, readers who do not identify themselves as competent avoid reading and any related practice, which can result in low reading achievement or grade level attainment (Hedges & Gable, 2016). This in turn results in low motivation and low performance and achievement in reading.

According to Hedges and Gable (2016), No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was aimed at improving reading. But indications were that despite efforts and an increase in literacy funding, many learners continued to struggle to achieve grade-level reading mastery. Some of the conclusions from the above study were that independent motivation to internalise the reading process were identified as determining factors in overall literacy achievement (Applegate & Applegate, 2010). The same literature indicated that struggling readers were already behind their counterparts at the start of school and remained behind unless successful intervention was put into place within the first years of their learning (Hedges & Gable, 2016). Thus, learners with positive perceptions of their reading are likely to have high self-esteem and self-efficacy. However, learners who remain behind in their reading might develop low self-esteem and self-efficacy.

#### **2.5.4.3 Attitude**

Reading attitude is defined by Crosby (2013) as an inclination to react either positively or negatively to any kind of reading. Furthermore, attitude is viewed in the same study as a continuum, with positive feelings at the high end of the spectrum and negative feelings at the low end.

Research also indicates that younger learners have more positive reading attitudes because they are more enthusiastic about beginning their reading journey than older readers (Knell, 2012). As learners progressed, findings in the study by the same author indicate that the initial effect dampens as they are confronted with more challenging reading levels. This means that as the tasks get more challenging, readers are likely to experience low motivation and develop a negative reading attitude. Knell (2012) asserts that the attitude learners held towards learning the target language was strongly associated with the amount of effort they were willing to expend on the reading task. Hence, learners' reading attitudes are positively linked to reading improvement.

According to the study by Moransky-Miller (2010), reading attitudes function as a causal agent in the reading process, where factors such as what the child believes about her/his reading outcome and what the learner believes about other people's expectations of her/his reading determines how the learner would approach her/his reading. Results in the study indicate that children's prior beliefs and cognitive-affective knowledge might affect the reading of the learner. Moreover, a learner who approaches the reading task with a positive attitude will be more likely to read even if the text has unknown words (Crosby, 2013).

Positive reading outcomes assist in the development of a positive attitude, whereas negative outcomes discourage further venture into reading, resulting in the development of negative attitudes (Lukhele, 2009). Learners are therefore to be helped as much as possible with models that will yield positive outcomes and promote positive reading attitudes.

In light of the above, the factors discussed might have affected the reading development of learners at government schools, whereas the same factors could have had positive effects on the reading development of private school learners. It is therefore prudent for teachers to understand how their learners have been affected by these factors in order to devise relevant teaching techniques to assist them.

## **2.6 Theoretical framework of reading**

In order to consider the factors discussed above and to understand how a child learns to read and comprehend the information they read, a teacher has to understand how these learners interact with the material so as to promote effective learning outcomes. In view of this, the researcher chose Coady's psycholinguistic model as a theoretical framework because it explains the reading process

within L2 reading and outlines reading components that are relevant from the beginner level, where there is a reliance on phonics, to a more advanced conceptual reading.

### **2.6.1 Psycholinguistic model of reading by Coady**

A number of reading models have been put forward in an effort not only to represent the reading process but to provide a paradigm on which aspects of reading might be tested. The researcher finds the psycholinguistic model of reading by Coady (1979) relevant to the study as it is designed specifically for second-language learners (ESL/EFL).

Coady's (1979) psycholinguistic model of reading is a follow-up to Goodman's (1967, 1971, 1973) psycholinguistic model of reading (Carrell & Eisterhold, 2012; Enkin, 2014). Coady's premise is that learners' background knowledge interacts with conceptual abilities and processing strategies to arrive at comprehension. By conceptual ability, Coady is referring to the general intellectual capacity (cognitive ability) of the reader (Randi, Newman & Grigorenko, 2010). This refers to higher levels of processing such as inference-making, sensitivity to the story structure and comprehension-monitoring (Randi, Newman & Grigorenko, 2010).

Coady describes processing strategies as various subcomponents of reading ability (Carrell & Eisterhold, 2012), which include grapheme-morphophoneme symbols, syllable-morpheme information (deep and surface), lexical meaning and contextual meaning. Coady puts emphasis on the role of background knowledge rather than the former factors describe when he asserts that "background knowledge becomes an important variable when we notice, as many have, that learners with a Western background of some kind learn English faster, on the average, than those without such background" (Carrell & Eisterhold, 2012: 555). According to Coady, background knowledge may be able to compensate for certain syntactic deficiencies.

He also contends that the subject of reading materials should be of high interest and relate well to the background of the reader, since strong semantic input can help compensate when syntactic control is weak (Coady, 1979; Enkin, 2014). In his view, Coady believes that interest and background knowledge enable the reader to comprehend at a reasonable rate and keep readers involved in the material even though it has syntactic difficulties.

It is argued that background knowledge contributes to reading more than the print on the page. Additionally, background knowledge is viewed as the circumstances; environment and setting brought to the text by the reader, as opposed to context, which is the circumstance, environment and setting created by the author (Lally, 1998). The reader brings to the task of reading a considerable amount of information and ideas, attitudes and beliefs. This knowledge, coupled with the ability to make linguistic predictions, will govern the expectations the reader will develop as he/she reads (Clarke & Silberstein, 1977). Skill in reading will depend on the efficiency the reader will have during the interaction of linguistic knowledge and the knowledge of the world (ibid).

### **2.6.2 Implications for EFL/ESL readers**

For readers to activate their background knowledge, pre-reading activities have to be directed by the language teacher in order to develop in learners' skills in anticipation and prediction for the reading of graphic material (Lally, 1998). Enkin (2014) concurs with Lally, arguing that formerly attained background knowledge, which he also refers to as schemata, contributes to Coady's theory as an integral component in that it leads to comprehension. He argues that readers might impose inappropriate background knowledge, and teachers are therefore to guide readers and give direction as they conduct pre-reading sessions. This will enable readers to bring to the reading appropriate meanings. The issue in this case is that, unless they are guided, L2 readers have challenges, not in fitting and providing specific background knowledge to what they read, but in projecting appropriate background knowledge.

Since L2 readers are required to have some language proficiency in order to activate relevant schemata, whenever learners fail to bring meaning to the text, it is often interpreted as having challenges in language processing skills, yet it may be that the reader has failed to project appropriate background knowledge to the text. L2 readers require collaboration in the form of engaging able peers or readers in instating appropriate schemata (Chaiklin, 2012). In addition, background knowledge can be activated if teachers are particularly sensitive to pre-reading activities that will engage learners in discussions that seek to match the background knowledge embedded in the text with the background knowledge possessed by the reader (Carrell & Eisterhold, 2012).

Furthermore, it has been discussed according to Coady's theory that meanings could be gathered from what is read if the text is of interest to the learner even though the text presents syntactical difficulties. Creating the desire to read in learners and building reading confidence are said to play a significant role in increasing reading motivation (Ashley, 2008). Similarly, presenting opportunities in the classroom that give learners reasons to read helps increase their motivation, in as much as choosing a text that interests them would allow them to base their choice on prior knowledge or positive feelings about what they read (ibid).

Teachers are therefore obliged to work out strategies that would help learners grasp the reading concept by taking advantage of the pictures that could be used to invoke background knowledge as well as brainstorming sessions on the title of the reading passage before it is read. Furthermore, teachers could use role play methods as these might also stimulate background knowledge on the passage to be read.

During the reading process, teachers could also institute collaborative sessions where learners help each other in coming out with topic sentences, supporting details as well as concluding remarks of what they are reading on. This might also help them motivate the learners as they share their discoveries.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has briefly dealt with different reading theories: bottom-up, top-down and interactive. The discussion was an attempt to give insight into how the reading process could be facilitated in recognition of the challenges that learners may have experienced from 2006 to 2008. From the theories that the researcher dealt with, it was noted that learning to read was expected to have taken place at primary and elementary level to Grade 3, and thereafter the learners are expected to read to learn. It is expected that, by Grade 3, learners have mastered the basic fundamentals of reading and are able to apply their reading skills across the curriculum. The home and school environments, such as the classroom and the library, as well as motivation and other affective factors have been established as contributing to reading prowess or difficulty. Given the Zimbabwean situation from 2006 to 2008, it is presumed that learners' reading development may have been affected or stunted due to some of these factors. The discussion in the literature review and theoretical framework

have been provided to set the context for an investigation into the factors that influence English reading proficiency of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in Zimbabwe.

The following chapter will discuss methodology undertaken to carry out the research.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research philosophy that informs the study, as well as the methodological aspects of the study, such as population, instruments, data collection, and data analysis. These methodological aspects are applied in seeking to establish the reading comprehension level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools, as well as the factors that influence the reading proficiency level of the same learners. The chapter also presents the research design used for the study, then explains the various methodological aspects, and concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations.

### **3.2 Research design**

A mixed-methods research design was used in order to provide both quantitative and qualitative findings to answer the research questions. Research design refers to the overall plan according to which the research is undertaken. Vosloo (2014) defines research design as operations to be performed in order to test a specific hypothesis and a given condition. On the other hand, Bryman, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt and Wagner (2011: 41) view research design as “a structure that guides the execution of a research method and the analysis of the subsequent data.” Research design, therefore, focuses on all the steps that are used to process and achieve the outcome of the research (Vosloo, 2014). Traditionally, the qualitative and quantitative research designs were viewed as two separate research paradigms until Northcutt and McCoy, as discussed by Boakye (2012), called for the reconciliation of the two in order to take advantage of the strengths of both for the benefit of a study. Creswell (2012) opines that neither the quantitative nor the qualitative approach is sufficient in itself to capture the trends and details of the situation, but that in combination, both the quantitative and the qualitative data would complement each other and yield a more complete analysis. In subtle terms, the mixed-methods approach combines both the qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to collect, analyse and integrate data using both research methods (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. According to Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) the convergence of findings stemming

from two or more methods enhances validity in the results, which Bouchard (1976: 268) previously observed as not a 'methodical artefact'. Questionnaires were used to complement the qualitative data, which typically cannot be generalised, and similarly, the inclusion of qualitative data from the narratives helped to explain relationships discovered by the quantitative data. By using a mixed-method design, the researcher aimed at employing deductive and inductive analysis in the same research study (Creswell, 2011), hence complimenting the numerical estimation with narrative description.

Quantitative data from questionnaires was used to answer questions 1 and 2 and qualitative data from narratives was also used to answer question 2.

### **3.3 Population**

In this research, the population comprised of four high schools in the Bulawayo Central District. According to O'Leary (2009: 87) population is "the total membership of a defined class of people, objects or events." Similarly, Magwa and Magwa (2015, 45), affirms that population is "the entire group of persons or set of objects and events the researcher wants to study." One important aspect of population is that, whether viewed as people or objects, conclusions reached from a research sample could be applied to the population (ibid).

Participants were selected from Form 2 (Grade 9) learners from government and private high schools as well as teachers that taught English in these schools. Two of the schools are boys' schools (one private and one government) and the other two are girls' schools (also one private and one government). The choice of the schools was influenced by their nature, in that the schools are within the same district and would be easily accessible to the researcher. Moreover, the schools have similarities in that they are single-sex schools and offer single-session tuition.

The government boys' high school (GBHS) and the government girls' high schools (GGHS) had a combined total of 490 learners enrolled in Form 2 (Grade 9) at the time of the study. The private boys' high school (PBHS) and the private girls' high school (PGHS) had a total of 220 learners enrolled in Form 2 (Grade 9). The choice of the form/grade was influenced by the fact that the learners involved in the study were in Grade 1 in 2008. It is assumed that these learners were



affected by absenteeism of teachers and learners, high teacher-learner ratio, lack of reading material and low teacher remuneration and motivation.

The choice of the form/grade of learners was also influenced by the research objectives that the researcher sought to achieve. The researcher sought to establish the reading level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners as they were in Grade 1 in 2008 and would have been most affected by the economic turmoil during that year. In addition, the researcher sought to establish the factors that influenced the reading proficiency level of these learners. It is expected that the government-run high schools would have been most affected by the economic turmoil of 2008 and learners in these schools would probably exhibit deeper reading challenges than those in private schools. Also, most learners in government schools were from low socio-economic status (SES) families, while those in private schools were from middle to high SES families. Reading resources in the private schools were also available due to adequate funding and low teacher-learner ratio. The researcher chose the single-session schools because they could be compared in a balanced way with the private schools, none of which operate according to a double-session format.

Teachers were also participants in the study to offer information pertaining to the factors of the research question that determined the reading proficiency of the learners. Female teachers outnumbered male teachers; 81% were female and 19% were male. This reflects the social structure of the Zimbabwean society, where professions like teaching and nursing are dominated by women (Kanyenze et al., 2011). The inclusion of teachers as participants was influenced by the fact that they were directly involved with the learners in the school environment. The sample consisted of 12 teachers from the English department of the government schools and 9 from the private schools.

### **3.4 Sampling**

A non-probability sampling technique was used, where the researcher used the sampling procedure to select a sample that does not involve random selection. The researcher selected the participants simply because they were readily available and convenient (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). Specifically, the purposive sampling technique was chosen and the researcher used her judgement as to who could provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study (Kumar, 2011). Furthermore, in purposive sampling, a specific case is chosen because it illustrates a process that

is of interest for a particular study (De Vos, 2003). Teddlie and Yu (2007) also point out that purposive sampling is sampling in which particular people or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be obtained from other choices. The purposive sampling technique would help the researcher compare opposite extremes of learners in the study so that a hypothesis could be generated about the results. Again, it was felt that the purposive sampling technique would help the researcher choose participants who were likely to provide the most comprehensive data for the study (Hewitt-Taylor, 2011). These would be information-rich participants.

Participants for the first set of quantitative data from questionnaires on factors that determine the learners' reading proficiency level was drawn from twelve (12) teachers from government high schools. These teachers were chosen based on the criteria that they taught English and that they had been teaching English in 2008. The private high schools chosen had nine (9) teachers that taught English. This was determined by the nature of the schools that had low enrolment with few teachers.

Participants were also drawn from a sample of 12 teachers from government schools and 9 were drawn from private schools to provide answers to the questionnaire based on the second research question aimed at determining the reading proficiency of learners. The teachers sampled had taught English since at least 2008.

A further sample of 48 learners was drawn from a population of 490 learners from two government schools. Finally, 22 learners were sampled from the two private schools. This sample was drawn from a population of two hundred and twenty learners (220). This was in accordance with Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2011) argument that 10% of the population provides a true representation of all the characteristics which make the population. The sample of learners provided data to answer the first and the second research questions by writing a PIRLS test, completing questionnaires and writing narratives.

### **3.5 Instruments**

The data collection instrument consisted of a learner PIRLS test, teacher and learner questionnaires (quantitative) and learner literacy narratives (qualitative).

### 3.5.1 Quantitative data

Quantitative data were used to collect numerical information. Learners were given a PIRLS test that was to answer the first research question. Questionnaires were also completed by both learners and teachers to answer the second research question.

#### 3.5.1.1 *The PIRLS (2011) test*

The Progress International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (2011) test was used to determine the reading level of the learners. The test was taken from Appendix B of the PIRLS 2011 document (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Drucker, 2012). Furthermore, the test was accessed and administered to learners without seeking special permission to use it as it was accessible in the public domain. The researcher selected a comprehension passage by Hohler titled ‘An Unbelievable Night’ and the researcher offered the scoring guides.

The PIRLS (2011) test is said to be set at a Grade 4 reading proficiency level, but the researcher used it for the Form 2 (Grade 9) learners, since the learners in the study were affected by the economic decline and may not have received the appropriate proficiency level for their grade. The tests comprised a comprehension passage, where learners were to read and answer seven multiple-choice questions that focused on retrieving explicitly stated information. The questions demanded little or no inferencing or high-level interpretation. The first seven questions constituted 20% of the total mark. Five sentences were given to learners to be arranged according to the sequence of events in the passage. The sequencing of events tested the learners’ ability to make straightforward inferences and constituted 30% of the total score. One major question was on interpreting and integrating ideas and information and also constituted 30% of the total. Finally, a question was posed on the skill of examining and evaluating content, language and textual elements and constituted 20% of the total (Mullis et al., 2012). The initial seven objective questions are multiple-choice questions, which test specific knowledge and understanding of the passage by the learners, as the questions bear the ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ variety, which require working memory (Ozuru, Briner, Kurby & McNamara, 2013). Working memory has been identified as an integral part of reading comprehension, as it is an executive function responsible for keeping information in the mind (Moore, 2013). However, the objective test is “considered to be an efficient item format particularly for factual recall but also for assessing conceptual understanding”

(Johnston, 2012: 27). Seven multiple-choice questions tested the learners' ability to recall what they have read, which refers to the knowledge level in the cognitive domain of Bloom's Taxonomy, a fundamental cognitive skill that refers to retention of specific, discrete pieces of information (Adams, 2015). The questions on sequencing tested learners' prior knowledge, specifically their ability to use information which is held in long-term memory to answer questions. Learners reordered sentences to reflect the correct sequence in the passage and the whole item had to be correct for the learner to have shown evidence of the skill. Full marks were to be merited if the whole order was correct (Adams, 2015). The inferential questions tested reasoning, where learners were to use information from the text to determine additional information that is only implied by the text (Moore, 2013). The PIRLS test is said to be a direct predictor of reading comprehension among learners in Grades 3 and 4 (Mullis, et al., 2012).

#### *3.5.1.2 Questionnaires*

The questionnaires that were used for the study consisted of five-point Likert scales. A Likert scale is a device used to discover strength of feeling or attitude towards a given statement or series (Bell, 2010). According to White (2000), a questionnaire is regarded as a series of questions, each providing a number of alternative answers from which the respondents can choose.

#### *3.5.1.3 Learners*

Quantitative data were sought from learners in the form of five-point Likert questionnaires. In Section A, learners indicated their demographic information about sex, form and school. In section B, learners answered 17 questions on reading practices on comprehension. The questions solicited information on the nature of the learners' reading in class, and how their parents and the library assisted in this reading journey. Three questions on reading strategies were asked to establish the way learners were taught reading comprehension. The researcher instituted the questionnaire to expand the scope or breadth of research and to offset the weaknesses of the narratives as well as the PIRLS test (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah & Rupert, 2007; Magwa & Magwa, 2015).

#### *3.5.1.4 Teachers*

The researcher designed a questionnaire for teachers so as to gather information on the factors that, according to the teachers, influenced the reading proficiency of the learners. The questionnaire

was chosen because it provided anonymity and allowed the teachers to provide responses that might reflect negatively on the learners' reading development and on them as teachers. The fact that questionnaires were cost- and time-effective in soliciting data from a large number of people (Magwa & Magwa, 2015) also influenced the choice.

In Section A, the participants had to indicate demographic information that included age, sex, professional qualifications, academic qualifications, language teaching experience, classes taught and schools where they teach. Section B comprised 32 questions which were grouped into six categories: six questions on reading behaviour at school in 2008, five questions on motivation, six questions on home and socio-economic factors, and seven questions on school factors. The last three questions comprised one on teacher-learner ratio and two on top-down and bottom-up models of teaching reading.

Ethical considerations were adhered to. An informed consent letter that explained the purpose of the study, requested cooperation and assured protection of the results was provided with the questionnaire. Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of participation were also highlighted in the letters.

### **3.5.2 The qualitative data**

The qualitative data comprised written narratives from the learners. Kumar (2011) asserts that from a narrative, the researcher seeks to find out the personal experiences of the learners. In this study the researcher sought to find out the reading experiences of the Form 2 (Grade 9) learners as they undertook their reading journey from 2008 up to now. Cohen et al., (2011) view narratives as analyses that report personal experiences or observations bringing fresh insights to often-familiar situations.

Learners were given the topic, 'My Reading Journey', where they narrated how they learned how to read, what reading guidance they got from teachers, parents and other family members, and what influence the library had on their reading development. They were also required to narrate what support systems were available to them and how the support systems helped them learn how to read. Furthermore, learners were to mention who and what motivated them to read and the grade at which they were taught to read. They were also required to mention situations and people that

may have hindered or facilitated their reading development. The narratives were to give a description of the learners' reading experience from the learners' point of view (Creswell, 2011).

The narratives were intended to find out who and what influenced the learners in their reading development, in order to establish the factors that determined their reading proficiency. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) contend that narratives give crucial and detailed reports on the events in question. The various instruments used for the study and discussed above are presented in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: A breakdown of research instruments and participating schools**

<b>PRIVATE SCHOOLS</b>	<b>GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS</b>
<b>PIRLS 2011TEST (Learners)</b>	<b>PIRLS 2011TEST (Learners)</b>
<b>QUESTIONNAIRE (Learners) (Teachers)</b>	<b>QUESTIONNAIRE (Learners) (Teachers)</b>
<b>NARRATIVES (Learners)</b>	<b>NARRATIVES (Learners)</b>

### **3.6 Data collection procedures**

#### **3.6.1 PIRLS test**

The same learners who wrote the narratives and completed the questionnaires also wrote the PIRLS reading comprehension test. Teachers who taught the learners were the ones who administered the test in a double period to allow for ample time for reading and answering of the questions. The PIRLS reading comprehension test papers were distributed to 29 learners at the GGHS, which constituted 10% of the population. Nineteen PIRLS reading comprehension test were distributed to GBHS, which constituted 10% of the population and making a total of 48 PIRLS test papers written by government schools learners. A further PIRLS reading comprehension test was distributed by teachers to 12 learners from PGHS and 10 learners from PBHS. All in all, 22 PIRLS tests papers were distributed to private schools. Upon completion of the test, the researcher collected a total of 70 PIRLS test papers from both schools.

### **3.6.2 Questionnaire for learners**

Questionnaires were given to the teachers to distribute to the Form 2 (Grade 9) learners. These teachers supervised the exercise, and after completion, collected and sent the tests to the researcher. This was to allow learners to complete the questionnaire in the learning environment and avoid bias or the halo effect (McKistry et al., 2004) which would have been relevant if the tests were distributed by the researcher. Twenty-nine questionnaires were distributed and collected from GGHS learners. Nineteen of the 20 questionnaires distributed to GBHS learners were completed and collected, making a total of 48 questionnaires from government schools.

Twenty-two questionnaires were distributed by the teachers who taught English at private schools, 12 of which were distributed to and collected from the PGHS and ten of which were distributed to and collected from the PBHS. The completed questionnaires amounted to 70 from all schools. Teachers were helpful as they encouraged the learners to complete the questionnaires.

The questionnaires were completed during a single period. However, the completion of the questionnaires and the writing of the narratives took place on two separate days. Permission was sought from the parents as well as from the heads of the schools before the collection of data.

### **3.6.3 Questionnaire for teachers**

The researcher requested the teachers in the English departments to participate in the completion of the questionnaire. Ten questionnaires were distributed to the GGHS, seven of which were completed. Five questionnaires were distributed to the GBHS and all were completed, bringing the number of questionnaires for teachers at government schools to 12. The researcher distributed five questionnaires to the PGHS, all of which were completed, while of the five distributed to the PBHS, only four were completed. The number of questionnaires received from all schools stood at 21.

A cover letter was given to each participant explaining the procedure for the completion of the questionnaire. Most of the teachers had been teaching since at least 2008.

### **3.6.4 Narratives**

The narrative question was distributed during a single period in each of the schools and administered by the teachers who taught the class, while the researcher observed and collected the scripts after the exercise was completed. Learners who participated had permission from their parents or guardians. Twenty-nine learners from the GGHS wrote the narrative and 19 learners from GBHS did likewise. In all, a total of 48 learners from two government schools participated in the narrative write-up. Learners volunteered to sit for the PIRLS test, complete the questionnaire and write narratives on their reading development. Twelve girls and ten boys participated from the PGHS and PBHS respectively, making a sample of 22 learners who voluntarily opted to do the task with their parental consent. Teachers also helped in administering the narratives.

## **3.7 Data analysis**

### **3.7.1 PIRLS**

The researcher used the PIRLS (2011) comprehension test by Hohler, titled ‘An Unbelievable Night’, to analyse the results obtained in the test by learners. The questions were awarded scores as follows,

1. Retrieving explicitly stated information: 20%
2. Making straightforward inferences: 30%
3. Interpreting and integrating ideas: 30%
4. Examining and evaluating content, language and textual elements: 20%

Based on the scores, the researcher grouped performances in terms of low, average and higher achievement as follows for analysis:

0–20%: First tier of low achievement

21–49%: Second tier of low achievement

50–60%: Average achievement

61–74%: First tier of higher achievement

75–100%: Second tier of higher achievement



The above scores measured learners' reading comprehension level. The t-test was also used to evaluate the mean differences between the schools under study. This was to determine whether there was a statistical difference between the two groups of schools being compared.

### **3.7.2 Questionnaires**

The survey questions were distributed to both teachers and learners in order to determine factors influencing reading proficiency and SPSS software were used to analyse the data. Standard deviation was used as a measure of dispersion to establish the extent of variability.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also used to detect if there was any variation of achievement in reading in the different schools. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to describe the statistics involved and find out if different school types performed differently.

### **3.7.3 Narratives**

The narratives written by learners were analysed to determine the relationship between learners' reading journey since they began to read and their reading proficiency. Content analysis was used. The themes that emerged in the learners' narratives were used by the researcher to establish the factors that influenced their reading proficiency. In analysing the narratives, the researcher read and documented the pre-set themes according to the literature and the emerging themes, as they surfaced in the narratives, and categorised them. The number of times a specific theme was evident in all the narratives was calculated as a percentage by dividing it by the number of narratives and multiplying by 100.

The research questions, the instrument used to collect data, the corresponding data and the analysis are provided in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Research questions, corresponding instrument and data analysis**

<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>INSTRUMENT</b>	<b>DATA</b>	<b>ANALYSIS</b>
1. What is the reading comprehension level of Form 2 Learners in Bulawayo Central District government and private schools in Zimbabwe?	PIRLS (2011) TEST (Learners)	QUANTITATIVE	T test Descriptive and inferential statistics
2. What are the factors that determine reading proficiency in learners?	QUESTIONNAIRES (Learners) (Teachers)	QUANTITATIVE	ANOVA Descriptive and inferential statistics
2. What are the factors that determine reading proficiency in learners?	NARRATIVES (Learners)	QUALITATIVE	Content analysis

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Prior to commencing data collection, informed consent was sought from the participants as required by twenty-first century research ethics. In addition, Akaranga and Makau (2016) enunciate that the researcher has to “refrain from referring to respondents by their names or divulging any other sensitive information about a participant”. Ethical clearance was obtained from the ethics committee of the Humanities Faculty of University of Pretoria. Permission was sought from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in Zimbabwe, in liaison with the Provincial and District Officers to grant the researcher permission to carry out the research. Permission was granted on the condition that the researcher provides a copy of the final report of the research to the Provincial Education Director. Consent was also sought from the heads of the four schools.

Informed consent letters were sent to parents requesting their permission to allow their children to participate in the study. The letters spelt out the nature of the study and the activities that the children were to engage in. The researcher also indicated in the letter that participation by their children was voluntary and confidential, that information collected from learners would be kept in a secure location and that the results of the study might be published or presented at professional

meetings. Parents were assured that the anonymity of their children would be preserved, as the learners' identity is not revealed anywhere in the research instruments. The learners were not required to write their names and had the right to withdraw from the study should they wish to do so. Parents were asked to append their signatures to the consent letter to approve or disapprove.

Assent letters for learners and consent letters for teachers were also issued with similar requests to those made to the parents. Learners and teachers were requested to partake in the study voluntarily and without revealing their identities so that the information remained anonymous and confidential. At the end of the letters, there was an assent statement that the participants were to sign to indicate their willingness or unwillingness to participate. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from participating at any time should they wish to do so.

Furthermore, the researcher included introductory remarks that guided learners and teachers on how to complete the research tasks. The value of their participation was also highlighted.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The methodology and research design for the study have been expounded in this chapter. The researcher chose a mixed-method design in order to combine both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The participants were from both government and private schools in Bulawayo Central District. The researcher chose the schools as they presented similar ideologies. All four schools were single-sex schools and operated in a single-session learning environment.

Participation from both learners and teachers was voluntary and consent was sought from the parents of learners first. Learners that were in Form 2 (Grade 9) were chosen for they were in Grade 1 in 2008 and were perceived to have been most adversely affected by the economic turmoil in their reading development.

Learners wrote a comprehension test (PIRLS 2011) to determine the reading comprehension level of this cohort of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners. Learners and teachers also completed questionnaires to determine the factors that influenced learners' reading proficiency. Finally, learners wrote narratives on how they were taught to read from the time they started school up to now. This was to reveal factors that determine reading proficiency and to confirm or refute the information in the tests and the questionnaires.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS software. Data from the tests were analysed using the t-test to determine any correlation of the scores between government and private schools.

The qualitative data were analysed using content analysis according to pre-set and emerging themes. Table 3.2 presents the instrument, data and corresponding analysis for each research question. The next chapter presents the findings of the research.

## **Chapter 4: Data presentation and discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the methodological aspects of the study. These included the research design, participants, research instruments, data collection and analysis procedures. This chapter presents the data and a discussion of the findings. The data consisted of a quantitative analysis of the learners' performance on the comprehension test, responses to questionnaires from learners and teachers, as well as qualitative analysis of learners' narratives. The comprehension test was used to determine the reading proficiency level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe, and the questionnaires sought to address the second research objective that aimed at finding out the factors which influence the reading proficiency level of Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in the same district. The narratives were an attempt to provide an in-depth understanding of the learners' development, as well as their writing abilities. The chapter is organised in the order of the research questions and therefore presents and analyses the test results, questionnaire responses and the narratives. Each data set is analysed separately, that of learners and that of teachers. The chapter concludes with an integration of all data sets.

### **4.2 The socio-demographic characteristics of the learners**

This set of data was intended to describe variables of the sample and to assess if there it had any influence on the research findings. The demographic data consisted of 70 learners: 29 (42%) females and 19 (27%) males from government schools; and 12 (17%) females and 10 (14%) males from private schools. The learners were asked to indicate their socio-demographic characteristics, including gender and school type attended. The detailed demographic information is given in Table 4.1.

<b>Table 4.1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the learners</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Gender	Male	29	41
	Female	41	59
	<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>
Type of school	Government school (Girls)	29	42
Attended	Government school (Boys)	19	27
	Private school (Girls)	12	17
	Private school (Boys)	10	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Participants were voluntarily drawn from the school types as described in Chapter 3. There were roughly the same numbers of female learners as males attending both school types, yet more females than males volunteered. Gender is not an aspect of this research; hence, it will not be discussed further.

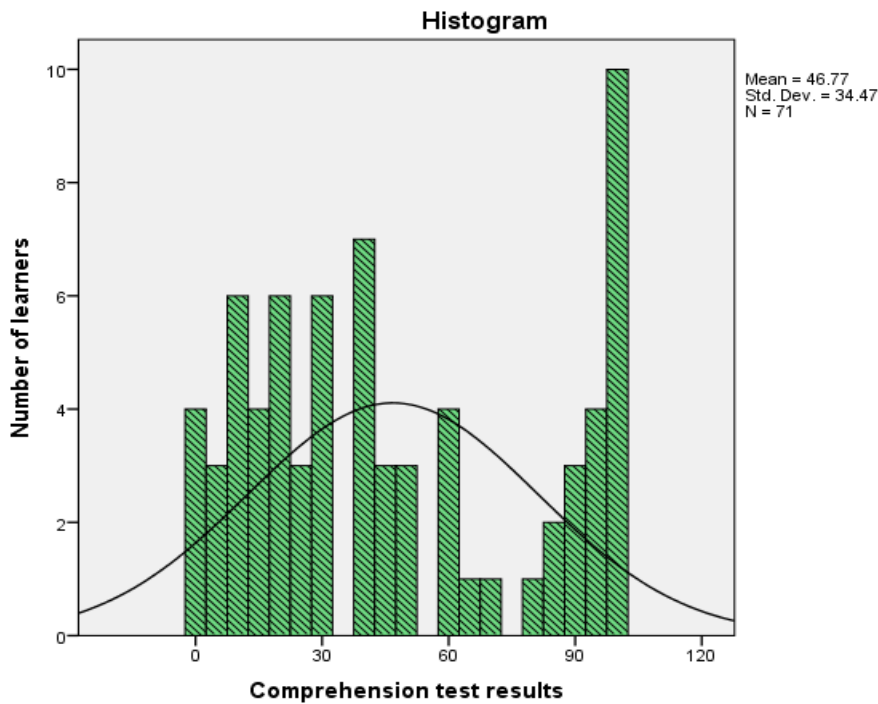
### **4.3 Quantitative analysis of the learners' comprehension test**

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, learners were given a comprehension test (PIRLS 2011), consisting of four sections (comprehension, sequencing, interpreting, and integrating and evaluation). The test was marked by the researcher and validated by one of the teachers. Since this exercise was voluntary and had to be consented to by parents, only 22 learners from the private schools and 48 learners from the government schools wrote the test. The descriptive statistics of the comprehension test, the independent t-test and ANOVA results are presented in the following subsections.

### 4.3.1 Descriptive statistics of the comprehension test

From a sample size of 70 learners from both government and private schools, within a range of 0% to 100%, the mean score was 47.77% and the median score was 40%. The overall mean score of 47.77% was below average. The standard deviation of 34.47% and the coefficient of variation of 73.7% showed that there is a lot of variability between the scores as the coefficient of variation is far from zero.

Using the empirical rule, which provides a quick estimate of the spread of data in a normal distribution, about 68.26% of learners had their average score ranging from 12.3% to 81.2% ( $\pm$  one standard deviation from the mean). This shows that there is high inconsistency in the performance of the learners. This is shown in Figure 4.1, which presents the results of the comprehension test for all the learners in both private and government schools.

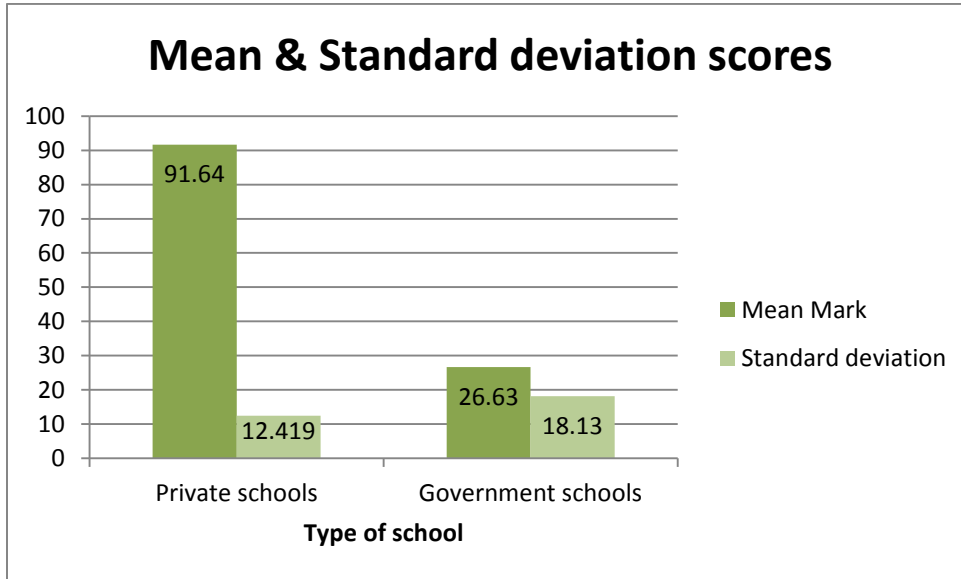


**Figure 4.1: Comprehension test results**

The histogram shows that the highest peak was at 100%. Ten of the learners scored 100%. However, the majority (63%) of the learners got marks below 50%, indicating that the distribution was positively skewed. Fourteen per cent of the learners got marks from 90% to 100%.

### 4.3.2 Descriptive statistics for comprehension test by type of school

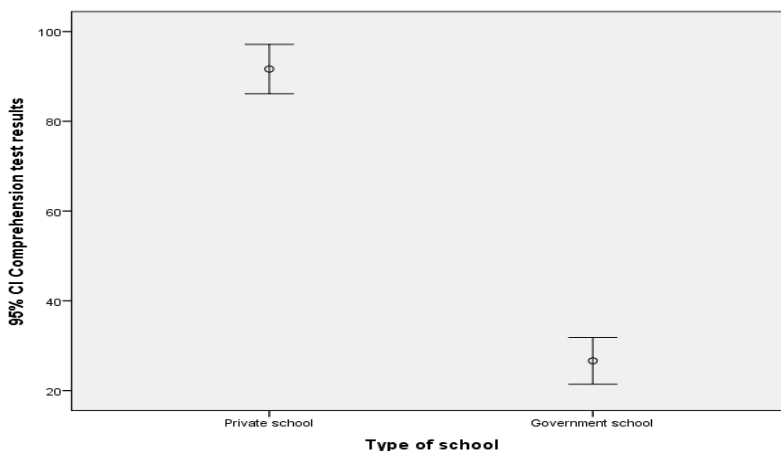
In terms of type of school attended, the average mean and standard deviation scores were calculated and the results are shown in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2: Mean and standard deviation results by type of school**

The performance difference in the comprehension test between private school learners and government school learners was significant. The private school learners had an average of 91.64% compared to 26.63% for government school learners. Performance by government school learners was below average and the standard deviation was wide, indicating that the scores were scattered away from the mean. The confidence interval error bars in Figure 4.3 show the non-overlap of the two categories in performance by the learners from the two school types in the comprehension test.





**Figure 4.3: Error bars for performance in comprehension test by type of school attended**

The error bar shows the confidence interval to be between 80 and 100 for private school learners and between 20 and 30 for government school learners. The error bar further supports the arguments presented in section 4.2.1, that private school learners outperformed government school learners. A plausible explanation of the better performance by the private school learners could be that the early reading programmes they undertook in their early years of tuition were closely monitored with adequate pacing and classroom management. Government school learners' poor performance might be a result of the previously mentioned conditions of disruptions, hyperinflation, and depreciation of the Zimbabwean dollar and lack of human capital, especially in the education sector (Munangagwa, 2009).

#### **4.4 Quantitative analysis of learners' responses to questionnaire**

As indicated in Chapter 3, learners were asked to fill in a questionnaire on reading strategies. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions that required learners to indicate their views on reading practices and on factors that influenced their reading. Questions were derived from *Simple view of reading* by Snowling et al. (2009) and *Comprehension: a paradigm for cognition* by Kintsch (1998).

The internal consistency and reliability of the instrument were measured using Cronbach's alpha. A higher value of Cronbach's alpha signified that the instrument was reliable. According to Manerikar and Manerikar (2015), if Cronbach's alpha is  $\geq .9$  then it is excellent for use in high-stakes testing. A Cronbach's alpha of  $\geq .7$  is good and can be used for low-stakes testing,  $\geq .6$  is

acceptable,  $\geq .5$  is poor and  $< .5$  is unacceptable. The reliability of the research instrument was .77, which is good according to Manerikar and Manerikar (2015), and thus the instrument was reliable.

#### 4.4.1 Descriptive statistics of learners' questionnaires

Learners were asked to indicate their level of agreement regarding 17 issues around reading practices and reading strategies, which were measured on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A mean of 3.5 and above meant that the learners were in agreement, while a mean of less than 2.5 meant that the learners were in disagreement. The higher the mean, the higher the level of agreement. The percentage for each question was calculated by dividing the number of respondents for each option by the overall number of participants and multiplied by 100.

##### 4.4.1.1 Reading practices

Responses to the 17 questions on reading practices yielded mainly positive results. However, it should be noted that this is a combined response from both the government and private school learners. Table 4.2 shows the percentage response for each question.

**Table 4.2: Learners' responses to questions on reading practices**

Statement	Level of agreement					Mean
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Q1. My parents used to read story books to me before I started going to school.	24%	31%	9%	11%	24%	3.20
Q2. I used to read books to my parents when I started Grade 1.	23%	33%	10%	19%	15%	3.32
Q3. When I was in Grade 1 my parents used to accompany me to the library to borrow books.	9%	17%	10%	34%	30%	2.4

Statement	Level of agreement					Mean
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Q4. Nursery rhymes were taught to us in Grade 1.	26%	20%	18%	17%	20%	3.15
Q5. The teacher encourages us to ask questions about what we read in the class.	50%	33%	7%	6%	9%	4.00
Q6. I do not share a reading textbook with other learners in the class.	13%	10%	6%	28%	44%	2.22
Q7. The teacher encourages us to read aloud in class.	21%	49%	4%	19%	7%	3.56
Q8. I get higher marks in comprehension when questions are done in groups first.	16%	37%	9%	24%	14%	3.16
Q9. The teacher used to give us tasks to read to our parents twice a week at home.	9%	17%	13	28%	33%	2.41
Q10. During classes we read passages that have pictures.	21%	34%	16%	22%	7%	3.38
Q11. The teacher used to give lessons to learners who had problems with reading properly.	11%	27%	14%	30%	17%	2.86
Q12. Classrooms in my primary school had reading charts on the walls for us to read.	19%	34%	10%	17%	20%	3.14

Statement	Level of agreement					Mean
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Q13. I am given time during school period to visit the library every week to read books.	29%	38%	3%	13%	17%	3.48
Q14. In primary school I used to read one story book every week since Grade 1.	12%	17%	13%	25%	33%	2.49
Q15. I enjoy reading to my brother, sister, friend or relative.	27%	37%	6%	16%	14%	3.47
Q16. I get bored when I try to read a book.	12%	20%	7%	26%	35%	2.48
Q17. I do not like answering questions that come below the passage.	6%	9%	7%	44%	34%	2.07

The majority (78%) of the learners agreed that that teacher encouraged them to ask questions about what they read in class (question 5). This is consistent with what Goodman (1981) refers to as the confirmation process of reading. In this process, the learner uses his/her world knowledge to confirm his/her previous hypotheses. Sixty-nine per cent of learners agreed that they were encouraged to read aloud in class (question 7), which is the initial process of reading comprehension by Goodman (ibid) and Snowling et al. (2009), where learners apply the recognition process. Furthermore, 67% of learners agreed that they were given time to visit the library every week to read books (question 13). According to Snowball (2009), independent reading improves learners' reading proficiency. It was also obtained that 64 % of learners agreed that they enjoyed reading to their siblings, friends or relatives (question 15). More than half (54%) agreed that passages that they read had pictures to make them understand the passage (question 10), while 57% agreed that they read different books to parents when they started Grade 1 (question 9). More than half of the learners (52%) also agreed that they get higher marks in reading

comprehension when the questions are done in groups first (question 8). This confirms Vygotsky's (1978) theory on collaboration that what learners do in groups, they are able to do independently later on. The majority of the learners (61%) disagreed with question 16, 'I get bored when I try to read a book.' Thus, learners indicated that they like, and probably even enjoy reading books. The majority of the learners (71%) disagreed with question 17, 'I do not like answering questions that come below the passage.' As this was also a negative question, the responses show that learners like answering comprehension questions, which may indicate that they do not find the questions to be extremely difficult. The overall responses to the statements as shown in Table 4.2 reflect positive reading practices by the learners. Before presenting the reading practices of learners per school type, the reading strategies of the learners as a whole, which were posed on a similar Likert scale, are presented.

#### 4.4.1.2 Reading strategies

Although there were only three questions on reading strategies (questions 18, 19 and 20), responses to these questions also yielded mainly positive responses, as shown in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Levels of agreement on reading strategies**

Statement	Level of agreement					Mean
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Q18. I keep a book where I write words that I do not understand.	24%	27%	8%	25%	16%	3.16
Q19. I write summaries on what I read in the library during the library period.	10%	19%	3%	42%	26%	2.45
Q20. When I do not understand what I read, I read it again.	47%	38%	4%	4%	9%	4.09

The majority of the learners (83%) indicated that when they do not understand what they read, they read it again (question 20). This indicates that learners monitor and repair meaning to some

extent when it is lost (Pardo, 2004). Most learners are in agreement with the premise by Pardo (2004) and Grabe and Stoller (2011) that readers at higher levels monitor what they read by building mental models of what has been read. Whether they eventually find meanings, this is yet another issue. About half of the learners (51%) agreed that they keep a book where they record words that they do not understand (question 18); however, 68% of the learners said they do not write summaries on what they read in the library (question 19). This is contrary to the premise that learners at higher levels of reading write summaries on what they read as a symbol of self-motivation. The significant number of learners who do not write summaries are considerably less motivated (Vogel, 2013).

#### *4.4.1.3 Responses by type of school*

The analysis according to type of school (government or private) was done to determine whether reading abilities differed according to the type of school attended by the learner. The hypotheses were stated as follows:

H<sub>0</sub>: The means for private school learners and government school learners are equal.

H<sub>1</sub>: The means for private school learners and government school learners are not equal.

The assumption of equal variance was tested using Levene's test for homogeneity of variances. The results show differences in the means for private school learners and government school learners, as shown in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 Descriptive statistics of the type of school**

Variable	Type of school	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Reading practices	Government	48	3.043	.589
	Private	22	3.392	.424
Reading strategies	Government	48	3.188	1.047
	Private	22	3.386	.841

The private schools showed higher means than the government schools (P: 3.392 and 3.386; G: 3.043 and 3.188). The private school learners therefore reported relatively better reading practices and better reading strategies than the government school learners.

#### **4.4.2 Inferential statistics**

While the descriptive statistics showed that the government school learners differed from the private school learners in terms of their reading practices and their use of reading strategies, the results of the t-tests showed the statistical significance of these differences.

As mentioned in the methodology section, composite variables were created by averaging items in a construct. The items, ‘I get bored when I try to read a book’, and ‘I do not like answering questions that come below the passage’ were reverse-scored. The composites were *reading practices*, which consisted of 17 items, and *reading strategies*, which consisted of three items. The t-test was done at a 5% level of significance and the p-value was used to determine the statistical significance of the differences. The central limit theorem was used to assume normality.

Looking at Table 4.5 on the test for equality of means, the reading practices dimension had a p-value of .015, indicating that the difference was statistically significant. However, the section on

reading strategies had a p-value of .437, indicating that the difference was not statistically significant, perhaps because questions were too few to yield expected results.

**Table 4.5: Independent t-tests to determine difference in mean scores by type of school attended**

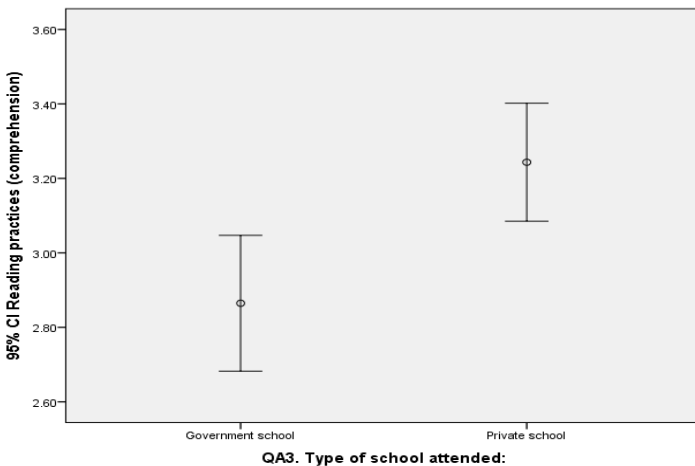
Group statistics					Levene's (1960) test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		
Variable	Type of school	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig	Equal variance	t-value	Sig (2-tailed up-score)
Reading practices	Government	48	3.043	.589	2.18	.145	Assumed	-2.496	.015
	Private	22	3.392	.424			Not	-2.813	
Reading strategies	Government	48	3.188	1.047	1.91	.172	Assumed	-.782	.437
	Private	22	3.386	.841			Not	-.848	

Although there was a difference in mean scores in reading strategies, the p-value was not significant. The p-value was .437, which is greater than .05. It can therefore be concluded that in terms of reading strategies, there was no statistically significant difference between private school and government school learners. The outcome of the reading strategies could have been determined by very few questions asked by the researcher on reading strategies. However, the means for reading practices were not only different but the differences also proved to be statistically significant. The findings could imply that government schools reading practices were disturbed by the climate prevailing in the schools. As alluded to in the introductory chapter, given that, learners were faced with absenteeism from teachers and learners, reading instruction may not have been done with the planning and deliberate patterns as required. Close monitoring, pacing and classroom management might have been lacking in the learners' reading practices. Learners from private schools seemed to have engaged in positive reading practices, which are reflected in



their performance in the comprehension test. Studies indicate that the basis of reading does not develop naturally, but learners need well-planned and deliberate patterns of study (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, (OECD) 2009). Hence, learners from private schools benefitted from their reading practices, as they outperformed learners from government schools in the PIRLS test. Results from reading strategies did not yield the expected results, probably because of the few questions. The research therefore does not show statistical differences in the school types with regard to reading strategies. However, mean scores showed relatively better reading practices by private school learners.

For the section on reading practices, the p-value was .015. The null hypothesis of equal means was rejected since the p-value was less than .05. The effect size of 2.496 was deemed a large effect, as indicated by Cohen (1988). The mean for government school learners was 3.04, while the mean for private school learners was 3.39. The degree of agreement was greater in private school learners, as evidenced by the higher mean. The confidence interval error bars are shown in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.4: Error bars for reading practices by type of school**

There is no overlap between the bars; one can conclude that the private school learners were more in agreement than the government school learners regarding reading practices. This further indicates that learners' reading practices at private schools were more positive, as posited at the beginning of this section. The positive reading practices could be supported by the premise that investment by the family in home learning

practices has a positive bearing on the child's early and later linguistic and cognitive development, and leads to school success in reading (Matvichuk, 2015). Early reading practice such as engagement in activities like frequent visits to the library, shared storybook reading, and colouring activities, sets children up for higher reading achievement at age 12 and beyond (Colarocco, 2012). The availability of reading materials and close monitoring by teachers seemingly is a factor that facilitates reading achievement at private schools as compared to the situation at government schools.

#### **4.5 Quantitative analysis of teachers' responses to the questionnaire**

Teachers from private and government schools were given a questionnaire that sought to establish what factors influence the reading proficiency level of Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools. The questionnaire consisted of five factors presumed to influence reading proficiency, namely, motivation, socio-economic status, home, school environment and the behaviour of learners during reading. The questions were adapted from *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language* by Nuttall (2000). Possible answers ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A mean of at least 3.5 meant that the teachers were in agreement with the statement, while a mean of 2.5 and below meant that teachers were in disagreement. The reliability of the instrument is discussed in the next section, followed by descriptive statistics on the responses. Twenty-one teachers participated in the study. Since the sample size was small and the assumptions of parametric tests were not met, non-parametric tests were used. The Mann-Whitney U test was used where the categories were more than two. Post-hoc analysis was done using the Kruskal-Wallis step-down method, which groups categories with same locations into homogeneous groups. The findings are presented in the following subsections.

##### **4.5.1 Reliability of the teacher instrument**

Seven items were reverse scored to orient them in the positive direction, as they were phrased in the negative direction. These seven statements are: 'In 2008, learners were disruptive during reading lessons' (question 1), 'In 2008 learners were passive during reading lessons' (question 2), 'Learners were not so keen on reading in class' (question

5), ‘Learners are withdrawn during reading lessons’ (question 6), ‘In 2008, learners were unlikely to complete a reading task in time’ (question 7), ‘most learners lack interest in reading on their own’ (question 8).

All sections had reliabilities greater than .6, which, as recommended by Manerikar and Manerikar (2015), places them at an acceptable level. The instrument’s overall reliability was .96, which is excellent and thus the instrument was reliable. The details of the internal consistency of the instrument are provided in Appendix 11.

#### 4.5.2 Socio-demographic characteristics of the teachers

The first part of the questionnaire required teachers to indicate their socio-demographic characteristics, including age, gender, academic and professional qualifications, language teaching experience and classes taught, and the school type. This information is presented in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6: Socio-demographic characteristics of teachers**

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Age	26–35 years	3	14.3%
	36–45 years	9	42.9%
	46–55 years	8	38.1%
	56–65 years	1	4.8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Gender	Male	4	19.0%
	Female	17	81.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Professional Qualifications	CE	3	14.3%
	DIP.ED	3	14.3%
	GRAD CE/GRAD DIP	3	14.3%
	BA	9	42.9%
	MA	3	14.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Academic	O level	5	23.8%

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Qualification	A level	5	23.8%
	BA degree	10	47.6%
	MA degree	1	4.8%
<b>Total</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Language teaching Experience	5 years and below	1	5
	6–10 years	4	19
	11–20 years	12	57
	21–30 years	4	19
<b>Total</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>
Forms	Form 1	3	14
	Form 2	9	43
	Form 3	5	24
	Form 4	4	19
<b>Total</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>
Type of school	Government school	12	57
	Private school	9	43
<b>Total</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>

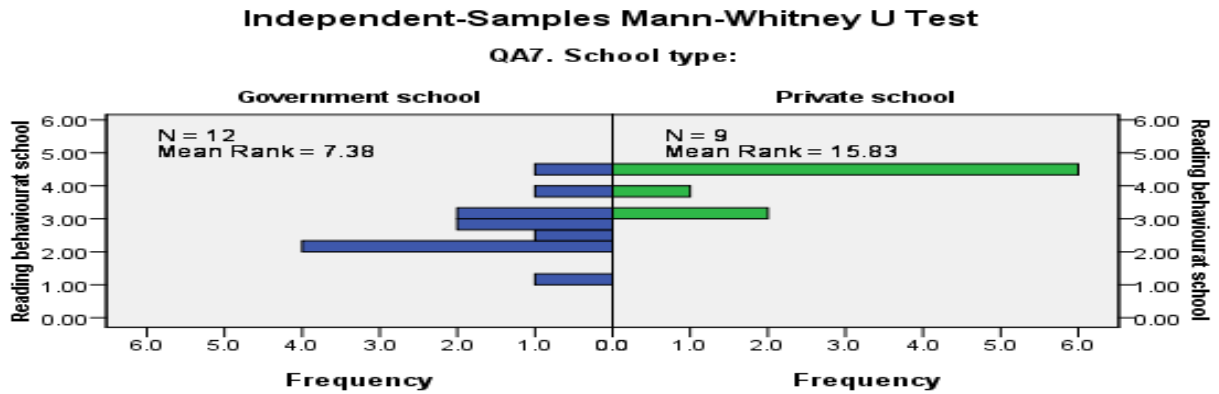
The analysis of the teachers' socio-demographic data has been presented as combined for both school types instead of separating per school type, as the teachers were of the same profile with all of them having teaching qualifications. Of the 21 teachers that participated, 43% were aged 36–45 years, while 38% were between the ages of 46 and 55. Only 14% were aged 26–35 and only 5% were aged 56–65. Moreover, more than half of the teachers (57%) had 11–20 years of teaching experience, 19% had 6–10 years, while 19% had 21–30 years. Thus, the majority of the participants were quite experienced, as supported by the fact that 76% had more than ten years of language teaching experience. This shows that teachers in both schools were experienced as far as teaching language is concerned. Most of the participating teachers were government school teachers, constituting 57%, while 43% were teachers from private schools.

### **4.5.3 Descriptive and inferential statistics of teachers' questionnaire responses**

The descriptive and inferential statistics on the teachers' responses on factors influencing reading ability were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The factors were *reading behaviour, motivation, home and socio-economic status, school environment and reading habits*.

#### *4.5.3.1 Teachers' responses on reading behaviour*

All the items on reading behaviour were reverse scored to orient them in the positive direction. Teachers were required to indicate if learners were active during reading comprehension lessons, if they were keen to read aloud, if they participated actively and if they were well-behaved during reading comprehension lessons. The factor *reading behaviour at school*' had distributions that were not identical. The mean rank of those in private schools was 15.83 while that of those in government schools was 7.38. Teachers in private schools agreed that the learners exhibited positive reading behaviour more than teachers in government schools. The reading behaviour of the learners was thus ranked more positively by teachers in the private schools. The distribution is shown in Figure 4.5.



<b>Total N</b>	21
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	97.500
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	142.500
<b>Test Statistic</b>	97.500
<b>Standard Error</b>	13.980
<b>Standardized Test Statistic</b>	3.112
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.002
<b>Exact Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.001

**Figure 4.5: Mann-Whitney U test for reading behaviour by school type**

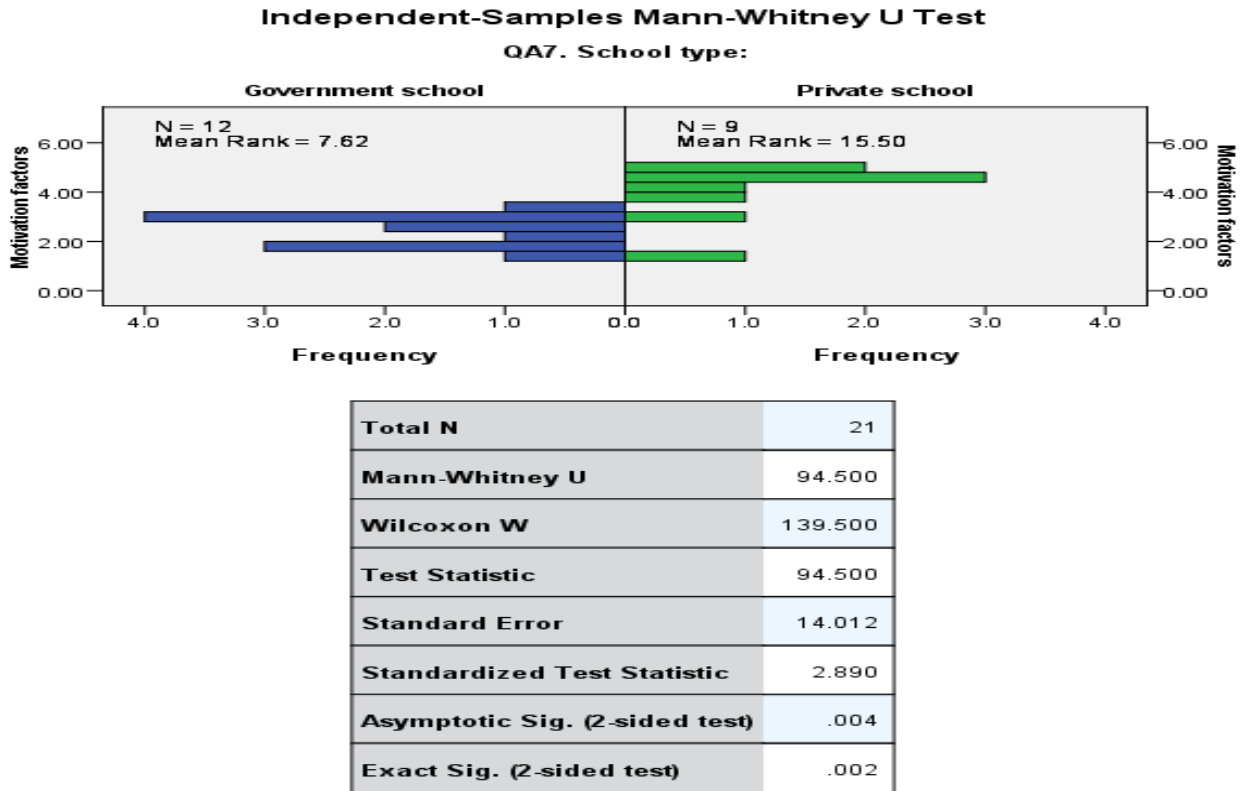
The histogram was positively skewed, indicating that teachers from private schools were of the opinion that learners in private schools exhibited good reading behaviour while government school teachers saw their learners as lacking good reading behaviour. These findings further support the results of the comprehension test written by the learners. The poor performance of government school learners might be attributed to the loss of tuition in the early stages of reading development in Grade 0. The Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy (2004) strongly agrees that, for the most part, learners' success or failure in reading is seen as a function of the quality of their elementary education. Thus, the economic upheaval that prevailed during the learners' elementary education may have negatively impacted on their reading development of the government school learners.

Whilst the descriptive statistics above indicated that the private school learners differed from the government school learners in terms of their reading behaviour at school as reported by the teachers, the results of the t-tests showed the significance of these differences as the z-value stood

at 3.112 with a p-value of .002, leading to the conclusion that the factor was highly significant. Positive behaviour is required for learners to achieve highly on what they read. Positive behaviour is strongly associated with positive attitude, which is viewed as enthusiasm in reading. Knell (2012) asserts that the attitude learners hold towards learning the target language is strongly associated with the amount of effort they are willing to expend on the reading tasks. Positive reading behaviour is thus said to be linked to reading improvement. The findings on positive reading behaviour of readers from private schools might be a causal agent in the reading process, and the opposite might be true of learners from government schools.

#### *4.5.3.2 Teachers' responses on motivational factors*

In terms of motivational factors, teachers were required to indicate their opinions on whether learners were completing their reading tasks in 2008, whether learners were interested in reading on their own and whether they showed enjoyment in what they read. In terms of *motivational factors*, the mean rank for private schools was 15.59 while that for government schools was 7.62. Figure 4.6 presents a histogram that indicates a concentration in the lower rankings for government schools. Teachers from government schools indicated disagreement with the statements about motivational factors. On the other hand, the majority of private school teachers were in agreement that learners in their schools were motivated to read.



**Figure 4.6 Mann-Whitney U test for reading motivation by school type**

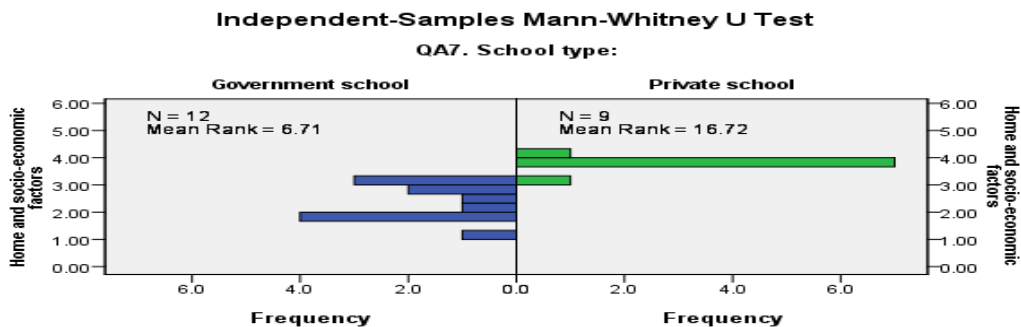
Teachers in private schools were more in agreement on issues of motivational factors than teachers in government schools. The highest ranking by teachers in government schools was 3, which indicates that they neither agree nor disagree, whereas private school teachers' highest ranking was 4, indicating agreement with the statements on motivation. The findings indicate the perception of private and government school teachers in relation to the value their learners place on reading comprehension. Government school learners seemed to have lacked motivation because their teachers perceived them as neither motivated nor demotivated to read. This might mean that learners were neither engaged in reading nor eager to talk about what they read. According to Marinak et al. (2010), motivated readers are readers who are engaged in their reading, are curious and are eager to talk about what they read. They are also able to read several texts at the same time and look forward to new challenges in reading. These findings may indicate that government school learners may be placing little or no value on reading, given the poor reading practices they reported on, due to the poor reading conditions that prevailed in 2008. Private school learners, on the other hand, were shown to have exhibited high motivation to read, as the mean rank of the



teachers' report was above 4. Due to the high motivation of the private school learners, as reported by their teachers, these learners may have developed reading autonomy, which may have led to their willingness to read challenging texts. Readers who are highly motivated are determined to read even challenging texts on their own, unlike learners who lack motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

#### 4.5.3.3 Teachers' responses on home and socio-economic factors

Questions in this category were intended to solicit teachers' views on how learners attended school in 2008 and at present, and whether learners were supported by their parents in terms of reading materials and stationery as well as supervision of homework. Results of the responses indicated a distribution that was positively skewed, with the majority of teachers agreeing that home and socio-economic factors had a bearing on learners' reading. The majority of teachers at government schools either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The histogram for government schools was more concentrated in the lower rankings, indicating that the majority of teachers disagreed with the statement. Government school teachers therefore had views contrary to an enabling home and socio-economic environment for reading development. Figure 4.7 illustrates the results obtained.



<b>Total N</b>	21
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	105.500
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	150.500
<b>Test Statistic</b>	105.500
<b>Standard Error</b>	13.989
<b>Standardized Test Statistic</b>	3.682
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.000
<b>Exact Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.000

**Figure 4.7: Mann-Whitney U test for home and socio-economic factors by school type.**

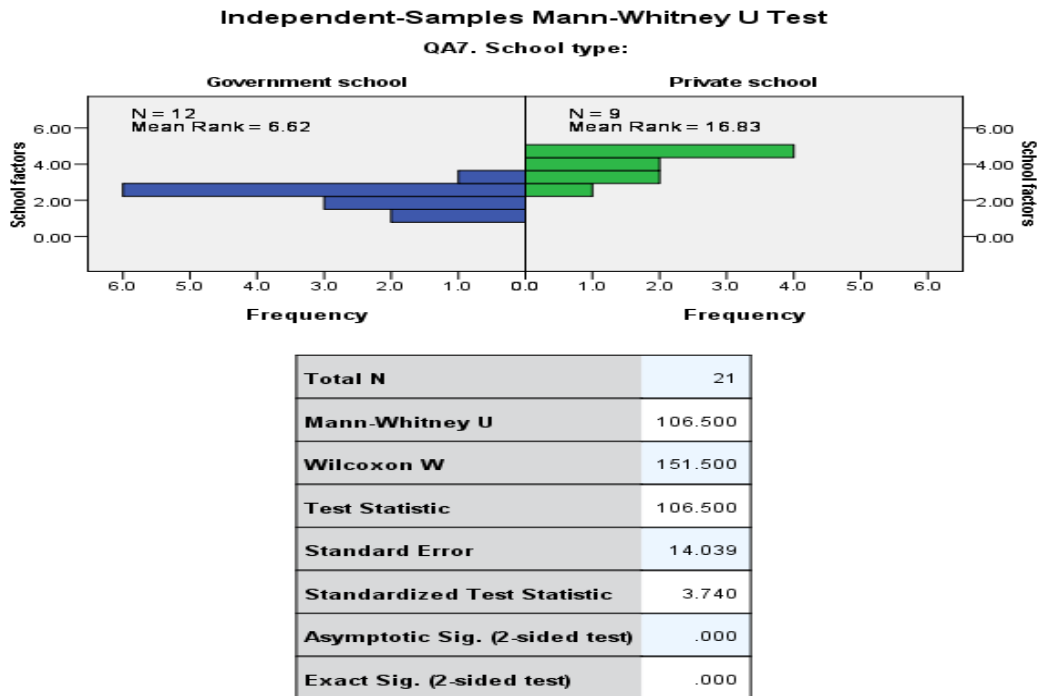
The mean rank for private schools was 15.72, while that for government schools was 6.71. It can be observed that most private school teachers gave a ranking of more than 3, with 4 being the highest peak as shown in Figure 4.7. The private school teachers were more in agreement than the government school teachers on issues of home and socio-economic factors. Private school teachers agreed that learners at their schools come from considerably high socio-economic status (SES) homes, hence their high reading achievement. Dexter (2013) argues that SES is strongly associated with many measures of childhood cognitive and academic achievement, including IQ and reading development. Less advantaged parents, whose children attend government schools, may have been less likely to recognise their children's low phonological awareness or to provide the resources necessary to overcome the challenges in phonological awareness. Hence, financial capital could be regarded as a vital factor in developing reading prowess in this study.

The results were further authenticated by the inferential statistics obtained from a z-value of 3.682 and a p-value of .001 for the factors, which indicated that the factor 'home and socio-economic factors' was highly significant in terms of the differences between the school types.

#### *4.5.3.4 Teachers' responses on school factors*

Teachers were asked to indicate whether reading was taught at pre-school during 2008, whether schools had adequate reading materials in 2008 and at the present time, and whether reading comprehension is allocated more time so that learners can complete their tasks. More positive results were seen in the private schools than in the government schools. This is discussed in detail below.

The same trend as with the preceding factor, SES, was observed with the school factors, as shown in Figure 4.8. The independent-sample Mann-Whitney U test was used. The histogram is concentrated on the lower rankings for government schools, indicating that the majority of teachers in government schools were in disagreement.



**Figure 4.8: Mann-Whitney U test for school factors by school type**

The highest peak at 5 was obtained by private school teachers, indicating strong agreement, while teachers from government schools had their highest peak at 3, indicating that they neither agreed nor disagreed. From this it may be concluded that teachers in private schools were in agreement on issues of school factors. School factors indicate that private schools were adequately resourced and have stable human capital. The learner-textbook ratio of 8:1 for government schools discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1) is further shown to have negatively impacted on the learners' reading achievement, while the 1:1 learner-textbook ratio at private schools may have positively impacted on the learners' reading development. In addition, government schools experienced a high staff turnover in 2008 that may have adversely affected the learners. With private schools adequately resourced, learners would have been highly motivated to read from a diverse selection of reading materials. Access to both learning and teaching materials may have had a positive influence on the learning and teaching process in private schools since well-resourced and well-organised reading materials might fulfil many functions, including independent reading, thinking and talking about information from different materials (Donald, Lazarus & Moolla, 2014). Diversity of information

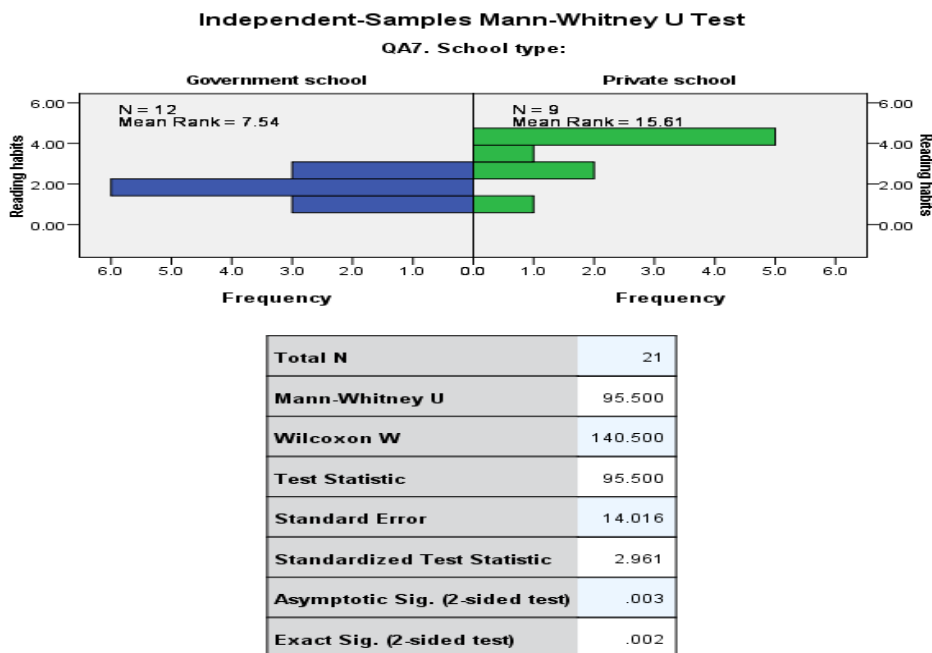
might have equipped learners at private schools with different knowledge systems, such as rich vocabulary and prowess in writing as well.

Results of t-tests on this factor showed statistically significant differences between the two school types. The z-value was 3.740 with a p-value of less than .001. Thus, the null hypothesis of identical probability distribution was rejected.

#### 4.5.3.5 Teachers' responses on learners' reading habits

Questions in this category required teachers to indicate how learners undertook their reading sessions, whether with peers, individually, or on their own, without the teachers' influence. The teachers also reported on whether learners keep vocabulary books where they record what they read and on the various texts they read. The findings are shown in the following paragraphs.

The mean rank for the private schools was 15.61, while that for government schools was 7.54. The histogram was more concentrated on the higher rankings for private schools, indicating that the majority of teachers in private schools were in agreement with the statements, as shown in Figure 4.9.



**Figure 4.9: Mann-Whitney U test for reading habits by school type**

The highest option (5) was recorded from private school teachers, who indicated that they were strongly in agreement with the statements on the reading habits of their learners. On the other hand, the government school teachers selected options three and below. Implications are that learners in private schools had positive reading habits, unlike learners in government schools. Conclusions may be drawn to suggest that learners in private schools enjoyed stable staffing, library facilities and classroom management, hence the positive reading habits. However, government school learners, with high staff turnover, limited reading material and changes in leadership may have been negatively impacted in terms of their reading habits.

While the descriptive statistics showed that the government school learners differed from the private school learners in terms of their reading habits, the extent of the difference was shown in the p-values. The composite variable for *reading habit* showed a z-value of 2.986 with a p-value of .003, indicating that the difference was statistically significant.

#### 4.5.3.6 Learner-teacher ratio

Teachers were also asked to indicate the learner-teacher ratio in the classes that they teach. The information is shown in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7 Learner-teacher ratio**

Ratio range	Private	Government
25–28	9	0
35–38	0	4
39–44	0	2
45–50	0	6
Total	9	12

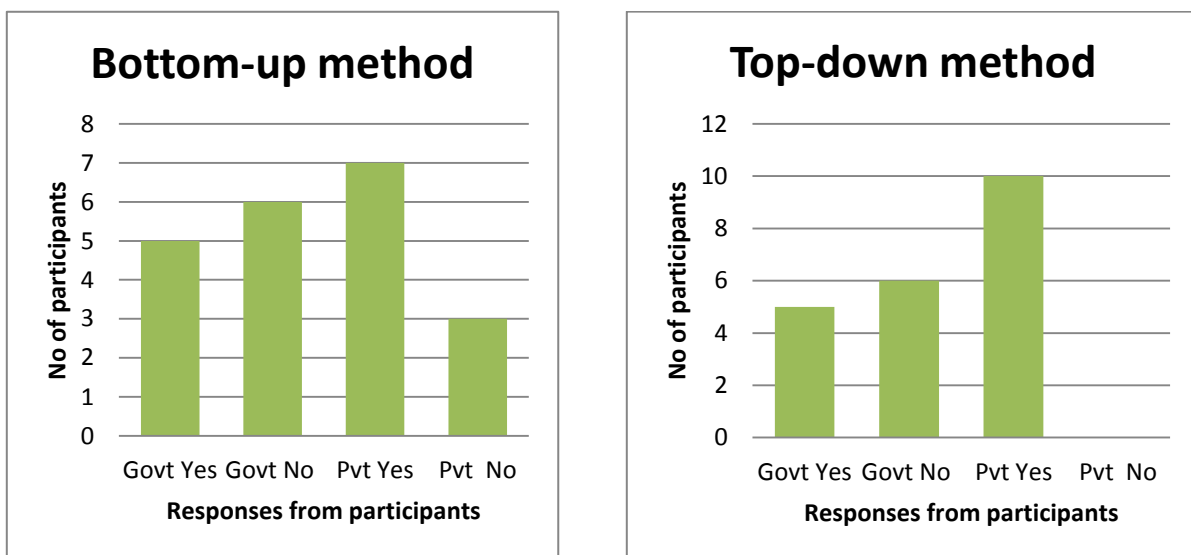
Nine teachers participated from private schools and indicated that they have a learner-teacher ratio of between 25 and 28 learners per class, while twelve teachers sampled from government schools indicated that they had ratios ranging from 35 to 50 learners per teacher. The ratio indicated by government school teachers is considered large, as indicated in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1), where

government schools were said to have had high learner-teacher ratios in 2008. There is irrefutable evidence that large classes are difficult to manage and result in a compromise on individual attention (Ecalte, 2006). The ratios at private schools were small, resulting in favourable class management, organisation, teaching and learning resources for learners.

Independent reading in private schools may have been possible too (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 2010).

#### 4.5.3.7 Teaching strategies by school type

Teachers were also asked to indicate their approach to teaching reading – whether top-down, bottom-up, or interactive. The results showed differences in the teachers’ approaches to teaching reading according to the type of school. Figure 4.10 illustrates these results.



**Figure 4.10 Distribution of teachers and their methods of teaching reading**

From a sample of 11 teachers from government schools and ten teachers from private schools, the following was obtained as percentages of their responses: Less than half (45%) of the teachers from government schools indicated that they use both the top-down and bottom-up methods in teaching reading, while 54% indicated that they do not use the top-down and bottom-up methods to teach reading comprehension. On the other hand, all the teachers (100%) from private schools indicated that they use the top-down method, while 70% indicated that they use the bottom-up

method of teaching reading. Only 30 % of the teachers from private schools indicated that they do not use the bottom-up method, and none indicated that they do not use the top-down method.

A closer look at the reading strategies employed by government school teachers reveals that the bottom-up and top-down reading models is not fully utilised. Although the teachers might use the strategies to some extent, they seem unclear on the rationale behind them. The results do not seem to be in accordance with the views of De Debat (2006), Goodman (1981) and Grabe and Stoller (2011), who argue that the goal of reading is constructing meaning in response to the text being read. If such issues of meaning are not interrogated by the teacher, then there seems to be a challenge in how learners are taught. Teachers have to teach learners words (bottom-up) and word recognition (top-down) concurrently if the learners are to make sense of what they read. These are complementary principles which one cannot ignore. The findings in this study provide a fresh insight into the nature of teaching reading comprehension in government schools.

On the other hand, private school teachers indicated the use of both teaching methods and a low 30% of the sample indicated no use of the bottom-up method. These findings imply that private school teachers are not only concerned with decoding words at Form 2 (Grade 9), but also include in their teaching the invoking of learners' world knowledge and world view, as espoused by Abraham (2000). The results further indicate the differences in teaching methods employed by the different schools and hence the differences that have been observed in the performances of learners in the comprehension test and in the narrative report that is discussed in the next section.

#### **4.6 Analysis of narratives**

Learners were asked to write narratives on their reading development. The narratives were analysed and coded by identifying common issues, as well as similarities and differences (Austin & Sutton, 2015). The researcher drew together themes running through the narratives. Emergent and set themes included the role of mothers, fathers, family, teachers and the library. In addition, the overall use of language in the writing of these narratives was analysed for grammatical errors to indicate the learners' writing ability at this level, as reading and writing are interrelated. Participation was voluntary and parental consent was sought as indicated in Chapter 3. Government schools were represented by 48 learners, while private schools were represented by

22 learners. The results are discussed in detail in the subsections that follow. The researcher used pseudonyms to identify participants. The extracts from learners' narratives are quoted verbatim.

#### **4.6.1 Influence of mothers on learners' reading development**

Information gathered from the narratives indicates that most learners from both school types were influenced by their mothers in terms of their literacy development. However, there were differences between the school types regarding the type of involvement. All the learners (100%) from the PGHS and the majority of learners (90%) from the PBHS acknowledged the involvement of their mothers. Unlike the private school learners, less than half of the government school learners (Girls 43%; Boys 31%) attributed their literacy development to their mothers' reading involvement.

The results indicate that learners in private schools were generally supported by their mothers in their reading development, unlike those in government schools, where relatively fewer learners had this support. This involvement by mothers in learners' reading development is supported by studies by Mwamwenda (2004), who argues that mothers who have close relationships with their children play an important role in their language development. Similarly, the premise that parents who engage their children in age-appropriate learning opportunities contribute positively to their children's reading prowess (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). Private school learners, most of whom were supported by their mothers, performed considerably better in the comprehension test than their government school counterparts. Mwamwenda (2004) confirms that the bond between a mother and child enables the mothers to teach their children the meanings of words before anyone else in the family, thus shaping and modifying their language and consequently their reading activities.

In her write-up, Chelsey from the PGHS wrote: *'I remember my mother reading to me at a very young age. When I was a bit older, about grade one, she used to point out certain words to me. My mother told me that I was very determined to read, at a very young age.'* Thomas from PBHS wrote: *'Every day after work hours my mom used to do an exercise with me. I got better and better every session.'*

Thandeka from GGHS had this to say: *'I started read and as star to read properly it was in grade 4. I will be continiue reading as my mother help me.'* Bongani from GBHS wrote: *'But my mother give me a short time to teach me reading until I was more adicted to readhing.'*



It seems mothers play a crucial role in learners' reading development.

#### **4.6.2 Influence of fathers on learners' reading development**

Responses from all learners generally indicated that there was support from fathers, though at a somewhat lower level compared to the mothers' involvement. Eleven per cent (11%) of the learners from the GGHS indicated that their fathers helped them, while 23% of the learners from the GBHS had this support. A higher number of the learners from the private schools had their fathers' support in their literacy development. Fifty per cent (50%) of the learners from the PGHS and 30% from PBHS stated that their fathers helped them in their reading development. The support of fathers from all schools could mean that fathers do influence learners' reading development, but to a lesser extent than mothers. This minimal involvement may be attributed to fathers generally spending more time at work and away from home than mothers. A study conducted in the United Kingdom, in which children were given a head-start through the slogan, 'Bookstart', facilitated mothers and children beginning an interaction of reading. Mothers were given books before and after the birth of their children (Chidiebere et al, 2013). The study points to the high influence mothers are seen to have over their children's reading development, unlike fathers who may have limited participation in their children's literacy development.

Although fathers had some influence, they were not generally indicated as major influential actors when it came to learners' reading development. In the narratives, other members of the family were mentioned more often than fathers. With regard to fathers influence, Sophia from the PGHS wrote: *'My father would help me read the bible before bed.'* Mary from PGHS also wrote, *My father would read tome and I would then read to him before bed too.*

Mention of father figures was limited to PBHS learners, and even in those instances it was not the father but an uncle. Thomas from the PBHS wrote: *My uncle taught me how to read. We would go to his work place and while he was negotiating deals with people, he would be teaching me at the same time.*

The majority of the learners' narratives point to other members of the family being instrumental in their reading journey. The following section focuses on the influence of the family on learners' reading development.

#### **4.6.3 Influence of family on learners' reading development**

In their write-ups, learners indicated that other members of the family helped them, either with their reading or answering of questions. There are indications that there was support from the family across all schools, though not as frequent as those of the mother, as the range is below 50% across both school types. The PBHS had the highest percentage (30%) of learners mentioning the involvement of other family members in their reading journey. This was followed by the PGHS with 17%, the GBHS with 15% and the GGHS with 11%. The involvement by the family supports Matvichuk's (2015) view that families that invest in their children in the form of home learning, build a positive foundation on the child's early linguistic and cognitive development. Linguistic and cognitive development are also aided by an active home environment where family members make efforts to engage children in activities designed to foster literacy and language development (Cunningham, 2009). Such exposure to reading may have yielded positive results, especially for learners in private schools. Moreover, the involvement of family members might also indicate that as the child grows, he/she moves away from his/her mother's attachment, to a broader community (Byram, 2011).

Betty from the PGHS wrote: *'Almost every evening my family and I always gathered in the lounge where bible readings were taking place. I used to volunteer to read a lot.'* Thomas from the PBHS wrote: *'My brother and teachers have influenced me in my reading.'* Thandeka from the GGHS wrote: *'My sister supports me to read.'* Themba from GBHS wrote: *'My family support me to read difficulties words.'*

The extracts from the learners' narratives above indicate the involvement of other family members in their reading development. Thus, mothers and fathers, as well as other family members, influenced some of the learners in their reading development. A greater number of learners from the private schools attested to this influence compared to the learners from the government schools. The next section discusses how teachers supported learners in their reading pursuits.

#### **4.6.4 Influence of teachers on learners' reading development**

The analysis of the narratives showed a common thread throughout the schools. Teachers were indicated as the most significant factor in reading development as 75% of government school learners and 95% of private school learners indicated that teachers served as role models in their

reading development. As learners moved away from home to spend more time in school, their support structure became the school, and teachers took over the mentorship role from mothers. As learners got involved in formal tuition, mothers' influence lessened and the teacher became the main role model. The view that the teacher bears the most influence on learners' academic development is consistent with Vesay and Gischlar's (2013) view that the greatest impact on reading is from the quality and skill of the teacher who is implementing the curriculum.

The results indicate that there is a fundamental support structure in schools, evidenced by the fact that all learners (100%) in the PGHS indicated that they had the support of teachers and 90% of PBHS learners indicated the same. However, 77% and 75% of GGHS and GBHS learners respectively indicated that they received support from their teachers. The following excerpts are indications of the teachers' support. Pamela from the PGHS wrote: *'I'm always grateful for the teachers who taught me how to read...My teacher used to have a chart...'* Watson from PBHS wrote: *'Then I started Grade one, where my teacher would make a practise...My teachers always helped me...'*

Sibongile from the GGHS wrote: *'The influence I get from my teachers...The influence I got from my teachers are that they showed me how read...'* Temba from the GBHS wrote: *'I started to be read at grade 5. The teacher that was N. Mphala. Which was a Good teacher at the whole time...'*

The predominance of the teachers' influence on reading development was observed in private school learners' narratives, as evidenced by their sentence constructions and expressions that were logical and precise. On the other hand, the narration from the government school learners, as exemplified in the preceding paragraph, demonstrates a restricted code, with sentences grammatically incorrect, direct, and less conversational. Bolander et al., (2009: 164) confirm what Bernstein (1959) termed the restricted code, which is typical of 'unskilled and semi-skilled strata'. Although learners from all four schools had some influence from their teachers, correctness and organisation of their written narratives separated the two groups in this regard. Learners from private schools, who did not experience the negative effects of the economic downturn, displayed greater knowledge of bottom-up and top-down reading strategies, language proficiency, vocabulary and accurate spelling. The combination of the home and school support systems in relation to reading seems to have yielded positive results for the private school learners, more so than for the learners in government schools, as shown in their narratives.

#### 4.6.5 Influence of library on reading development

The library also seems to have had an impact on learners' reading development, judging from the results obtained from the learners. GGHS learners had the least participation. All learners indicated that they either went to the library during their spare time or were escorted to the library by their family members in order to do leisure reading.

Ninety-two per cent of PGHS learners indicated an influence of the library, while 90% of learners in the PBHS indicated the library's influence on their reading development. On the other hand, 61% of the GBHS learners stated that the library had an influence and only 11% of the GGHS learners indicated the influence of the library. The high number of private school learners who had library interactions was reflected in their narratives and displayed in correct grammar and spelling, as well as better sentence construction. The narratives of private school learners showed almost proficient language use compared to those written by government school learners. The following examples display the performance by the different learners.

Karen from the PGHS wrote: *'When my parents realised that I loved reading, they started paying for me to get books from the Public Library and since then reading has been my sacred haven.'*

Gerald from the PBHS wrote: *'My mother would take me to the library once in a while but sometimes she would buy me books to read. At a later stage my mother bought me a kindle which I used for reading.'*

Felistas from the GGHS wrote: *'They joint me library at town and at school. I donot go to the library to read. I normally phasteze answering qoustions.'*

Amkela from the GBHS wrote: *'Infor I we go to library and talks books. Reading is a difficult thing. It the library read to match them everyone in ou class Anna saw that crocodile and whisperd his maller ayd for will happening in his son.'*

Although learners from all four schools indicated that the library had an impact on their reading development, the extent of the influence seems to vary. The excerpts above testify to the fact that private school learners still demonstrate a sound level of language proficiency as compared to their government school counterparts. The premise that visiting a library has an impact on the reading development of learners is further confirmed by the performance of the learners from private

schools. Private school learners outperformed their peers in government schools. In addition, the premise that a well-furnished library with a variety of reading materials and qualified personnel helps learners improve their reading is also shown to be true by the narratives of the learners from private schools (Fasola, 2015). The private schools usually have well-resourced libraries. Furthermore, it has been observed that a library is the heart of the school and children build strong mental bases and academic ability due to reading. This has been the case for learners from the private schools. Private school learners further demonstrated liberty in using vocabulary they may have accumulated during their reading, while their counterparts seemed economical with their diction and at times regurgitated the comprehension passage that was given to them instead of focusing on their narratives. For example: Phethokuhle from the GBHS wrote: *'I want to separate egg whit from yorh...that bad hase Ara good story about Glamingos the crocadali amina saw that crocodile that crocodile broke the door and amina sturned.'*

The above excerpt is copied, though incorrectly, from the passage that was given to learners to read for the quantitative data.

Learners at private schools not only used library materials, but their parents could afford to buy them electronic resources such as the Kindle, as well as other reading materials. James (2014) indicates that a variety of reading is promoted in the library, and not only through texts but also through audio-visual and other related electronic resources. It is also evident that financial capital is a factor that can facilitate reading achievement, as it enables access to resources that parents provide for their children in order to keep their children reading outside school.

Furthermore, the excerpts from the learners' narratives underline the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and reading achievement. Dexter (2013) states that there is a correlation between SES and a child's academic achievement. The examples given by learners from private schools state that the buying of reading materials such as books and electronic devices, such as the Kindle, enabled learners from private schools to augment the library facilities and attain high reading achievement. The shortcomings of learners from government schools in terms of spelling and sentence construction, as illustrated in the excerpts, could indicate a reading lag at Grade 0 or Grade R in 2008. As pointed out by Hindman and Morrison (2012), the reading gaps at

kindergarten are mostly associated with a child's level of poverty, which is perceived as being caused by the lower SES of his/her parents.

Besides the influence of parents, family members and visits to the library, the age at which learners started to read and the strategies they use, such as writing summaries after reading, also seemed to have had an impact on learners' reading development.

#### **4.6.6 Grade at which learners started reading**

Besides indicating who influenced learners in their reading development, learners were asked to indicate the grade at which they started reading properly in their narratives. The following section indicates these responses.

A factor in reading development that has been seen as particularly important is the age at which learners are introduced to reading. Learners at private schools seem to have started reading earlier than learners at government schools. Most learners at private schools indicated having been introduced to reading at the age of three, and most of them were able to read fluently by the time they were in Grade 2. Government school learners indicated that reading was introduced at the age of six, and that they were able to read fluently in Grade 4.

The following are excerpts from the narratives on the ages when learners started reading and began to read fluently.

Karen from the PGHS wrote: *'This reading journey started as I entered the doors of my pre-school, Greystone Montessori. I was young and innocent and didn't really know what I was doing there...I smiled as I saw the cover of the little pigs, this was in Grade 2. I couldn't wait to read this book.'*

Gerald from the PBHS wrote: *'In grade 1, I would read for my parents every night before I slept. I started reading fluently and properly in grade four.'*

Learners from government schools wrote:

Felistas from the GGHS wrote: *'I started to read a little at grade one (1) but some word I didn't no them or spell so my journey was not good.'* Amkela from the GBHS wrote: *'In grade 7 you can get able to read properly. To read is very difficult thing.'*

The findings indicate that learners at private schools were able to read earlier than learners at government schools. The results also justify the performance difference of the two school types. Private schools have consistently shown positive reading and writing constructs, probably because their learners started reading fluently at an earlier age. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009), close monitoring, adequate pacing and classroom management, as well as clarity of presentation and well-structured lessons on reading, have a positive impact on learners' achievements. Learners at private schools might have received good tutorials that enabled them to read in the first few grades, hence becoming efficient readers by Form 2. Learners at government schools may have failed to get well-structured lessons due to the country's prevailing economic turmoil from 2006 to 2008. This might have been a handicap as it had a negative impact on learners' performance even at Form 2 (Grade 9) level. Comprehension scores are evidence of the level at which learners in all school types are reading.

#### **4.6.7 Writing a summary / retelling the story**

Learners were asked to indicate what they did after reading a story, whether they wrote summaries or retold the story to show their comprehension. All (100%) of the learners from the PGHS and 90% of those from the PBHS indicated that they wrote summaries after reading, whereas only 27% from the GGHS and 46% from the GBHS did so. For example, Chelsey from the PGHS wrote: *'After I read a book or passage, I really try to summarise the book or passage. I also think about it in depth.'* Watson from the PBHS wrote: *'After reading I usually tell someone what I read and make them understand it too.'*

On the other hand, Sibongile from the GGHS wrote: *'Yes I go to the library and I normally write down what I read about,'* and Temba from the GBHS wrote: *'When I finish reading a book I sit and relax.'*

Most learners from the private schools (95%) seem to have approached reading with a positive attitude, hence the interest in writing summaries of what they read. This correlates with Moransky-Miller's (2010) view that reading attitudes function as a causal agent in the reading process, where factors such as what a child believes about his/her reading outcome are held. Writing summaries might not have been sanctioned by teachers but rather done voluntarily by the learners, indicating that they were goal-oriented readers (Buelens et al, 2011). Writing summaries or retelling the story

of what one has read is considered as a self-monitoring comprehension strategy that is said to be done by motivated readers (Vogel, 2013).

On the other hand, most learners (46%) from government schools indicated that they do not write summaries at the end of their reading. Government school learners do not seem to have had any interest in writing summaries, probably owing to a lack of positive attitude and diversity of information as highlighted by Donald, Lazarus and Moola (2014), who assert that for learners to be efficient readers they ought to read, think and talk about what they read from diverse reading materials. When learners read, think and talk about what they have read, they are summarising the material. In the study by the National Reading Panel (2000), summarising the text is proposed as one of the reading strategies that all learners should be using. However, few government school learners were not practising this strategy. The fact that few learners indicated that they summarise what they read might imply they lack self-motivation or have failed to understand what they read.

#### **4.6.8 Language use in narratives**

The researcher also used the language used by learners as a measure to ascertain their reading level. According to Gove and Cvelich (2011), as learners read they train their minds to get familiar with word patterns, and as a result, begin to pay attention to the spelling and pronunciation, as well as the meanings of words. Avid readers are less likely to make grammatical and spelling errors than those who are not. Most of the sentences from government school learners lacked logic and contained multiple spelling errors. Some even failed to copy words given as instructions in the guide. This points to their low reading ability, as they ought to have been familiar with the spelling of words they had just read. Sentences from private school learners were well constructed and indicated high reading proficiency. They were precise and logical, and spelling errors were minimal.

Sizwile from the GGHS wrote in her narrative: *‘The influence did I get from the teachers is I must practise reading. I was very excited when reading books of dictionories and norvels. I am woundefull about that.’*

Similarly, Temba from the GBHS wrote: *‘I am writeng a composition learn to read. Because legs is seris. It’s a long tym sins I go to last yer. The November to go my Reading Journey. A tym when you were not reading.’*



The sentences written by government school learners above lack logic and many of the words are misspelt. In most cases, the sentences were not developed fully and as a result lacked meaning. This could be an indication that the learners might have missed out on bottom-up and top-down instruction in their early years of learning. Early reading is said to improve linguistic skills by encouraging the acquisition of a rich vocabulary, correct grammar, improved writing and better spelling through the integration of bottom-up and top-down reading strategies (Boakye, 2012; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Nunan, 1991). In addition, government school learners lacked narrative skills, whereby a well-structured story with a developed beginning, middle and ending is told. According to Dickinson, McCabe and Sprague (2003), narrative skill can be improved by having children tell sequentially what they have just done as previously stated.

Furthermore, government school learners' poor performance and low language proficiency might have been caused by the lower socio-economic status (SES) of their parents. Parents might have failed to spend quality time with their children, practising reading and discussing stories read before they began their schooling. Hoff (2013) postulates that children from low-SES homes frequently have lower levels of language skills due to less parental during early reading.

Learners from private schools exhibited high levels of mastery in sentence construction as well as in spelling. Sophia from the PGHS wrote: *'I learnt how to read when I was three years old. When I was in Grade 1, I could read the whole book by myself. I used to read every syllable on my own and when I came across a new word, I would ask what it meant.'*

Susan from the PGHS wrote: *'As a beginner, my teachers came up with different methods to help me read. For example, in Grade One they would call us up one by one to read words and we got sweets for each word we got right.'*

The above excerpts from private school learners display high knowledge of bottom-up and top-down reading models, as their language skills are more proficient than those of government school learners. Moreover, as Brown (2005:26) states, 'reading is treated as one or more skills that also deal with listening, speaking and writing skills.' This premise is demonstrated by learners from private schools as they displayed both a good grasp of spelling and vocabulary skills. Such writing would normally yield better scores, even in comprehension, as demonstrated in the quantitative findings of this study. Learners at private schools scored highly in their reading comprehension

test, exhibiting positive reading practices and strategies. The joint efforts by parents were also evident in private school learners' narratives. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the learners' performance in comprehension tests was better in private schools.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

The findings have shed light on the reading behaviour, habits, attitudes, motivation and proficiency levels of the cohort of learners. The qualitative data have revealed information about the reading development of Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools. There are indications that learners at the two types of schools demonstrate different reading behaviours and operate at different reading ability levels. Results of the quantitative findings from the learners' questionnaire did not show much in terms of differences in their reading strategies. However, independent t-tests to determine differences in mean scores by school type showed that there were differences in the reading practices, implying differences in reading ability between private and government schools. These results are supported by the findings from the learners' narratives, as they shed more light on the disparity of reading ability between the two school types. Learners from private schools demonstrated good reading prowess, while learners from government schools showed performance lag in reading. The results from the comprehension-test portion of the quantitative analysis further separated the two school types in terms of their reading proficiency level. Error bars for performance in the comprehension test by school type showed a confidence interval from 80 to 100 for private school learners and from 20 to 30 for government school learners.

The quantitative data of the teachers' cross-sectional study also confirmed differences between school types. The Mann-Whitney U test showed that the average mean score on reading behaviour was 15.83 for private schools and 7.38 for government schools, implying that private school teachers agreed that learners at their schools showed positive reading behaviour while government school teachers felt that learners at government schools exhibited negative reading behaviour.

Motivational factors were also strong in private schools, confirmed by learners' performance in both the qualitative and the quantitative data results. The Mann-Whitney U test indicated mean scores of 15.59 for private schools and 7.62 for government schools, implying that private school learners were more motivated in the reading comprehension activities than government school learners. Similar indications were obtained for home and socio-economic and school factors.

It can thus be concluded that private schools exhibited better results than government schools as far as reading proficiency is concerned. The next chapter, which concludes the dissertation will summarise the research questions, the research problem and the theoretical and conceptual framework; present an interpretation of the findings and suggestions for further research; expound the significance of the research; and make recommendations.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Understanding the factors that contribute to reading proficiency is important, as reading proficiency is critical for the academic performance of learners. Learners with low reading proficiency are at risk of leaving school without the requisite skills, and this may hinder learners' progress in later academic endeavours. The primary purpose of this study was to find out the reading proficiency levels of Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools, since these learners were previously disadvantaged during the Zimbabwean economic meltdown of 2006 to 2008. The research also sought to establish the factors that determined the reading proficiency level of the same learners. In order to investigate these issues, the following questions were put forward:

Question 1: What is the reading comprehension level of Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe?

Question 2: What are the reading factors that determine the reading proficiency level of Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe?

In gathering information to answer the research questions, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Learners were exposed to a reading comprehension test to answer the first research question. In addition, learners and teachers were given questionnaires that were analysed quantitatively to answer the second research question. Furthermore, learners were required to write narratives on their reading developments to provide further insight into the information provided in the questionnaire. This chapter endeavours to establish the extent to which the research questions have been answered in order to draw conclusions from the findings. The chapter will restate the research problems and sum up the theoretical and conceptual framework. The findings will be summarised, conclusions will be drawn and the significance of the study will be highlighted before recommendations are made.

## **5.2 Research problem, theoretical and conceptual framework**

With episodes of hyperinflation and depreciation of the Zimbabwean dollar, human capital especially in the education sector reached a critical low from 2006 to 2008. High staff turnover, absenteeism and disruptions in government schools affected the early years of learners' reading development. Most learners, who were in Grade 1 at that time, particularly those in government schools, are seen to have been adversely affected, especially in their reading development. The early years of reading are considered vital to all subsequent learning, as these include and transcend all learning in different subjects (Sampson, 1989). As such, this research sought to find out the reading comprehension levels of the Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools who were in Grade 1 during the critical years of learning in Zimbabwe. In addition, the research sought to establish the factors that may have influenced the reading comprehension and general literacy levels of the cohort of learners at the same schools.

The concept of reading refers not only to the ability to decode print, but as Rumelhart (1972) puts it, reading is a perceptual and a cognitive process. This view of reading bridges and blurs the traditional distinctions of reading, phonics and phonemic awareness. Grabe and Stoller (2011) concur that reading combines the key ideas of the bottom-up model of reading with the views of top-down model, the latter referring to readers continually making guesses about what they read. Moreover, reading is said not to occur without comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). There have been several studies in the literature reporting that reading comprehension is not only making meaning of written codes, but a number of other factors are incorporated to arrive at desired meanings. The National Reading Panel (2000) defines reading comprehension as the mastering of a set of skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. In the act of reading, the reader poses questions throughout the reading in order to monitor meaning, lest it be lost (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Pardo, 2004).

However, a number of studies show that teaching the basic reading skills can only improve learner outcomes in reading if teachers have had training in the teaching of these skills, an 'inevitable matter for language teachers' (Byram, 2011). In addition, unless the teacher builds upon the subject matter to unlock what is unknown to the reader, readers might lose interest in what they read (Knoll, 2000). It was in view of this that the researcher designated the theoretical framework by

Coady (1979) as a guiding principle for the current research, as it presents an exhaustive paradigm that enables learners to have the desire to read and build confidence in reading.

The theoretical framework by Coady (1979) draws influence from the psycholinguistic model of reading by Goodman (1967, 1971, 1973), where readers' background knowledge interacts with conceptual and processing strategies to arrive at comprehension. Coady (1979) puts emphasis on the role of background knowledge rather than other factors. He asserts that "background knowledge becomes an important variable when we notice, as many have, that learners with a Western background of some kind learn English faster, on average, than those without such background" (Carrell & Eisterhold, 2012: 555). Background knowledge, according to Coady (1979), may compensate for certain syntactic deficiencies as it is viewed as the circumstance, environment and setting brought to the text by the reader. This is as opposed to context, which is the circumstance, environment and setting created by the author of the text (Lally, 1998). For readers to activate this background knowledge, pre-reading activities are said to be directed by the language teacher in order to develop skills in anticipation and prediction of the reading of graphic material. Hence, readers are said to be able to bring appropriate background knowledge, if guided by teachers, as they conduct pre-reading sessions (ibid).

With government schools experiencing high staff turnover and numerous challenges in the years in question, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.3.1), learners could have been deprived of the close monitoring, adequate pacing and classroom management required for successful reading development, as espoused in the psycholinguistic model of reading. Essential reading strategies that needed to be taught to develop reading comprehension may have been glossed over, poorly taught or not taught at all due to the challenging situation at that time. Thus, teachers might have failed to adequately develop learners' reading comprehension ability and build their motivation for reading. The disturbances in government schools might have affected learners such that there was loss of interest in school, resulting in minimal reading culture.

### **5.3 Summary of the results**

In order to answer the two research questions highlighted in the introduction, data were collected through a comprehension test to answer research question 1, "What is the reading comprehension level of Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools?" Questionnaires were given

to both learners and teachers in order to answer research question 2, “What factors determine the reading proficiency level of Form 2 learners in Bulawayo Central District high schools?” To give further insight into the information obtained from the questionnaires, learners were asked to write narratives. Participants were drawn from four schools: two private schools (one girls-only school one boys-only school) and two government schools (also one boys-only school and one girls-only school). There were 22 learners from the private schools and 48 from the government schools who participated in the study. The learners sat for a comprehension test, completed the questionnaires and wrote narratives on their reading development. Nine teachers from the private schools and 12 teachers from the government schools completed the questionnaire. The comprehension test was analysed using the t-test, the questionnaire was analysed using ANOVA, and the narratives were analysed qualitatively through content analysis.

In answering research question 1, the comprehension test attempted to determine the learners’ reading proficiency level. The findings from the comprehension test suggest that, generally, the performance of learners from private schools was relatively good compared to that of learners from government schools. The mean performance for the private school learners was 91.64% with a deviation of 12.42%, indicating a brilliant performance, as most learners did not get scores deviant from the mean score. However, government school learners had a mean score of 36.63% and a standard deviation of 18.13%, implying that their reading comprehension level was far below that of Grade 4 level. Moreover, the error bars in shown in Chapter 4 (cf. 4.2.2) separated the two school types by the confidence interval for the comprehension test results of 80 to 100 for private school learners and 20 to 30 for government school learners.

The reading proficiency level of the two different types of schools is, therefore, different. The difference in the performance level of the two schools could be attributed to the economic downturn, as assumed and explained in Chapters 1, 2 and 4. Learners from government schools might have been negatively affected by the economic instability at that time.

In answering question 2, questionnaires were collected from learners and teachers. Responses from learners’ questionnaires revealed differences between the reading practices and the reading strategies. This was confirmed by the t-tests, which showed the statistical significance of these differences. The category of *reading practices* showed a p-value of .015, indicating the difference in schools to be statistically significant. The mean score for government schools was lower as

compared to that of private schools, implying that private schools offered positive learning practices. Conclusions can be drawn that reading practices were positive in private schools.

*Reading strategies* did not receive different responses from learners from both schools. Learners from the two types of schools both used positive reading strategies. The p-value was .437, which is greater than .05, indicating that there was no significant difference in terms of reading strategies. Learners from both school types indicated similar reading strategies and the results did not yield significant differences as learners might not have found the variable important or the category had few questions to project differences. Even though the difference in reading strategies seemed not to be statistically significant, the means showed differences according to school type. Learners from the PGHS implemented reading strategies more often and more appropriately than government school learners, with a mean of 3.78. This relatively high mean of PGHS learners further reflects the differences between the government and private school learners' reading proficiency.

Responses from the teachers' questionnaires to answer the second research question indicate that factors such as behaviour of the learner during reading, motivation, home and socio-economic status have an impact on reading comprehension proficiency. Teachers in private schools agreed that learners in their schools had good reading behaviour while teachers from government schools envisaged learners in their schools as lacking in good reading behaviour. The results of the t-tests showed the significance of these differences, as the z-value stood at 3.112 with a p-value of .002, implying that the factor was highly significant. Positive behaviour is required for learners to comprehend what they read. Positive behaviour is mostly associated with a positive attitude, which is viewed as enthusiasm in reading. One could conclude that government school learners lacked enthusiasm. Government school learners might have failed to attach value to what they did at school from 2006 to 2008, since government schools were beset with upheavals, as discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 4. On the other hand, private school learners showed positive behaviour due to the positive attitudes held about learning the target language. Teachers' responses from questionnaires also indicated that motivation might have been a factor that influenced reading for learners in private schools. However, teachers in government schools were not in agreement with the premise. Indications were drawn from the mean rank of 15.59 for private school teachers and 7.62 for government school teachers. The findings showed that government school learners may



have low motivation as far as reading is concerned, while learners at private schools were said to be curious to read even several texts. Reading several texts is seen as a precursor to motivation. The findings could also be a culmination of the unsupportive reading conditions of the period from 2006 to 2008, when learners at government schools had limited resources and availability of teachers, as mentioned in the introduction of this study. The conditions in government schools could have negatively impacted on learners' reading attitudes. Learners from private schools could have developed motivation and self-determination because of the positive conditions prevailing in their schools. The availability of resources and human capital in private schools might have enabled learners to develop reading autonomy and self-determination that are considered important factors in motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The findings further suggest that the home and socio-economic status (SES) of the learners' parents play an important role in their reading proficiency level. The mean rank of 15.72 for private schools indicated that most private school teachers agreed that learners from their schools came from considerably high-SES homes. As a result, SES seems to be an important reading factor for these learners, which corroborates previous research as reported by Grabe and Stoller (2011). Contrary to this, teachers from government schools had a mean rank of 6.71, indicating that teachers were in disagreement and held the opinion that learners in government schools were from considerably low-SES homes. Low SES might have had a negative impact on learners from government schools as families may not have been able to afford to buy extra reading materials other than those given by the school. The current findings, therefore, add substantially to the understanding of the performances of the two groups of learners, and calls for efficient intervention for government school learners.

In order to shed more light on the information gathered from the quantitative comprehension test and the questionnaires from learners and teachers, the learners' narratives were analysed qualitatively to find out how they performed in writing, as writing builds from reading. In addition, the learners' performance in writing gave a picture on how they developed their reading proficiency.

Learners from private schools wrote strong narratives as far as logic and precision are concerned. However, the performance by government school learners was marred by spelling and grammatical errors. The performance by the learners from government schools indicates a gap in the bottom-

up and top-down reading processes. With inadequacies in both phonics and background knowledge application, learners at government schools would have been unlikely to attain the perceptual and cognitive reading processes, which Grabe and Stoller (2011) posit as being key to interactive reading. Learners from private schools demonstrated a high level of reading proficiency in their narratives by being able to use varied vocabulary, appropriate and correctly constructed sentences, as well as displaying a good command of the language, demonstrating that they are well read.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the findings: Form 2 (Grade 9) learners from government schools are lagging behind in their reading proficiency. The implications of this are that if these learners are not given special attention, including diagnostic instruction to overcome the reading comprehension lag, the reading comprehension gap will be carried over to tertiary level. This could mean that the majority of the learners might either drop out or struggle, spending more years in education than are required. Most learners graduating to advanced-level school might exhibit the reading comprehension lag.

#### **5.4 Significance of the study**

The short-term significance of the study is its possible impact on teaching and learning of reading comprehension. The long-term implications of this study are that it will impact on issues of policy, contribute to the body of knowledge and stimulate further research. The following paragraphs will deal with each of the issues in detail.

In light of the impact of the economic downturn in Zimbabwe between 2006 and 2008, the research has indicated an important relationship between the socio-economic status (SES) of the families and the school. Researchers and educators might want to consider the implications of SES within the realm of teaching and reading comprehension. The study also indicated that the unavailability of resources hinders reading development. Lack of resources might impact negatively on the promotion of independent reading, or recreational reading which is envisaged to improve learners' reading proficiency. Likewise, researchers, school administrators, and parents' liaison committees might have to consider prioritising accessing reading resources in their budgets.

Moreover, motivation and family involvement have been shown to result in reading achievements; hence, the understanding of motivation and family involvement might enrich the language teacher.

The implication of the findings might also enable the researcher and the language teacher to initiate policies and strategies with regard to dealing with low reading achievement. The research pointed out that learners who were affected by the economic instability might have failed to receive interventions to redress the performance lag. Indeed, the researcher and language teachers might realise the need to draw the attention of the ministry so that a policy is drawn up on how the reading comprehension performance lag should be addressed.

Implications of the study might also be in terms of an important voice that contributes to the existing body of knowledge in teaching and learning of reading. With the reading comprehension level established in government schools, teachers and other stakeholders would place a considerable emphasis on the learners' early reading ventures. Early reading strategy should be considered strongly as a reading precursor to reduce the gap for government school learners. The findings of the study may also prompt teachers to examine the reading strategies they teach and how they teach them in order to promote comprehension.

Finally, this study may stimulate further research on reading and its divergent facets. Reading the findings of this study might prompt other researchers to add to the body of knowledge covered by this study. For instance, girls at most schools performed better than boys. But since the study was not focusing on gender issues, gender was ignored. Future research could also consider finding out what factors influence the high reading achievement of the girls in comparison to the boys. Ultimately, the study could also improve parents' perceptions of school and home as platforms of learning to read and reading to learn.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

There are numerous reasons why learners struggle to read, and countless solutions are in place. Some of the reasons relate to the attention learners get from their teachers, but the researcher finds the government at the centre of reading development in schools. Based on the findings, the following suggestions are made: re-introduction of special classes by government; revival of government high school libraries; and facilitation of exchange and networking programmes. These suggestions are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

### **5.5.1 Re-introduction of special classes**

In the introductory chapter (cf. 1.3.3), the researcher indicated that learners with reading challenges were once withdrawn from the mainstream to receive individual corrective tuition, but the programme was disbanded during the economic downturn. Currently, learners of mixed ability and those who are reading below their expected grade level are catered for in the same class in government schools.

The researcher proposes that policy-makers entertain the issue of resuscitation of the corrective reading programme. The programme would require that learners be tested by specialists at a particular stage and if they have reading challenges, as shown in this study, then they should be accorded appropriate tuition.

The implementation strategy would also consider the following:

- i) Introducing a blueprint, that is, policy articulation, including recommended resources
- ii) Training of trainers to monitor the programme
- iii) Introducing in-service programmes targeting teachers
- iv) Establishing a timetable for the programme at school level

### **5.5.2 Revival of government high school libraries**

Government high school libraries might have been impoverished by the economic situation that prevailed from 2006 to 2008, and the researcher recommends that libraries be upgraded. It was established that libraries were principal sources of books, audio-visual and other electronic resources for supplementary, instructional and voluntary reading in private schools. Hence, the researcher proposes that government should revive libraries by taking the following actions:

- i) Putting in place a policy on the revival of public libraries by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.
- ii) Allocation of resources and rebuilding of infrastructure
- iii) Training of librarians and implementing in-service programmes for librarians

iv) Introducing a timetable for a library period at school level

### **5.5.3 Exchange and networking programmes**

One might argue that the world has become a global village, and as such, schools ought to embrace the call to work as a family. There is need for both government and private schools to step up on benchmarking the global practices in exchange programmes. Team teaching on reading comprehension within schools and between schools might improve teachers' strategies. Teachers could also engage in staff development programmes at the school, district, provincial, regional and global levels to share knowledge. The sharing and exchange of material and teaching strategies could improve learners' reading comprehension, especially for those who are lagging behind.

The government, through the Department of Research, could also fund teachers to attend regional and world research conference platforms to improve their teaching skills. This might enable teachers to keep abreast of new trends in teaching reading comprehension.

The exchange programmes could also be extended to learners, enabling those from the different school types to network on issues of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The government is recommended, therefore, to set aside funds for the recommended programmes.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This study has indicated that there is a reading comprehension lag among Form 2 (Grade 9) learners in government schools, as it seems they were disturbed by the economic challenges of 2006 to 2008 when they were in Grade 1 (Zimbabwe and South Africa). The learners who were studied showed that their reading comprehension level still lies below minimum comprehension level, and factors such as reading habit, motivation, socio-economic status and school factors have a bearing on their reading levels.

Unless an intervention is instituted for the learners who exhibit reading comprehension challenges, the performance lag will be carried over. Learners who were affected will continue to struggle to read and to learn, many will drop out of school due to repeated failures, and the few who make it to tertiary education will continue to experience challenges at that level.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Research Ethics Committee

26 August 2016

Dear Prof Carstens

**Project:** Factors influencing learners' reading ability in English in Bulawayo Central District High Schools in Zimbabwe  
**Researcher:** T Gumede  
**Supervisor:** Ms N Boakye  
**Department:** Unit for Academic Literacy  
**Reference number:** 15097651(GW20160819HS)

Thank you for the application that was submitted for ethical consideration.

I am pleased to inform you that the above application was **approved** by the **Research Ethics Committee** on 25 August 2016. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

The Committee requests you to convey this approval to the researcher.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PP. [Signature]', with the initials 'PP.' written to the left.


**Prof Maxi Schoeman**  
**Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Ethics**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**e-mail: tracey.andrew@up.ac.za**

Kindly note that your original signed approval certificate will be sent to your supervisor via the Head of Department. Please liaise with your supervisor.

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Harris; Dr L Blokland; Dr R Fasselt; Ms KT Govinder; Dr E Johnson; Dr C Panebianco; Dr C Puttergill; Dr D Reyburn; Prof GM Spies; Prof E Taljard; Ms B Tsebe; Dr E van der Klashorst; Mr V Sithole

## Appendix 2: Ethical clearance from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

all communications should be addressed to  
"The Provincial Education Director"  
Telephone: 09-69511/69942  
Telegraphic: "SCHOLASTIC"  
Telex: 50531 MPSEM ZW  
Fax: 09-77027



ZIMBABWE

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education,  
Bulawayo Metropolitan Province  
P O Box 555  
Bulawayo  
Zimbabwe

23 February 2016

Thenjiwe Gumede  
545 Aberfeldy Road  
Killarney  
**Bulawayo**

**RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH AT TOWNSEND,  
MILTON, EVELINE, HAMILTON AND MONTROSE HIGH SCHOOLS:  
BULAWAYO EAST DISTRICT: BULAWAYO PROVINCE.**

Reference is made to your application to carry out a research at the research at the above mentioned schools in Bulawayo Province on the research title "An investigation into the factors that influence learners' reading in (ability)".

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the District Education Officer, who is responsible for the schools which you want to involve in your research.

You are required to provide a copy of your final report to the Provincial Education Director.

H.R. S Makwati  
MIN. SECRETARY  
S MAKWATI (MRS)  
PHRO- LEGAL AND DISCIPLINARY SERVICES  
For: PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR  
BULAWAYO METROPOLITAN PROVINCE.


MIN. OF PRIMARY & SECONDARY EDU.  
BULAWAYO METROPOLITAN PROVINCE  
DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICER  
2016-04-23  
P.O. BOX 555, BULAWAYO  
ZIMBABWE TEL: 09-61525

## Appendix 3: Ethical clearance from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development

MINISTRY OF HIGHER AND TERTIARY EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT  
**HILLSIDE TEACHERS' COLLEGE**

ADDRESS ALL  
CORRESPONDENCE TO

THE PRINCIPAL  
PRIVATE BAG 2,  
HILLSIDE, BULAWAYO  
ZIMBABWE  
E-mail Addresses:  
[hillside.teachers@gmail.com](mailto:hillside.teachers@gmail.com)  
[hillsideteacherscollege@yahoo.com](mailto:hillsideteacherscollege@yahoo.com)



CECIL AVENUE  
HILLSIDE  
BULAWAYO  
ZIMBABWE  
TEL: +263 9 242283/4/6  
FAX: +263 9 241985

DISCIMUS UT DOCEAMUS  
"We learn in order to teach"

13 May 2016

### To Whom It May Concern

Dear Sir/Madam,

**CONFIRMATION OF UNDERTAKING OF RESEARCH STUDIES: GUMEDE  
THENJIWE: E.C. No. 0041565D: HIGHER AND TERTIARY EDUCATION,  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT.**

Mrs. Gumede is a bonafide Hillside Teachers' College Lecturer who is studying, Master of Arts Degree in Linguistics with the University of Pretoria in South Africa. She is currently carrying out research on "An investigation into the factors that influence learners' reading in (ability)"

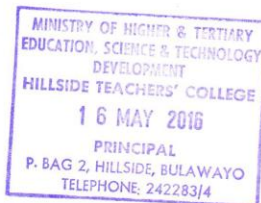
This letter serves to confirm that the College is aware that she is undertaking her research in the Bulawayo District Schools.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully





**E. M. GUMPO (MR)  
PRINCIPAL**



*\* Our mission is to develop professional, committed and reflective teachers for the lower & middle secondary schools in Zimbabwe\**

## Appendix 4: Informed consent for learners

34



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

**Faculty of Humanities**  
**Unit for Academic Literacy**

30 June 2016

Dear learner

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. As required for my degree, I am conducting a study on factors influencing learners' reading ability in Bulawayo Central District High Schools in Zimbabwe. I would like you to participate in the study. You will be writing a comprehension test, a story about how you learnt to read from Grade One until now, and complete a questionnaire on your reading strategies.

Participation is voluntary, anonymous and confidential. Your identity will not be revealed. This means that no one will know what your answers are. So please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials. Study information will be kept in a secure location. at the University of Pretoria. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings.

Your involvement would require you to write a comprehension test, your literacy/reading journey and complete the questionnaire of ten questions.

If you would like to participate then you may tick the appropriate box and sign below.

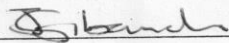
**Assent**

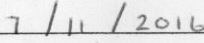
I have read the information on the letter/memo about the study and what it describes.


I would like to participate in the study.

**OR**

I do not want my child to participate in the study.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



unit for academic literacy  
eenheid vir akademiese geletterdheid  
Tel: +27 (0)12 420 5905 | Fax/Faks: (012) 420 3682 | E-mail/E-pos: Naomi.boakye@up.ac.za

## Appendix 5: Informed consent for teachers

94

100  
1908-2008



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Unit for Academic Literacy

30 June 2016

Dear Teachers

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. As required for my degree, I am conducting a study on factors influencing learners' reading ability in Bulawayo Central District High Schools in Zimbabwe. I would appreciate your participation in completing the attached questionnaire.

Participation is voluntary and confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure place and the results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings. Your identification will not be revealed. Participation is also anonymous, as you will not be required to disclose your names or any form of identification on the questionnaire.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate please tick the appropriate box and sign below.

**Assent**

I have read the information on the letter/memo about the study and what it describes.

I would like to participate in the study.

**OR**



I do not wish to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

28-10-2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

 unit for academic literacy  
eenheid vir akademiese geletterdheid  
Tel: +27 (0)12 420 5905 | Fax/Faks: (012) 420 3682 | E-mail/E-pos: Naomi.boakye@up.ac.za

## Appendix 6: Informed consent for parents

  **UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA**

**Faculty of Humanities  
Unit for Academic Literacy**

30 June 2016

Dear Parents

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. As required for my degree, I am conducting a study on factors influencing learners' reading ability in Bulawayo Central District High Schools in Zimbabwe. I would like your children to participate in writing a comprehension test, a story about how they learnt how to read from Grade One until, and complete a questionnaire on their reading strategies.

Participation in the research study is voluntary and confidential. The information will be kept in a secure location. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings but the identity of your children will not be revealed. Participation is hence anonymous which means that no one will know what their answers were. They will not be required to provide their names or other form of identification.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like your child to participate, may you please tick the appropriate box and sign below.

**Assent**

I have read the information on the letter/memo about the study and what it describes.


I would like my child to participate in the study.

**OR**

I do not want my child to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Naomi Boakye \_\_\_\_\_ 25/10/2016

Signature Date

 unit for academic literacy  
eenheid vir akademiese geletterdheid  
Tel: +27 (0)12 420 5905 | Fax/Faks: (012) 420 3682 | E-mail/E-pos: Naomi.boakye@up.ac.za

## **Appendix 7: PIRLS comprehension test**

### **Comprehension passage and questions: PIRLS (2011)**

An unbelievable Night by Franz Hohler

Anina was ten years old, so even half asleep she could find her way from her room to the bathroom. The door to her room was usually open a crack, and the nightlight in the hallway made it light enough to get to the bathroom past the telephone stand.

One night, as she passed the telephone stand on her way to the bathroom, Anina heard something that sounded like a quiet hissing. But, because she was half asleep, she didn't really pay any attention to it. Anyway, it came from pretty far away. Not until she was on her way back to her room did she see where it came from. Under the telephone stand there was a large pile of old newspapers and magazines, and this pile now began to move. That was where the noise was coming from. All of a sudden the pile started to fall over – right, left, forwards, backwards – then there were newspapers and magazines all over the floor. Anina could not believe her eyes as she watched a grunting and snorting crocodile come out from under the telephone stand.

Anina was frozen to the spot. Her eyes wide as saucers, she watched the crocodile crawl completely out of the newspapers and slowly look around the apartment. It seemed to have just come out of the water because its whole body was dripping wet. Wherever the crocodile stepped, the carpet under it became drenched.

The crocodile moved its head back and forth letting out a loud hissing sound. Anina swallowed hard, looking at the crocodile's snout with its terribly long row of teeth. It swung its tail back and forth. Anina had read about that in "Animal Magazine" – how the crocodile whips the water with its tail to chase away or attack its enemies.

Her gaze fell on the last issue of "Animal Magazine," which had fallen from the pile and was lying at her feet. She got another shock. The cover of the magazine used to have a picture of a big crocodile on a river bank. The river bank was now empty!

Anina bent down and picked the magazine. At that moment the crocodile whipped his tail so hard that he cracked the big vase of sunflowers on the floor and the sunflowers scattered everywhere. With a quick jump Anina was in her bedroom. She slammed the door shut, grabbed her bed and pushed it against the door. She had built a barricade that would keep her safe from the crocodile. Relieved, she let her breath out.

But then she hesitated. What if the beast was simply hungry? Maybe to make the crocodile go away you had to give it something to eat?



Anina looked again at the animal magazine. If the crocodile could crawl out of a picture then perhaps other animals could too. Anina hastily flipped through the magazine and stopped at a swarm of flamingos in a jungle swamp. Just right, she thought. They look like a birthday cake for crocodiles.

Suddenly there was a loud crack and the tip of the crocodile's tail pushed through the splintered door. Quickly, Anina held the picture of the flamingos up to the hole in the door and called as loud as she could, "Get out of the swamp! Shoo! Shoo!" Then she threw the magazine into the hallway, clapped her hands and yelled and screamed.

She could hardly believe what happened next. The entire hallway was suddenly filled with screeching flamingoes widely flapping their wings and running around all over the place on their long, skinny legs. Anina saw one bird with a sunflower in its beak and another grabbing her mother's hat from its hook. She saw a flamingo disappear into the crocodile's mouth. With two quick bites he swallowed the flamingo and quickly followed it with another, the one with the sunflower in its beak.

After two portions of flamingo the crocodile seemed to have had enough and lay down contentedly in the middle of the hallway. When he had closed his eyes and no longer moved, Anina quietly opened her door and slipped through it into the hallway. She placed the empty magazine cover in front of the crocodile's nose. "Please," she whispered, "please go back home." She crept back into the bedroom and looked through the hole in the door. She saw the crocodile back on the cover of the magazine.

She now went cautiously into the living room where the flamingoes were crowded around sofa and standing on the television. Anina opened the magazine to the page with the empty picture. "Thank you," she said, "thank you very much. You may now go back to your swamp."

In the morning it was very difficult for her to explain the giant wet spot on the floor and the broken door to her parents. They weren't convinced about the crocodile even though her mother's hat was nowhere to be found.

Adapted from *Eine Wilde Nacht in Der Grobe Zwerg und Andere Geschichten* by Franz Hohler. (2003) German, Munchen, D.T. IEA.

### **Questions: An Unbelievable Night**

1. What was the first sign that something unusual was happening?
  - a) A pile of newspapers began to move.
  - b) Anina saw the magazine cover.
  - c) The door to her room was broken
  - d) Anina heard a hissing sound.

2. Where did the crocodile come from?

- a) The bathroom
- b) A magazine cover
- c) Under the bed
- d) a nearby river

3. Which words tell you that Anina was frightened?

- a) “ frozen to the spot”
- b) “ could not believe her eyes”
- c) “ let her breath out”
- d) “ sounded like a quiet hissing”

4. Why did Anina think the crocodile was going to attack?

- a) It showed its long row of teeth.
- b) It let out a loud hissing sound.
- c) It started grunting and snorting.
- d) it swung its tail back and forth.

5. Put the following sentences in the order in which they happened in the story.

The first one has been done for you.

\_\_\_\_ Anina saw the crocodile.

\_\_\_\_ The crocodile ate two flamingos.

\_\_\_\_ Anina tried to explain the broken door to her parents.

  1   Anina started to walk to the bathroom.

\_\_\_\_ Anina ran to the bedroom and slammed the door.

6. Why did Anina call the flamingos?

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7. How did the bedroom door get broken?

- a) The crocodile’s tail pushed through it.
- b) the big vase cracked against it.
- c) The flamingo’s sharp beak crashed into it.
- d) The bed smashed against it.

8. How did the magazine help Anina? Write **Two** ways.

1)

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2)

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## Appendix 8: Questionnaire for English learners

The questionnaire guide presented here is to gather information on reading activities conducted by learners. Please feel free to give the researcher information that will help make the research a success. Information is collected in confidence and is voluntary.

### Section A: Demographic Information

#### 1. Sex

a) Female

b) Male

2. Form

3. a) Government School (Girls)  (b) Government School (Boys)

(c) Private School (Girls)  (d) Private School (Boys)

### SECTION B

#### KEY

1. Strongly Disagree (SD)

2. Disagree (D)

3. Not Sure (NS)

4. Agree (A)

5. Strongly Agree (SA)

<b>Reading Practices</b>	<b>1(SD)</b>	<b>2(D)</b>	<b>3(NS)</b>	<b>4(A)</b>	<b>5(SA)</b>
1 My parents used to read story books to me before I started going to school.					
2. Most of the time I read different books to my parents when I started my Grade one.					
3. When I was in Grade one my parents used to accompany me to the library to borrow books					
4. Nursery rhymes were taught to us at Grade one.					
5. I read one story book every week since Grade one.					
6. I do not share a reading text book with other learners in the class.					
7. I get bored when I try to read a book.					
8. The teacher encourages us to read aloud in class					
9. The teacher encourages us to ask questions about what we read in class.					
10 I enjoy reading to my brother, sister, friend or relative.					
11. I do not like answering questions that come below the passage.					
12. I get high marks in comprehension when questions are done in groups first.					
13 The teacher gives us tasks to read to our parents twice a week at home.					

14. Passages that I read have pictures to make us understand the passage.					
15. When I have problems with reading properly, the teacher gives individual reading lessons.					
	<b>1(SD)</b>	<b>2(D)</b>	<b>3(NS)</b>	<b>4(A)</b>	<b>5(SA)</b>
16. Classrooms have reading charts on the walls for us to read.					
17. I am given time during school period to visit the library every week to read books.					
<b>Reading Strategies</b>					
18. I keep a book where I write words that I do not understand.					
19. I write summaries on what I read in the library during the library period.					
20 When I do not understand what I read, I read it again.					

**Thank you for your time.**

## Appendix 9: Questionnaire for language teachers

### INTRODUCTION

The questionnaire guide is meant to solicit views from English Language Teachers in the Bulawayo Metropolitan province and specifically earmarking Bulawayo East District Secondary Schools on factors influencing learners' reading ability in English.

### INTRODUCTION BY THE RESEARCHER

I am a student at University of Pretoria, South Africa, doing a Master of Arts Degree in Linguistics. At the present moment I am carrying out research on factors that influence learners' reading ability.

The information that you are to give will be used for this research only and is to be treated with utmost confidentiality. Please help to make this study a success by sincerely responding to the questions below.

### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

**TICK** in the box provided for the answer that best describes your situation.

#### A: Age

1. 25 & below

2. 26 - 35 years

3. 36- 45 years

4. 46 - 55 years

5. 56-65 years

#### B: SEX

1. Male

2. Female

### C: PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

1. C.E.

2. Dip. Ed.

3. Grad. C.E./Grad. Dip.

4. BA

5. MA

6. Other (specify).....

**D: ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS**

- |             |                      |             |                      |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1. O' Level | <input type="text"/> | 2. A' Level | <input type="text"/> |
| 3. B.A      | <input type="text"/> | 4. M.A      | <input type="text"/> |

**E: LANGUAGE TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

- |                       |                      |                |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| 1. 5 years and below  | <input type="text"/> | 2. 6- 10 years | <input type="text"/> |
| 3. 11- 20 years       | <input type="text"/> | 4. 31-30 years | <input type="text"/> |
| 5. 41 years and above | <input type="text"/> |                |                      |

**F: Tick As Many Classes As You Teach**

- |           |                      |           |                      |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| 1. Form 1 | <input type="text"/> | 2. Form 2 | <input type="text"/> |
| 3. Form 3 | <input type="text"/> | 4. Form 4 | <input type="text"/> |

**G: SCHOOL**

- |                              |                      |                           |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Government School (Girls) | <input type="text"/> | 2. Private school (Girls) | <input type="text"/> |
| 3. Government School (Boys)  | <input type="text"/> | 4. Private School (Boys)  | <input type="text"/> |

**SECTION B**

**KEY**

1. Strongly Disagree (SD)
2. Disagree (D)
3. Not Sure (NS)
4. Agree (A)
5. Strongly Agree (SA)



<b>READING BEHAVIOUR</b>	<b>1(SD)</b>	<b>2(D)</b>	<b>3(NS)</b>	<b>4(A)</b>	<b>5(SA)</b>
1. In 2008, learners were disruptive during reading lessons					
2. In 2008, learners were passive during comprehension lessons.					
3.Learners read with little understanding most of the comprehension passages					
4. Learners are no so keen on reading aloud the comprehension in class					
5. Learners are withdrawn during reading comprehension lessons.					
6 Most learners were not actively involved in reading during 2008					
<b>MOTIVATION FACTORS</b>					
7 In 2008, learners were unlikely to complete a reading task on time.					
8. Most learners lack interest in reading on their own					
9. Learners in all my current classes finish every reading assignment given to them.					
10. Learners show enjoyment in reading books.					
11. Learners show enthusiasm and are willing to put effort to read better.					
<b>SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS</b>					
12. Learners attended school regularly during 2008.					
13. Learners had adequate learning materials from home in the form of stationery during 2008.					
14. Learners had adequate reading materials from school.					

15. Learners have access to libraries where they loan out reading books.					
16. Learners have support from parents/guardians as they sign the reading book card.					
17. Majority of the learners are from homes without one or both of their parents.					
<b>EDUCATIONAL FACTORS</b>					
18. Reading was taught to Pre-school learners during 2008.					
19. Teachers were supervised by their Heads of schools in their teaching during 2008.					
20 Textbooks for teaching reading were available for learners to use during 2008					
21. The English Department has adequate reading material for learners now.					
22. The English Department has special teachers to teach reading to learners with reading challenges.					
23. Reading comprehension is allocated two periods in the time table for learners' completion of reading tasks.					
<b>READING HABITS</b>					
24. Learners have peer groups that engage in reading as a group to help the not so able readers.					
25. Learners read on their own without the teacher's influence.					
26. Learners keep a book where they record what they read on their own.					
27. Learners write summaries of what they read on their own.					

28. Learners read a variety of books during study time					
29. Learners read story books either at home or at school.					

Tick the appropriate box.

30. What is the teacher: pupil ratio?

- a) 1: 25-28
- b) 1: 29-34
- c) 1: 35-38
- d) 1: 39-44
- e) 1:45-50
- f) 1:49-60

31. Do you use top-down method of teaching reading?

- a) Yes
- b) No

32. Do you use bottom-up method of teaching reading?

- a) Yes
- b) No

**Thank you for your time.**

## Appendix 10: Narratives

Title: My Reading Journey.

Task: Write about how you learnt how to read, including your reading of books at home and at school.

Length: 1 page

Include these aspects in your story

- What is the most exciting book that you have read since you started reading?
- What influence did you get from your teachers as they taught you to read?
- In which grade were you able to read properly?
- How does your family support you in your reading?
- Who has influenced you in your reading story ( a teacher, parent, a friend, a relative, etc.)
- Do you go to the library to read? What do you normally do after reading a book or passage?
- Were you taken to the library to read when you were a child?
- How have you developed as a reader?
- Were there any gaps in your reading journey? (a time when you were not reading)
- Do you go to the library to read?
- What do you normally do after reading a book or passage?

## Appendix 11: Internal consistency of the questionnaire instrument

<b>Table 4.15: Results of the internal consistency of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha</b>			
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>No. of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>Acceptable level</b>
Reading behaviour	6	.885	Good
Motivational factors	5	.898	Good
Home and socio-economic factors	6	.673	Acceptable
School factors	7	.912	Excellent
Reading habits	6	.933	Excellent
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>.965</b>	<b>Excellent</b>

## Appendix 12: Statistical narrative representation

<b>Factors influencing reading</b>	<b>GGHS</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>GBHS</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>PGHS</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>PBHS</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>MOTHER</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>FATHER</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>FAMILY</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>TEACHER</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>LIBRARY</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Average grade when starting to read</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>5</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>	
<b>Retelling story after reading</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>