



**The influence of schooling conditions
and teaching practices on curriculum implementation
for Grade 4 reading literacy development**

by

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
AS	Assessment Standard
ASs	Assessment Standards
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CAQDAS	Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CEA	Centre for Evaluation and Assessment, University of Pretoria
CPTD	Continuing Professional Teacher Development
DoE	South African National Department of Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EFL	English as a First Language
ESL	English Second Language
FDE	Further Diploma in Education
GET	General Education and Training
HED	Higher Education Diploma
HoD	Head of Department
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
INSET	In-service Teacher Education and Training
IRA	International Reading Association
JPTC	Junior Primary Teaching Certificate
KMO	Kaiser- Myer- Olkin
LiEP	Language in Education Policy (DoE, 1997)
LO	Learning Outcome
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LSEN	Learners with Special Educational Needs
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
MLA	Monitoring Learning Achievement
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NICHHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, U.S.A
NRP	National Reading Panel
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development



OTL	Opportunity-To- Learn
PCA	Principal Components Analysis
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PGCE	Post- Graduate Certificate in Education
PRESET	Pre-Service teacher Education and Training
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACMEQ	Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SES	Socio- Economic Status
SPTC	Senior Primary Teaching Certificate
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Note: Owing to their size, the appendices are located on the CD in an envelope at the back of this thesis.

- APPENDIX A:** *Grade 4 English home language learning outcomes*
- APPENDIX B:** *Grade 4 English additional language learning outcomes for the learning outcome reading and viewing*
- APPENDIX C:** *Grade 4 Foundations for Learning reading milestones and assessment tasks*
- APPENDIX D:** *PIRLS 2006 teacher and school questionnaires*
- APPENDIX E:** *Opportunity-To-Learn questionnaire*
- APPENDIX F:** *Head of Department and teacher interview schedules*
- APPENDIX G:** *PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire data tables*
- APPENDIX H:** *Photographs of literacy resources at case study schools*
- APPENDIX I:** *PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data tables*
- APPENDIX J:** *Data tables for factor analysis and significance testing of selected teacher questionnaire items*
- APPENDIX K:** *Reading comprehension texts and questions for classroom observation*
- APPENDIX L:** *Analysis of reading comprehension lessons observed*

SUMMARY

The influence of schooling conditions and teaching practices on curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy development

The findings of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 highlighted concerns about support for and the quality of reading literacy teaching in South African primary schools. In South Africa there is a paucity of research outlining schooling conditions and teachers' reading literacy teaching practices especially in the Intermediate Phase. The aim of this mixed methods study was to explore schooling conditions and teaching practices for the implementation of the curriculum for Grade 4 learners' reading literacy development across a range of education contexts.

Two research sub-questions explored in two research phases were used to investigate the overall question which was: *What influence do schooling conditions and teaching practices have on curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy?* In phase one, PIRLS 2006 principal and teacher questionnaire data were re-classified for secondary analysis according to language of instruction (English First Language or English Additional Language) and the mean performance of each participating class of learners on the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks and further benchmarks established to reflect the performance of the majority of South African learners. Response distributions on selected classroom level variables detailing teacher characteristics and reading literacy teaching practices as well as selected school level variables describing teaching conditions impacting the teaching of reading literacy were compared across each reclassified benchmark sub-sample. In phase two, six school and teacher case studies were purposively selected from each of the sub-samples to complement and extend the findings from the analysis of the survey data using multiple qualitative data sources.

The findings revealed that differences in schooling conditions and teaching practices across the PIRLS achievement spectrum were generally aligned to differences between advantaged, high achieving schools and disadvantaged low-achieving schools. Thus, the study provides insights into the high levels of between-school inequalities for the

development of Grade 4 reading literacy and school and classroom level reasons for such inequalities. On the basis of the findings, recommendations for policy, teacher practice and teacher education, and further research are provided.

Key words:

- *the Progress in International Reading Literacy study (PIRLS) 2006*
- *partially mixed equal status mixed methods research design*
- *Grade 4*
- *Intermediate Phase*
- *reading literacy*
- *schooling conditions*
- *teaching practices*
- *curriculum implementation*
- *English First Language learners*
- *English Additional Language learners*

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CHAPTER ONE

MOTIVATION FOR AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 ORIENTATION

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

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 RATIONALE, RESEARCH AIM AND CONTRIBUTION

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

1.3.1 Rationale and research aim

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3.2 Potential contribution of the research

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

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

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

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

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

1.4 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

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

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

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

Research sub-question 1:

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

Research sub-question 2:

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

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

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

1.5 OPERATIONALISATION OF KEY TERMS FOR THE STUDY

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

1.5.1 Reading literacy

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

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

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

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

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

1.5.2 Reading literacy instruction

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

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

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

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

1.5.3 Grade 4 English language teaching

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

1.5.4 Grade 4 classes with an English Additional Language learner cohort

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

1.5.5 Grade 4 classes with an English First language learner cohort

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

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

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

1.5.6 Intended, implemented and attained curriculum

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

Table 1.1: A typology of curriculum representations

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

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

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

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

1.6 CHAPTER DELINEATION FOR THE STUDY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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CHAPTER TWO

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

2.1 ORIENTATION

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

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

2.2 OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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

2.2.1 Historical antecedents

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

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

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

2.2.2 Desegregation of the education system

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 SYNOPSIS OF POLICY INFLUENCES IN EDUCATION

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

2.3.1 The introduction of Outcomes-Based Education

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.2 The Revised National Curriculum Statement¹²

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

2.3.2.1 The place of language instruction in the primary school years

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.2.2 *The Foundation Phase Literacy curriculum*

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

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

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

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

2.3.2.3 *The Intermediate Phase Languages Learning Area*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.4 The Language-in-Education Policy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

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

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

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CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 ORIENTATION

In Chapter One the literature reviewed informed a clarification of the main constructs and presented initial literature-driven insights into the rationale for this study. The literature and policies explored in Chapter Two further illustrated the context of the research. In this chapter the literature review offered augments the literature already introduced in the first two chapters. The focus is on exploring the constructs for and the context of the study further as well as providing background to the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Four by situating the study within recent empirical research literature.

For the literature review presented, it is recognised that there is a vast corpus of research into reading literacy internationally (for example, Allington & Johnston, 2002; Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007). Conversely, concurring with the concerns raised by Pretorius and Machet (2004b) regarding the paucity of reading research in South Africa (see Chapter One), O'Sullivan (2003) argues that the literature on teaching reading to young learners in developing countries is limited. Perry (2008) verifies this by stating that although literacy development in early schooling in Africa has received increased attention from scholars, it is still under-represented in the scholarly literature. Moreover, Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) observe that there has been a wide variety of research into reading and writing in English-speaking countries, which has mushroomed in the past six decades or so, but again, there has been comparatively little research on literacy development on the African continent. With this in mind, as the research focus area reflects a localised research problem potentially germane to other countries, a decision was made to focus the review primarily on literature from South Africa, and, where applicable, to align it to broader international perspectives.

As an orientation to the chapter, in the next section (3.2) a brief discussion of literacy and literacy monitoring worldwide is provided. Section 3.3 continues the discussion of South African learners' achievement of reading literacy, as first considered in Chapter One. In section 3.4, an overview of factors influencing learners' reading literacy achievement is presented, followed by consideration of specific school factors (3.5) and classroom factors (3.6) identified in the literature which may impact learners' achievement (3.5).

3.2 INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK ON READING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

In this section a generalised discussion about the status of literacy worldwide and on the African continent in particular is deliberated upon (3.2.1), together with discussion of the role of international comparative studies in monitoring and evaluating learners' academic development (3.2.2).

3.2.1 A global snapshot

Literacy is recognised as being crucial for economic, social and political participation and development, especially in the knowledge driven societies of today. A United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) report on its Education for All (EFA) initiatives claims that literacy is a right denied to nearly a fifth of the world's adult population. In absolute numbers, the majority of those without literacy skills are from Sub-Saharan Africa, South, East and West Asia and the Pacific. In relative terms, with only about 60% literacy rates, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and the Arab states are the regions with the lowest literacy rates. Albeit that these regions would appear to need to make the most gains in diminishing illiteracy, direct testing of literacy does suggest that the global challenge is much greater than the conventional numbers based on indirect assessments would indicate, and, that the challenge affects both developing and developed countries (UNESCO, 2005). Certainly, South African learners' participation in the PIRLS 2006 assessments (Howie *et al.*, 2007) has reinforced the gravity of the challenge of addressing literacy development for the South African population.

As emphasised in the introduction to this chapter, in spite of the challenges of illiteracy in Africa, many reading studies cited in the international research literature involve educational contexts in developed countries where resource availability, access to reading texts in learners' vernacular, quality of instructional methods and literacy levels are not problematic. Localised research, taking into account context and the impact of these challenges, is therefore needed, especially as the findings of a slowly burgeoning number of individual studies and large-scale national assessments suggest that learners in Africa battle in their accomplishment of literacy (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007).

In South Africa, out of a population of over 47 million people, it is estimated that between 7.4 and 8.5 million adults are functionally illiterate, and that between 2.9 and 4.2 million people have never attended school. Moreover, one million children in South Africa live in a home where no adult can read (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2007). Pretorius and Mampuru (2007) estimate that about 86% of South African adults have achieved basic

literacy, but this does not mean that they have achieved advanced levels of literate understanding. This lack of literate understanding is compounded by a society where reading for enjoyment is scarce and where reading materials are not readily available (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007).

The need to monitor and evaluate the global drive towards the eradication of illiteracy (UNESCO, 2005) means that both national and international assessments of literacy have a key role to play. The role of international studies in this monitoring is considered in the next sub-section.

3.2.2 The role of international comparative studies of reading literacy

Interest in assessment specifically increased following the 1990 World Conference on EFA in Jomtien, Thailand, during which student achievement was proposed as a major point of reference in judging the quality of education. Whilst national examinations have long been prevalent in African education systems, national assessments are a relatively new occurrence (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2005). South Africa, together with other African countries, has participated in a number of these assessments, such as the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) and the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) project. However, only a handful of African countries, including South Africa, have participated in the array of international comparative studies that have come to the fore in recent decades (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2005). Organisations such as UNESCO, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are involved in monitoring literacy development, but only the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) is discussed here as this research is based on South Africa's participation in an IEA study.

The IEA, which conducts the PIRLS, initiates comparative studies focused on educational policies and practices around the world. The IEA is headed by a permanent Secretariat in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, supported by a Data Processing Centre in Hamburg, Germany, and has a membership of about 70 countries. The IEA studies use the world as an "educational laboratory", in which the strengths and weaknesses of educational practices can be assessed (Mullis, 2002, p.2). Many countries have national policies governing variables such as curriculum and teaching strategies, and, without much differentiation in the approaches used within a country, it is difficult to estimate the effectiveness of various policies and practices in relation to educational outcomes. Across-country comparison therefore allows examination of the impact of different educational approaches on achievement and additional insight into a country's own educational system (Mullis, 2002).

Thus these studies have a variety of purposes including comparison of levels of achievement between countries; identification of the major determinants of national achievement within a country; examination of similarities and differences across countries and identification of factors that affect differences between countries. Specific functions of such studies include benchmarking, monitoring, enlightenment, understanding and cross-national research (Howie & Plomp, 2006). The benefit of insight into one's own educational system is of particular relevance for this research, an argument furthered in the discussion of the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 data (Chapter Five).

The background information collected as part of large-scale assessments such as the PIRLS is significant to help understand the factors that influence learners' educational experiences and to describe the learners being assessed. The collection of background information is also used to inform policy by collecting descriptions of the contexts of learning, sometimes described as *Opportunity-To-Learn* (OTL). This incorporates the content officially specified in the curriculum, whether and how it is taught, learners' propensity to learn, as well as home and school reports that can contribute to learning (Mullis, 2002). Therefore, background data can "... provide a picture of what is being done and how that coincides with what is thought to work best" (Mullis, 2002, p.4).

In fact, in large-scale assessments, priority is given to identifying instructional practices that relate to high achievement. However, there may be problems with identifying these instructional practices as strategies deemed to be effective might be reported as being used, but in actuality may not be implemented in ways envisioned to enhance learning. Also, what is considered effective may evolve and change over time, and therefore it may be difficult to report timely data about best practices. Nevertheless, it is seen as important for large-scale studies such as the PIRLS to collect information about instructional practices to help ascertain the extent to which current research recommendations are being implemented and to capture what teachers are actually doing (Mullis, 2002). As in the case of this study, such reporting can also provide a springboard to further research.

As with any research, international studies do present some further concerns that are important to acknowledge. Kellaghan and Greaney (2005) highlight further problems identified with international studies. Firstly, it may be difficult to design an assessment procedure that will adequately measure the outcomes of a variety of curricula despite common elements across the world. There are also considerable differences in expected standards of achievement and in what is taught between developing and industrialised countries (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2005).

Secondly, issues of translation of instruments into one or more languages is a concern as the achievement differences that become apparent may be attributable to language-related differences in the difficulty of the assessment tasks, making question equivalence difficult to achieve. A third challenge relates to the cross-country equivalence of the populations and samples of learners being assessed. For instance, where retention rates differ or where countries differ in their inclusion of children with special education needs or learning problems in the study. A fourth difficulty occurs when the primary focus in reporting the results of the study is on the ranking of countries in terms of the average scores of their learners, since rankings in themselves say nothing about the many factors that may underlie differences between countries in performance. Finally, the relationships between inputs, processes and outcomes need to be examined in the context of individual countries as one cannot assume that practices associated with high achievement in one country will reveal a similar relationship in another (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2005).

In their review of the benefits and limitations of international educational achievement studies, Beaton, Postlethwaite, Ross, Spearritt and Wolf (1999, p.34) of the International Academy of Education, concluded that "... there are many benefits to such studies *on condition that* [Beaton *et al.*'s emphasis] the studies have been well conceptualised and conducted". The validity and reliability of the PIRLS 2006 assessment conceptualisation and its implementation, translation and determination of learner populations (Howie *et al.*, 2007) is outlined in Chapter Five. Beaton and colleagues (1999) further explicate that the type of studies conducted by organisations such as the IEA focus on the variables that might improve achievement in a current system of education. Thus, these types of studies are worthwhile but do require effort on the part of the participating countries, much expertise on the part of the researchers and great care in the interpretation by researchers and policymakers. Resulting recommendations for policy changes in a country need to consider not only the results of the international analyses but also the educational and cultural context in which that country operates (Beaton *et al.*, 1999), which mirrors the argument adopted by Kellaghan and Greaney (2005) about the importance of context in interpretation. For this study, this account of the educational and cultural context of the results of the PIRLS study is explored in-depth via secondary analysis of PIRLS data and PIRLS data informed case studies, especially since it would appear that more investigation is needed into context given South African learners' poor performance in the study.

3.3 SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS' READING LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

Matier Moore and Hart (2007) note that there is a growing corpus of research and debate which suggests deep problems in the South African education system linked to learners' low levels of literacy achievement. They further posit that the root of these problems lies in the ineffective teaching of reading in schools and learners' consequent inability to learn from reading across the curriculum independently. Research findings which connect with Matier Moore and Hart's (2007) observations are explored in this section. Learners' performance on the PIRLS 2006 International benchmarks is summarised (see 3.3.1). Aside from the PIRLS 2006 findings, other studies of reading literacy which also illustrate the difficulties learners' experience are discussed. These studies include the second Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II) (3.3.2), the DoE's systemic evaluations at Grades 3 and 6 (3.3.3) and small-scale empirical studies in individual classes and schools (3.3.4).

3.3.1 South African learners' performance on the PIRLS 2006 International benchmarks

As mentioned in Chapter One, South African learners' performance in the IEA's PIRLS 2006 reading literacy assessments was also scrutinised by means of a process of benchmarking. Benchmarking provides qualitative indications of learners' performance on a scale in relation to questions asked in an assessment. The PIRLS international mean was set at 500 points with the range of performance of learners being aligned to four set benchmarks. These benchmarks included an *Advanced International Benchmark* set at 625 points, a *High International benchmark* of 550 points, an *Intermediate International Benchmark* of 475 and a *Low International Benchmark* set at 400. These benchmarks are cumulative in that learners who were able to reach the higher ones also demonstrated the knowledge and skills for the lower ones (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

Table 3.1 (below) shows the benchmarks, outlining the international achievement median for each and indicating South African Grade 4 and 5 learners' median achievement. Only 13% of South African Grade 4 learners reached the *Low International Benchmark*, in stark contrast to the 94% of Grade 4 learners managing to do so internationally. Apart from South African learners' poor representation on the international benchmarks, it also has to be noted that 87% of Grade 4 learners and 78% of Grade 5 learners did not reach any of the benchmarks. More than half of the English and Afrikaans speaking learners and over 80% of African language speakers did not reach the *Low International Benchmark*, meaning they lacked basic reading skills and strategies to cope with academic tasks. Of the minimal percentages

of South African learners reaching the *High* and *Advanced International Benchmarks*, no African language learners were represented (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

Table 3.1: Percentage of South African learners reaching the PIRLS 2006 International Benchmarks

PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks	Benchmark descriptions	International median	South African median (SE)	
			Grade 4	Grade 5
Low (400- 474)	Basic reading skills and strategies (recognise, locate and reproduce explicitly stated information in texts and answer some questions seeking straightforward inferences).	94	13 (0.5)	22 (0.2)
Intermediate (475-549)	Learners with some reading proficiency who can understand the plot at a literal level and can make some inferences and connections across texts.	76	7 (1.1)	13 (0.8)
High (550-624)	Linked to competent readers who have the ability to retrieve significant details embedded across the text and can provide text-based support for inferences.	41	3 (2.0)	6 (1.6)
Advanced (625+)	Able to respond fully to the PIRLS assessment by means of their integration of information across relatively challenging texts and the provision of full text-based support in their answers.	7	1 (1.5)	2 (1.1)

In contemplation of these findings regarding South African Grade 4 learners' reading levels, the phenomenon of so-called "fourth-grade slump" must be acknowledged. In discussing the North American reading research landscape, Moss (2005, p.46) reports that much has been made of a so-called "fourth-grade slump", which has been observed in Grade 3 learners from low income families. These learners had been reading at grade level but experienced a sudden drop in reading scores in Grade 4. A number of explanations have been offered to explain this phenomenon, namely that, (1) school tasks change significantly from Grade 3 to Grade 4, (2) assessment instruments shift from an emphasis on decoding to the reading of expository text between these grades, and (3) previously unimportant reading difficulties may arise for the first time in Grade 4 when children encounter informational materials (Moss, 2005).

However, it seems improbable that many South African learners would experience a similar fourth-grade slump, as they may not in any event be reading at grade level when they enter Grade 4, especially in light of the DoE's Grade 3 systemic evaluation findings (see 3.3.3) (DoE, 2003). Nonetheless, the reasons that Moss (2005) outlines for a fourth-grade slump are still likely to be complicit in South African learners' difficulties in reading comprehension as, regardless of their levels of reading development, they will still face similar changes in the

composition of their teaching and learning tasks, which may be overwhelming for those who already have poorly developed reading skills.

3.3.2 The second Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II)

For SACMEQ II, a regional assessment, Grade 6 learners from 14 African countries including South Africa completed purpose-designed tests in reading. It was the first time that South Africa participated in the study. Analysis in South Africa focused on establishing learners' levels of achievement in reading and examining whether differential levels of achievement existed according to gender, socioeconomic status and school location. Analysis was also aimed at determining the percentage of learners who demonstrated mastery of essential test items aligned to curricular content. Although fluctuating substantially according to provincial location, overall average learner performance for reading was 492 points, which was below the fixed international mean score of 500 (Moloi & Strauss, 2005).

Moreover, providing an apt illustration of the literacy continuum in South African classrooms, in-depth analysis demonstrated large discrepancies in learners' levels of literacy development. About 19% of the learners assessed had achieved *basic reading* skill competence, another 19% were functioning on an *emergent reading* level and, worryingly, 12% had only *pre-reading* skills. The other learners, a cumulative 50%, had reading competency levels *above basic reading* skills. These 50% included 16% of learners who could *read independently*, 9% who had *interpretive and inferential* reading skills, 7% with *critical reading* skills, 11% percent with *analytical reading* skills and 7% with the highest level of reading competency in the assessment, *insightful reading*. As Moloi and Strauss (2005) indicate, the distribution of reading competency levels was heavily skewed towards the lower competencies. It is further argued that the broad range of reading competencies amongst these learners has implications for training of teachers to deal with individual learner reading needs and competence levels (Moloi & Strauss, 2005).

3.3.3 Grade 3 and Grade 6 systemic evaluations

In another national study, the DoE (2003) undertook a systemic evaluation of the status of Foundation Phase education, which incorporated assessments of Grade 3 learners' Literacy, Numeracy and Life skills. A learner mean of 54% was obtained for the literacy assessment administered, which included the components of *reading and writing* and *listening comprehension*, with national means of 39% and 68% being achieved respectively (DoE, 2003). Thus, although the overall mean performance of 54% for literacy is seemingly

acceptable, the mean score of 39% for *reading and writing* is less so. The high mean for *listening comprehension* perhaps points to a very strong teaching emphasis on oral comprehension rather than written comprehension activities.

Further analysis also revealed that learners were more successful in selecting answers from multiple choice comprehension questions than in answering free response type questions. The mean score for free response type questions was just under 35% and the mean score for multiple choice questions was just over 50%. Moreover, learners' writing was worse than their reading, with a national mean for reading being in the region of 55% and that of writing being 30% (DoE, 2003).

One has to query the level of difficulty of this local systemic assessment as there are seemingly large differences in performance in reading between these Grade 3 learners and the Grade 4 learners who completed the PIRLS 2006 assessments. Conceivably, one would conclude that results would be somewhat similar in these two assessments if they had comparable testing content, given the expected progression in reading literacy abilities from one grade to the next. Furthermore, possible reasons for the systemic evaluation outcomes are not explored in the report, nor are actual teaching practices for reading literacy. Presumably these difficulties with literacy filter into Intermediate Phase classrooms. Perhaps as evidence of the continuance of these problems, learners also fared poorly in the Grade 6 systemic evaluation which followed three years after the Grade 3 evaluation. A national mean of 38% was obtained for English as the LoLT (DoE, 2005). Further stressing this point, in the USA, national longitudinal data show that three quarters of learners who exit Grade 3 as struggling readers continue to read poorly in high school (International Reading Association (IRA), 2006).

3.3.4 Small-scale empirical studies in South Africa

A number of small and localised studies on primary school reading have been published in South Africa in recent years (e.g. Matjila & Pretorius, 2004; Pretorius & Machet, 2004a; Lessing & Mahabeer, 2007; Manyike & Lemmer, 2008; Scheepers, 2008). These local studies focused mostly on concerns for literacy development amongst English as Second Language (ESL) learner populations. Moreover, research emphasis was placed on teacher perceptions, learner attributes and/or small-scale interventions to address learner reading difficulties.

There are two studies at Grade 7, one of which tracked the effect of a reading programme on Grade 7 learners' vocabulary development in a high poverty township school on the outskirts

of Pretoria (Scheepers, 2008), whilst the other compared the first and second language reading performances of 162 Grade 7 learners in English and Xitsonga. The findings were that these learners' reading skills were poor in both their home language, Xitsonga, and in English as their second language (Manyike & Lemmer, 2008).

Lessing and Mahabeer's (2007) study investigated the barriers that hinder Zulu-speaking ESL learners in the Foundation Phase from acquiring reading and writing skills. A random cluster sample of teachers (N=104) from 16 English medium schools in and around Durban completed questionnaires about which barriers hindered their learners' progress. With a 1% level of significance, the teachers perceived parental involvement, poor socioeconomic backgrounds, proficiency in English language structure, fear of responding to tasks and knowledge of phonetic skills as contributory factors to these learners' inability to read and write in English ($p=0.01$). At a 5% level of significance, teachers perceived that their proficiency in Zulu was important for the teaching of English language structure ($p=0.05$) (Lessing & Mahabeer, 2007).

Pretorius and Machet (2004a) conducted research into the effects of an out-of-school literacy enrichment programme on the literacy skills of an intervention group of Grade 1 and Grade 4 learners in five rural primary schools in rural KwaZulu-Natal. Fifteen learners were included in the intervention group per grade at each school. As part of a broader project, five randomly selected Grade 1 learners per school participating in the intervention and their randomly selected non-participant peers were given a battery of tests that tapped into their emergent literacy skills and knowledge in Zulu. The Grade 1 learners who attended the programme showed gains in most of the literacy measures with the most consistent gains shown for those activities involving reading. The assessment of five participating Grade 4 learners per school was focused on Zulu literacy and numeracy, Zulu comprehension, English word recognition and English oral fluency and comprehension. A levelling-off effect was apparent as the gains were not as numerous and differences between intervention and non-intervention groups not as marked as those of the Grade 1 group (Pretorius & Machet, 2004a).

The literacy practices and perceptions of the Grade 1 teachers were also investigated (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b). Teachers were interviewed and given a questionnaire regarding perceptions of reading, their literacy habits at home as well as at school. Of the small number of 20 teachers who completed a questionnaire, 60% classified themselves as "an average reader" in contrast to the 10% who saw themselves as "a fast, highly skilled reader", which is a characteristic one might expect of most teachers. About 57% of the respondents indicated having received "a thorough training" in reading theories and methods,

yet only 34% recognised that their learners were not really performing up to standard. Thus, there was a mismatch between the teachers' perceptions of the reading abilities of their learners and their actual reading levels as revealed by the formal assessments. The lack of external assessment and national standards were hypothesised as perpetuating the idea that their learners' reading levels were adequate (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b).

As a further example, signifying the contributory effects of primary teachers' potential inability to deal with reading literacy development, Matjila and Pretorius's (2004) research over a three-year period in high poverty South African township schools also revealed that Grade 8 learners were entering high school with very poor reading skills, regardless of whether they were reading in their vernacular or English. The findings reinforced the claim that inadequate attention is being given to the development of reading in primary schools (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007), thus highlighting the necessity for research into the teaching of reading literacy in primary school classrooms.

As national performance in reading is often viewed as an indicator of the effectiveness of an education system (Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005), there are clearly grave concerns about the effectiveness of the current education system. In the next section, an overview of contributing factors to learners' achievement levels is presented.

3.4 OVERVIEW OF FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNERS' READING LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

Four distinct reasons are often given for the variation in learner average achievement across different schools (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). The first reason is that some schools are located in privileged areas. The assumption is that learners in these schools come from homes where parents care about their children's education, ensure that their children are well-fed, try to help their children to learn to read as early as feasible, show interest in schoolwork, and provide access to books at home. In contrast, schools serving less privileged communities have larger proportions of learners without the background characteristics of their more advantaged counterparts.

Secondly, schools with higher learner achievement are better equipped than schools with low achievement. These schools have ample space, enough places to sit and write, textbooks for every learner, sufficient classroom and school library reading materials, small class sizes, and appropriately designed classrooms. Thirdly, schools with high average learner achievement have good teachers. The teachers know their subject matter, have high expectations of their learners, know how to structure the material to be learned and keep

good order in the classroom. These teachers also obtain systematic feedback from learners on which objective types the learners have mastered and give help to those learners who are battling mastery of the objectives. Alluding to these teachers' understanding of the curriculum, it is also claimed that these teachers will have a superior grasp of the education system's aims and a better knowledge of which strategies are most likely to address them. A fourth reason for high levels of learner achievement is that these schools are well-managed, with the principals helping teachers through enthusiasm and creative leadership in terms of school pedagogy (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992).

Postlethwaite and Ross (1992, p.2) wisely advise that:

There are various "movements" within the educational world that would tend to support one or more of these four reasons as the key to explaining variation among schools in terms of average student achievement. However, as with many social processes, the most likely answer is that the explanation lies in some kind of combination of all four reasons.

Providing further insight into combinations of factors that impact learning, Todd and Mason (2005) relate the findings of studies of factors that influence learning. They particularly refer to the work of Wang, Haertel and Wahlberg (1993), which considered the power of proximal and distal factors in influencing school learning. Of relevance to this study is the assertion that, in general, proximal variables such as psychological, instructional (related to teaching) and home environment, exert more influence on learning than distal variables such as demographic, policy and organisation factors. With distal variables being one step removed from the daily experience of learners, simply instituting new policies will not necessarily enhance learning. Rather effective policies require implementation by teachers with their learners in the classroom. Of course, one cannot assume that distal factors such as sufficient funding for adequate schools, classrooms and textbooks and qualified teachers and catering for learners according to socioeconomic needs do not impact classroom learning, but once these are satisfied, the actions of teachers, learners and their parents matter most in learning outcomes. However, since it is unlikely that learners' social status or quality of educational infrastructure available to under-qualified teachers will change in the short term, teachers' implementation of classroom factors that enhance learning become fundamental (Todd & Mason, 2005).

The PIRLS 2006 explanatory model (Mullis *et al.*, 2006) (Figure 3.1, below) illustrates the dynamic interaction of context, home, school and classroom factors for learner achievement outcomes mentioned above as factors for learner achievement by Postlethwaite and Ross (1992). The model shows the relationships among the home, school and classroom influences on children's reading development and how this interaction is situated within and

shaped by the community and country. Learner outcomes, both their achievement and attitudes, are a product of instruction and experiences gained in a variety of contexts. The model as a whole can be viewed as a system of reciprocal influences as learner outcomes also feed back into the home, school and classroom environments to some degree (Mullis *et al.*, 2006). Macro level national and community contexts influencing achievement were discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, especially *governance and organisation of the education system* and *curriculum characteristics and policies*. While the home context is recognised as being highly influential in learner outcomes, factors linked to the home environment (*languages in the home, economic resources, activities fostering literacy, and learners' out-of-school literacy activities*) are not focal points for the literature reviewed in the rest of this chapter.



Figure 3.1: Contexts for the development of reading literacy (Mullis *et al.*, 2006, p.24).

This non-focus on home factors is due to the focus of this research being on teachers' classroom practices and the schooling conditions that support or impede these practices, and is also based on the assumption, as argued by Todd and Mason (2005), that teachers' implementation of classroom factors to enhance learning are fundamental. School level factors include *school policy and curriculum* and *school environment and resources*. At the classroom level, the discussion of influential factors includes *teacher training and*

preparation, classroom environment and structure, instructional strategies and activities, instructional materials and technology and homework and assessment (Mullis *et al.*, 2006).

The next two sections of this chapter further expand on the four reasons given by Postlethwaite and Ross (1992) for learner achievement with more heed being paid to the South African situation in particular. School level factor influences (3.5) on learner achievement and micro classroom level factor influences (3.6) are specifically addressed.

3.5 SCHOOL LEVEL FACTORS

School-wide reading programmes impact class teaching (Taylor, 2008). Allington and Cunningham (2007) relay that when schools have a few good teachers it is usually as a result of individual initiative, whereas when a school has many good teachers it is a result of leadership. In this section, important factors in the creation of effective schools in reading literacy are discussed. Firstly, school management and shared vision are considered (3.5.1) and, secondly, school resource factors are contemplated (3.5.2).

3.5.1 School management, shared vision and cohesion in objectives

Although choosing effective educational inputs is the first step towards improving learning, managing these inputs well at school level is also necessary (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). Over the forty years following the Coleman report (Coleman *et al.*, 1966) educational effectiveness research expanded rapidly. The contributions of US and British research literature in this regard bear remarkable similarities (Reynolds, 1998). South African educational effectiveness research for reading literacy is not as forthcoming. Sailors *et al.* (2007) note the non-availability of such research for reading literacy locally, in what would appear to be the only published contribution to understandings of school effectiveness for reading literacy in South African schools.

Sailors *et al.* (2007) investigated the qualities of seven high-performing schools in reading literacy serving low-income South African learners. These schools had participated in a five year intervention focused on school-improvement initiatives, training of teachers in effective teaching strategies and providing classrooms with high-quality learning materials. These schools stood out as consistently high performers across all measures of learner achievement in the sub-sample of schools evaluated at the end of the intervention. Documents and artefacts, field notes, observational and interview data (from teachers, deputy-principals, and principals) were collected at each, as well as a measure of the print environment in the school and classrooms from Grades 1 to 7. Five broad themes linked to these high-performing schools were identified: (1) a safe, orderly, and positive learning

environment; (2) strong leaders; (3) excellent teachers (competent, committed, caring, collaborative); (4) a shared sense of competence, pride and purpose for the school; and (5) high levels of school and community involvement (Sailors *et al.*, 2007). The findings confirm that these local effective schools had similar attributes to their overseas counterparts from the school effectiveness literature (see Reynolds, 1998). Even so, the Sailors *et al.* (2007) study reveals little insight into what makes a school effective in terms of reading literacy practices in particular.

Lockheed, Verspoor and colleagues (1991) also provided general insights into the role of effective educational management. The provision and effective use of education inputs are the role of educational management at all levels. Effective schools manage to transform their given inputs into children's learning, in spite of poor conditions in some instances. Moreover, such schools have an orderly school environment, clear goals, high expectations, a sense of community and strong instructional leadership. In terms of an orderly school environment, there is good attendance by learners and teachers; clean facilities in good condition; and routine provision of teaching materials. The academic emphasis of these schools is evident in high expectations and defined goals for academic achievement; a curriculum which is focused on teaching both basic and complex goals; the concentration of available resources and their operations on achieving these goals; sufficient time for teaching these goals; coordination of instruction across grade levels; and continuous monitoring of learner progress to check whether goals have been achieved (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). Related to coordination of instruction across grade levels, Moats (2009) particularly emphasises that all teachers, not only reading specialists, need to understand best practices of reading instruction. Prevention and amelioration of reading problems further need to be viewed as a whole school responsibility involving teamwork and a coordinated approach between teachers and other role-players in a school. Thus, a common knowledge base between all teachers who must collaborate to the benefit of learners must be held (Moats, 2009). In consideration of strong instructional leadership, the principal is highly visible at school and devotes considerable time to coordinating and managing instruction. A common sense of commitment and collegiality amongst staff is evident and a participatory management style is employed (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991).

Further elaborating on these factors for effective reading instruction, there are a number of features of school-wide reading programme initiatives that positively impact classroom practices (Taylor, 2008), and school change initiatives that enhance learners' academic achievement (Allington & Cunningham, 2007). In effective schools, the staff is committed to the idea that all learners can learn to read and write and thus work to produce this outcome. Teachers work together to develop a cohesive school-wide programme. They collaborate

between themselves and other resource teachers. Interventions are in place to meet the needs of learners experiencing reading difficulties, those with special educational needs or who are second language learners. Support programmes are reorganised to connect such support with classroom instruction and teachers, especially by means of collaboration. Cohesion is created in the amount of time for reading instruction across different grades and blocks of time during the school day (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Taylor, 2008). According to Allington and Cunningham (2007), this is important in that nearly every study of classroom effectiveness in primary schools has concluded that teachers who allocate more time to reading and language instruction are those whose learners show the greatest gains in literacy development. Such studies also show that the amount of time allocated to teaching reading and writing varies substantially from school to school and even within schools, as teachers schedule more or less time. In effective schools, more classroom instructional time is allocated to reading and writing activities while using multiple approaches to literacy instruction, and, cross-curricular integration of reading and writing into other learning areas. Moreover, school-wide assessment plans in which learner data are collected and used regularly to inform instruction are utilised. Successful schools also work to involve families. Parents are not just expected to monitor homework but also help to make decisions about the use of school resources, curriculum and schedules. These schools thus work effectively with parents as partners (Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Taylor, 2008). Allington and Cunningham (2007) further highlight that, in such schools, substantial investments are made in teachers' professional development, primarily to enhance their instructional skills and to create teaching and learning environments that support high quality instruction.

There is also investment in classroom libraries and reading material resources (Allington & Cunningham, 2007). The fundamental place of instructional resources in effective schooling for literacy is discussed more in the next sub-section.

3.5.2 Material resources

Lockheed and Verspoor (1991, p.47) wrote that "Instructional materials are critical ingredients in learning, and the intended curriculum cannot be easily implemented without them", and it has been found that learners in well-resourced schools are inclined to attain higher literacy levels than learners from schools with high levels of poverty (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b). The problems of quality in basic education in Africa are linked to a shortage of resources for education and the inefficient use of those resources that are available (Sedel, 2005). Researchers have argued that there is a so-called "book famine" in Africa (Perry, 2008, p.64). Schools in rural areas are thought to experience particular challenges in gaining access to books, and, even where they are available there are not always enough for

all learners. Books other than textbooks may be even rarer. Textbooks play a significant role in Southern African education so shortages have serious consequences for teaching and learning. Textbooks can be the only source of academic knowledge and information in classrooms, especially in cases where teachers are unqualified, poorly trained or have not obtained higher levels of education themselves. Access to textbooks is however not enough to promote reading achievement in developing countries, as learners must have access to a wide range of reading materials, especially for the majority of second language learners. The scarcity of books may also mean that African children have little opportunity to read for enjoyment, and, outside school, enter a nearly bookless culture (Perry, 2008). Perry (2008) also argues that availability of resources is a serious consideration for language policy in African schools as many countries simply do not have enough resources to supply either the teachers or the materials necessary to provide local-language education to all children.

In illustrating literacy instruction resources in South Africa specifically, Scheepers (2008) reveals that the print environments in many schools are poor. As in the rest of Southern Africa, books that children in township and rural schools use are mostly textbooks, which often need to be shared. Moreover, she relates that there is a dearth of both fiction and non-fiction titles published in the African languages, giving learners scant opportunities to develop first language vocabulary (Scheepers, 2008). Pretorius and Currin (2010) concur with Scheepers' (2008) comments by highlighting that, in South African schools, there are few if any storybooks or classroom readers in the African languages, and schools are poorly resourced so storybook reading seldom occurs in the classroom (Pretorius & Currin, 2010).

Lack of access to school libraries compounds the issue of non-available or poor quality books in classrooms. For the PIRLS 2006 main study, 60% of the learners were reportedly in schools without a school library. Those that were in schools with a school library fared far better in the assessments than their peers who were not (Howie *et al.*, 2007). The DoE's (2008b) *National Literacy Strategy* document states that it is rare to find schools with well-used general libraries. It is further acknowledged that some classrooms have no books, and even those classes with sets of readers may have them at a developmentally inappropriate level (DoE, 2008b).

An intervention study reported by Pretorius and Currin (2010) revealed that when high poverty schools were given assistance in making books available to learners and motivating them to read, their reading levels did improve. The authors stress that one crucial factor requiring financial outlay is that of making books available to learners, and as poor schools cannot afford to buy print resources on their own they will continue to produce poor readers.

Crucially, Mnkeni and Nassimbeni (2008) underscore the discrepancies between the curriculum and school realities regarding literacy resources. These two authors reason that the curriculum relies on the use of a variety of resources to assist learners in their construction of knowledge with the school library being the provider of all of the required resources for teaching and learning. Regardless of the emphasis on resource-based learning in the curriculum, school libraries are not referred to in the C2005 documents, despite emphasis being placed on information literacy skills. The RNCS documents also put special emphasis on resource-based learning and teaching, with learners being given the opportunity to learn from a variety of resources (Mnkeni & Nassimbeni, 2008).

Therefore, what materials do learners need to enhance their reading literacy development? Ready access to books, magazines and other reading materials is an essential factor, and, in this regard, classroom libraries are particularly important. Moreover, when classroom libraries are well-designed, offering a wide-range of appropriate books and magazines, children are more likely to use them. Copious amounts of easy and interesting reading are also essential to develop reading strategies and foster positive reading motivation, especially for those learners who struggle (Allington & Cunningham, 2007).

Curriculum material use can be grouped into three broad categories, namely, (1) commercial reading series, (2) reading series and trade books, and (3) trade books. Commercial reading series are most commonly used. However, although reading series can play a useful role, no such series can make up the whole reading and language curriculum in itself. Heavy reliance on these series limits learners' development of reading stamina and book selection strategies (Allington & Cunningham, 2007). Nor are textbooks always well written or interesting, and they can be too difficult for many learners to read (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

In their study of exemplary Grade 4 classrooms, Allington and Johnston (2002) found that teachers organised their instruction around multiple curricular materials rather than relying on a single text or curricular material. Although the teachers sometimes used textbooks of subject areas, they hardly ever followed a traditional curriculum plan, varying their activities and materials from week to week. There was a strong literary emphasis in the classrooms observed, each of which had a substantial library. Teachers used historical fiction, biography and information texts in subject areas other than language. Either teachers or learners drew materials from the Internet, from magazines or from other non-traditional curricular sources. More extensive use of materials other than just textbooks provided greater opportunities to read and introduced substantially more content. Materials in these classrooms also reflected diversity in genres, of class experiences, of gender and of culture. There were also texts that varied in their range of difficulty, meaning that all learners were able to read and understand

them. Difficulty, relevance and meaning were important aspects of text choices made by teachers. Even so, teachers worked with limited organisational support, receiving multiple copies of the same text. This meant that teachers had to locate the supplementary texts and purchase other materials with their own funds (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

3.6 CLASSROOM TEACHING FACTORS

Teachers are an important part of a school's resources (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b). In this section, teachers' competency in teaching reading literacy is first considered (3.6.1). Thereafter, the status quo of reading literacy teaching in South African schools is discussed (3.6.2), with issues around teaching English language learners being specifically considered (3.6.3). Finally, teacher qualities, teaching goals and reading instruction practices recognised as being relevant in the development of learners' reading literacy are delineated (3.6.4).

3.6.1 Teacher competency

In a 2009 report on trends in education macro indicators from the DoE (2009a), it is stated that the percentage of qualified teachers in South Africa increased by 30% between 1994 and 2008. These gains occurred largely amongst Black teachers, implying that equity in the distribution of qualifications has increased. However, the DoE (2009a) admitted that these figures only reflect formal certification courses, not any measure of teachers' classroom competency or subject knowledge, which was conceded as an issue that remains a serious concern.

The DoE (2008b) lists teacher competency as a specific challenge for implementing its *National Reading Strategy*. Teachers in South Africa may have an under-developed understanding of teaching literacy, especially reading and writing. They may not know how to teach reading or may know only one method meaning they cannot adapt to the instructional needs of individual learners. As a result of misunderstandings of the role of the teacher in teaching reading for C2005 and the subsequent RNCS, many teachers mistakenly thought that they did not have to actively teach reading but merely had to facilitate the process as children would teach themselves to read. Teachers were also expected to develop their own teaching materials and reading programmes as part of curriculum implementation, aspects which it is now recognised they did not have the experience to undertake (DoE, 2008b).

As hinted at in the DoE's (2009b) macro indicator report, teacher preparation for the teaching of reading literacy is not unproblematic either. A 2008 survey of the Foundation Phase literacy programmes for the Bachelor of Education degree for Early Childhood Development

and/or Foundation Phase teacher preparation at eight South African higher education institutions revealed wide variation in the programme goals espoused and the design of the programmes at the different institutions. Whilst the content of the programmes was mostly well considered, with goals in line with the national curriculum and international trends, time limitations, resource inadequacies and less than optimal student practicals in schools impeded optimal initial teacher preparation for teaching reading (Zimmerman, Howie & Long, 2009a). Linked to this survey, a case study of a specific institution's initial preparation of Intermediate Phase language teachers revealed a lack of specific focus on preparation for the teaching of reading, a scenario likely to be present for the majority of Intermediate Phase Language teacher preparation programmes in the country (Zimmerman, Howie & Long, 2009b).

Notwithstanding the influence of educational policy and school context, Bloch (1999) contends that how teachers understand the process of becoming literate has consequences for what they identify as appropriate teaching strategies in the classroom. Intermediate Phase teachers may not be automatically aware of the connections amongst basic reading skills and reading comprehension. They may notice that learners in the Intermediate and upper grades read poorly but may not understand that proficiency in basic reading skill must be taught before learners can progress. Furthermore, without instruction and practice, teachers are unlikely to develop strategies that can promote thoughtful reading by their learners (Moats, 1999). As Stoller and Grabe (2001) assert, the requirements for the development of reading fluency necessitate that teachers as well as curriculum developers determine what instructional options are available to them and how to go about the optimal pursuit of instructional goals in various contexts. Moats (1999) reinforces this by stating that classroom teaching for reading instruction needs to be considered as the critical factor in preventing reading problems and must be the central focus for change. As such, teachers' acquisition of the teaching skills necessary to bring about the development of literate language competency is critical, especially as, in South Africa, many assumptions have been largely unquestioned about how to teach reading and writing, which languages to use and what counts as high quality practice in classrooms (Bloch, 1999).

3.6.2 The status quo for teaching reading in South African primary schools

Depending on the medium of instruction at each school, reading skills in South African schools are developed during the Foundation Phase of schooling using mother tongue basal readers (Pretorius, 2002). Much emphasis is placed on the teaching of decoding skills but this is often done in a superficial, haphazard and decontextualised fashion. Children may

read lists of syllables or words aloud from the chalkboard. As teachers assume that when learners can decode they will be able to comprehend, little attention is given to reading comprehension, therefore the transition from decoding syllables or words on a chalkboard to meaningful reading activities using extended texts does not happen easily (Pretorius & Currin, 2010).

In the Intermediate Phase, learners' reading as a language and information-processing skill is then largely presumed to be developed as they can decode text. The texts used also change from predominantly first language narrative formats to English expository texts with topics and issues that learners are unlikely to be familiar with. The focus on decoding of text in the primary language essentially means that non-English learners have most likely not yet mastered reading comprehension skills in their vernacular. As a result, these learners lack the necessary skills to transfer to literate reading in English. The system through which these learners then progress does not place enough emphasis on promoting reading skills and is strongly characterised by rote learning principles, verbatim recall and oral modes of information dissemination (Pretorius, 2002). The focus on decoding of texts in the Foundation Phase also likely means that even first language learners' comprehension skills may not be adequate as they enter further primary school education.

The only empirical research found which begins to broach South African teachers' overall literacy teaching practices is the SACMEQ II study (Moloi & Strauss, 2005) (first discussed in sub-section 3.3.2). For the SACMEQ II, investigation was also conducted into South African Grade 3 teachers' personal characteristics (age, gender, SES), training, time allocation for teaching, preparation and marking, and viewpoints on learner activities, teaching goals, approaches and assessment procedures. Teachers were particularly asked about their opinions of the most important learner activities for teaching reading, their decisions about the most important goals for teaching reading, and to give ratings of their most frequently used reading activities for instruction and assessment of reading. Percentages of teachers according to response to categories provided were given.

Approximately 45% of teachers rated reading for comprehension as the most important learner activity for teaching reading, 22% rated learning new vocabulary and 13% rated sounding words as most important. Small percentages of teachers rated listening to reading, silent reading, taking books home to read, reading materials at home and reading aloud in class as most important. Teachers' ideas about the most important goals of teaching reading were also sought. About 29% thought the most important goal was to develop a lasting interest for reading in learners, 32% considered the development of life skills to be most important, 11% indicated making reading enjoyable and another 15% suggested that

improving reading comprehension were the most important goals in teaching reading. Small percentages referred to the improvement of word attack skills, extending vocabulary and opening up career opportunities as the most important goals. Teachers were also asked to rate their most frequently used teaching activities for reading according to the most often used. Majority percentages of teachers reported asking questions to deepen understanding (91%), asking questions to test comprehension (88%), giving positive feedback (84%), reading aloud to the class (72%) and introducing the passage before reading (67%) as the most often used strategies. Using materials made by the teacher was the least often used strategy for teaching reading, with only 37% of teachers reporting using it. In relation to the assessment of reading, 36% of teachers reported giving weekly reading tests, whereas a further 41% reported only giving reading tests two or three times per month (Moloi & Strauss, 2005). Nonetheless, these teacher survey data offered only superficial signs of teachers' opinions and do not give any indications of which strategies teachers use or how they use and adapt them to diverse learner populations in the classroom. Nor do they provide any indications of the quality of these strategies or the school contexts that support them.

3.6.3 Teaching and learning in English for English non-vernacular learners

In multilingual educational situations, Bloch (1999, p.41) reveals that the teacher has to make decisions not only “about how to teach literacy but also about which languages children should learn in”. She further explains that “(a)t the moment, many teachers are not confident that they can provide appropriately the kind of education they have themselves experienced to teach children who do not speak the same language as they do leaves them feeling ill-equipped” (p.41).

There is much controversy about whether reading problems are caused by low level proficiency in a second language or by a learner's difficulty in transferring reading strategy skills from their mother tongue to second language texts (Macaro, 2003). As Matjila and Pretorius (2004) point out, as the education system is tasked with promoting bilingualism, then, due to literacy's undeniable linkage to academic achievement in bilingual education settings, it is also tasked with promoting biliteracy. There is an assumption that if one is proficient in a language then one will automatically be able to read in that language. However, although there is a link between proficiency in a language and reading capability in that language, the relationship between the two is asymmetrical. Proficiency in a language does not guarantee reading fluency in it (Matjila & Pretorius, 2004).

To illustrate this, Pretorius (2002) maintained that, in South Africa, reading problems tend to be masked by language proficiency issues. It is assumed that poor academic performance is caused by poor mother tongue proficiency. An associated assumption is that, when learners have difficulty using reading as a tool for learning, their comprehension problems are a product of limited language proficiency. This then leads to the idea that language proficiency and reading ability are alike. However, this is not the case. Improving the language proficiency of learners does not automatically improve their reading comprehension. Attention to reading improves reading skill and as a result language proficiency also improves. Therefore, although reading ability alone cannot guarantee academic success, it is highly likely that a lack of reading ability can function as a key barrier to academic achievement (Pretorius, 2002). Although English is the main language of instruction in South African schools, poor literacy results cannot be solely attributed to second language instruction, as learners are battling to read in the African Languages as well as English (Pretorius & Machet, 2004b; Howie *et al.*, 2007). As Alexander (2006, p.2) comments:

Language medium policy and practice in and of themselves are a necessary but not sufficient explanation of poor academic performance. There are many other factors that are part of the causality. Of these, socio-economic status, teaching method and parental involvement are probably the most important.

Research focused on the second language medium of instruction situation in some South African content classrooms found that teachers did not have the methodological and presentational skills or language associated with effective second language instruction. These teachers were thus considered incapable of “consciously promoting” functional language skills for content (Uys, Van der Walt, Botha & Van den Berg, 2006, p.68). Second language learners may experience reading comprehension in another language as an overwhelming task and teachers may not be aware of the difficulties that these learners may confront as they attempt to gather meaning from text in another language (Stoller & Grabe, 2001). As Dyers (2003) notes, teachers are struggling to respond adequately to the increased linguistic diversity amongst learners in their classrooms. These teachers’ formal training experiences may have afforded limited consideration of the practicalities of promoting these learners’ literacy development (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2009a; 2009b).

Theron and Nel (2005) did conduct research into the needs and perceptions of South African Grade 4 teachers who taught ESL learners. The sample only included teachers at schools where English had been the medium of instruction from Grade One¹⁶. Survey research was conducted by distributing a closed ended questionnaire to a sample of Grade 4 teachers (N= 100) in one district, which sought information about these teachers’

¹⁶ Such a school is referred to as an ‘EFL’ school for this research.

perceptions of: learners with language barriers; language issues that exacerbate language barriers; demographic factors that complicate teacher support of ESL learners; and supportive strategies that teachers used for ESL learners. Although the importance of other foci for the study is recognised, of specific relevance to this study were teachers' reported uses of supportive strategies to aid and accommodate these learners in their classrooms. Roughly 86% of the teachers reportedly: experimented in the classroom by trying out new methods, tools and techniques or using alternative teaching practices such as stories, words and concepts that related to the learners' immediate environment, drilling of words with flash cards, role play, drama and dialogue. Development of vocabulary was recognised as a priority task. Adaptation of the level of teaching by use of additional time for remediation, adaptation of levels of assessment or adaptation of worksheets was reported. The compilation of language enrichment programmes for these learners was also indicated, as was teacher use of code-switching to assist these learners and the use of peer translators. These outcomes provide some interesting insights into teacher adaptation according to learners' ESL status. Even so, the findings offer only a surface level description of a small sample of teachers' practices in engaging ESL learners in English medium schools only.

Given the scarcity of research on South African teachers' reading instruction practices, the literature review now turns to recognised goals and practices for developing learner reading literacy in primary schools in the international literature.

3.6.4 Teaching goals, teacher qualities and teaching practices advocated

In this sub-section, goals for teaching reading are briefly listed (3.6.4.1). Attention is then turned to the qualities of excellent reading teachers (3.6.4.2) followed at length by the explication of teaching practices considered effective for literacy development (3.6.4.3).

3.6.4.1 Reading teaching goals

In the Intermediate and Senior Phases of schooling there is a need for learners to become increasingly fluent readers, and as they do so it is expected that reading independence will be exhibited and many of the behaviours listed below will become automatic. For newly fluent readers it is proposed that they will be able to read in such a manner that they will:

- rarely interrupt the flow of their reading to decode words
- consistently integrate and use cueing systems (phonics, meaning, and structure) to confirm the meaning of the text
- use all the information in the text to confirm the message

- retell, summarise and infer meaning
- self-monitor and self-correct while reading
- use inference, deduction, and prior experiences to predict and make meaning from text
- read flexibly and strategically from a variety of texts
- ask questions as an extension for further reading
- make inferences, predictions and generalisations
- confirm and extend knowledge
- use word identification strategies very effectively
- discuss point of view
- contrast text themes and types.

(Lapp *et al.* 2001, pp.5- 6)

3.6.4.2 *Reading teacher qualities*

Teacher abilities may have a greater impact on learner achievement than actual instructional programmes (Topping & Ferguson, 2005). Indeed, competent teaching can alleviate the severity and consequences of reading failure, especially for high risk populations such as children of low SES, from second language backgrounds and those with reading disabilities (Moats, 2009). As Taylor (2008) stresses, teachers need to focus not only on the content of reading instruction but equally on the pedagogy as well.

The research-based qualities of excellent reading teachers are that they: (1) understand reading and writing and believe that all children can learn to read and write; (2) continually assess children's individual progress and link reading instruction to children's prior experiences; (3) know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine methods into an effective instruction programme; (4) offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read; (5) use flexible grouping strategies to fit instruction to individual children; and (6) are good reading coaches in that they provide help strategically (Blair, Rupley & Nichols, 2007).

In a study comparing effective teachers of reading, Wray, Medwell, Fox and Poulson (2000) found that it was common for such teachers to teach a range of literacy skills and knowledge at the word, sentence and text level via shared text. There were distinctive beginnings and endings to lessons, and learners were often required to present a review at the end of an activity. The teachers followed a brisk pace and used time-limits for sub-tasks within lessons. They re-focused their learners' attention to the task regularly and used modelling and demonstration to teach both purposes and processes of literacy. The teachers used a wide

range of questions and were inclined to ask learners open-ended questions about decisions and strategies (Topping & Ferguson, 2005).

In summarising research on effective elementary teachers of reading, Taylor, Peterson, Pearson and Rodriguez (2002) also noted a number of similar characteristics of these teachers, notably that they maintain an academic focus, keep more learners on task and provide direct instruction. Such direct instruction involves making learning goals clear, asking learners questions to monitor understanding of content or skills covered and providing feedback to learners on their academic progress. These teachers also use modelling and explanation to teach learners strategies for decoding words and understanding texts, and emphasise higher-order thinking skills more than lower order skills. More small group than whole group instruction is provided and these teachers elicit high levels of learner engagement. They also coach rather than instruct in interacting with learners, and engage in more higher level thinking for reading. Telling indicates a strong teacher-directed stance and lessens opportunities to assist learners to take responsibility for their own skills and strategies. Balance is also achieved in the reading programme by teaching skills, fostering much reading and writing and developing self-regulation in learners' use of strategies (Taylor *et al.*, 2002).

Interestingly, Reynolds (1998) notes that certain teaching factors may apply only in certain contexts. He indicates that effective practices in low SES contexts involve the teacher behaviours of:

- generating warm and positive affect
- getting a response before moving onto new materials
- presenting small segments of material with practice before moving on and showing how bits fit together
- emphasising knowledge and application before abstraction, therefore putting the concrete first
- having strong lesson structures and well-planned transitions
- using individually differentiated materials
- using experiences of learners.

In contrast, effective teaching behaviours in middle-income SES contexts include (Reynolds, 1998):

- requiring extended reasoning
- posing questions that require associations and generalisations



- giving difficult materials
- providing projects for independent judgement, discovery, problem-solving and use of original information
- very rich verbalising
- encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning

Perhaps related to this SES-based outlook on differentiated instruction, Moats (2009) argues that teachers who are able to identify their learners' abilities and needs and can then adapt their instruction to meet them are more likely to experience success with a range of learner abilities. Moreover, the provision of differentiated instruction is dependent on teachers' insight into what causes variation in learners' reading achievement (Moats, 2009).

In a study of the expertise of literacy teachers from preschool to Grade 5, Block, Oakar and Hurt (2002) found that highly effective Grade 4 teachers distinguish themselves by their abilities to simultaneously instruct learners who are either learning to read, reading to learn, trying to use higher-order thinking skills to gain more information from content-area texts and using higher level comprehension abilities. These teachers can also move literacy activities up or down the cognitive scale as learner needs dictate (Block *et al.*, 2002).

In the only comprehensive study of Grade 4 teachers of reading found in the scholarly literature, Allington and Johnston (2002) studied the characteristics of exemplary teachers of reading at Grade 4 in the USA. Classroom observations of and interviews with 30 Grade 4 teachers in five US states (New York, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Texas and California) identified as exemplary through a nomination process participated. The schools in which the teachers taught were located in a variety of communities according to geographical location, school size and learner SES. Ten days of classroom observation, two semi-structured **interviews**, spontaneous informal interviews, interviews with target children from each classroom, samples of student writing and reading logs and end-of-year achievement test performances were collected. The observations focused on the structure of classroom activity (time allocation, grouping, movement) and the essence of the language environment (who talks, the nature and content of talk) (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

Cross-case analyses of the features (personal characteristics, beliefs, attitudes and values and practice) associated with these exemplary teachers both confirmed and extended the features of exemplary teachers already noted in the literature review for the study. In terms of their personal characteristics, these teachers were: warm, caring, supportive, encouraging, friendly, enthusiastic about their work, confident, accurate in self-judgements with a sense of agency and a genuine like of people. Related to their beliefs, attitudes and expectations,

these teachers: expected diversity, assumed potential, recognised that learning is social, requires ownership, relevance and choice, and that error and modelling is important (Allington & Johnston, 2002). Table 3.2 (below) reveals the practice features (classroom talk, curriculum materials, the organisation of instruction and evaluation) of these teachers as reported by Allington and Johnston (2002).

Table 3.2: Practice features associated with exemplary Grade 4 teachers

Classroom talk	<p><i>Learners talk to each other publicly; respectful, supportive and productive talk is expected, modelled and taught.</i></p> <p><i>Talk between teacher and learner is personalised; teachers actively learn about learners.</i></p> <p><i>Teachers encourage learners to engage each other's ideas, thereby distributing authority.</i></p> <p><i>Discussion is common, including "tentative" talk, making it possible for others to complete incomplete ideas or otherwise contribute to the group thinking.</i></p> <p><i>"No" or "wrong" are rarely heard. Teachers support the partially correct, turn attention to the process, and encourage further thinking or reflection, even about a "correct" answer.</i></p> <p><i>Teachers admit their limited knowledge of various topics (especially those raised by learners), their mistakes, and their own interests.</i></p> <p><i>Inquiry and problem-solving processes are normal topics of conversation, such as "How do we find that out?" Emphasis is on making meaning and finding the means for doing so.</i></p>
Curriculum materials	<p><i>Instruction is multi-sourced (e.g. in social studies: historical fiction, biography, biography, informational books)</i></p> <p><i>Multi-sourced curriculum is also multilevel, with texts varying with difficulty.</i></p> <p><i>Relevance and meaning are important aspects of curriculum materials selected</i></p> <p><i>Language itself is treated as a curriculum material; even word study emphasises a search for meaningful patterns, meaning acquisition, interest in words and turns of a phrase, and the strategic, purposeful selection of words.</i></p> <p><i>Strong literary emphasis.</i></p> <p><i>Instruction often guided by an awareness of state or district standards but not driven by them.</i></p>
Instructional organisation	<p><i>Plan open instructional opportunities on which to capitalise.</i></p> <p><i>Curriculum coverage is lower on agenda than curricular engagement.</i></p> <p><i>Instruction is personalised (versus "individualised"); teachers know learners' interests, strengths and needs.</i></p> <p><i>Utilise managed choice: strategically arrange for learners to have choices and make them productively, or learn from their errors.</i></p> <p><i>More individual and small-group than whole-class instruction; learners learn to consult with one another.</i></p> <p><i>Collaborative, meaningful problem-solving is common; learners learn how to learn, to teach, and to interact in ways that foster mutual learning.</i></p> <p><i>Learners are expected to manage group work; breakdowns are dealt with not as misbehaviour but as interactional problems to be solved strategically.</i></p> <p><i>Foster personal responsibility for learning by providing choice, goal setting guidelines, and collaborative independence.</i></p> <p><i>Much of the schoolwork is longer-term in nature rather than a series of small and unrelated tasks.</i></p> <p><i>Integration across subjects, topics, and time fosters engagement and curricular coherence.</i></p>
Evaluation	<p><i>Improvement, progress and effort are valued more than achievement of a single priori standard.</i></p> <p><i>Personalised attention is given to individual development and goals.</i></p> <p><i>Rubrics designed for teachers are adapted for learner use and focused on complex achievements.</i></p> <p><i>Self-evaluation is widely encouraged, shaped and supported.</i></p>

Source: Allington and Johnston (2002, pp.214-215).

One of the classroom level factors which consistently and most strongly affects reading test scores is Opportunity-To-Learn (OTL) whether it is measured as the amount of the curriculum covered or the percentage of test items taught. It can be linked to length of school day, year and hours of reading experience taught. It is also linked to the quality of teachers' classroom management, and time on task, and linked to the use of homework, which expands available learning time. In ensuring OTL, effective teachers emphasise academic instruction with learning as the main classroom goal. Instructional time is spent on curriculum based learning activities in a task-oriented, business-like manner within a relaxed and supportive environment. The classroom itself is well-organised and there are minimal disruptions or learner misbehaviour. The learners are active rather than passive participants in their own learning, with teachers asking many questions and involving learners in class discussion (Reynolds, 1998).

3.6.4.2 *Specific instructional strategies advocated*

Reynolds (1998) notes that successful teaching of reading equips learners to draw on phonic knowledge, word recognition, grammatical knowledge and contextual information when reading to make meaning. Frequent opportunities are given for children to listen to, read and discuss texts and to think about the language and content used. Good library use is also stimulated and required alongside the provision of time for productive individual reading both at school and at home (Reynolds, 1998). Dimensions of effective instruction supported by research include instruction in phonemic awareness; phonics; fluency; vocabulary; and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2000; Taylor, 2008).

Rasinski and Padak (2004) observed that after years of debate about which approaches to reading instruction were more effective, i.e. whole language or phonics, skills-based or literature-based based instruction, comprehension-oriented or word-based, the field has generally concluded that they are all important and need to be taught. Although they further indicate that this balance makes sense, particularly the inclusion of the aforementioned dimensions of effective instruction, these authors (Rasinski & Padak, 2004, p.92) argue that a balanced approach has to be "more than the simple conglomeration of disparate approaches to literacy instruction - in a truly balanced system, one element influences other parts of the curriculum, and that interrelationship of parts needs to be considered". The significance of their position is acknowledged, albeit that each of the dimensions of effective instruction is considered separately, as in this rest of this sub-section.

- Phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency

Most learners, especially those in the first grades of schooling, benefit from systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. Effective systematic phonics instruction approaches include letter-by-letter decoding and decoding by onset and rhyme. Oral reading used to develop decoding fluency and during which learners receive teacher guidance and support has a positive impact on their overall reading (Taylor, 2008).

- Vocabulary

Although weak readers do need robust instruction in decoding, teachers also need to realise that disadvantaged children specifically may have one half of the oral language vocabulary typical of children from more privileged backgrounds. This means that vocabulary development is a cornerstone of good teaching (Moats, 2009).

Given other studies on vocabulary growth in childhood, McKeown (2010) suggests as target vocabulary growth 1,000 words a year through elementary school. Vocabulary growth in the intermediate grades is mostly a result of interactions with texts rather than from oral interactions. All children in the intermediate grades do experience vocabulary growth but such rates vary and for some children it is not fast enough to help them to deal with the text materials from which they should be reading and learning. Poor readers also have difficulties interacting with text, meaning that they have fewer opportunities to learn new words too (McKeown, 2010).

There is very little vocabulary instruction in schools and most often such instruction is organised around a dictionary as a source of word meanings. This can be ineffective if learners cannot make sense of the information offered by the dictionary. Otherwise, most vocabulary is learnt incidentally from context during reading. Instead, intensive instruction is needed to provide learners with opportunity for vocabulary growth adequate to keep pace with academic demands (McKeown, 2010).

McKeown (2010, p.4) proposes that learners in Grades 4 and 5 should be building vocabulary by developing

- knowledge of individual word meanings and ability to use these words in multiple contexts
- ability to apply a word's meaning to make sense of text in which the word is used
- ability to extend meanings metaphorically

- ability to work out meanings of inflected and derived forms of words, e.g. *run* to *running*
- ability to use context to acquire information about word meaning
- awareness of common prefixes and suffixes
- recognition that words share word parts that can have similar meanings across words
- ability to find words in a dictionary and interpret the information given
- awareness of how words are used to convey meaning, including figurative language.

Beneficial vocabulary instruction techniques involve direct teaching of specific words, pre-reading instruction in words, learning to use strategies to determine word meanings and learning words in rich contexts and incidentally through wide reading. The words studied also need to be of use to the learner in many contexts (Taylor, 2008). McKeown, Beck and Blake (2009) also indicate that teaching vocabulary can enhance comprehension, particularly if the kind of instruction provided can help learners to build meaningful associations onto their knowledge base and more than a brief definition is provided.

- Comprehension

Reading comprehension is recognised as a multidimensional process that is an essential component of the learning process (NICHD, 2000; Lesaux, Lipka, & Siegel, 2006). Lesaux, Lipka and Siegel (2006) observe that this process of comprehension can be undermined by a number of different factors at various levels, including the reader, the actual text, and activities associated with the reading process itself. There are two types of reading comprehension breakdown for English language learners specifically. There are those learners who are poor comprehenders and readers due to difficulties with lower-level processing skills, and there are poor comprehenders who experience difficulties at the higher-level text level despite good word recognition skills. The latter may battle with higher-order processing such as inference making, working memory and story structure knowledge (Lesaux, Lipka & Siegel, 2006).

The U.S. National Reading Panel's (NRP) *Teaching Children to Read* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) 2000) analysis of 203 studies on instruction of text comprehension strategies led to the identification of 16 different kinds of effective procedures. Of the 16 different types of instruction, eight were determined to have a firm scientific basis for concluding that they actually improve learner comprehension. These eight types of comprehension instruction are presented in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Effective instruction types to improve learner comprehension

Instruction type	Description
<i>Comprehension monitoring</i>	The learner learns how to be aware of his or her understanding during reading and learns procedures to deal with problems in understanding as they arise.
<i>Cooperative learning</i>	Learners work together to learn strategies in the context of reading.
<i>Graphic and semantic organisers</i>	Allow the learner to represent graphically through writing or drawing the meanings and relationships of the ideas that underlie the words in the text.
<i>Story structure</i>	From which the learner learns to ask and answer who, what, where, when and why questions about the plot and, in some cases, maps out the time line, characters, and events in stories.
<i>Question answering</i>	The learner answers questions posed by the teacher and is given feedback on the correctness.
<i>Question generation</i>	The learner asks himself or herself what, when, where, why, what will happen, how, and who questions.
<i>Summarisation</i>	The learner attempts to identify and write the main or most important ideas that integrate or unite the other ideas or meanings of the text into a coherent whole.
<i>Multiple-strategy teaching</i>	The reader uses several of the procedures in interaction with the teacher over the text. Multiple-strategy teaching is effective when the procedures are used flexibly and appropriately by the reader or the teacher in naturalistic contexts.

Source: NICHHD (2000, pp. 4.5-4.6).

Gill (2008) confirms that teaching even one comprehension strategy can improve learners' comprehension. For example, activating prior knowledge, generating questions while reading, visualising text, inferring, predicting, retelling, deciding what is important, evaluating, synthesising, summarising and graphic and semantic organisers. Gill (2008) also holds that those learners who can understand plot, character, setting, point of view and theme of texts are able to better understand what they read. Another factor is vocabulary development. Comprehension does improve when teachers help learners to understand important vocabulary and concepts they will encounter in their reading, or demonstrate strategies that they can use to work out unknown words as they read (Gill, 2008).

3.7 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This literature review was aimed at highlighting the factors that may influence reading literacy teaching practices at Grade 4. A number of studies were discussed which highlight the difficulties that learners are experiencing in their development of reading literacy and the research available on the teaching of reading literacy in South Africa. The importance of international assessments in monitoring learners' reading development was also presented, alongside the benefits and limitations of such studies. Lastly, factors indicated in the

scholarly literature regarding effective schooling and teaching for reading literacy were discussed.

In spite of a number of South African studies outlining the problems of schooling and the factors that affect literacy accomplishment in the last decade, it is only in the last two years that the government has started to take tangible steps towards rectifying the situation (DoE 2008a; 2008b; 2008c). Given the lack of evidence of any publications elucidating instructional practices and schooling conditions for teaching reading literacy in South Africa in depth, it is important to investigate what teachers are actually doing. This is particularly so given the vast corpus of research literature in other countries which explicates the practices of effective schools and effective teachers for reading literacy development.

In the next chapter, Chapter Four, the conceptual framework for the study is elucidated.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

4.1 ORIENTATION

As stated in Chapter One, this research aims to explore schooling conditions and teaching practices for the implementation of the curriculum for Grade 4 learners' reading literacy development across a range of education contexts in South Africa. This goal is founded on the recognition that teachers' practices are influenced by the context in which they teach, their teaching interactions with learners, their own conceptions of reading literacy and the teaching of reading literacy and the curriculum from which they must teach. Therefore, there are three key elements incorporated into the conceptual framework for the study presented in this chapter: (1) teaching context, (2) the teacher, and (3) the curriculum. Addressing these elements for the conceptual framework has necessitated the amalgamation and/or adaptation of concepts and components from other conceptual models in the literature. Section 4.2 clarifies the concepts and components from relevant models used in the conceptual framework presented in section 4.3. Although literature specific to the conceptual framework is presented, the framework is also based on understandings garnered from the literature reviewed in Chapters Two and Three.

4.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNINGS

This section explicates the concepts and models which have informed the development of a conceptual framework for this study. In sub-section 4.2.1, levels and dimensions of curriculum (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996; Van den Akker, 2003) are deliberated on, particularly as these levels and dimensions relate to teachers' teaching practices. Sub-section 4.2.2 examines how teachers' classroom practices are formed, with specific attention afforded to how these practices both influence and are influenced by teachers' conceptions for teaching reading literacy and the context in which they teach.

4.2.1 Macro to micro infiltration: the role of the curriculum for teaching reading literacy

In this sub-section, ideas on levels and dimensions of curriculum (4.2.1.1) are broached in relation to teachers and their teaching practices. This is followed by the consideration of the

International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) model for the provision of educational experiences (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996), a model used in the design and interpretation of IEA studies (4.2.1.2).

4.2.1.1 *Levels, dimensions and components of the curriculum*

- *Levels of curriculum*

A country's official curriculum offers what Van den Akker (2003, p.2) calls a "plan for learning", and which distinguishes between various levels of the curriculum:

- a system/ society/ nation/ state (or macro) level
- the school/ institution (or meso) level
- classroom (or micro) level
- individual/ personal (or nano) level.

Van den Akker (2003, p.2) further explains that curriculum development at the system or macro level is usually generic in nature whereas "site-specific" approaches are more applicable for the remaining levels. This study touches on each of these levels to varying extents. That is, the *macro level*, the *meso level*, the *micro level* and the *nano level*.

- *Dimensions of curriculum*

Schmidt *et al.* (1996) point out that a feature of IEA studies is that they recognise the need to consider educational outcomes in relation to educational inputs. IEA studies vary in form and content but overall retain curriculum-based explanatory designs based on the original work of Travers and Westbury (1989) (IEA, 1998). A number of manifestations of the IEA's working model also assume that various factors influence the educational process at three different levels, namely system, classroom and student¹⁷, which are akin to the levels of curriculum outlined in the sub-section above. These three levels are however represented by three conceptions of the curriculum, the *intended*, the *implemented* and the *attained* (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996).

As Schmidt *et al.* (1996) explain, each of the three curriculum dimensions represents a particular set of variables and a societal context in which they are embedded. The *intended*

¹⁷ These levels are evident in the PIRLS 2006 explanatory model, introduced in Chapter Three.

curriculum involves the macro education system's goals and means. Decision-making about these factors can occur at local or regional level, or via a central, national authority with official curriculum visions, aims and goals presented in national and regional guides, or through documents used to guide the education process. The *implemented curriculum* pertains to practices, activities and institutional arrangements in the educational context of meso level schools and micro level classrooms. Practices occur to implement the visions, aims and goals specified in the intended curriculum. Significant for the conceptual framework for this study is that implementation is influenced by the background, ideas, attitudes and pedagogical orientation and practice of teachers. The *attained curriculum* is concerned with the outcomes of schooling evidenced by what learners have actually attained through their educational experiences. What students learn is influenced by what the education system has intended them to learn. Learning is also influenced by the quality and manner in which these intentions have been implemented (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996). For this study, the attained curriculum is evidenced by learners' achievement profiles for the PIRLS 2006.

Van den Akker (2003) also recognises that teaching curricula which offer plans for learning can be presented in various forms, and thus refers to the common distinction which is made via these three levels of curriculum present in any teaching and learning situation. These levels are also depicted in Table 4.1 (below), which outlines Van den Akker's (2003) typology of curriculum representations:

Table 4.1: A typology of curriculum representations (source: Van den Akker, 2003, p.3)

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

This typology advances each of the three dimensions of curriculum by breaking them down into further sub-levels within each level. In applying this typology to the intentions of this study, the focus of this research is on the macro level intended curriculum in the form of the contents of the formal RNCS for Home Languages at Grade 4 (the formal/ written curriculum) and its micro level implementation by teachers who interpret its contents (the perceived curriculum) taking into account their meso level school context and then operationalise it in classrooms (the operational curriculum).



- Curricular components

Klein (1991) refers to different elements of curriculum decision-making that can occur at any of the levels while Van den Akker (2003) refers to 'curriculum components'. For Van den Akker (2003, p.4) "(o)ne of the major challenges for curriculum improvement is creating balance and consistency between the various components of the curriculum", and he provides a list of ten components that address ten specific questions about the planning of student learning (Table 4.2):

Table 4.2: Curriculum components (Van den Akker, 2003, p.4)

COMPONENT	QUESTION
Rationale	<i>Why are they learning?</i>
Aims and objectives	<i>Toward which goals are they learning?</i>
Content	<i>What are they learning?</i>
Learning activities	<i>How are they learning?</i>
Teacher role	<i>How is the teacher facilitating learning?</i>
Materials and resources	<i>With what are they learning?</i>
Grouping	<i>With whom are they learning?</i>
Location	<i>Where are they learning?</i>
Time	<i>When are they learning?</i>
Assessment	<i>How far has learning progressed?</i>

The relevance of these components varies across the curriculum levels (Van den Akker, 2003). The *Rationale* component serves as a major orientation point offering overall principles or the central mission of the plan, with the nine other components ideally being linked to this rationale. The ten components are also ideally consistent with each other. Not all address what knowledge is important for inclusion in teaching and learning, for instance, *Grouping*, *Location* and *Time* refer to organisational aspects. Furthermore, *Rationale*, *Aims and objectives* and *Content* components are usually dealt with in curriculum documents at the macro level. All ten components are involved when looking at the operational curriculum in schools and classrooms, and have to be coherently addressed for successful implementation and continuation. The *Teacher role*, *Materials and resources* and *Learning activities* components are central to the micro-curriculum, whereas *Assessment* must receive

attention at all levels and representations as alignment between assessment and the rest of the curriculum may be critical for successful curriculum change (Van den Akker, 2003).

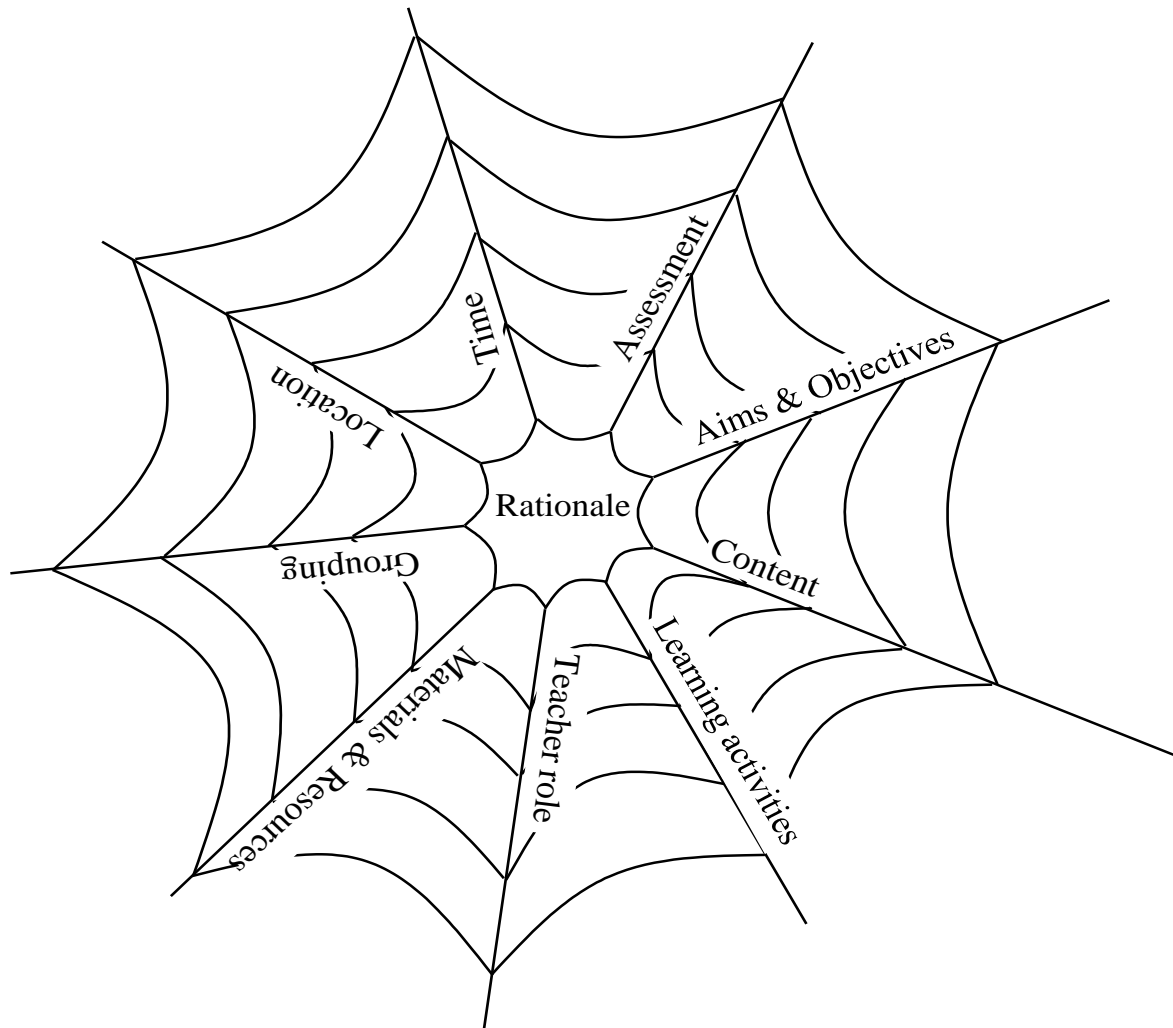


Figure 4.1: Curricular spider web (source: Van den Akker, 2003, p.5)

Van den Akker (2003) actually prefers to arrange these ten components in a spider web (Figure 4.1, above), a visualisation that demonstrates not only their interconnectivity but also their vulnerability. The spider web is illustrative of the expression that “every chain is as strong as its weakest link”. Although in curriculum design these components may receive attention at different stages, eventually they need to show some kind of alignment to maintain coherence (Van den Akker, 2003, p.5).

In the next sub-section are presented the generic model of an IEA research study (*IEA guidebook*, 1998) and Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) model of the provision of education experiences which incorporates the three curriculum levels showing their inter-relationships. Aspects of Van den Akker's (2003) typology of curriculum representation and curriculum components may also be represented, although these are not instantaneously identifiable in the models themselves.

4.2.1.2 The IEA model of provision of education experiences

The generic model of an IEA research study is shown in Figure 4.2 (below), (IEA, 1998; Travers & Westbury, 1989). The model incorporates the system, school or classroom and student levels, and the three dimensions of curriculum referred to as ‘curricular content’. Importantly, the model takes account of the role of curricular antecedents (system features and conditions; community, school, student and teacher characteristics) and curricular context (institutional settings; school and classroom conditions and processes; the student) in the implementation of curricular content:

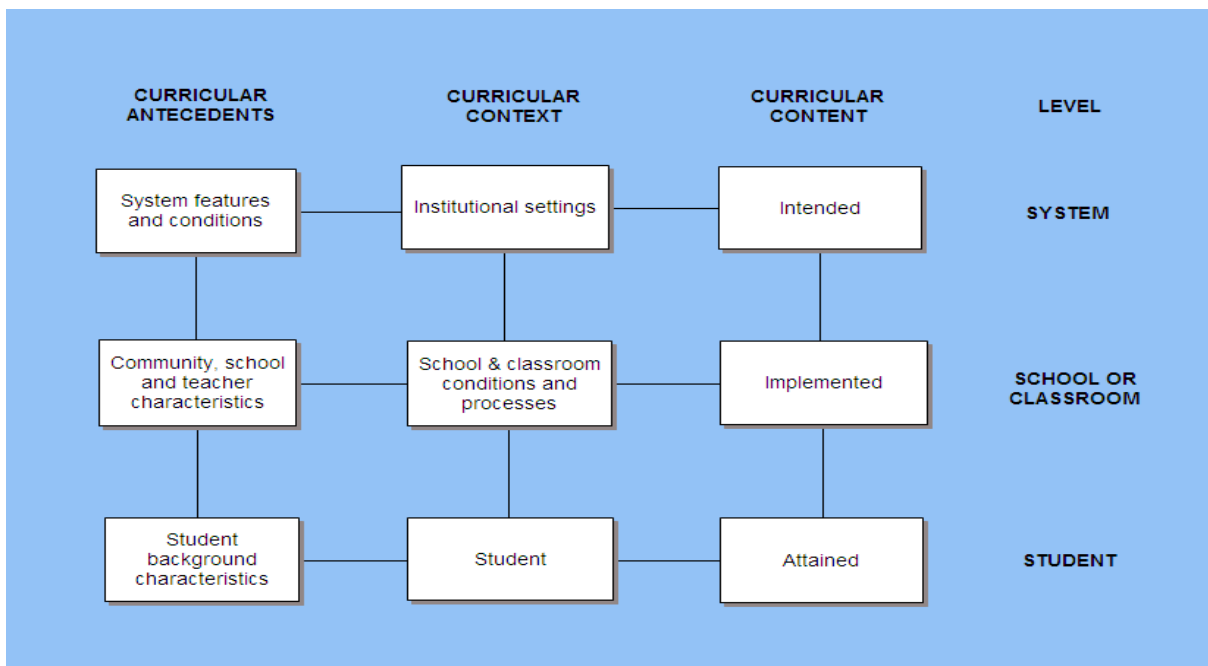


Figure 4.2: Model of an IEA research study (IEA, 1998, p.53; Travers & Westbury, 1989)

A later version of the conceptual framework for the IEA studies used largely in the context of Mathematics and Science performance, Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) model of the provision of educational experiences, includes the dimensions of curriculum without Van den Akker's (2003) additional sub-levels and components outlined in the previous sub-section. The model is based on a number of notions dovetailing with the ideas of Van Den Akker (2003) regarding curricular components outlined above. First is the notion that learners' curricular experiences reflect the complexity of the education system as a whole, with many factors having an impact on education. Therefore, efforts to identify the effects of a single, isolated aspect of the system fail because of the interrelated nature of the educational system (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996). This argument about interrelatedness supports this study's goal to explore teachers' practices linked to learner achievement and the context in which they teach. This is instead of judging the effectiveness of these teachers' practices solely based

on learner achievement. Secondly, the model is also based on the notion that any given system's provision of educational experience is limited, as no system can provide for all possible experiences. Thus, decisions made impact what is and what is not included. Thirdly, the model is based on the idea that curriculum has both intended and implemented aspects (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996).

The model (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996) (Figure 4.3 below) expands the idea of the *Intended*, *Implemented* and *Attained curriculum* into a column and row structure. The rows are divided according to elements pertinent to the *system* or macro level, the *school* or meso level, the *classroom* or micro level and nano level *student* experiences. As Schmidt *et al.* (1996, p.22) declare

(i)t is neither possible or desirable to identify and measure every possible factor that affects an educational system- or even all of those portrayed in the model... However, this model of students' educational experiences recognizes the interconnections between major components of the educational system in a way analogous to conceptualizations of many proponents of systemic educational reform.

The model is also a useful tool for placing teachers' teaching practices within the larger education system and showing the possible interrelationships between the components of this system and teachers' implementation of the curriculum in individual classrooms.

The columns, meanwhile, address four key questions fundamental to cross-national studies, written at the bottom of each. While these questions are different from those addressed in this study, there are similarities. While one question "*What have students learned?*" was already addressed via the outcomes of the PIRLS 2006 assessment (Howie *et al.*, 2007), three questions in the model's columns are still relevant for this study and touch on aspects of the research questions presented in Chapter One:

- "*What are students expected to learn?*"
- "*Who delivers the instruction?*"
- "*How is the instruction organised?*"

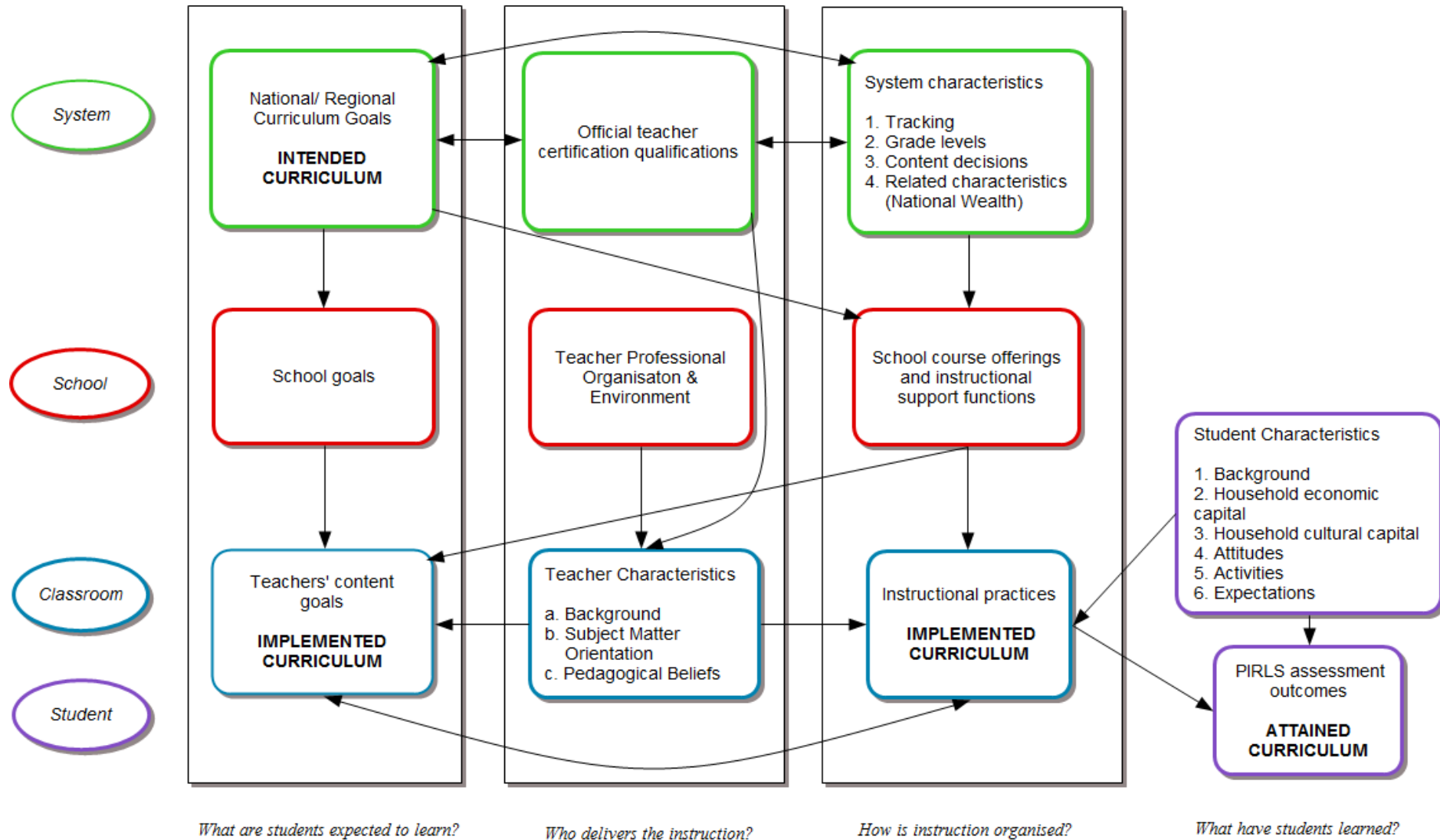


Figure 4.3: The provision of educational experiences (source: Schmidt *et al.*, 1996, p.19).

Addressing the model's question "*What are students expected to learn?*" requires a description of what knowledge and skills learners are expected to attain, one which can be dealt with at the national or regional level, school-site and classroom level. Learning goals specified at a national or regional level are considered part of the intended curriculum, whereas learning goals specified at the school or class level are part of the implemented curriculum. If one connects this to Van den Akker's (2003) typology of curriculum representations, this meso level goal-setting may incorporate the *perceived curriculum* sub-component of the implemented curriculum. The question "*Who delivers the instruction?*" specifically explores the role of the teacher delivering instruction. The question "*How is instruction organised?*" pertains to the influence of instructional organisation on both the implemented curriculum and students' learning experiences (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996, pp.19-20).

As Pudi (2006) points out, the teacher is the filter through which the intended curriculum must pass. Therefore, the next sub-section expands on ideas around the micro level of the curriculum, specifically focusing on teacher characteristics and their perceptions and operationalisation of it as aligned to the questions of Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) model.

4.2.2 Focus on the micro level

This research is premised on the supposition that what happens in the classroom at the micro level cannot be divorced from the knowledge, beliefs, goals and interpretation of the curriculum by individual teachers in their schooling contexts. At the micro level, the question "*How is instruction organised?*" pertains to the influence of instructional organisation on both the implemented curriculum and students' learning experiences. Decision-making about instruction occurs at all levels of the education system, including classroom teachers. The influence of the school and the teacher were also discussed extensively in the literature review in Chapter Three. The organised implementation of the curriculum in the classroom includes the role of learners in classrooms and factors related to the classroom itself. These factors include: textbook usage; lesson structure; instructional materials; assessment of students; teacher and student interaction; homework; and grouping of learners in classrooms (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996), factors not dissimilar to Van den Akker's (2003) curriculum components.

Again, the question "*Who delivers the instruction?*" explores the role of the teacher delivering instruction. It is the teacher who moulds instructional activities which impact learners' learning experiences. According to Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) model, the factors influencing the teacher's role can be investigated by examining official teacher certification qualifications, the professional organisation and environment of the teacher which influences their teaching

(including time usage- time spent planning, time teaching or cross-grade level teaching, cooperation and collaboration amongst teachers), and teacher characteristics. Teacher characteristics influence the quality of instruction and thus the quality of learners' educational experiences. Teachers' backgrounds and their beliefs are included. Background variables include: age; gender; education; subject taught; and teaching experience. Beliefs involve subject-matter orientation and subject-matter specific pedagogy which influence instructional practices and learner achievement. Subject-matter beliefs include views a teacher has of a subject as a discipline whereas pedagogical beliefs deal with the teacher's beliefs about good ways to teach particular topics in the subject (Schmidt *et al.*, 1996). Schmidt *et al.* (1996) further highlight the relationship between subject matter orientation, pedagogical beliefs and what teachers do.

Poulson and colleagues (2001) point to a growing body of research that suggests that it is not only teachers' behaviour in the classroom that influences what children learn but also teachers' knowledge (both formal and practical); values, beliefs, theories and thought processes which are important. Teacher knowledge is considered an integrated system of internalised information about learners, content and pedagogy. Beliefs are a personalised form of dynamic knowledge, implicit assumptions or interpretive filters that guide teachers' perceptions, judgements and behaviour regarding content, learners and learning. Teachers' goals are defined as their expectations about the intellectual, social and emotional outcomes for learners as a result of classroom experiences (Artzt & Armour-Thomas, 1998), in this case their classroom reading experiences. Most teachers thus have a "personal theory" of what they wish to teach which frames their teaching activities (McKenzie & Turbill, 1999, p.8).

The relationship between beliefs and practice is complex, because the relationship seems to be dialectical rather than unilateral as practice does not necessarily flow from beliefs, with changes in beliefs sometimes occurring as a result of change in practice (Poulson *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, Lin, Schwartz and Hatano (2005) argue that the problems that teachers face, such as assisting diverse learners to achieve reading literacy, can take more time to solve. Also, potential solutions have to be weighed against the competing values of other teachers, the school as a whole, district, provincial and national education directives and even the values of learners, their parents and the community itself. Lin *et al.* (2005) further contend that teaching involves active adaptation to learners and the teaching environment. It is therefore appropriate to consider teachers' practices, which are driven by their underlying knowledge, beliefs, goals and thought processes, as adaptive practices based on their continually evolving thinking about their learners' needs and their teaching context.

Adding to ideas about subject matter orientation and pedagogical beliefs in specific reference to reading instruction practices, Leu and Kinzer (2003, pp.15-16) state that teachers provide effective reading instruction by relying on different types of frameworks. These assist them in deciding what and how to teach whilst reducing the number of conscious decisions that they have to make in interactions with learners. There are three types of frameworks: (1) a *material framework*, (2) a *method framework* and a (3) *literacy framework* (Figure 4.4, below):

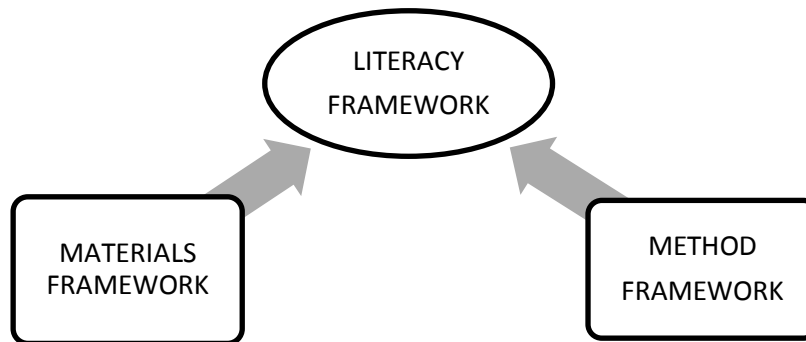


Figure 4.4: Teacher frameworks for deciding what and how to teach reading (Leu & Kinzer, 2003).

Both the *material framework* and *method framework* are concrete in nature. Teachers using a *material framework* generally use and follow very closely materials such as reading programme manuals and lesson-planning information that is available to them. A *method framework* is used by teachers who follow specific reading instruction methods with instructional steps and options which they can incorporate into each step to meet instructional goals. However, the most powerful and flexible of the three frameworks is a *literacy framework* which is the ultimate goal of effective teachers. The literacy framework provides teachers with insights about teaching and individual learners in the classroom, allowing for the individualisation of instruction. With a literacy framework, teachers' beliefs are organised around two issues, namely, what to teach, and, how to teach. Teachers become knowledgeable about a wide range of materials and methods and are able to articulate beliefs around these two issues. Thus, a literacy framework helps teachers to adapt lesson plans and activities on the basis of materials and methods. The choices that teachers then make are deliberate, reasoned and consistent with their beliefs. Literacy frameworks are not static devices as they are modified as knowledge about materials, methods, and the reading process develop and change (Leu & Kinzer, 2003).

McKenzie and Turbill (1999) further theorise that student learning, teacher practices and classroom practice are not only interdependent but are also embedded in the cultural setting

of the school. This commentary brings the meso school level to the fore as it relates to micro level classroom practices. McKenzie and Turbill (1999) argue that student learning is at the core of the school culture and is influenced by a complex mix of interactions between the series of events and processes that can occur between all the layers of the school culture.

4.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

In this section the relevant constructs and concepts outlined above are illuminated in the conceptual framework for the study. The overall approach followed is described (4.3.1) and each level of the conceptual framework discussed (4.3.2).

4.3.1 Approach followed

The conceptual framework for this study concurs with Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) acknowledgement of the impossibility of addressing all possible factors that affect the education system. Therefore, the study focuses on the practices of the teacher in implementing the intended curriculum and the factors that influence this implementation. At this point in the chapter it is useful to present the conceptual framework for the study (Figure 4.5, below), an adaptation of Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) model of the provision of educational experiences (Figure 4.4, above).

The adapted model has been presented in a linear flow diagram as Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) model was found to be too cumbersome to use as an interpretational tool, due to its complex column and row structure and resultant difficulties in examining the proposed interplay of the components. As a result, all the components of the original model have been retained, albeit arranged in such a way as to better show how they interact with others conceptualised for this research. The adapted model thus retains macro level factors linked to the intended curriculum, meso level school factors and nano level learner factors. Each of these levels is important for the conceptual framework in so far as they impact activities at the micro classroom level. In adapting the model for the purposes of this study, it was noted that Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) model did not account for Van den Akker's (2003) extension of our understandings of the three dimensions of curriculum. It did not include the ideal and the written curriculum as part of the intended curriculum, the perceived curriculum and operational curriculum as part of the implemented curriculum, or the experiential and learned curriculum as part of the attained curriculum. As a result these sub-levels have also been incorporated into the framework.

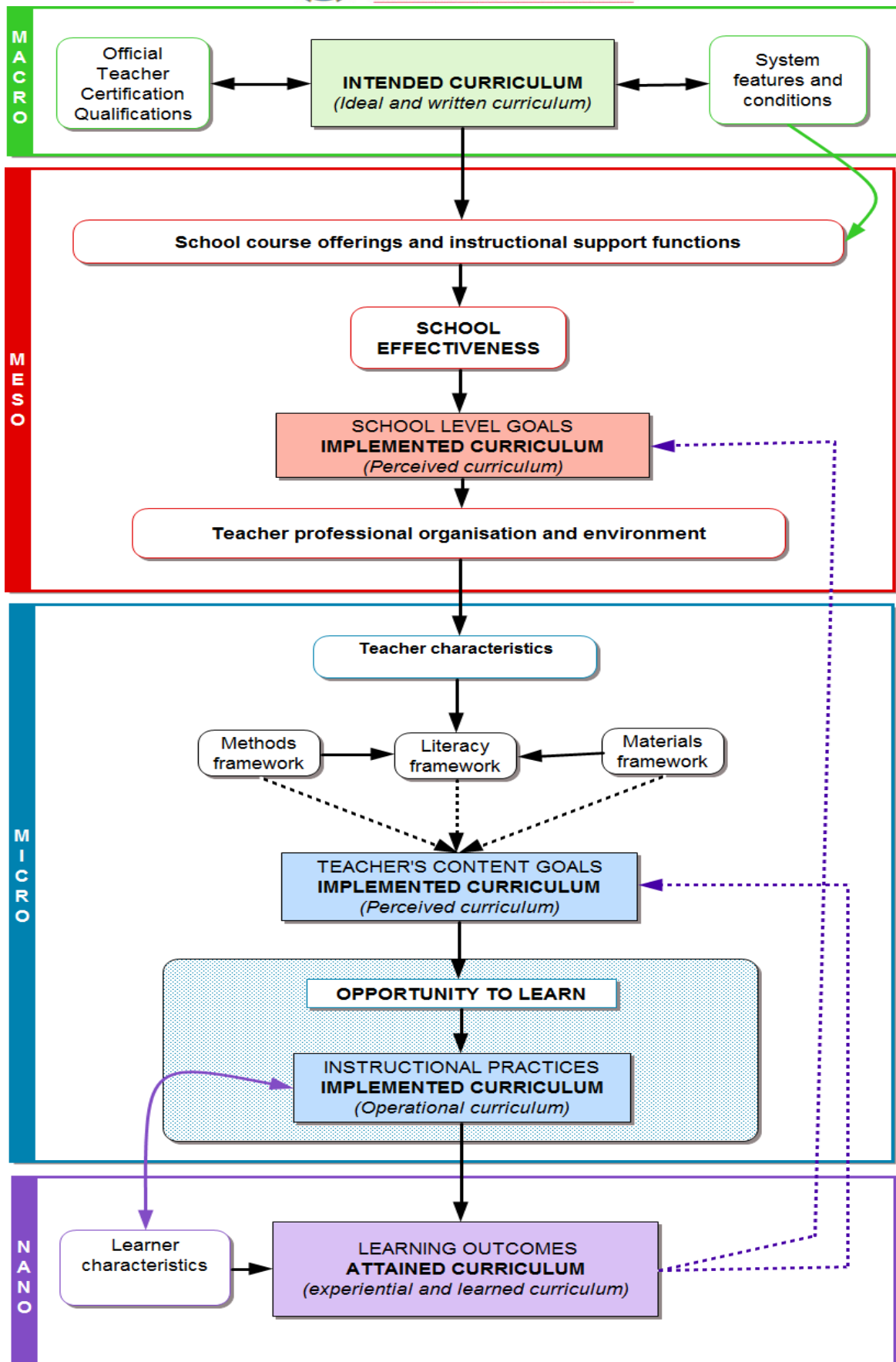


Figure 4.5: Factors influencing curriculum implementation for learners' reading literacy development (adapted from Schmidt *et al.*, 1996; Van den Akker, 2003, Leu & Kinzer, 2003).

The adapted model also integrates Van den Akker's (2003) curriculum components. Each of the ten components (aims and objectives; rationale; contents; grouping; time; location; teacher role; materials and resources; learning activities; assessment), which are comparable to items in the PIRLS 2006 school and teacher questionnaires, is discussed in the next sub-sections in terms of where it was thought they best fit in terms of curricular decision-making by the role-players at each dimension of the curriculum. The model also takes into account Leu and Kinzer's (2003) ideas about teachers' literacy frameworks as associated with teachers' micro level classroom practices. Some literature insights discussed in Chapter Three are also integrated into the framework.

4.3.2 Discussion of components of the conceptual framework

To recap the value of the conceptual framework for this study, the research focuses on the implementation of *macro level* official curricula and policies for reading literacy instruction by teachers. The macro level component of the conceptual framework is therefore outlined in sub-section 4.3.2.1. The *meso level* schooling context creates the professional environment in which teachers teach reading literacy. The meso level component of the conceptual framework is considered in 4.3.2.2. For this research, at the *micro level*, reported and actual classroom practices for teaching literacy are investigated together with the conceptions and experiences of selected individual teachers of reading literacy. The *nano level* experiences of learners are not a specific focus for the study, albeit information about learners' achievement levels in reading literacy in the PIRLS 2006 (the attained curriculum) is used as a central tool for describing the schooling contexts in which these learners learn and the teaching practices they experience. Also, the idea that learner characteristics also exert an influence on their contexts and teachers' practices is acknowledged. The micro and nano level components of the conceptual framework are discussed in sub-section 4.3.2.3.

4.3.2.1 The macro level component of the conceptual framework

Schmidt *et al.* (1996) point out that it is impossible to investigate typical instructional practices without a characterisation of relevant subject matter in the form of the intended curriculum. By this claim, they recommend that an understanding of relevant subject matter content is needed for any analysis of instructional practices. Recognition of the importance of this statement for the design of this study has meant that macro level policies in the form of the intended curriculum for Grade 4 Languages, i.e., the RNCS (DoE, 2002a), and other policies and directives for curriculum implementation and resource allocation in schools are

relevant for this research (see DoE 1997; 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2008d)¹⁸. The intended curriculum with its ideal and written sub-levels consists of *aims and objectives*, a *rationale* and curricular *content*, three of the ten components forming part of Van den Akker's (2003) curricular spider web.

The *content*, *aims and objectives* and *rationale* of the intended curriculum both influence and are influenced by *system features and conditions* and *official teacher certification qualifications* at the macro level. *System features and conditions* can determine the nature of instruction. For example, major system-level organisational aspects include variations in the age-grade structures of the educational system, the nature of the schools that serve an array of grades, and the curricular streams into which learners are placed. Economic resources also influence how instruction is organised as well as influencing the qualifications of teachers, the instructional resources available to teachers and the time and material resources available for learners (Schmidt *et al.*, 1991).

As Schmidt *et al.* (1991) argue, decision-making about instruction is widely distributed. Other embedded sub-levels impacting curricular-decision-making also operate generally at the macro level. These sub-levels include a scholarly *academic level* (university academics), a *societal level* (governmental agencies, business, industry, political and civic groups), and a *formal level* (local, provincial government, publishers, teacher unions, and education organisations outside of individual schools). The *formal level* is likely to have a more direct influence on individual schools than the academic and scholarly levels (Klein, 1991) which are distal to schools.

4.3.2.2 *The meso level component of the conceptual framework*

The meso school level is also referred to as the *institutional level* and includes participants in curriculum development at the individual school site (Klein, 1991). Participants at the institutional level are likely to be involved in collective curriculum planning for more than one classroom at the individual school. Decisions made at this level are made by school-based role-players, such as school management via departmental, grade level and general staff meetings. Significant curriculum development is not often undertaken at this level although it is an essential focus for school improvement (Klein, 1991).

At the meso level, the intended curriculum is therefore perceived by these role-players to institute school level goals for curriculum implementation. For this research it is hypothesised that these curricular implementation goals would have to be formulated on the basis of

¹⁸ These macro level policy directives were discussed in Chapter Two.

school course offerings and instructional support functions as determined at the macro level, and considerations of the factors that contribute to or impede *school effectiveness in reading instruction* at the school site.

Consideration of factors that contribute to or impede school effectiveness in reading instruction has led to the inclusion of a *school effectiveness* component to curricular decision-making at the meso level. An aspect missing from Schmidt *et al.*'s (1996) model is that of school effectiveness. Although Schmidt *et al.* (1996) recognise that *teacher characteristics* and teachers' *professional organisation and environment* impact implementation there is no direct reference to the role that *school effectiveness* characteristics play in the effective implementation of the reading curriculum. Perhaps the Schmidt *et al.* (1996) model does not take school effectiveness into account as the model was developed by scholars in contexts with less likelihood of poor school effectiveness factors impacting educational outputs. In a developing country context such as South Africa, factors impeding school effectiveness are likely to be more prominent.

The conceptual framework for this study therefore incorporates school effectiveness in reading instruction as a factor impacting school level goals in the implementation of the curriculum. As suggested by Postlethwaite and Ross (1992), factors impacting school effectiveness in reading instruction include: *teacher quality* (as determined by teacher characteristics and official teacher certification qualifications); *school management characteristics*; *location of the school*; *materials and resources* that are available and the *involvement of the community* particularly parents in the school. *Learner characteristics* at the nano level will also have an impact on the school's effectiveness in reading instruction. It is hypothesised that these factors in a school likely impact the effectiveness of the school and its capability of interpreting macro curricular intentions and translating them into school goals. Moreover, schools will have to take these factors into account in their interpretations of the curriculum for the formulation of school level goals to implement the curriculum.

School goals then lead to determination of instructional support availability to staff, learner *grouping*, *time* allocation for learning, *location* of learning and, certainly, the setting of school curricular *aims and objectives* and the *content* of learning. The organisation and management of *teaching support availability* to teachers is also an addition to the model at this level. All of these meso level components together constitute the *professional organisation and environment* of the school.

4.3.2.3 *The micro and nano level components of the conceptual framework*

Within the context of meso level school goals and the professional organisation and environment of the school, the curriculum is implemented by the teacher in the micro level classroom. Klein (1991) refers to the micro level as the *instructional level*, which is compiled from what the classroom teacher decides in planning about the curriculum. As decisions made at the other levels are channelled through the teacher, the instructional level is therefore especially influential, with teachers being fundamental curriculum decision-makers who often determine what decisions are actually implemented. Teachers can decide how they implement the curriculum, choosing to implement according to directives from higher levels, to modify what others expect or even to ignore completely decisions made at other levels. Teachers will have their own firm beliefs about what the curriculum ought to be for their group of learners and are not only reactive in relation to the expectations of others. They may also be proactive in developing their own curricula and implementing their own beliefs and values as to how to best educate their learners (Klein, 1991).

According to Schmidt *et al.* (1996), teacher characteristics such as background, subject matter orientation, and pedagogical beliefs impact *teachers' content goals*. For this research, it is also hypothesised that teachers' *grasp of curricular materials* and *expectations of learners* will also play a role in this goal-setting. In connection to subject matter orientation and pedagogical beliefs, it is further hypothesised that the *types of framework* teachers have for deciding what and how to teach reading (a methods, material or literacy framework) (Leu & Kinzer, 2003) impact more specifically on their content goals for teaching reading literacy.

It would appear that the decisions teachers make about a plan for learning then create the nature of Opportunities-To-Learn (OTL) in the classroom. Thus, teachers interpret the *rationale, aims and objectives, content, time, location, and grouping* components of the curriculum to formulate their own *roles* in teaching as well as *learning activities* and *assessment*. Moreover, teachers' planning should be based on their use of the *materials and resources* available to them at the school and in consideration of the *characteristics of the learners* in their classes. According to Schmidt *et al.* (1996), these nano level learner characteristics include their backgrounds, socioeconomic status, household cultural capital, attitudes, motivation, out-of-school activities and expectations. In a linguistically diverse country such as South Africa, language is also a major learner characteristic impacting learning and teaching.

Teachers' content goals, namely the perceived curriculum (Van den Akker, 2003), are then enacted in the classroom leading to the *operational level* of decision-making. The operational

level is the interactive level or the way in which the curriculum unfolds in the classroom due to the engagement of the teacher and learners with the content to be learned (Klein, 1991). Meaningfully, Klein (1991) stresses that teachers may have certain curriculum implementation plans from any of the other levels but the circumstances of the classroom and the interaction of the teacher and the learners may create a much different curriculum. Due to the pace and complexity of the operational level of curriculum decision-making, the teacher can be too engaged in making on-the-spot decisions which characterise the operational curriculum to be able to describe or analyse it comprehensively (Klein, 1991).

Teachers' knowledge, skills, goals and beliefs about the intended curriculum will not only influence teaching and learning but will also be influenced by what takes place within the classroom through teachers' processing of their classroom experiences in teaching reading literacy. They will also be influenced by teachers' adaptation to the school context in which they find themselves, as well as their interactions with learner outcomes (the attained curriculum). Ideally, reflection on the attained curriculum should lead to adaptation of both school and classroom level goals.

4.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This chapter has explained concepts and components from relevant models which are used in the conceptual framework for this research. The actual conceptual framework adapted from these concepts and components was then presented and its relevance as an interpretative tool for this research discussed.

In the next chapter, the research design and methodological undertakings that address the research questions posed for this study are outlined.

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CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 ORIENTATION

In this chapter, the research design and methodological undertakings that address the research questions posed for this study are outlined. Firstly, the research paradigm for the study is discussed (5.2). Secondly, the research design for the study is explicated (5.3). Subsequently the methodological norms for the research are taken into account (5.4). Lastly, as ethical conduct permeates all aspects of a study, the ethical undertakings for the study are considered (5.5).

5.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

In this section, the ontological and epistemological positions for the study are discussed (5.2.1). Thereafter, the complementarities of qualitative and quantitative research are argued (5.2.2) and dialectical thinking and pragmatism as an epistemological basis for the research (5.2.3) are considered.

5.2.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

The selection of research methods cannot be divorced from researchers' theoretical concerns or conceptions of knowledge building (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). Creswell (2003) maintains that although philosophical ideas are largely hidden in research, they still influence the actual practice of research and thus need to be identified. These conceptions of knowledge building or paradigms can be treated as the belief systems that researchers share, which in turn influence the kinds of knowledge sought and how collected evidence is interpreted (Morgan, 2007). The choice of mixed methods for this research is partly founded on my identification with a pragmatic viewpoint of knowledge generation, together with my acknowledgement of a number of arguments of an auxiliary nature that support the mixing of quantitative and qualitative research methods for this study.

Qualitative and quantitative research paradigms are dominant in the social sciences. The emergence of mixed methods research offers an alternative research paradigm which combines, integrates or mixes qualitative and quantitative methods (Morgan, 2007). As

Morgan (2007) indicates, rather than assessing any new approach strictly on its own merits, the implications of that approach should be pondered within the realms of an ongoing research context in which researchers have established commitments to other sets of beliefs and practices or research paradigms. Thus, established qualitative and quantitative research paradigms and the paradigmatic arguments for mixing them for this research are now contemplated.

Researchers' beliefs about the research questions to ask and usage of methods to address these questions are generally based on their stances about what can be known and how to go about achieving such knowledge. These stances are important components of researchers' ideas about reality or ontology and the nature of knowledge or epistemology as reflected in their worldviews (Morgan, 2007). Quantitative research is associated with the ontological view of a social world that is external, independent, fixed or objectively real, whereas qualitative research is linked to ideas of a world that is constructed, subjectively experienced and the product of human thought as expressed through language (Opie, 2004). Each of these ontological vantages on the social world drive epistemological assumptions about which knowledge is deemed valid, which in turn impacts the type of knowledge or research evidence that is sought (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Opie, 2004).

According to Creswell (2003), quantitative research has traditionally been linked to the so-called 'scientific method', also identified as positivist or post-positivist research, empirical science and post-positivism. As its name suggests, post-positivism specifically refers to the thinking that followed positivism, which challenged the notion of an absolute truth awaiting discovery, and recognised that there cannot be absolute certainty about knowledge claims when studying human behaviour and actions. Nonetheless, post-positivism does reflect a deterministic philosophy in which causes do probably determine outcomes, a stance which is often reflected in the design of the research associated with this paradigm. Research data, evidence and rational considerations shape knowledge, and, researchers will collect information on instruments based on measures completed by participants or researcher recorded observations. The goal is to develop relevant, true statements, which can explain the situation of concern or which describe causal relationships of interest (Creswell, 2003).

However, if it is assumed that reality is interpreted and therefore knowledge is experiential, personal and subjective, reflecting an interpretivist or constructivist epistemology, then there will be a need to undertake in-depth interpersonal gathering of information with the individuals involved in a situation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Opie, 2004). The social constructivist knowledge claim therefore offers an alternative to positivist and post-positivist viewpoints of knowledge development. Assumptions associated with social constructivism

posit that individuals seek understanding of their life worlds and, in so doing, develop subjective, multiple and varied meanings. This leads researchers to look for the complexity of views as opposed to narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. As such, research questions are broad and general to allow participants to construct their meanings of a situation (Creswell, 2003).

Epistemological wrangles, or so called ‘paradigm wars’, about the epistemological superiority of each research paradigm outlined above have abounded for many years (Fleisch, 2008, p.141; Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). To explain, there has been an argument made for the incommensurability of paradigms, which means that radically different assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge make it impossible to translate and reinterpret research between them (Morgan, 2007). Expressly, the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms have been represented as two essentially different, mutually exclusive paradigms through which to study the social world (Brannen, 2004). As a result researchers who have chosen to work within one research paradigm have inherently rejected the principles of other paradigms (Morgan, 2007). Regardless, a case has been made against this separate paradigms outlook. It is argued that the zealous following of a singular research paradigm may lead to a warped sense of its value in the research process, with a failure to engage pragmatically with those aspects that it cannot, by its makeup, address (Brannen, 2004). A number of motivations for using more than one research paradigm in a research undertaking have thus been offered. In sub-sections 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 which follow, the motivations that have been identified as meaningful in relation to this research are outlined.

5.2.2 The complementarities of qualitative and quantitative research

Combining quantitative and qualitative research paradigms brings to the fore the question of researchers’ movement between paradigms at the levels of epistemology and theory (Brannen, 1992). To address this question, some methodologists argue that that there is not an inevitable link between ontological and epistemological assumptions on the one hand and methodological commitments on the other (Brannen, 2004; Bryman, 2004). Bryman (2004) explains that the links forged between ontology, epistemology and methods are at best tendencies rather than definitive connections, and, on this basis, argues that research methods should be viewed as autonomous from ontological and epistemological commitments (Hammersley in Brannen, 2004). Thus, my aim was to select research methods that were best suited to interrogating the questions that I wished to address, rather than selecting methods that purely paid homage to their presumed link to the ontological and epistemological position for the research. Indeed, Northcutt and McCoy (2004) call for

reconciliation between quantitative and qualitative paradigmatic views to utilise the strengths of both to the benefit of the research undertaking as a whole.

There is growing consensus regarding the critical value and complementarities of quantitative and qualitative research (Fleisch, 2008). Qualitative and quantitative data can be complementary although not necessarily at ontological and epistemological levels. Complementarities occur when differing data sets are used to address complementary but different aspects of the research (Hammersley in Brannen, 2004), a feature present for this research.

It would seem that Brannen's (1992, p.16) justification for combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, which is one solution to the so-called "duality of structure" in understanding society reflected in both approaches, dovetails with the argument for complementarity between the two paradigms. That is, there are macro-structural ways of understanding society which call for a deterministic explanatory mode associated with quantitative research. There are also micro-structural approaches to understanding society which emphasise the creative and interactive explanations and processes associated with qualitative approaches (Brannen, 1992). Macro-structural and micro-structural levels of inquiry thus cannot be conducted using the same methods. However, according to Brannen (1992), macro-level social phenomena need to be grounded in statements about social behaviour in concrete micro-level contexts. This justification conforms to the aims for this research in that meso-level school data and micro-level data collected from teachers in Grade 4 classrooms were used to both ground and illustrate the macro-level PIRLS 2006 systemic data used for secondary analysis. The macro therefore becomes more clearly known through the lens of the micro. If the macro cannot be fully understood without speaking through the micro then micro and macro cannot stand in opposition to each other (Mason, 2006), which, seemingly intimates that they are complementary in nature.

5.2.3 A dialectical stance and pragmatic epistemological underpinnings

Recognition of the argument for the complementarity of qualitative and quantitative research in addition to the research questions, led to the use of a mixed method design for this research. Mixed method research is placed in the middle of the extremes of quantitative research and the extremes of qualitative research as it attempts to respect the wisdom of both while seeking a workable middle ground for research problems of interest (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). This middle ground is perhaps reflective of ideas about dialectical thinking in research, which involves the dynamic integration of opposing perspectives to achieve the goal of constructing knowledge by finding a resolution to

contradictions (Reznitskaya & Sternberg, 2004). It entails inviting the juxtaposition of contradictory or opposed ideas. When dialectical thinking is applied to the research realm, some scholars propose a dialectical stance when reasoning for the use of multiple paradigms when doing research. These theorists believe that all paradigms are valuable, albeit that each offers only a partial worldview. Thus, from a dialectic stance, the assumption is that all paradigms have something to offer to the research process and the use of multiple paradigms affords a greater understanding of the issue under empirical scrutiny (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Pragmatism, in its many forms, originated from the work of Pierce, James, Mead and Dewey (Creswell, 2003), and as an epistemological stance for this research ensconces these ideas and those introduced in the sub-section above most appropriately. Knowledge claims are thought to arise from actions, situations and consequences rather than from antecedents, as in the case of post-positivism. The concern is with applications and solutions to problem situations, and, the problem is more important than the actual methods chosen (Creswell, 2003).

Pragmatism is further based on the idea that a false dichotomy exists between quantitative and qualitative research and that researchers should make the most efficient use of both research paradigms to understand educational and social phenomena (Onwuegbuzie, 2002). Pragmatism is not committed to any one philosophical system of reality and knowledge (Creswell, 2003). Knowledge from the pragmatic viewpoint is considered to be both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and live in (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). On the basis of my understanding, both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were integrated into this research in the form of a mixed method research design.

5.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this section, the research questions and how these questions are addressed are briefly considered as an introduction to the research design for the study (5.3.1). The actual mixed method research design chosen for the research and reasons for this design choice are then explicated (5.3.2). Thereafter, research methods, sampling, data collection and analysis procedures for the first quantitative phase of the research are introduced (5.3.3), followed by discussion of the same methodological foci for the second qualitative phase (5.3.4).

5.3.1 Research question overview

The research design is based on the research questions for the study. To reiterate, the overall research question is:

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

Answering this overall research question requires integration of the findings from two research sub-questions for the study. The two sub-questions each manifest at two phases of the research process, one of which is quantitative and the other qualitative.

To recap, the first research sub-question is:

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

To answer this question, selected data from the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire are used to provide a descriptive overview of a representative sample of schools' Grade 4 schooling contexts on the basis of their learners' mean performance in PIRLS 2006 and the predominant language profiles of learners in schools. The question is also addressed via school case studies selected from the representative sample to complement and extend the findings from the first phase.

The second research sub-question which deals with teaching practices for Grade 4 reading literacy is:

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

To answer this question, selected data from the PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire are used for description and comparison of practices according to class average profiles and language of teaching. Thereafter qualitative analyses of cases characterised by learner performance trends in reading from PIRLS 2006 and language of instruction complexities, with purposively selected teacher participants, are undertaken during the second phase to complement findings from the first phase.

5.3.2 Mixed methods as research design

In this sub-section, the rationale for the use of mixed methods is discussed (5.3.2.1), followed by consideration of the specific design used (5.3.2.2).

5.3.2.1 *Rationale for use*

Once a study combines both quantitative and qualitative techniques to any degree, the study is no longer considered a mono-method design (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009), which has led to the use of a mixed method design for this study. Mixed method research is an approach to theoretical and practical knowledge that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions and standpoints (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). The benefits of mixing qualitative and quantitative designs are generally stated as enhanced triangulation, a more robust development of theory and the potential to more comprehensively understand the research situation (Anaf & Sheppard, 2007). In support of this, Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) suggest that there are five broad purposes for mixing quantitative and qualitative research. The first purpose is that of *triangulation*, which involves the use of different methods within a study to seek convergence and corroboration of the results from different methods studying the same phenomenon. A second purpose is that of *complementarity*, which, as already outlined, involves seeking elaboration, enhancement, illustration, and clarification of the results of one method with the results of the other. A third purpose is *the use of one method for the development of or to inform the other method*, and, the fourth purpose is *initiation, or discovering paradoxes and contradictions that lead to reframing the research questions*. A final purpose is that of *expansion*, which involves seeking to expand the breadth and range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007).

Except for the triangulation¹⁹ and research question reframing goals, the other three purposes played major and minor roles in the design of this study. The research design for this study departs from the understanding that both qualitative and quantitative research can complement each other. The design also ensues from recognition of the important links that can be forged between information gleaned from larger representative samples and delving into micro-level cases linked to these samples to explore the processes and realities present

¹⁹ The triangulation goal is not used for this research, based on agreement with the argument of Bryman (2007) who asserts that the metaphor of triangulation has sometimes hindered the process of constructing a negotiated account between quantitative and qualitative research findings. He further argues that mixed methods research is not necessarily an exercise in testing findings against each other but is rather about forging an overall or negotiated account of the findings that brings together both components of the conversation or debate, a goal for this research.

in individual micro level contexts (Fleisch, 2008). This is reiterated by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007), who state that mixed methods can be used to probe a data set to determine its meaning. The goal of mixed method use for this research is therefore to add breadth and scope to the study, as well as to contribute to the knowledge base via examination and attempts to understand different aspects of a complex phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007), such as the teaching of Grade 4 reading literacy. For this research a mixed method design is particularly suitable as there are multiple facets of the research questions that need exploring (Anaf & Sheppard, 2007).

5.3.2.2 *The specific mixed method design used*

A myriad of mixed methods research designs are available for use but the number of designs available can make choosing a suitable one challenging, which has necessitated typologies (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). A number of typologies are also offered to assist researchers in their choice of a mixing design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Leech and Onwuegbuzie's (2009) typology of mixed methods research design, which was developed according to three dimensions, was used to aid in the choice of a mixed method design for this study. These dimensions are (1) the *level of mixing of methods* (partially mixed versus fully mixed); (2) *time orientation* (concurrent versus sequential) and, (3) *emphasis of approaches* (equal status versus dominant status). Fully mixed methods involve the use of quantitative and qualitative methods within one or more stages of the research process or across these stages, whereas when partially mixed methods are used the qualitative and quantitative components are conducted either concurrently or sequentially in their entirety and are only mixed at the data interpretation stage. Affording equal status means that the qualitative and quantitative phases of a study have approximately equal emphasis with respect to addressing the research questions (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

For the purposes of this research, a *partially mixed sequential equal status design* (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009) was considered most appropriate as the research comprised two phases, one quantitative and the other qualitative. In the first phase, teacher and school level survey data from a nationally representative sample from the PIRLS 2006 were used to describe Grade 4 Language teachers' reading literacy instruction strategies and the schooling conditions in which they were implemented. This description took place on the basis of the reclassification of the teacher and school survey data according to class language profiles and learners' average class performance aligned to each of the benchmarks of the PIRLS 2006 discussed in Chapter Three. Thereafter, qualitative case studies of teachers' practices and contexts for teaching (Yin, 2003) from each reclassification

sub-sample were purposively selected to add illuminating depth to the study²⁰. The results of the quantitative first phase were used to inform the use of the qualitative method (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007), particularly in terms of sampling decisions and to aid in the development of data collection strategies for the qualitative method. Figure 5.1 (below) illustrates the *partially mixed sequential equal status research design* for this study. It also outlines the methodological undertakings for each phase of the research in terms of sampling choice and specific methods of data collection, aspects which will be explicated in-depth in the sub-sections following this illustration.

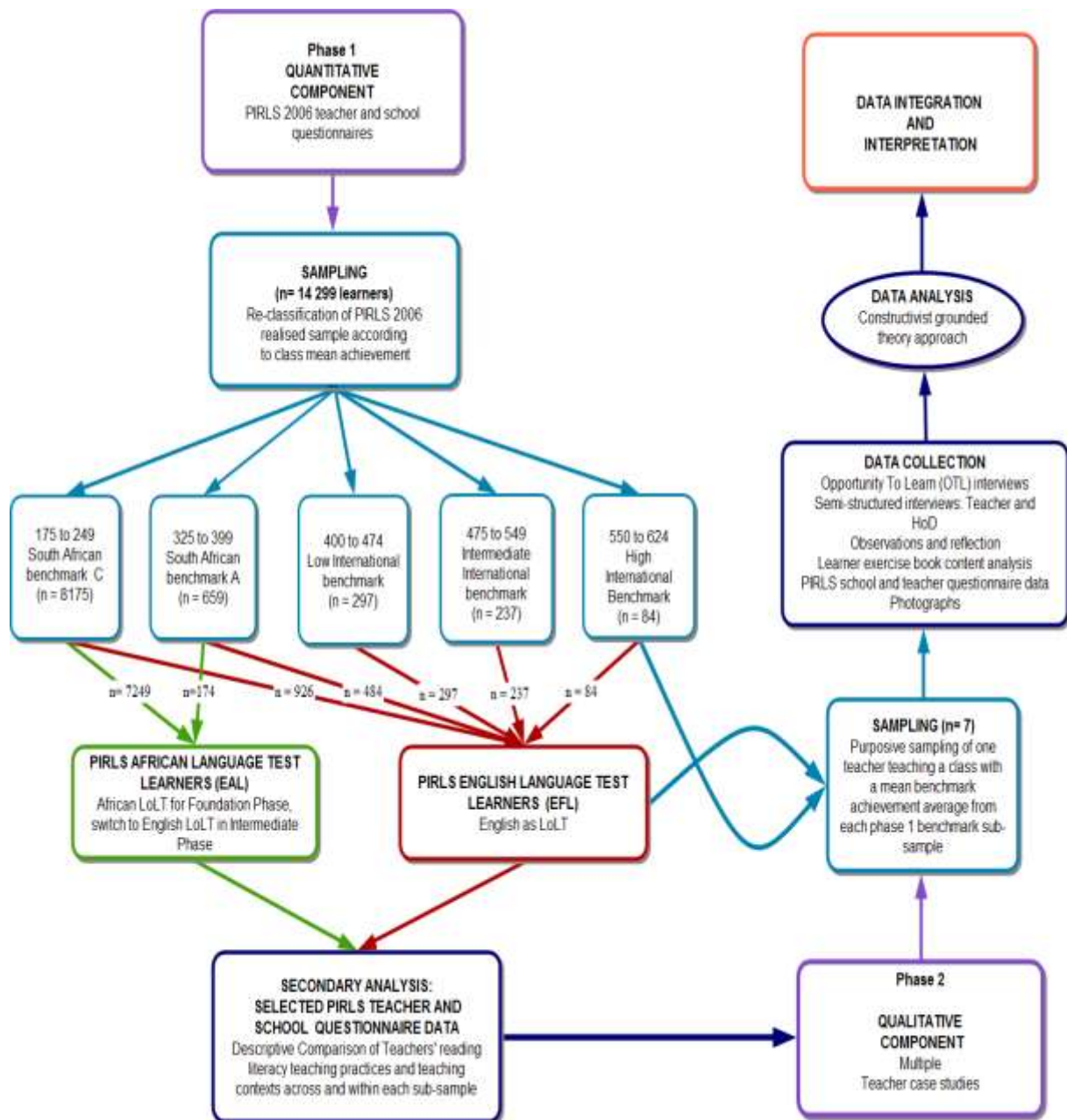


Figure 5.1: The partially mixed sequential equal status research design for this study

²⁰ The nature of this reclassification of the data will be explained further in sub-section 5.3.2.2

5.3.3 Phase one: contextual questionnaire data from the PIRLS 2006

This phase of the research partly addressed both research sub-questions for the study. In this sub-section, an overview of the research process employed to address these questions via the phase one quantitative component of the study is firstly discussed (5.3.3.1). The sampling strategy used is then outlined (5.3.3.2), followed by the explication of the analytical strategies utilised (5.3.3.3).

5.3.3.1 *Secondary analysis of selected items from the PIRLS teacher and school questionnaires*²¹

To collect baseline information about key factors related to learners' home and school environments, cross-sectional structured survey questionnaires were collected from learners, parents, teachers and school principals as part of the PIRLS 2006 (Howie *et al.*, 2007). Of relevance to this study were the administrations of both the school and teacher questionnaires. For phase one specifically, in cognisance of the role of meso school contexts in implementation of the curriculum in micro level classrooms²², selected items from the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire were included for secondary analysis in phase one to answer research sub-question 1. For these purposes, the data were reclassified according to class mean performance on the four PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks and South African benchmark(s) generated according to English First Language (EFL) and English Additional Language (EAL) classroom sub-samples. The school questionnaire sought information from the school principal at each sampled school about the school's reading curriculum and instructional policies, and also sought indications of the its demographics and resources (Kennedy, 2007).

The teacher questionnaire data were used to answer research sub-question 2 by means of description and comparison of classroom reading literacy teaching practices, also using reclassified data from the PIRLS 2006 sample. The teacher survey questionnaire sought information about the structure and content of reading instruction in the classroom as well as within the school as a whole. Information about teachers' preparation to teach reading and experience at Grade 4 was also sought (Kennedy, 2007). In South Africa, Grade 4 language teachers responsible for teaching reading completed the questionnaire.

²¹ Summaries of both the PIRLS 2006 teacher and school questionnaire items used for the analysis in Chapter Five are situated in Appendix D.

²² As highlighted for the conceptual framework in Chapter Four.



5.3.3.2 Phase one sampling

In this sub-section, the sampling process for the PIRLS 2006 is discussed, followed by elucidation of the sampling process for this particular study based on the PIRLS 2006 sampling frame.

- PIRLS 2006 sampling

The sampled schools, Grade 4 learners and teachers for the PIRLS 2006 main study were used in the secondary analysis of PIRLS data for phase one of the research. Therefore, it is important to outline the sampling approach undertaken for the main study. A standardised sampling approach was specified by the PIRLS 2006 sample design. The international desired target population were all learners enrolled in the grade that represents the first four years of formal schooling in a country, provided the mean learner age at the time of testing was at least 9.5 years. Due to sampling that involved schools and learners in classes, a three-stage stratified cluster sample design was employed, with schools being sampled in the first stage, intact classes in the next stage and learners in the final stage (Joncas, 2007a).

Stratification or the grouping of sampling units into smaller sampling frames according to information found in the initial sampling frame could be employed to ensure adequate representation of specific groups. This sampling was used when the usual proportional allocation did not result in adequate representation of some groups. In most countries participating in PIRLS 2006, the sample allocation amongst strata was proportional to the number of learners found in each stratum. The school sampling method was a systematic (random start, fixed interval) probability proportional-to-size (PPS) technique. To draw school samples representative of the learner population a measure of size (MOS) at the school had to be provided, together with the expected number of sampled learners per class and variables describing school characteristics (e.g., gender of learners and degree of urbanisation). Within each sampled school all Grade 4 classes were listed and a systematic random start was used (Joncas, 2007a).

In South Africa, pseudo- or combined classes were constructed when individual classes were too small. Furthermore, schools were sampled according to province and language to create 62 explicit strata. Implicit regional stratification then occurred to create 250 implicit strata (Howie *et al.*, 2007). In South Africa, Grade 4 learners were assessed with a mean testing age of 10.9 years. South Africa realised 100 percent of the international desired population for PIRLS 2006 with only 4.3 percent exclusions. Out of a population of 15,045 schools and

942,494 learners, a total of 429 schools were in the realised sample, with 16,073 learners assessed at Grade 4 (Howie *et al.*, 2007; Joncas, 2007b).

School participation was calculated at 96 percent after replacements, classroom participation was recorded at 100 percent, and there was a 92 percent learner participation rate (Kennedy, 2007). Teachers who taught the participating learners in the sampled classes within sampled schools completed the PIRLS teacher questionnaires, while their principals completed the PIRLS school questionnaires.

- Reclassification of the PIRLS 2006 sample according to achievement benchmarks

As mentioned above, the realised sample for PIRLS 2006 was reclassified for this study based on a goal to investigate how teachers engaged with reading literacy instruction given learners' language backgrounds, learner performance as determined by a class average benchmark and a variety of schooling contexts. The reclassification strategy was also based on my assumption that the majority of learners in a sampled class were likely to perform at similar levels of literacy development as a result of similar educational experiences. The South African Grade 4 schools and associated class samples were therefore reclassified according to the mean achievement score of each sampled class of learners. These class averages were then checked for their potential alignment to each of the PIRLS international benchmarks.

The process of reclassification undertaken is now discussed. To do so, it is first necessary to outline the process of benchmarking for the PIRLS 2006 main study, followed by the consideration of the reclassification process undertaken.

- *The PIRLS 2006 Benchmarks*

As stated in Chapter Three, South African learners' performance in the PIRLS 2006 assessment was scrutinised by means of a process of benchmarking²³ (Howie *et al.*, 2007). To recap, benchmarking provides qualitative indications of learners' performance on a scale in relation to questions asked in an assessment. Four PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks were identified, namely: *Low* (400); *Intermediate* (475); *High* (550); and *Advanced* (625). Criteria were established for identifying learners reaching each of the benchmarks, and all learners scoring within +/- 5 score points of each were included in scale-anchoring analyses. Once the number of learners achieving each benchmark was established, criteria were then

²³ See Chapter Three for a description of each of the benchmarks.

identified to delineate the assessment items that these learners were likely to have answered correctly and which discriminated the benchmark in question from the other benchmarks (Kennedy & Trong, 2007). This scale anchoring then allowed for the development of descriptions of skills that learners at each benchmark demonstrated. Items that anchored or described the skills associated with the achievement of each benchmark were determined via the percentages of learners who answered items correctly or received partial credits for items. For example, for a constructed response item from the assessment to be anchored as a descriptor at the *Intermediate International Benchmark*, at least 50 percent of the sampled learners had to achieve either a partial credit (at least 1 or 2 points when the maximum number of score points was 3) or the maximum score for the item. For a multiple-choice item, at least 65 percent of learners at this *Intermediate International benchmark* had to have answered the item correctly and less than 50 percent of learners situated at the next lowest benchmark, the *Low International Benchmark*, had to have answered the item correctly (Kennedy & Trong, 2007). Once each benchmark anchoring item had been identified in this manner, the items were reviewed by the PIRLS 2006 Reading Development Group, a group that then developed descriptions of learner performance associated with the achievement of each benchmark according to the properties of the anchoring item (Kennedy & Trong, 2007).

- *Reclassification of the PIRLS 2006 Grade 4 achievement data into benchmarks*

For this research, the realised sample of schools for the PIRLS 2006 (N =429) was reclassified according to the mean PIRLS 2006 achievement performance of each school's sampled Grade 4 classes. The data were prepared for the phase one analysis in the following way: (1) firstly, learner performance data for schools with learners tested in Afrikaans²⁴ were removed from the sample; (2) the mean Grade 4 class performance score of each remaining class was then calculated; (3) As PIRLS background questionnaire data are aligned to average learner performances, each learner (N= 14 299) in each class in the sample for this study was allocated the mean class performance score to allow for comparison of teaching practices according to class average performance; and (4) mean class performances were then checked for their potential alignment to each of the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks.

Each of these classes was then further categorised according to the stated Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) at the school, be they schools where the language of instruction had not changed at Grade 4, referred to as English First Language (EFL) medium

²⁴ A sampling decision prompted by both the potential of lack of language diversity in these schools and the goal to focus on English as main language of instruction at Grade 4 for this research.

schools, or schools where the language medium had changed, referred to as English Additional Language²⁵ (EAL) medium schools. Table 5.1 (below) presents the reclassification of the data according to the number of learners for EFL and EAL schools aligned to the class average scores on the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks.

Table 5.1: Percentage of learners according to PIRLS 2006 class benchmarks per EAL and EFL class reclassification

CLASS AVERAGE ON PIRLS INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS	Did not reach benchmark		Low International benchmark		Intermediate International benchmark		High International benchmark	
	Below 400		400 to 474		475 to 549		From 550 to 624	
	n	% (SE*)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)
ALL learners	13 681	93 (1.4)	297	3 (1.1)	237	3 (1.2)	84	1 (1.0)
EFL learners	2185	70 (5.3)	297	11 (4.3)	237	13 (5.0)	84	6 (3.9)
EAL learners	11496	100	NR**	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR

*SE = Standard Error of measurement

**NR = Not Reached

For the PIRLS 2006 main study, very small numbers of South African learners reached the *High (550) and Advanced (625) International Benchmarks*, and only English and Afrikaans learners were represented at either (Howie *et al.*, 2007). For this research specifically, removal of the Afrikaans test language results and calculation of learner performance according to average class achievement revealed that no learners were in classes with a mean performance at the *Advanced International Benchmark*. As is evident in Table 5.1 (above), 93 percent (SE = 1.4) of all learners tested in either an African language (EAL) or English (EFL) were in classes where the average class performance was below the *Low International Benchmark*. Moreover, very small percentages of learners were in classes with an average performance at the *Low, Intermediate or High International Benchmarks*. When this sample was then reclassified further, it was apparent that 70 percent (5.3) of learners tested in English were in EFL classes where the class average did not reach the *Low International Benchmark* of 400. Only 11 percent (4.3) of learners were in EFL classes where the class average was at the *Low International Benchmark*, 13 percent (5.0) of learners in EFL classes where their mean class performance reached the *Intermediate International Benchmark* and six percent (3.9) of learners were in classes with an average at the *High International Benchmark*. Disconcertingly, all learners tested in an African language were in EAL classes where the average class achievement was below the *Low International Benchmark*. The fact that there was a bottom effect in the data, specifically with regard to

²⁵ Although these EAL learners learn in English as the main language of instruction from Grade 4, the learners were assessed in the language of instruction from Grades 1 to 3, an African language, for the purposes of the PIRLS 2006.

learners tested in an African language (EAL), prevented meaningful analysis when only using the PIRLS international benchmarks of 400, 475 and 550. For further analytical purposes, it was thus necessary to create new benchmarks to allow for greater insight into group variations between the sampled South African Grade 4 classes, especially those with EAL learner cohorts. Benchmarks reflective of the levels of performance that the majority of South African learners reached thus needed to be created to assist understandings of teaching practices at these achievement levels. The value in creating these benchmarks is that instructional interventions aimed at improving South African learners' reading literacy cannot be appropriately designed without an understanding of the needs of the majority of learners, their teachers and schools.

Table 5.2: Average class performance distribution for South African benchmarks and class language profile

LEARNERS IN CLASSES WITH AN AVERAGE AT EACH OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN BENCHMARKS IDENTIFIED	South African Benchmark D		South African Benchmark C		South African Benchmark B		South African Benchmark A		PIRLS International Benchmarks	
	100 to 174		175 to 249		250 to 324		325 to 399		400 and above	
	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)
ALL learners	2495	18 (2.9)	8175	51 (3.7)	2352	17 (2.9)	659	7 (1.6)	618	7 (1.4)
EFL learners	448	13 (5.0)	926	25 (7.0)	326	8 (3.7)	484	23 (6.4)	618	30 (5.3)
EAL learners	2047	19 (3.5)	7249	59 (4.1)	2026	20 (3.5)	174	2 (1.2)	NR*	NR

*NR = Not Reached

Table 5.2 (above) presents the possible choices considered for the establishment of the South African benchmarks used in this study. The learner mean class average achievement data was segmented in the same way as the PIRLS International Benchmarks, starting at 75 scale points below the PIRLS *Low International Benchmark* of 400, a scale point of 325, referred to as *South African Benchmark A*. *South African Benchmark B* is a scale point of 250, *Benchmark C* is a scale point of 175 and *Benchmark D* is a scale point of 100 on the achievement scale. I decided that Benchmark A (325) and Benchmark C (175) would be appropriate choices for further analysis for this study. The majority of the learners (51%, 3.7) were in classes with an average achievement score at South African Benchmark C (175) with 59 percent (4.1) of the EAL learners and 25 percent (7.0) of the EFL learners represented at this benchmark. Whilst only seven percent (1.6) of the learners were in classes with an average represented at Benchmark A, two percent (1.2) of learners in EAL classes were represented, the highest achieving EAL classes in South Africa according to class average, making this benchmark an extremely important analytical choice for this

research. Also, nearly as many EFL learners (23%, 6.4) were in classes reaching Benchmark A as those EFL learners in classes reaching Benchmark C (25%, 7.0).

Table 5.3: Final sample used for secondary analysis of PIRLS teacher and school questionnaire data

LEARNERS IN CLASSES WITH A MEAN REACHING THE SELECTED BENCHMARKS	South African Benchmark C		South African Benchmark A		Low International Benchmark		Intermediate International Benchmark		High International Benchmark	
	175 to 249		325 to 399		400 to 474		475 to 549		550 to 624	
	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)
EFL learners	926	25 (7.0)	484	23 (6.4)	297	11 (4.3)	237	13 (5.0)	84	6 (3.9)
EAL learners	7249	59 (4.1)	174	2(1.2)	NR*	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR

*NR = Not Reached

Table 5.3 (above) delineates the final sample used to reclassify the associated school and teacher questionnaire data for secondary analysis. To reiterate the sampling process used, only teacher and school questionnaire data aligned to certain class average achievement benchmark and language profiles were used. That is, the questionnaire data for teachers and schools where learners were assessed in English (EFL) and the class average achievement was at one of five established benchmarks were used. These benchmarks were: the *High* (550), *Intermediate* (475) and *Low* (400) *International benchmarks* and *South African benchmarks A* (325) and *C* (175). For those learners assessed in the African languages (EAL), teacher and school questionnaire data in cases where the class performance average was aligned to *South African benchmark A* (175) and *C* (325) were used as no EAL learners were in classes with an average reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks. The identified analysis sub-samples are labelled as EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325, EAL 325, EFL 400, EFL 475, and EFL 550 for the purposes of reporting in the findings chapters for this study.

In the next sub-section the process of secondary data analysis of selected school and teacher questionnaire data as used for comparison according to language profiles and average class performance on these benchmarks is described.

5.3.3.3 Phase one secondary data analysis

Secondary analysis involves exploring new research questions and/or theoretical frameworks using existing data (Smith, 2008). For this study, the existing PIRLS 2006 data were used for the purpose of secondary analysis. Structured surveys such as the PIRLS contextual

questionnaires provide data that are categorised and tabulated, such that these data can be explored quantitatively via descriptive or inferential statistics (Baumann & Basson, 2004). Secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 teacher and school questionnaire datasets was considered meaningful for this research as it is a useful option for those who have access to databases that may not have been fully tapped in the original designs (Thorne, 1993).

For the PIRLS main study, teacher questionnaire data were reported by means of percentage of learners responding to each category of a variable accompanied by mean reading achievement of the learners in each category. Thus the teacher data were presented from the perspective of learners' educational experiences. In some cases response categories were collapsed and indices compiled. The same descriptive reporting occurred for this study, however the descriptive summaries of response distribution were considered within and across the reclassified sub-samples according to benchmark mean performances and the class average performance assigned to each learner that was generated for this research (Trong & Kennedy, 2007). As a result, seven different educational landscapes defined by average class performance on the benchmarks and class language profile (i.e. EFL and EAL 175, EFL and EAL 325, EFL 400, EFL 475 and EFL 550) were presented for both internal analysis of each benchmark and for cross-comparison with the other benchmark scenarios. For the main study, the school questionnaires were completed by the principal at the sampled school and these data were reported according to the percentage of principals responding to each item. The same reporting convention was used for reporting of the school questionnaire data for this study.

Frequencies and mean scores were generated for selected variables in the teacher and principal questionnaire data. Where appropriate, the mean scores were calculated per benchmark and presented as cross-tabulations. IDB analyser (IEA, 2009) was used in order to correctly estimate the standard errors given the cluster sample.

To summarise the data further, a number of scales were also explored. Exploratory factor analysis was used to identify groups of variables that correlated with each other and to determine the underlying dimensions of a set of factors (Field, 2009). Principal Components Analysis (PCA) using varimax rotation was chosen as a preferred method of factor extraction for the analysis (Kremelberg, 2011). Initial attempts to execute the factor analysis for the selected items revealed that it was not feasible due to small sample sizes for some of the sub-samples. As a result, selected sub-samples were merged. The EAL 175 (175 to 249 on the PIRLS achievement scale) and EAL 325 (325 to 399) datasets were thus merged to create the EAL 175-325 benchmark merged on the basis of these benchmarks' EAL and class average performance below the PIRLS international benchmarks commonalities. The

EFL 175 (175 to 249) and EFL 325 (325 to 399) benchmarks were merged as EFL 175-325 due to their EFL and performance below the PIRLS international benchmarks commonalities. The rationale for the merge of the EFL 475 (475 to 549) and EFL 550 (550 to 624) samples were their EFL and highest class average benchmark commonalities. The EFL 400 sample was not merged with any others as descriptive analysis for some of the items had already revealed that at times the benchmark shared commonalities with the lower benchmarks and at other times commonalities with the higher class average benchmarks. Where merged data are presented it is stated in Chapter Eight. Significance testing between each of the sub-samples is also reported. Moreover, the baseline factor analyses scores for the overall sample are provided in Appendix J.

A number of criteria were used for the factor analysis. Firstly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was used to verify the sampling adequacy for each analysis. KMO values greater than .5 were considered acceptable for inclusion with the further acknowledgement that values between .5 and .7 are judged as mediocre, values between .7 and .8 as good, values between .8 and .9 as great and values above .9 as superb. Secondly, Bartlett's test of sphericity was also used to indicate whether correlations between the variables were sufficiently large for PCA with a significance of less than .05 ($p < .005$). Thirdly, the proportion of common variance or communality present in each variable for the scale across the merged benchmarks was checked. Those items with communality of .4 were retained for each component generated. Moreover, components with eigenvalues meeting Kaiser's criterion of 1 were retained for analysis at each benchmark (Field, 2009). For each remaining component, items with negative factor loadings and factor loadings under .4 were removed. The remaining items loading onto a component were then analysed for any underlying structure or latent variable. Items that did not fit conceptually with the rest of the items of a component were also removed. Only factors meeting all the criteria above are presented in Chapter Eight.

Once the scales (factors) were identified, their internal reliability was explored. The reliability analyses of the scales were calculated for all the benchmarks. Factors were analysed to see if the factors formed reliable scales using Cronbach's alpha. As these were considered exploratory analyses, a lower coefficient of .5 were considered the criterion to be included (see Howie, 2002). The inter-item correlation coefficients were analysed to ensure that no items were correlated too highly (Cronbach's alpha was greater than .7), the variance statistics and the Cronbach's alphas were also considered in the item-deletion statistics. In this regard, if the Cronbach's alpha was substantially higher after a particular item was deleted and did not adversely affect the conceptual composition of the scale, particular items

were subsequently considered for deletion. Where this occurred, this is explicitly mentioned in the text. If not the original scale was included in its entirety.

Whilst secondary data analysis can reveal what is happening it cannot disclose why in detail, as this requires combined approaches (Smith, 2008). Moving from this macro-level secondary analysis selected PIRLS 2006 teacher and school questionnaire data, micro-level case studies were initiated for exploratory illustration of teaching practices and schooling contexts for the development of reading literacy.

5.3.4 Phase two: case studies of teachers' reading instruction practices and teaching contexts

This second phase of the research also partly addressed the two research sub-questions for the study, both of which were addressed via qualitative case studies of selected teachers' reading literacy instruction practices and their schooling contexts for the development of reading literacy. In this sub-section, the second qualitative phase of the mixed methods study is thus described. Firstly, the value of qualitative research methods for the second phase is presented (5.3.4.1). Subsequently, in sub-section 5.3.4.2, the rationale for the use of multiple case studies is discussed. Thereafter, the purposive sub-sampling strategy employed for the selection of cases and participants is outlined (5.3.4.3). This is followed by the exposition of the data collection (5.3.4.4) and data analysis (5.3.4.5) strategies used for the second phase.

5.3.4.1 The value of qualitative methods for phase two

As Yin (2003) suggests, surveys can try to deal with phenomenon and context but on account of their descriptive nature their ability to do so is restricted. The second phase of this research addressed the PIRLS 2006 school and teacher survey questionnaire data's restricted ability to investigate teaching practices and the contexts in which teachers address reading literacy instruction using qualitative research strategies. In so doing, the aim was to complement and extend the findings from the secondary analysis of the survey data.

The properties that made qualitative methods apt for this phase of the research are their purported emphasis on the qualities of phenomena and their focus on processes, interpretation and on the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As Mason (2006, p.17) writes: "A distinctive strength of qualitative research lies in its intimate and habitual concern with context, with the "particular" and with understanding the situatedness of social experience, processes and change". Qualitative research undertakings seek elucidation of research questions by examining social settings and the people who are

part of these settings. The researcher interprets phenomena in interaction with participants according to the representations of meaning that they afford to them, in so doing seeking to build a holistic picture with detailed descriptions of the participants' perspectives. The researcher is able to share in the understandings and perceptions of others, and the social shaping and processes that people use to create meaning in their lives and maintain their social realities (Berg, 1998; Macmillan & Schumacher, 2000). Qualitative research is best when it delves in unfettered ways into the complex processes and contextual realities of teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom (Fleisch, 2008). The methodological vehicle chosen to do this was multiple case studies, which are discussed in the next sub-section.

5.3.4.2 *Utilisation of multiple/collective case studies*

In this sub-section my argument for the use of case studies for the second phase of the research is presented, with specific reasoning for the use of multiple case studies.

- Why case studies?

Many qualitative researchers are committed to a case-based, insider's perspective of a phenomenon. This position directs their attention to the specifics of particular cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A case study provides a comprehensive examination of a single example and in so doing delivers a unique illustration of real people in real situations (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2004). A case study is further delineated as being composed of any social entity that can be restricted by parameters and that uncovers a specific dynamic and relevance, revealing information that can be captured within its realms (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Case study research as such involves the study of an issue, via one or more cases in a bounded system, with the general goal of developing as full an understanding of each case as possible (Creswell, 2007; Silverman, 2005).

The specific strengths of case studies are that they provide illustrations of effects of phenomena in real-life contexts, especially as context is recognised as a powerful determinant of both the cause and effect of phenomena and understandings of them. Moreover, the illustrative, in-depth description that a case study provides helps to report on complex dynamics (Cohen *et al.*, 2000), such as the teaching of reading literacy at Grade 4 in a range of diverse schooling contexts. Case studies are based on recognition of the embedded state and complexity of social truths (Bassegy, 1999). They do not give indications of causality when considering teaching and learning practices but they can provide rich descriptions of the dimensions and dynamics of classroom learning (Barone, 2004). The

study of selected cases for this phase of the research was considered useful as these cases were aimed at providing detailed illustration, insight, discovery and interpretation of teachers' teaching practices for reading literacy and the schooling contexts in which these practices took place, a goal of this research. The case studies were considered especially useful for exploration of selected teachers' practices and teaching contexts, to add illustrative depth to the reporting of teacher questionnaire data from the first phase of this research and to provide a wealth of details and a nuanced view of teachers' practices in their unique contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

- The use of multiple case studies

Multiple or collective case studies were used because looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases can aid understanding of a single case by grounding it through specifying how, where and why it occurs as it does (Merriam, 1998). This was necessary given the complexity of teaching and learning contexts presented in South African primary schools, and the need to investigate the diverse classroom realities that teachers may face in their task of further reading literacy development. Multiple case studies can also aid in building a stronger understanding of the issue of interest (Barone, 2004) and the inclusion of multiple cases is a common strategy used to increase the credibility of the findings in the analysis of these cases (Merriam, 1998). For this research, it also provided for opportunities to gain a depth of perspectives about teaching Grade 4 reading literacy in a diverse range of educational contexts (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004).

The selection of multiple cases was also based on use of the phase one reclassified sample for purposive sub-sampling. A discussion of the selection process and sampling rationale for each of these cases follows.

5.3.4.3 *Purposive sampling: case and participant selection*

Purposive or non-probability sampling is used in case study research because it entails the deliberate selection of a particular section of the population to include in the study for the purpose of fulfilling the criteria for participants as set forth by the research questions (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, teachers and schools were selected on the basis of their ability to purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2007), which was to explore schooling conditions and teaching practices for reading literacy development across a range of educational contexts as determined by class average performance in the PIRLS 2006.

At the research design stage, quantitative data can assist sampling for the qualitative component by identifying representative sample members or helping to identify outlying or deviant cases (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Building on the reclassification of the initial three-stage stratified cluster sample from PIRLS 2006 in phase one (see 5.3.2.2), schools with Grade 4 classes which were reclassified according to class language profiles and by the average class performance of learners on the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks and South African benchmarks, provided the sample for purposive strategies used to select the case studies in this second phase. EFL and EAL schools with PIRLS 2006 Grade 4 class average at benchmarks 175, 325, 400, 475 and 550 were therefore included in the sample.

Moreover, although sampled schools meeting these criteria were scattered throughout all of the nine provinces in South Africa, focus was first placed on Gauteng schools from the sample. This decision was based on ease of access for research purposes due to my residence in the province. Using this purposive sampling frame of Gauteng schools reaching each of the class benchmarks, a convenience sampling strategy was then employed. Convenience sampling involves choosing the nearest sites and/or individuals to serve as participants, and continuing this process until the required sample size has been obtained (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Notwithstanding cognisance of the role of province²⁶ in the selection of cases, I acknowledged that each case would also present a diverse teaching and learning scenario.

Permission to approach schools selected from the Gauteng sub-samples of EAL and EFL 175, EAL and EFL 325, EFL 400, EFL 475 and EFL 550 was obtained from the DoE, then also from school management at each site to approach individual teachers. Thereafter, teachers who had taught the learners who completed the PIRLS 2006 assessments, who had completed a PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire, and who were still teaching Grade 4 in the same school sampled for PIRLS 2006 at the time of data collection for this study in 2009, were initially sought for participation. The Head of Department (HoD) responsible for the Grade 4 Language subject area at each school was also sought for participation.

²⁶ Each South African province has its own educational nuances due to the influence of: local governance by each of the provincial departments of education; a differing population dynamic and differing language profile to the other provinces; the availability of and access to resources, all of which could influence teaching and learning in schools. Of the nine South African Provinces, the Gauteng Province specifically achieved the third highest score of these provinces in the PIRLS 2006 assessment for Grade 5 learners. The South African province with the highest average performance was the Western Cape, achieving 404 points which is 51 points above the average achievement score of the Gauteng province. The Gauteng province scored 67 points above the Eastern Cape which was the lowest performing province. The Gauteng performance of 353 was slightly higher than that of KwaZulu-Natal at 314 (Howie, Venter, Zimmerman & Archer, 2009).

However, of the seven schools approached, with the exception of the teacher at EAL 325, teachers who had participated in the PIRLS 2006 study were either unavailable to participate; could not remember participating; were no longer teaching Grade 4 at the school; or had left the school. Therefore, except for the teacher at EAL 325, an HoD and a Grade 4 teacher teaching in each EAL 175, EAL and EFL 325; EFL 400, EFL 475 and EFL 550 school, and who volunteered to participate, were purposively chosen.

Also, there was only one school in Gauteng with a Grade 4 class average at EFL 475. The teachers at the school declined to participate and thus a school in KwaZulu-Natal reaching EFL 475 was approached for participation. The KwaZulu-Natal school approached was the only public school of the four reaching this class average benchmark in the province, which was why it was specifically chosen for inclusion. It must also be noted that upon data collection at the EAL 325 school selected, it was discovered that it was actually an EFL medium school. A decision was taken to continue data collection at the school as it turned out to be a private Roman Catholic township school with only second language English learners attending, and this meant that its difference from other township schools was considered analytically meaningful. Moreover, of the seven intended case studies of Grade 4 teachers' practices in context, six were undertaken due to difficulties in getting schools at EFL 175²⁷ to participate in the research during the time allocated for data collection.

This resulted in six cases altogether. The participants at each of the six school case sites were recognised as the "... experiential experts on the phenomenon being studied" (Rudestam & Newton, 2007, p.107) and considered to be "information rich" in that each possessed knowledge of and experience with the issue under investigation (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p.87). Each selected case was viewed as a critical case, which involves the choice of a representative case most likely to represent the phenomenon under exploration, thought to have been achieved by the sampling criteria of class average performance and language of instruction. The main argument for the use of this type of case is that what is valid for these participants is more likely to be valid for others too (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Merriam, 1998). A short overview of the biographical details of schools and the teachers that chose to participate in the study are set out in Table 5.4²⁸.

²⁷ Members of the EFL 175 school who had wanted to participate could not get permission from the principal due to his continual absence and thereafter also indicated that they could not participate as the school was dysfunctional, particularly during teacher strikes taking place at the time.

²⁸ Chapters Seven and Nine provide more biographical details for each of the schools and teachers.

Table 5.4: Biographical details of purposively selected school and teacher participants

<i>SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS</i>	South African Benchmark C 175 to 249	South African Benchmark A 325 to 399		Low International Benchmark 400 to 474	Intermediate International Benchmark 475 to 549	High International Benchmark 550 to 624
Language background of class	EAL	EFL	EFL	EFL	EFL	EFL
Province	Gauteng	Gauteng	Gauteng	Gauteng	KwaZulu-Natal	Gauteng
Location	Rural township	Urban	Urban Township	Urban	Suburban	Suburban
School pseudonym	F	E	D	C	B	A
Private/ public	Public	Public	Independent	Public	Public	Independent
Teacher's years of teaching experience	12	14	15	12	15	31
Teacher's years of experience at Grade 4	1	7	15	2	8	10
Teacher's age range	30-39	30-39	30-39	30-39	40-49	50-59 years

5.3.4.4 *Data collection*

In this sub-section, the approach to data collection and the actual data collection strategies employed for each case are considered.

- Approach to data collection

As Merriam (1998) points out, a case study does not have any particular methods of data collection, and any methods of gathering data may be employed to address the research questions posed. Indeed, case-based research leads to detailed data about the phenomenon being studied, no matter what particular research methods have been used (Henning *et al.*, 2004). Thus, given the range of data collection methods that could have been employed, Charmaz's (2006, p.15) caveat that "(h)ow you collect data affects *which* phenomena you will see, *how*, *where*, and *when* you will view them, and *what* sense you will make of them" was borne in mind during the selection of the actual methods chosen for this phase. Figure 5.2 (below) illustrates the data collection methods used for each case study of teacher practices in context. Each method informed the overall case and further acted to inform either the

implementation or analysis of the other methods. As such, each method led to the convergence of evidence for the overall case (Yin, 2003).

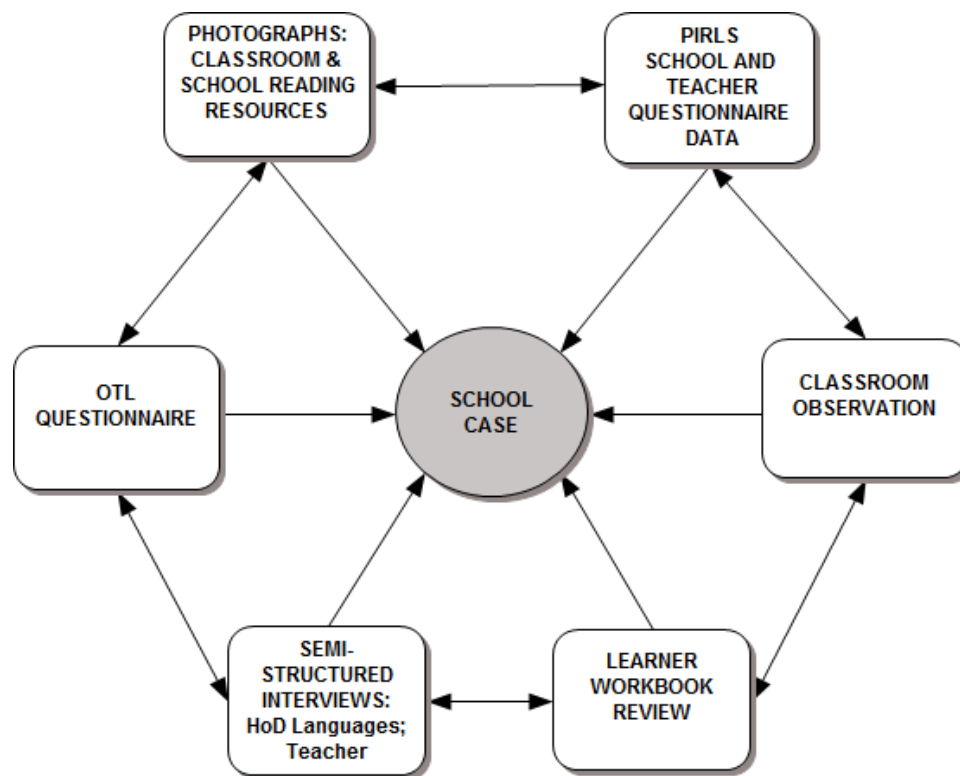


Figure 5.2: Case study data collection methods (adapted from Yin, 2003).

- Data collection strategies employed

Each of the data collection methods that were chosen to aid in answering the research questions for phase two of the study is now considered.

- *PIRLS 2006 school and teacher questionnaire data for case study contextualisation purposes*

As indicated above, the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire gathered information from school principals about availability and use of materials to teach reading, the school reading curriculum and instructional policies, in addition to school demographics and resources (Kennedy, 2007). Whilst these school questionnaires were not a central focus for analysis for phase two of the research, selected PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire items completed by principals at the purposively selected participating schools were utilised to contextualise the teachers' teaching practices. This was viewed as important to cover the contextual conditions that formed the boundaries of these cases (Yin, 2003) as these conditions are highly pertinent to understanding teachers' practices.

Also, the PIRLS 2006 teacher survey questionnaire sought information about the structure and content of reading instruction in the classroom, amongst other aspects (Kennedy, 2007). Except for one teacher at EAL 325, the other participating teachers who had not completed the questionnaire in 2005 filled in a PIRLS 2006 questionnaire. Each of the teachers' responses to selected items about teaching practices from this questionnaire acted as further teaching practice reference points for these cases.

- *Opportunity To Learn open-ended questionnaires*

Opportunity-To-Learn (OTL) was introduced as part of the IEA's First International Mathematics Survey in the 1960s. The Mathematics curriculum was conceptualized as functioning at the three levels of the intended, implemented and attained curriculum. To examine the implemented curriculum, an OTL questionnaire was administered to the teachers of the learners who were assessed. Teachers were asked whether the content needed to respond to items on the achievement tests had been taught to their learners. In instances where the content had not been taught reasons for this were explored (McDonnell, 1995).

A similar strategy was initiated for this research. The participating teachers at each school were given the PIRLS 2006 assessment passages released for public scrutiny to review, together with an open-ended questionnaire which sought their judgement on the suitability of the passage for their learners (see Appendix E). In particular, the teacher participants gave their opinions on the suitability of the passage for their learner group in terms of: length; vocabulary; cognitive level; and cultural appropriateness. They were also asked whether or not their learners would be able to successfully read the passage on their own and with comprehension, giving reasons for their answers. Another question sought the teachers' comments on the similarities and differences between the passage and the type of passages they would usually give their learners to read. The teachers were further asked what kind of teaching support they would need to give to their learners to help them to read and understand the passage. Finally, the teachers indicated what kind of assessment strategies they would use if they were to assess their learners' reading comprehension using the passage. I surmised that teachers' responses to such questions might yield further insights into the performance of prior learners in the PIRLS 2006 assessments at the school.

- *Semi-structured interviews*

Interviews are essential sources of case study information (Yin, 2003). The purpose of a qualitative research interview is to obtain nuanced descriptions of the interviewee's

interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation (Kvale, 1996). Qualitative interviewing is thus a directed conversation which permits in-depth exploration of a particular topic from the experience of the participant himself or herself (Charmaz, 2006). In the use of semi-structured interviews specifically, the topics for discussion are pre-specified and listed on an interview protocol, but the questions can be reworded and do not need to be presented in a set order (Johnson & Turner, 2003). Ideas and issues emerge during the interview which allows the researcher to pursue these leads (Charmaz, 2006).

On the basis of my recognition of the benefits of this method, semi-structured interviews were initiated with both the participating Grade 4 teacher and the HoD responsible for overseeing the Language subject area at Grade 4 in the sampled schools. The interview schedules in Appendix F outline the lines of inquiry for these interviews. In sum, the teacher interviews focused on teachers' understandings of and goals for teaching reading literacy; viewpoints of the curriculum for the teaching of reading literacy; descriptions of typical lessons; opinions on what experiences have shaped their teaching strategies; experiences in interacting with their learners for reading literacy; and ideas about which strategies are most useful. The HoD interview focused on: the HoDs' career path; their role as HoD at the school; the goals and planning process for reading literacy development undertaken by the HoD and teachers; the strategies for reading development used; teaching time allocation for Language and for reading instruction, specifically at Grade 4; description of a typical learner at the school; and opinion on the official teaching curriculum.

- *Classroom observation and follow-up interviews*

Non-participant observations assisted towards gaining greater understanding of the cases (Stake, 1995) and provided the opportunity to investigate teachers' teaching practices *in situ* instead of just from the second-hand accounts provided via the other data collection methods for the study (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). As a result, this allowed me to see things that may otherwise have been missed and to explore areas of practice that teachers may not have spoken about or reflected on in the interviews and questionnaires (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). This meant that the observational evidence was used to provide additional information (Yin, 2003) about teachers' teaching practices, and, was not used as the main source but rather a supplementary source of information. I asked to observe one reading comprehension lesson undertaken by each teacher. Each participating teacher chose when and which lesson I would observe. I postulated that asking the teacher to decide which lesson I could observe would perhaps result in the teacher delivering a lesson based on her ideas of best practice in teaching reading comprehension. For these cases, my role was that of non participant observer, in that I was present in the participant teachers' classrooms and my role as

researcher was known to the teachers and their learners, but I did not actively participate in the social interactions and teaching undertakings in the classes observed (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Specific foci for the observation were organised around four areas, as outlined in Table 5.5 (below), namely, the physical, human, interactional and programme settings in each class and the specific focus areas for each (Cohen *et al.*, 2000):

Table 5.5: Broad focus areas for classroom observations (adapted from Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.305).

SETTING	FOCAL AREAS FOR OBSERVATION
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Resources for reading and the classroom in which the observation took place.</i>
Human	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The characteristics and makeup of the learner cohort in the classroom in terms of gender, diversity and behaviour.</i>
Interactional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The teaching interactions that took place, either formal or informal, verbal and non-verbal between the teacher and learner.</i> • <i>The nature of questions asked and quality of responses given.</i>
Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The teaching resources and their allocation.</i> • <i>The events or sets of activities that took place and the sequence of these events or activities.</i> • <i>What the teacher was trying to achieve in terms of stated and non-stated goals.</i>

Each of the observations was videotaped and the audio²⁹ of teacher and learner interactions was transcribed for later analysis. Furthermore, as suggested in the work of Silverman (2005), field notes made at the time of the observation were kept to systematise the process. After the observation I also interviewed the teacher about the lesson. Moreover, each passage and questions used for the reading comprehension during the lesson observed was collected for later comparison, with the passages and questions from other lessons observed for the other cases. The passages and questions were then compared in terms of complexity of ideas and questions, level of vocabulary used, number of words and developmental appropriateness for Grade 4 learners.

- *Document review*

In literacy research, the analysis of artefacts usually involves the examination of physical evidence of literacy instruction, learning or practice (Purcell-Gates, 2004). For this research, this meant that a review of products of literacy instruction, learning and practice took place. The Language workbooks of a learner in each participating teacher's class were reviewed. The quantity, quality and type of activities evident, especially for reading comprehension, were recorded as well as the quality of the learners' written responses to these activities in terms of amount, content and developmental level. As data for the cases were collected

²⁹ The exception was School B (EFL 475), whose teacher did not give permission for recording of her lesson to take place using a digital voice recorder or video camera. In this instance, detailed field notes provided the basis for the analysis.

between June and November 2009, learner workbooks were also collected at different times during the year. As such, only workbook entries until the end of June 2009 were analysed, to ensure comparability of the documents for the analysis.

- *Photographs*

Photographs were taken of both the literacy resources available at the school, reading materials available in the Grade 4 teachers' classrooms, and of the print environment in the classroom overall (see Appendix H).

Table 5.6 (below) gives a breakdown of which data sources were collected from each of the six schools.

Table 5.6: Data sources for each phase two school case

<i>EFL 550 SCHOOL A</i>	<i>EFL 475 SCHOOL B</i>	<i>EFL 400 SCHOOL C</i>	<i>EAL 325 SCHOOL D</i>	<i>EFL 325 SCHOOL E</i>	<i>EAL 175 SCHOOL F</i>
HoD Interview	HoD Interview	HoD Interview	HoD Interview	-	HoD Interview
Teacher interview	Teacher interview	Teacher interview	Teacher interview	Teacher interview	Teacher interview
Classroom observation	Classroom observation	Classroom observation	Classroom observation	Classroom observation	Classroom observation
OTL questionnaire	OTL questionnaire	-	OTL questionnaire	-	OTL questionnaire
Library and class photographs	Library and class photographs	Library and class photographs	Class photographs	Class photographs	Class photographs
PIRLS teacher and school questionnaire	PIRLS teacher and school questionnaire	PIRLS teacher and school questionnaire	PIRLS teacher and school questionnaire	PIRLS teacher and school questionnaire	PIRLS teacher and school questionnaire
Learner workbook	Learner workbook	Learner workbook	Learner workbook	Learner workbook	Learner workbook

- *Denotes missing data*

Following from the collection of these data, data analysis was undertaken, the process of which is discussed in the next sub-section.

5.3.3.5 **Phase two data analysis**

In this sub-section the overall approach to analysis is first discussed. Thereafter, the initial and focused coding and memo-writing is considered, followed by explication of the cross case-analysis and synthesis.

- Approach to analysis

In qualitative research, data are interpreted by looking for themes grounded in the participants' responses (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) techniques were used to assist in the analysis of the data collected for this phase of the research. Scholars have updated traditionally positivist or post-positivist approaches to grounded theory by situating them in the social constructivist, postmodern and social justice frameworks (Ellington, 2008). As Charmaz (2006) indicates, grounded theory serves as a way of learning about the worlds we study and is a method to assist in the development of theories to understand them. These theories are not discovered, as in Glaser and Strauss's (1967) classic grounded theory, but rather constructed on the basis that participants' implicit meanings, and researchers' grounded theories are constructions of reality. As such, a constructivist revision of Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory captures more closely grounded theory's combination of systematic rigour in analysis, with the creative and dynamic character of the interpretive research process (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004). To elaborate, grounded theory methods "... preserve an open ended approach to studying the empirical world yet add rigor to ... research by building systematic checks into both data collection and analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p.23).

Each case was analysed separately and once this took place a cross-case synthesis occurred (Yin, 2003). It is important to note that researchers can adopt and adapt grounded theory guidelines to conduct different studies (Charmaz, 2006), and as a result analytical guidelines were adopted and adapted as needed for the analysis of the phase two data.

- Initial coding, focused coding and memo-writing

The first step in the analysis process was to initiate coding of each of the data sets for this phase of the research. Qualitative coding is a first analytical step towards moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations. Coding can be seen as the groundwork to analysis that prepares the way for a much more intensive study (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) by shaping an analytic frame from which to build analysis. Coding "fractures data into concepts and categories" (Henning *et al.*, 2004, p.131) and entails categorising

segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarises and accounts for each piece (Charmaz, 2006).

Grounded theory coding particularly involves an initial phase in which each word, line or segment of data is named, and a focused, selective phase in which the most significant or frequent initial codes are used to sort, synthesise, integrate and organise large amounts of data. However, contrary to a quantitative logic that applies preconceived codes to the data, codes are created from what is seen in the data (Charmaz, 2006) via inductive logic. Potter and Wetherell (1987) note that coding is distinct from doing analysis itself. The goal of the initial selective coding is not to find results but rather to break down an unwieldy body of information into more manageable chunks. The categories used for coding purposes flow from the research questions of interest. However, as coding has a pragmatic rather than an analytic function it is recommended that this process of collecting together information for analysis should be done as inclusively as possible. Therefore, all borderline information that seemed only vaguely implicated was incorporated (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

In practical terms, this initial coding process of all the generated data for phase two of the study was undertaken in a certain manner. Firstly, each verbatim data transcript was read to get an overall impression as to the emerging themes apparent throughout the text, then the transcript was read again. As this was done, units of meaning in the text were segmented out and the data were fractured through open, inductive coding procedures, by which the development and labelling of concepts in the texts considered to have potential relevance to the research occurred. Codes were attached to each of the units of meaning that were singled out from the transcript and the outcome was a condensation of what each participant originally said or did (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Henning *et al.*, 2004; Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004; Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

After the initial coding was completed, more selective, conceptual and directed coding was undertaken. This focused coding involved using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to filter through large amounts of data. Decisions were made as to which initial codes made the most analytical sense to allow for more incisive categorisation of the data (Charmaz, 2006). A kind of implicit quantification is present in this process, as a theme is more likely to be identified the more times the phenomenon it signifies is represented in the course of coding (Bryman, 2004). When the collection and coding of additional data no longer led to new insights for a specific category - a point of data saturation - a summary of each of the categories or themes elicited was described (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). I took up Charmaz's (2006) proposal of questions to ask to evaluate the quality of the data and thus contemplated whether I had enough background

data about persons, processes and settings for ready recall about contexts of the study; whether I had gained detailed descriptions of a range of participants' views and actions; whether the data revealed what was beneath the surface; whether I had gained multiple views of the participants' range of actions; whether I had gathered data that enabled me to develop analytic categories; what kinds of comparisons I could make between data; and how these comparisons generated and informed my ideas for the study (Charmaz, 2006). At this point, I considered relationships between the categories and more formal theory. As such, hypotheses for how these codes related were considered and integrated into theory (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004; Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Throughout the coding process, I generated theoretical memos to aid in openly representing emerging theoretical reflections. These memos contained hunches and insights, comments on areas in need of further investigation, deliberations about refinements of codes, explanations of modifications to categories (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004; Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software [CAQDAS] was used to assist the coding and analysis process. This software has been specifically designed for the use of qualitative researchers, who tend to deal with large amounts of text data. The specific software used, *Atlas.ti*TM, does not automatically do coding analysis for the research analyst but allows one to work interactively with the data and may lead to more varied representations of the data and coding. *Atlas.ti*TM, as a CAQDAS tool, specifically allows the researcher to see their data and the coding associated with that data side-by-side on the computer screen, and includes reorganisations of the data by codes as well as many other representative possibilities (Yates, 2001).

- Cross-case content comparison

A qualitative approach to comparison works by seeking to understand the distinctive dynamics, mechanics and particularity of each case holistically, and then to make comparisons at the level of analysis. This is instead of using standardised measures or comparators applied to all of the cases, as, although standardisation may be useful for some comparative purposes, it "can have a stultifying effect on our capacity for understanding and interpreting social change" (Mason, 2006, p.16). This is as when social existence is viewed as multi-dimensional as it is for this research, change can potentially occur on a range of dimensions that cannot be compared in a "like with like" fashion (Mason, 2006, pp.16-17).

Constant comparative methods are used to establish analytic distinctions and make comparisons of each analytic work as data are compared with data to find similarities and differences (Charmaz, 2006) both within and across the cases. The grounded theory focus on constant comparison of data meant that (1) data were compared with data from the beginning of the research, not after all of the data were gathered; (2) data were compared with emerging categories; and (3) relations between concepts and categories were demonstrated (Charmaz, 2006).

5.4 METHODOLOGICAL NORMS FOR THE STUDY

This section first expounds the approach to the methodological norms for the study (5.4.1). In sub-section 5.4.2, the methodological norms for phase one of the study are specifically discussed. In sub-section 5.4.3, the methodological norms for the second phase are described.

5.4.1 Approach to the methodological norms

Taylor (2001) maintains that academic analysis must involve a more systematic investigation. The paradigmatic choices available for research present a large number of terms for evaluating and describing the validity of a research study. In fact, definitions for validity have evolved over the years, and, the quantitative and qualitative research traditions differ with both treating issues of validity differently, despite sometimes similar terminology (Dellinger & Leech, 2007). Indeed, reliability and validity are treated separately in quantitative research, whereas in qualitative research these terms are not viewed separately. Rather terminology which encompasses both, such as trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability, may be used (Golafshani, 2003; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Although I chose to deal with the methodological norms for both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research separately, I also had to take cognisance that this study was a mixed methods undertaking, which presented other considerations in terms of ensuring the quality of the undertaking. My central consideration for the validity of the mixed methods nature of this study was to ensure its design quality and interpretive rigour. Design quality refers to the quality of inputs such as data, design, and data analysis procedures. Interpretive rigour involves the integrity of the process of meaning making (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Also, Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) indicate that transparency is used as an indicator for quality in both quantitative and qualitative studies. Transparency is judged by the clarity of explanations that researchers provide regarding all stages of the research process. To achieve this, my goal in writing this chapter was to provide clear explanations of

who the research participants were, how they were selected, how the data were analysed and how conclusions were derived from it (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

5.4.2 Methodological norms for phase one

Any study undertaken under the auspices of the IEA such as the PIRLS 2006 must conform to the technical standards which have been stipulated for such studies. The validity and reliability standards for IEA studies usually relate to: the measurement of student achievement in a school subject as a key objective; the collection of data via survey samples in school settings; simultaneous data collection in a large number of countries by national teams using internationally agreed upon instruments and following internationally agreed procedures; and the management and coordination of the study by an international team. The standards are as a result grouped into four areas, namely, (1) the design, management, operation and quality control of international studies; (2) the construction of instruments for measuring student achievement and background questionnaires for collecting information from students, teachers and schools; (3) survey data collection procedures in schools; and (4) data processing, analysis and reporting (Gregory & Martin, 2001).

For data collection specifically, quality control is an integral part of an IEA study at both the national and international levels. Such quality control involves internal mechanisms built into each stage of data collection to ensure that the procedures are implemented correctly with external reviews of the process by parties separate from those being evaluated (Gregory & Martin, 2001).

Therefore, these rigorous standards directed the implementation of the PIRLS 2006 study in South Africa. To ensure consistency in the fieldwork within and across countries and to ensure compliance with the IEA/PIRLS 2006 data collection guidelines and standards, a monitoring process was put into place and an international quality control manager acted as an external, objective observer of the process. National quality control officials were also appointed with monitoring occurring in eight percent of the sampled South African schools (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

5.4.3 Methodological norms for phase two

In 1985, Lincoln and Guba (1985) spoke of ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research and later indicated that this trustworthiness involved credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The attempts made to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative component of this research are discussed in terms of

credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Also, my own reflexivity in the process is considered.

5.4.3.1 *Credibility*

The credibility of a study is viewed as the fit between participants' views and the researcher's representation of these views. Credibility can be demonstrated by means of strategies such as triangulation, member checks and audit trails, amongst others (Tobin & Begley, 2004). A criterion for the credibility of the second phase of the research was based on the quality of the case studies. I hoped to achieve credibility via the collection of multiple sources of data evidence for each of the cases. As another quality check, participants had the opportunity to review, corroborate and revise the research findings, should they deem it necessary, through a process of member validation (Barone, 2004; Bryman, 2004). The aim of member validation was to seek corroboration of the account that I arrived at. I sought correspondence between my findings and the perspectives and experiences of the participants involved in the research (Bryman, 2004). Member validation was also used within the interview process as topics were confirmed, rephrased and probed to gain access to the holistic and subtle meanings of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2000).

5.4.3.2 *Dependability and confirmability*

Dependability can be ensured by making sure that the research is logical, traceable and clearly documented, in other words, by creating an audit trail. The creation of an audit trail also means that confirmability or authentication of the interpretation can be achieved (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Therefore, each case for this research has a formal presentable database so that other researchers can review or trace the case study evidence directly (Yin, 2003). Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002, p.28) reinforce the value of a presentable database by stating that "... providing access to the decisions that are made in the process of conducting qualitative research is part of responding to the question of whether or not the findings are sufficiently credible and trustworthy". The CAQDAS software, *Atlas.ti*, assisted in the creation of an audit trail in which the evidence for the conclusions drawn were presented in a linear manner to show how the data collection and analysis led to the conclusions drawn (Barone, 2004; Bryman, 2004). I also tried to achieve consistency in coding the raw data in ways such that another individual could understand the themes and arrive at similar conclusions (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).



5.4.3.3 *Transferability*

Transferability (or external validity) relates to the generalisability of the research (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Flyvbjerg (2004) argues that formal generalisation via quantitative measures is just one way in which knowledge can be accumulated, and maintains that even if knowledge cannot be formally generalised, as with qualitative case studies, this does not mean that these cases cannot contribute to “the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society”. Also, as situated and contextual understandings are at the core of qualitative explanation and argument, Mason (2006) considers it unfortunate that qualitative explanations are seen as too localised or contextualised to underpin generalisation or theorisation. She further qualifies this statement by suggesting that understanding how social processes and phenomena are contingent on or embedded within particular contexts is a crucial part of social explanation, and understanding how they play out across a range of different contexts also makes possible cross-contextual generalisations (Mason, 2006).

Furthermore, those who read case study-based research findings have the opportunity to decide for themselves what knowledge is applicable to their own unique circumstances. Readers of case study research can judge the implications of this type of study for themselves (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). The illustrative, in-depth description that is afforded by the qualitative case study thus offers “others... a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieus” (Bryman, 2004; Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

Case studies also allow for the presentation of research in a more publicly accessible format capable of serving multiple audiences. The research process itself is thought to be more accessible and, as such, is argued to aid in the democratisation of decision-making and knowledge (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Associated with this strength is the recognition that the concrete, practical, context bound knowledge produced can contribute to the learning process of others who can use it to aid in their understanding of the issue that is illustrated. As the research has aimed to be praxis enriching, the case study approach taken provided an avenue for learning about the practical manifestations and implications of teachers’ practices through case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2004). These case studies therefore began in the practical world of teachers’ practices and experiences in specific schooling contexts but the knowledge generated in terms of these cases is considered as capable of contributing to practical situations and theory building (Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

5.4.3.4 *Researcher reflexivity*

Ellington (2008) asserts that very few researchers still truly believe in objectivity and the discovery of an a-historical, unbiased and universal truth via research undertakings with most acknowledging the impossibility of eliminating subjective influence from research processes. To try to circumvent the challenges posed by my own bias and subjectivity in the research, a process of researcher reflexivity was initiated. Reflexivity also aids dependability as the researcher keeps a self-critical account of the research process (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

In addition to these practical attempts aimed at addressing possible subjective bias, there is recent literature that provides an applicable argument to thwart the viewpoint that a qualitative case study can be problematic as it can be subjected to the bias of the researcher. In this literature, Flyvbjerg (2004) presents the argument that the case study contains no greater partiality in terms of a researcher's bias towards verification of her pre-established ideas than other methods of enquiry. The difference is that it is more likely that the researcher's initial ideas will be directly engaged as her subjective views can be tested in-depth, up close in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice by means of a case study design. Thus, it is more plausible that a researcher's preliminary ideas will be falsified in this way due to the allowance for the in-depth viewpoints of those who participate in her research (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

5.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE STUDY

Clearance to undertake this study was received from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria. Ethics is a critical part of the research process from the initial formulation of the research issue to the interpretation and reporting of the research findings. The guiding ethical principle for this study was respect of the rights of research participants to safeguard their integrity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). As researcher, I undertook to adhere to the principle of respect for participants' integrity by ensuring their informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and by undertaking to protect them from any harm during the research process.

Consent to conduct the PIRLS 2006 main study was received from the then National Minister of Education by the PIRLS national research co-ordinators in 2005. The sampled schools, teachers and learners who participated in the PIRLS 2006 gave their informed consent and assent for participation prior to data collection for the study. Permission was also sought from the learners' parents. Therefore, permission to conduct secondary analysis of the PIRLS

2006 teacher and school survey data for this study was received from the co-national research coordinators for the main study.

For the second phase of the study in particular, the guiding ethical consideration for informed consent was my acknowledgement that participants had the right to know that their viewpoints were being researched. Furthermore, participants were entitled to be informed about the nature of the research and that they could withdraw from the research at any stage (Ryen, 2004) without fear of negative repercussions.

As a starting point, permission was obtained from the DoE to approach schools to participate in the second phase. Thereafter permission was also obtained from the management of the schools purposively sampled to approach potential teacher and HoD participants for participation in the study. I then visited each purposively selected school and met with potential participants for the second phase of the research³⁰. At each meeting I explained the goal of the research and outlined what would be expected of these possible participants if they chose to participate in the research. I also answered any questions, explained ethical procedures for the study and left a letter of informed consent for consideration by these individuals. The letter dealt with: written clarification of the research purpose and process; explanation that the participants could discontinue their participation in the research at any time during the process; and the assurance that their confidentiality and anonymity would be ensured at all times. The participants also had to give permission for their interview responses to be recorded using a digital voice recorder and for classroom practices to be recorded using a digital video recorder during the classroom observations. The participants were also informed about who would have access to the data they provided and about for which purposes their contributions would be used.

For those teachers and HoDs who then chose to participate in the research, at each phase of data collection, the process was explained, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the research at any time and all other ethical aspects were reiterated. For reporting purposes, the names of participating teachers, HoDs and schools have been protected and pseudonyms assigned. Also, in reporting the context of the case studies, every effort was made to make sure that the school is not distinguishable via contextual details given (Creswell, 1998; Cameron, 2001).

³⁰ An initial visit was not made to the school in KwaZulu-Natal due to geographical distance.

5.6 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Now that all design considerations and methodological undertakings for the research have been presented, it is essential to outline the relationships of these methodological undertakings to the research questions posed for the study. Table 5.7 (below) provides indications of the relationships between the overall research question, the operational sub-questions and the data sources used to address the questions. The last column of the table also outlines in which chapters each of the research questions and associated data are discussed in the rest of this thesis.

Table 5.7: Data collection and sampling aligned to the research questions

<i>Overall research question</i>	<i>Sub-questions linked to each overall research question</i>	<i>Data source for research sub-questions</i>	<i>Chapter in thesis</i>
What influence do schooling conditions and teaching practices have on curriculum implementation for Grade 4 reading literacy development?	Research sub-question 1: What are the schooling conditions in which Grade 4 reading literacy instruction practices occur at each identified PIRLS 2006 achievement benchmark?	PIRLS 2006 School Questionnaire Data	Quantitative findings: Chapter 6
		Teacher interviews HoD interview Photographs	Qualitative findings: Chapter 7
	Research sub-question 2: What are the practices of teaching Grade 4 reading literacy at each identified PIRLS 2006 achievement benchmark?	PIRLS 2006 Teacher Questionnaire Data	Quantitative findings: Chapter 8
		Teacher interviews HoD interview PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire Classroom observation OTL questionnaire Learner workbook review	Qualitative findings: Chapter 9

In the next chapter, Chapter 6, the quantitative findings for research sub question 1 are presented.

CHAPTER SIX

PHASE ONE FINDINGS:

MESO LEVEL SCHOOL CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS OF PRACTICE FOR READING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

6.1 ORIENTATION

This chapter presents findings for the Phase One secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire data completed by the principal at each participating school sampled for the PIRLS 2006 study. This chapter partly addresses research sub-question one for the study, namely:

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

The goal of the chapter is to describe and compare the characteristics of school milieus and reported learner characteristics across the re-classified PIRLS 2006 class achievement benchmark sub-samples of EFL 550, EFL 475, EFL 400, EFL 325, EAL 325, EFL 175 and EAL 175³¹. In keeping with the constructs used to organise the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Four³², this chapter is aimed at investigating the meso school level for its impact on teachers' micro level implementation of the reading literacy curriculum. Due to the recognition that learners will also shape the nature of a school environment, some nano level learner characteristics as outlined by principals are also considered. The PIRLS 2006 school questionnaires were completed by the principal as the representative of the sampled school. However, for reporting in this chapter, reference in terms of response distribution is made to the learner as PIRLS questionnaire data are presented from the perspective of learners' educational experiences and thus the unit of analysis is the learner allocated a class average reaching each of the designated benchmarks and not the principal who completed the questionnaire on behalf of the school. The data associated with class average benchmarks of EFL 550 and EFL 325 are based on small sample sizes due to the sampling strategy used. As such, the data are provided for illustrative purposes only and no generalisation should be made based on these data. All of the data tables for each graph in the chapter are presented in Appendix G.

³¹ EFL = English as a First Language; EAL = English as an Additional Language; See Chapter Five for an explanation of the sampling and selection of these class average benchmarks.

³² See Chapter Four for a visual summary of the conceptual framework.

The description and comparison of school level characteristics are focused on the principals' reports about: school environment and resources (6.2); teacher professional organisation and environment (6.3); and indications of learner characteristics (6.4). At the end of each section a discussion of findings and summary is provided for ease of comparison of the profiles of schools at each of the class average benchmarks.

6.2 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES

In this section, principal reports about school location (6.2.1); school climate (6.2.2) and school safety (6.2.3) are discussed. School library and reading material availability (6.2.4) and shortages and inadequacies in resources (6.2.5) are also considered. Thereafter, a summary of these data for school environment and resources across the identified class average benchmarks is presented (6.2.6).

6.2.1 School location

In the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire, principals were asked to characterise the area in which their school was situated by indicating whether it was in an *urban*, *suburban* or *rural* location. Figure 6.1 (below) presents principal responses in terms of the percentage of Grade 4 learners in each of these locations at each of the class average benchmarks.

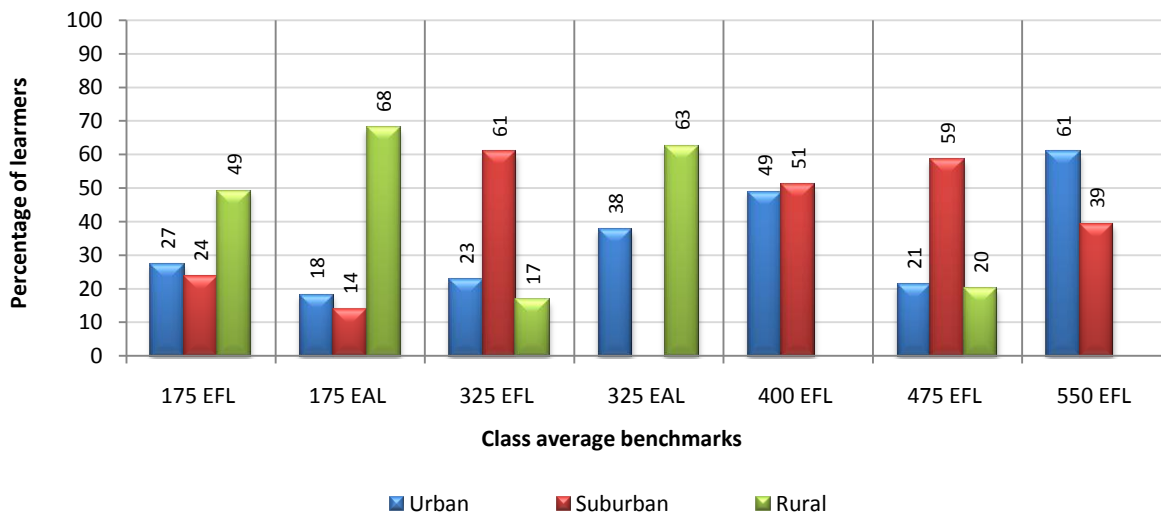


Figure 6.1: Principal reports on location of schools

At the lower benchmarks of EFL 175, EAL 175 and EAL 325, the majority of learners had principals who indicated that their schools were situated in a *rural* area. In contrast, the highest percentage of learners at EFL 325 had principals who indicated that their schools

were in *suburban* areas which in South Africa would include townships. Similarly, at EFL 400 and EFL 475, the majority of learners were in *suburban* environments. It was only at EFL 550 that the majority of learners had principals who indicated that their schools were located in an *urban* setting. As evidenced by these response trends, very few learners at the upper class achievement benchmarks were in schools in rural locations, whilst most learners at the lower class benchmarks were in schools in rural contexts.

6.2.2 School climate

The PIRLS 2006 index of principals' perception of school climate³³ summarises principals' portrayal of their school with regards to: teachers' job satisfaction; teachers' expectations for learner achievement; parental support for learner achievement; learners' regard for school property; learners' desire to do well in school; and learners' regard for each others' welfare.

Figure 6.2 (below) presents the percentage of learners whose schools were at each level of the school climate index per benchmark. The majority of learners at the lower benchmarks (EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325) and EFL 400 were in schools with a *medium* level school climate according to the index compiled. At EAL 325, there was a more even spread in the response distribution. At EFL 475 and EFL 550, most learners were in schools with a *high* level school climate as designated by their principals.

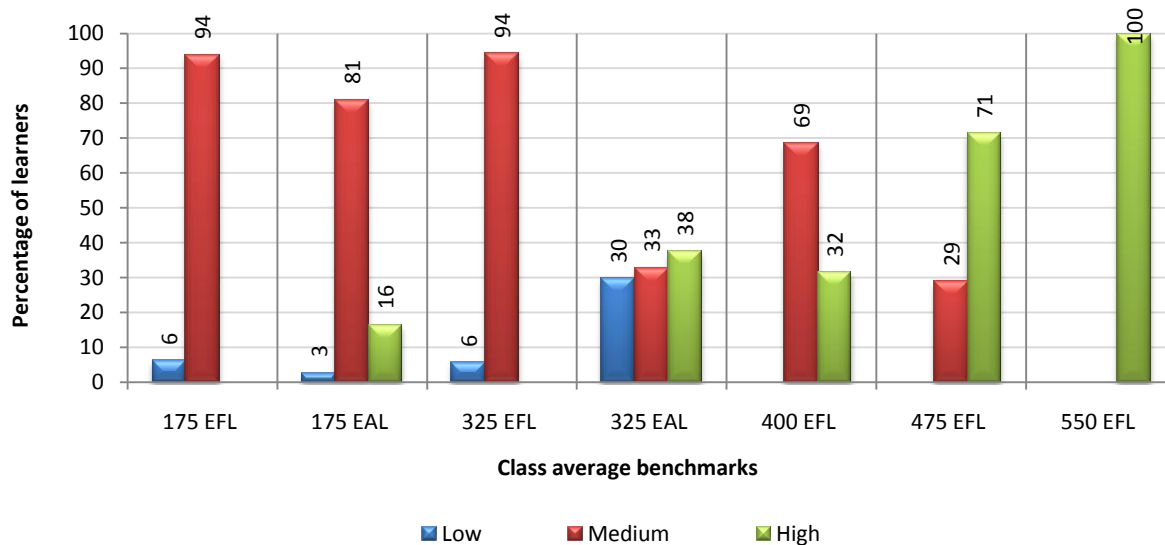


Figure 6.2: Index of principals' perceptions of school climate

³³ An average was computed for each principal on a five-point scale where: very low =1, low = 2, medium =3, high =4, and very high =5. Learners whose principal had an average response greater than 3.67 were assigned to the high level of the index; those where the average was below 2.33 to the low level; and the rest to the medium level (Mullis *et al.*, 2007, p.270).

6.2.3 School safety

The PIRLS 2006 index of principals' perceptions of school safety³⁴ was determined by principals' characterisations of the extent to which a number of learner behaviours were a problem at their school. These learner behaviours included: cheating, profanity, classroom disturbance, vandalism, theft, intimidation or verbal abuse of other learners, and physical conflict amongst learners.

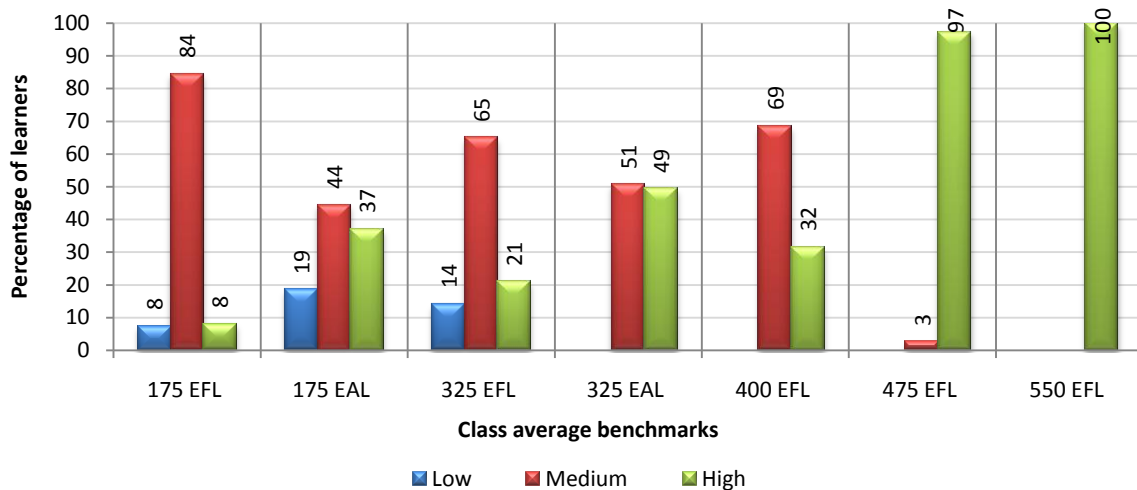


Figure 6.3: Index of principals' perceptions of school safety

As indicated by Figure 6.3 (above), the highest percentages of learners were in schools at the lower benchmarks (EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325, EAL 325) and EFL 400 which had a reportedly *medium* level of safety. Internationally, most learners (60%³⁵) on average were in schools with a *high* level of safety (Mullis *et al.*, 2007, p.279). This international trend is mirrored at the higher benchmarks of EFL 475 (97%) and EFL 550 (100%), where all or nearly all of the learners were in schools with a reportedly *high* level of safety.

6.2.4 School library and reading material availability

As part of the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire, principals were asked to indicate whether or not their schools had a school library (Figure 6.4, below). If so, these principals also had to give an estimate of how many books with different titles (Figure 6.5, below) and how many

³⁴ Principals' average response on a 4-point scale was computed in the following manner: Serious problem = 1; Moderate problem = 2; Minor problem = 3; and Not a problem = 4. Schools which had an average greater than 3 were allocated to the *high* level of the index; schools which had an average between 2 and 3 were assigned to the *medium* level of the index; and those with less than 2 to the *low* level (Mullis *et al.*, 2007, p.278).

³⁵ For data reporting purposes throughout this chapter, the results have been rounded off to the nearest whole number so the aggregate of the percentages at each benchmark may appear inconsistent.

titles of magazines and other periodicals were available in this library (Figure 6.6, below). The vast majority of learners in schools at EFL 325 and the higher class benchmarks of EFL 400, EFL 475 and EFL 550 had a school library. Indeed, at the top-performing benchmarks of EFL 475 and EFL 550 all learners were in schools which had a library. Also, approximately half of the learners in schools at EFL 175 and EAL 325 had a school library while the other half did not. It was only at EAL 175 where the clear majority of learners were in schools without a school library (see Figure 6.4).

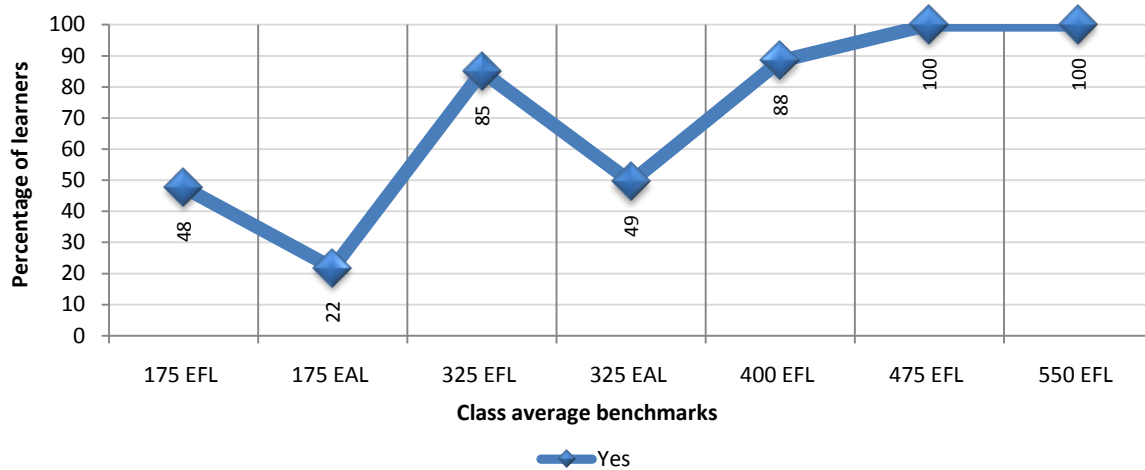


Figure 6.4: Percentages of learners in schools with a school library

The existence of a school library does not guarantee the availability of adequate resources in this library. There were large differences in the reported number of books with different titles available to learners in school libraries at each of the class average benchmarks (Figure 6.5).

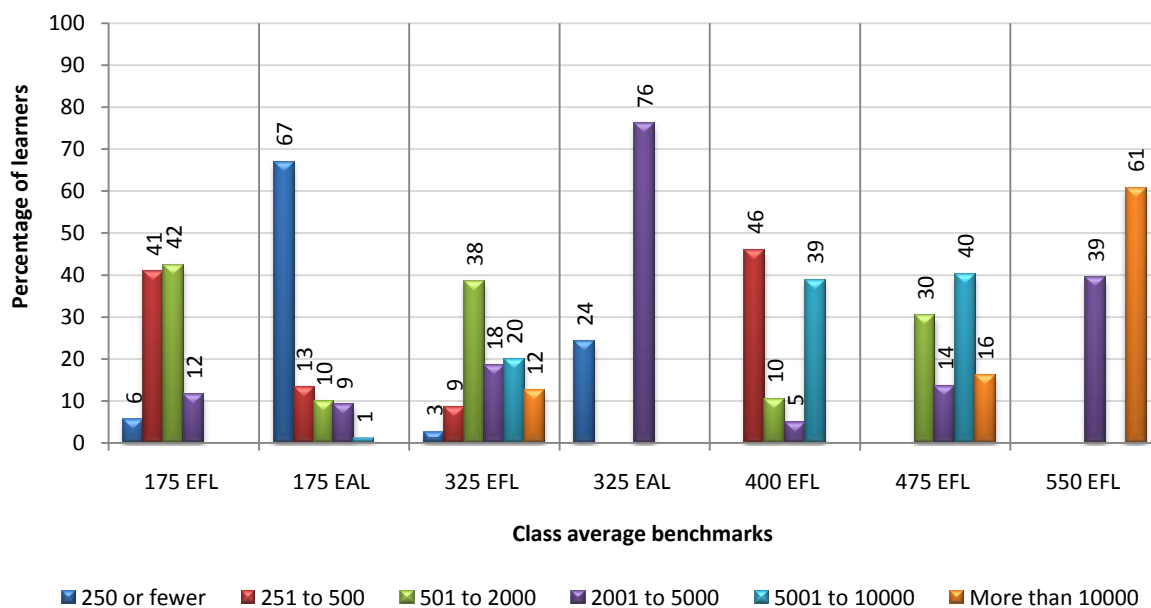


Figure 6.5: Number of books with different titles in school libraries

Generally, it was only at the two highest benchmarks of EFL 475 and EFL 550 that there were large numbers of books available to high percentages of learners. The majority of learners (61%) at EFL 550 were in schools with libraries that were well-resourced, with *more than 10 000* books with different titles. For the highest percentage of learners (40%) at EFL 475, *5 001 to 10 000* books were available in their school libraries. At the other benchmarks of EFL 400, EFL and EAL 325 and EFL and EAL 175, there was a spread in the availability of books in libraries both at the benchmark and in comparison to the other benchmarks. Illustrative of the huge differences even within a class average benchmark, there are two reporting trends at EFL 400. For one large group of learners, *5 001 to 10 000* library books were offered. For a greater percentage of other learners at the benchmark, only *251 to 500* books were available. Disconcertingly, in comparison to all of the other benchmarks, the highest percentage of learners in schools at EAL 175 (just over two thirds) had *250 or fewer* books in the library.

With reference to reports about number of titles of magazines and periodicals available (Figure 6.6, below), for learners in schools with a class average reaching the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks *6 to 10* titles of magazines and periodicals were available at the highest percentage of learners.

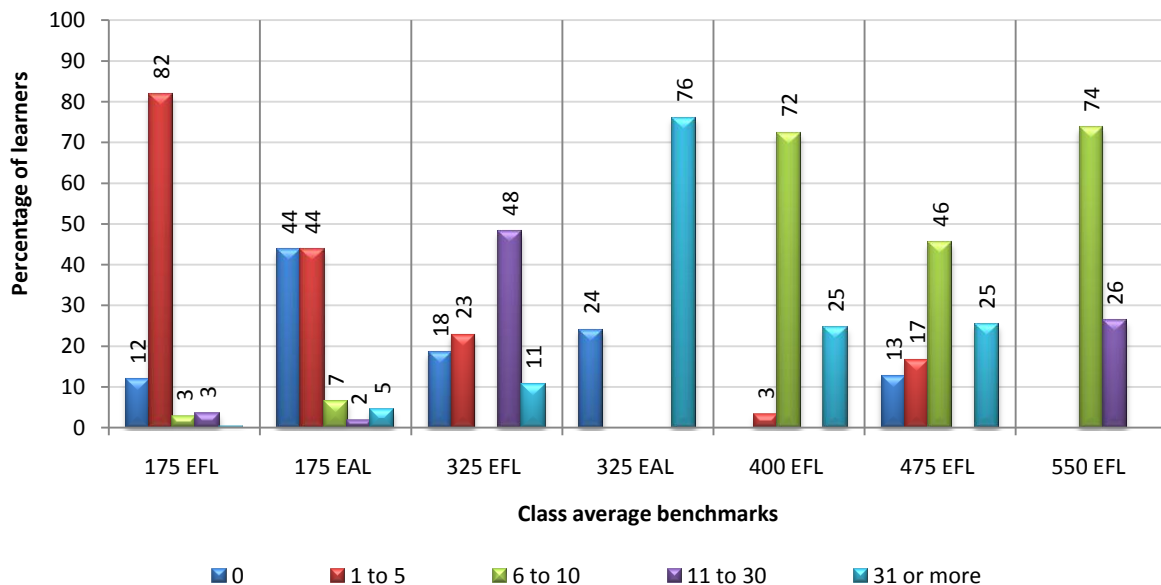


Figure 6.6: Number of titles of magazines and periodicals in school libraries

It is unexpected that at EAL 325, three quarters of the learners were in schools which had libraries with *31 or more* titles of magazines or periodicals and at EFL 325 nearly half of the learners were in schools with *11 to 30* titles in the library. This reporting could perhaps reflect a misunderstanding about number of titles available versus actual number of magazines or

periodicals. The figure of 82% of learners in schools with 1 to 5 titles available at EFL 175 and the 44% of learners in schools with 1 to 5 titles and 44% with no titles available at EAL 175 does seem more realistic.

Although reports about the effects of other shortages of or inadequacies³⁶ in resources at schools are dealt with in sub-section 6.4.5, reports on the percentage of learners in schools affected by shortages or inadequacies in library books (Figure 6.7, below) as a resource are considered in this sub-section. Reports on the impact of library book shortages generally do mirror reports about the number of book titles available (see Figure 6.6, above). For example, at EFL 475 and EFL 550, shortages in library books were *not at all* an issue for most learners and the reported number of book titles was generally also high meaning that schools at the top benchmarks were generally well-resourced. In contrast, at EFL 400, EAL 325, EFL 325 and EAL 175, the majority of learners were affected *some* or *a lot* by shortages of or inadequacies in library books whilst the majority of learners in EFL 175 schools were either *not at all* affected or only affected a little by such shortages or inadequacies. This is in spite of the fact that 42% of learners in schools at EFL 175 had access to only 501 to 2 000 library books.

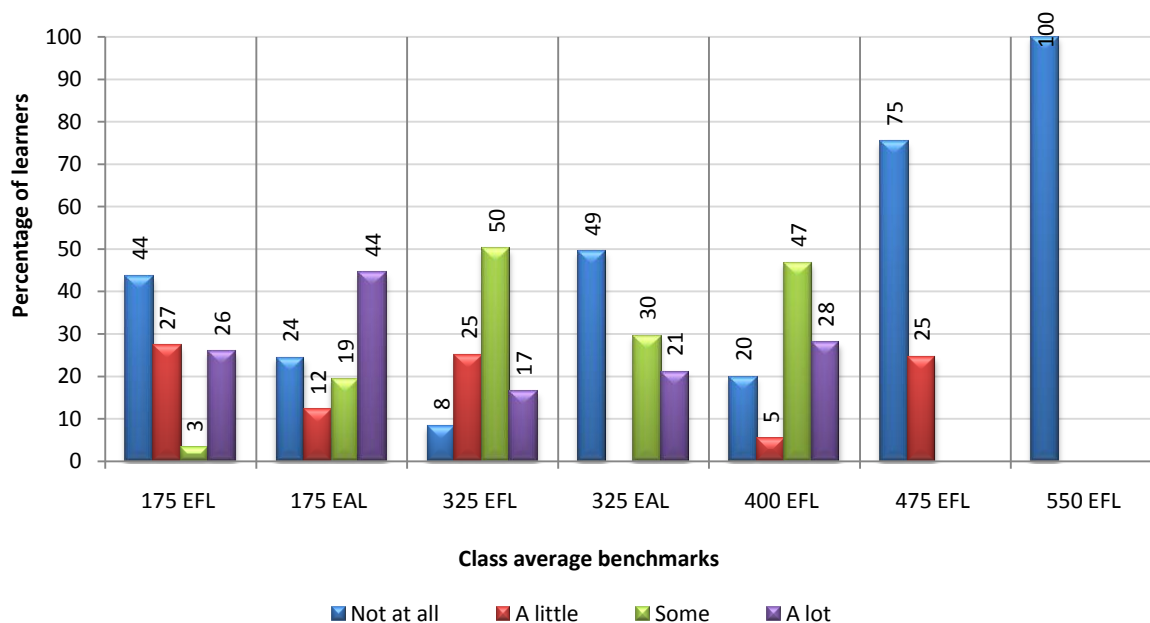


Figure 6.7: Percentage of learners affected by shortages of or inadequacies in library books

³⁶ It is recognised that the phrase “shortages or inadequacies” is ambivalent in that it can refer to either quantity or quality issues regarding key resources. However, the phrasing has been retained as it was used in the phrasing of the question for the items in the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire. Thus, principals may have been referring to shortages and/or inadequacies when they responded to these items but this cannot be determined.

6.2.5 Reported shortages of and inadequacies in resources

Principals were asked to point out how much their school’s capacity to provide instruction was affected by a shortage of or inadequacy in a number of resources. Response options were *a lot*, *some*, *a little* and *not at all*. Selected variables linked to this question are considered in this section, namely: qualified teaching staff (6.2.5.1); teachers with a specialisation in reading (6.2.5.2); second language teachers (6.2.5.3); and instructional materials (6.2.5.4).

6.2.5.1 Reports on impact of shortages or inadequacies of qualified teaching staff

There is a difference in principals’ reports about how much their school’s capacity to provide instruction was affected by a shortage of or inadequacy in qualified teaching staff between the lower and higher class average benchmarks (Figure 6.8).

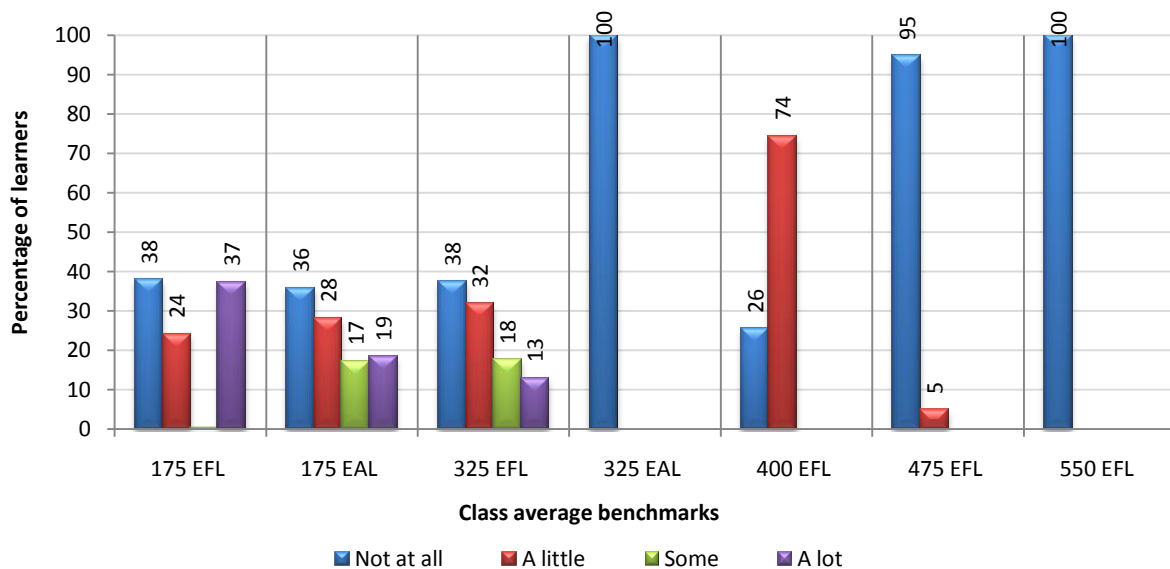


Figure 6.8: Percentage of learners affected by shortages of or inadequacies in qualified teaching staff

Generally, at the upper benchmarks (EFL 550 and EFL 475) and EAL 325, nearly all learners were in schools which had a principal who reported that shortages of or inadequacies in qualified teaching staff were *not at all* a problem. At EFL 400, 74% of the learners were in schools which were affected *a little* by a shortage of or inadequacy in qualified teaching staff. For class average benchmarks EFL 325, EAL 175 and EFL 175, this was *not at all* a problem for the highest percentages of learners. However, at these lower benchmarks (EFL 175, EAL 175 and EFL 325), there were still problems with qualified teaching staff (either *a lot*, *some* or *a little*).

6.2.5.2 *Reports on impact of shortages of or inadequacies in teachers with a specialisation in reading*

Figure 6.9 (below) illustrates that, at the two highest class benchmarks of EFL 475 and 550, shortages of or inadequacies in teachers with a specialisation in teaching reading either did *not at all* affect learners in schools, or only affected them *a little*. At EFL 400, the majority were also only affected *a little* by such a shortage or inadequacy. At the lower benchmarks (EAL 325, EFL 325, EAL 175 and EFL 175) one out of five learners (and one in two at EAL 325) were affected *a lot* or to *some* extent by such shortages or inadequacies.

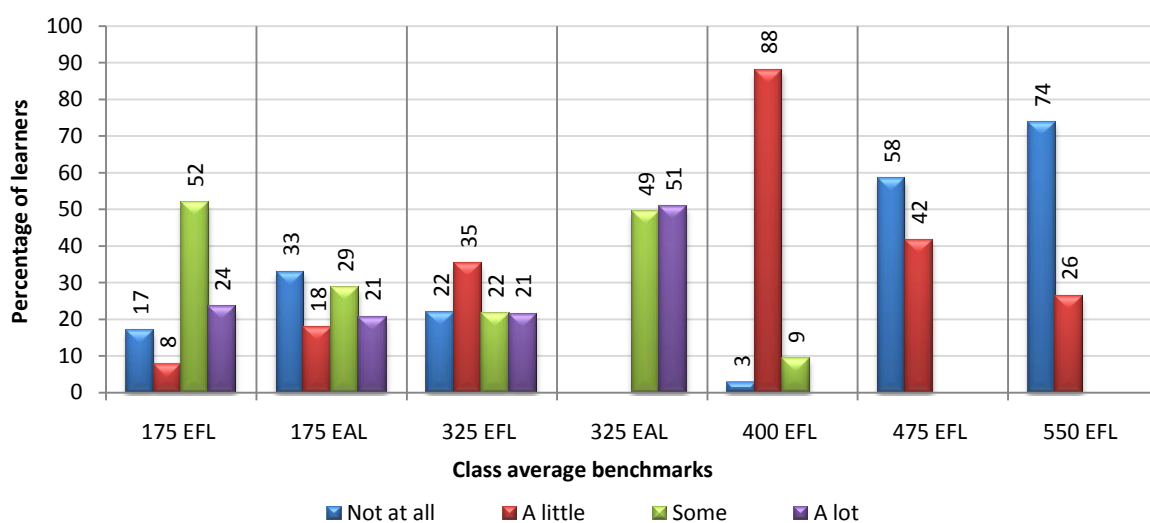


Figure 6.9: Percentage of learners affected by shortages of or inadequacies in teachers with a specialisation in reading

6.2.5.3 *Reports on impact of shortages of or inadequacies in second language teachers*

At EFL 400 and above, over 50% of the learners were affected *a little* by a shortage or inadequacy of second language teachers (see Figure 6.10 below). Also, the majority of learners at EFL 325 were *not at all* affected or only affected *a little* by second language teacher shortages. In contrast, the highest percentages of learners at the lower class average benchmarks of EFL and EAL 175 and EAL 325 were reportedly affected *some* or *a lot* by such shortages. Thus, the lowest achieving schools generally had the greatest problem with shortage or inadequacies in second language teachers. It is not clear which second languages were reported on by principals - either English or African languages - due to the complexities of learner language profiles and language of learning and teaching at these lower benchmarks that primarily serve second language learners.

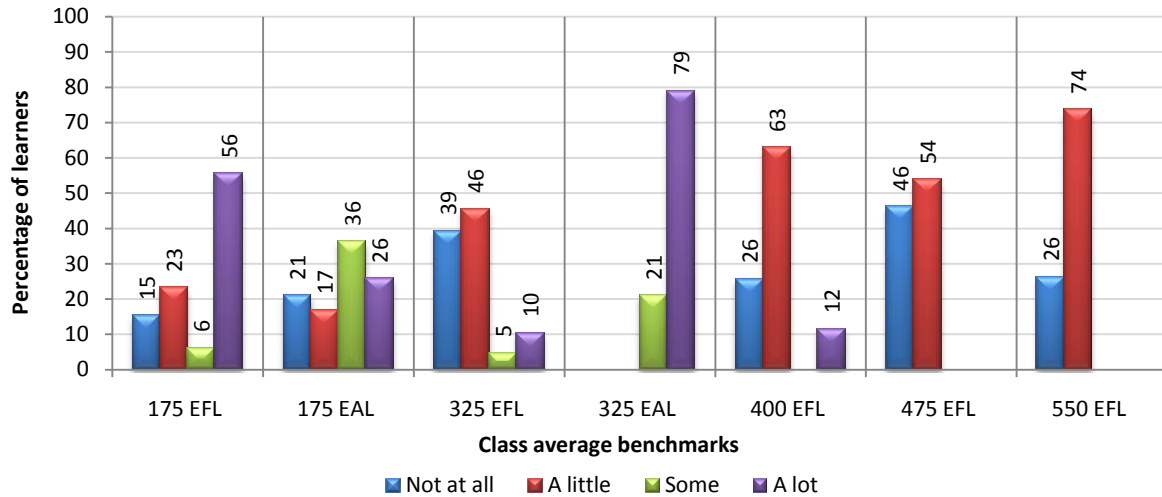


Figure 6.10: Percentage of learners affected by shortages of or inadequacies in second language teachers

6.2.5.4 Reports on impact of shortages of or inadequacies in instructional materials

The highest performing schools (EFL 475 and EFL 550) had learners who were not or were hardly affected by shortages of or inadequacies in instructional materials (see Figure 6.11). However, at EFL 400 and lower, shortages of or inadequacies in instructional materials clearly had a negative impact on the learners represented. Indeed, at EFL 400, EAL 325 and EFL 175, 20% or more of the learners were impacted *a lot* by shortages of or inadequacies in instructional materials. At EAL 175, more than half (58%) of the learners were affected either *some* or *a lot* by a shortage of or inadequacy in instructional materials, and for learners in schools at EFL 325 the response categories of *some* or *a little* were most prominent.

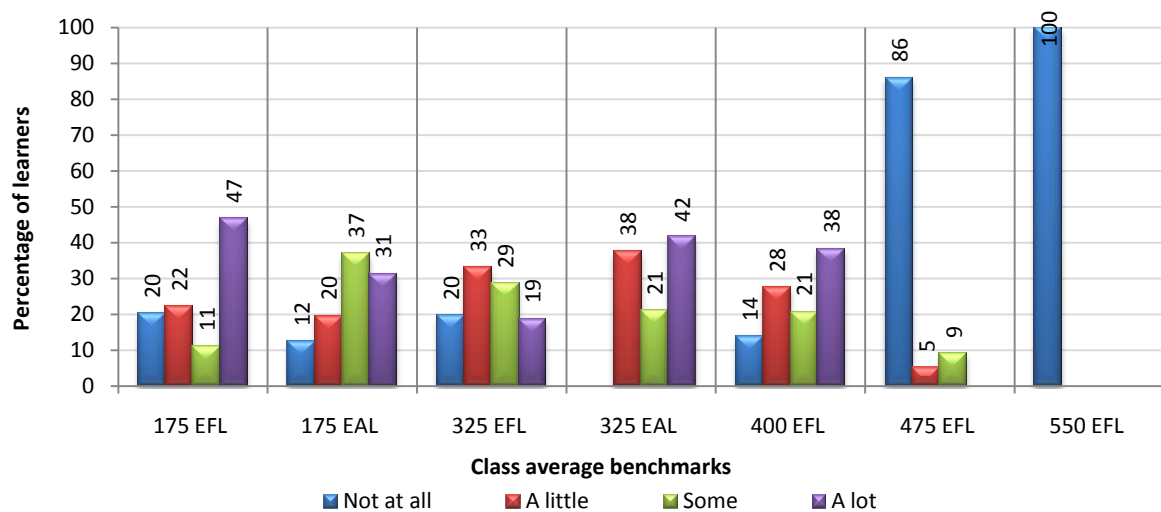


Figure 6.11: Percentage of learners affected by shortages of or inadequacies in instructional materials

6.2.6 Discussion and summary of data on school environment and resources

6.2.6.1 *School environment*

In terms of location, schools at the higher class average benchmark (EFL 400, 475 or 550) tended to be in urban or suburban areas. In contrast, schools with an average not reaching the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks tended to be in rural locations³⁷, with the exception of those at EFL 325, which also tended to be in suburban areas. The rural location of the majority of learners in schools could be a significant factor in the achievement results of learners at the lower class benchmarks.

Indices compiled from principal reports also revealed that the great majority of learners in the highest performing schools (EFL 475 and 550) had principals who reported high levels of both school climate and school safety. In contrast, the highest percentages of learners at EFL 400 and less tended to be in schools with medium levels of school safety and school climate.

6.2.6.2 *School resources*

Over four fifths of the learners in the highest performing schools, according to class average benchmark, had a *school library*. Indeed, there was a library for all learners in schools with performances at EFL 475 and EFL 550. For the majority of learners in schools reaching EFL 325 a library was also available. In contrast, the highest percentages of learners in other low-performing schools (EAL 325, EFL 175 and EAL 325) did not have a school library.

For those schools with a library, only the highest performing schools (EFL 475 and EFL 550) had reasonable numbers of *book titles and magazine or periodical titles*. The adequacy of the libraries available at EFL 400 and lower is of concern due to the highest percentages of learners having 2000 or fewer book titles in their libraries. Thus, it is puzzling why there are not higher percentages of learners negatively affected *a lot* by such book title shortages at benchmarks 175 to 400. This disjuncture in opinions about adequacy of library book resources perhaps refers to the perceived value of library books as a resource in schools,

³⁷ A factor that must be considered in the interpretation of this response distribution is that there is no consensus about what constitutes rural and urban areas in South Africa. Their meaning and uses vary considerably, depending on who employs them and for what purposes (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005, p.x). The high percentage of rural schools sampled for the PIRLS 2006 main study is however also a reflection of the location of several of the African language schools and attempts to ensure sufficient sampling of all the language samples for the study (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

whereby it is not seen as a serious problem to have a shortage of library books, nor thought to impact negatively on learners. Based on the large disparities in the number of books with different titles available in school libraries across the class benchmarks, it appears that there is no quantity standard for how many books should be available. Considering that school libraries should provide books to both learners and as teaching resources to their teachers, many schooling environments therefore lack proper access to books for literary experiences.

Principals also reported on the extent to which *shortages of and inadequacies in qualified teaching staff*, teachers with a specialisation in the teaching of reading, second language teachers and instructional materials affected their learners. Shortages of and inadequacies in qualified teaching staff were not an issue in some school settings (EAL 325, EFL 475 and 550). In spite of this, there were still other school environments where a lack of qualified teaching staff impacted the teaching and learning of reading either to small or large extents (EAL 175, EFL 175, EFL 325 and EFL 400). Therefore, there are still problems with shortages of qualified teaching staff which need to be addressed.

Whereas the majority of learners in schools at EFL 325, EFL 400, EFL 475 and EFL 550 were *not at all* affected or only affected a little by *shortages of or inadequacies in teachers with a specialisation in reading*, learners in lower-performing schools (EAL 325; EAL 175 and EFL 175) were inclined to be affected either *a lot* or to *some* extent. Therefore, shortages of and inadequacies in teachers with a specialisation in reading were not an issue in high-performing schools but there are clearly still some low-performing schools where this may be an issue that impacts the teaching and learning of reading. Given the rural location of these schools, location could be a factor in access to suitable teachers.

At EFL 400, 475 and 550, over 50% of the learners were negatively affected *a little* by *shortage or inadequacy of second language teachers*. As there is only one language of instruction in these EFL education settings, and as second language learners were not a majority grouping at these class benchmarks³⁸, it is plausible that a shortage in or inadequacy of second language teachers would not have a major impact on learners. In contrast, one can then understand why such shortage of or inadequacies in second language teachers would have a far greater impact at schools at the lower class average benchmarks of EFL and EAL 175 and EAL 325, where the highest percentages of learners were reportedly affected *some* or *a lot* by a shortage of or inadequacy in second language teaching staff. It is not clear what second languages are reported on by principals - either

³⁸ As suggested by Figure 6.21, which reports percentages of learners who did not write the PIRLS assessments in a first language.

English or African languages - due to the complexities of learner language profiles and language of learning and teaching at these lower benchmarks which primarily serve second language learners.

It was only for learners in the highest performing schools (EFL 475 and EFL 550) that *shortages of or inadequacies in instructional materials were not at all* an issue. However, at EFL 400 and lower, shortages of or inadequacies in instructional materials clearly had a negative impact at the schools represented. It can therefore be surmised that shortages of or inadequacies in instructional materials are serious problems in most education settings, except for the privileged minorities in high-performing, well-resourced schools.

In the next section, teachers' professional organisation and environment as reported by principals are presented.

6.3 TEACHER PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION AND ENVIRONMENT

In this section, the opportunities available for teacher collaboration and development in schools (6.3.1) are examined, specifically principals' reports on the existence of an official policy statement related to promoting cooperation and collaboration among teachers, and the frequency of formally scheduled time for teachers to meet to share or develop instructional materials and approaches. The organisation of the school reading literacy strategy (6.3.2) is then reported. The availability of a written statement of the reading curriculum to be taught is discussed, followed by reports on informal initiatives undertaken to encourage learners to read, school-based teacher development programmes for improving reading instruction, and the availability of school guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers.

6.3.1 Teacher collaboration and development opportunities

Figure 6.12 (below) depicts principals' responses to the question "*Does your school have an official policy statement related to promoting cooperation and collaboration among teachers?*" With the exception of EFL 550, the majority of learners in schools at the other class average benchmarks had an official policy statement for promoting cooperation and collaboration among teachers. Nevertheless, there were still large percentages of learners in schools at each of the class average benchmarks which did not have such a policy. Of course, the existence of this policy document does not guarantee implementation.

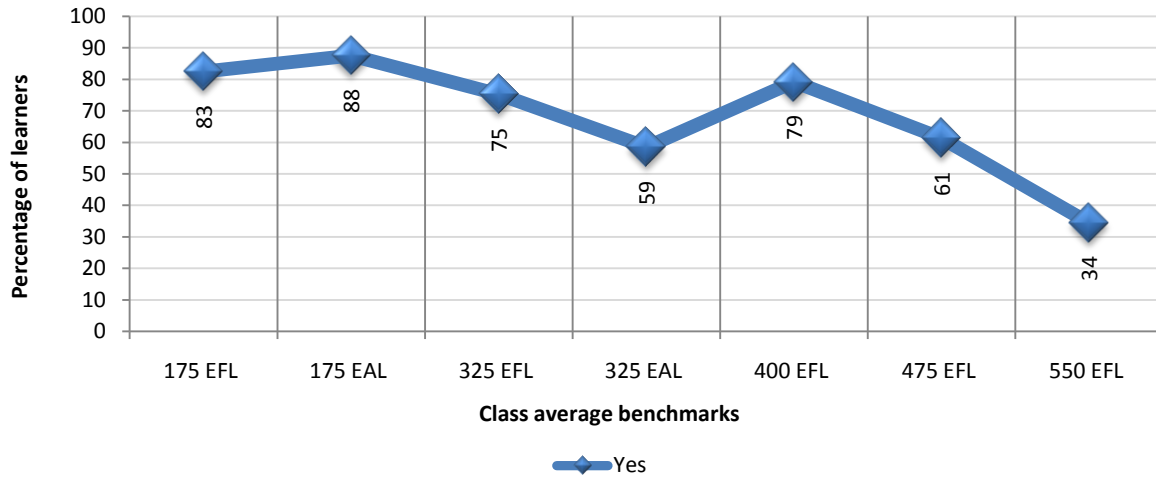


Figure 6.12: Reports on existence of an official policy statement related to promoting cooperation and collaboration among teachers

Principals’ responses to the question “About how often do the teachers in your school have formally scheduled time to meet to share or develop instructional materials and approaches?” offer some highly relevant insights into teacher collaboration in schools at each of the class average benchmarks (Figure 6.13, below).

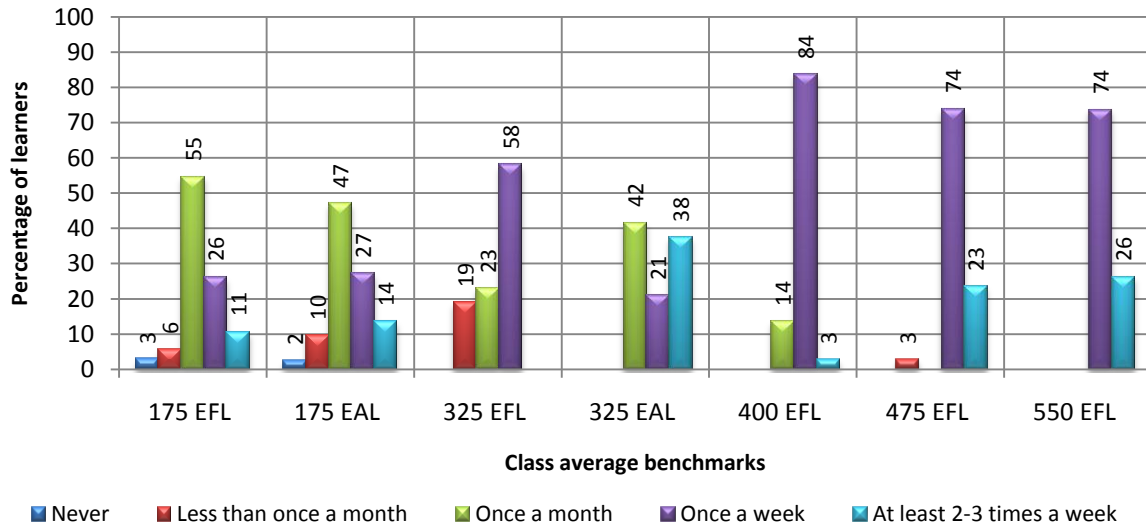


Figure 6.13: Reported frequency of formally scheduled time for teachers to meet to share or develop instructional materials and approaches

Most learners(87- 100%) in schools reaching the highest benchmarks according to class average (EFL 400, 475 and 550) had teachers with formally scheduled time to meet to share or develop instructional materials and approaches *once a week* more often. This scheduled

time dropped to between 37% and 59% of learners with teachers that met *once a week* or more often at the lowest benchmarks (EFL175, EAL 175, EFL 325 and EAL 325).

Principals were also asked to mark which teacher education opportunities were available to teachers responsible for reading instruction in their schools. At all of the class average benchmarks, all of the learners (100%) had teachers who had opportunities to attend short courses, workshops and seminars and in-service training programmes.

6.3.2 Organisation of the school reading literacy teaching strategy

Principals were asked a number of questions designed to give an indication of the level of planning, organisation and coordination of the school reading literacy teaching strategy. Firstly, principals stated whether or not their school had a written statement of the reading curriculum to be taught in the school (in addition to national or regional curriculum guides). At EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325 and EFL 400, the majority of learners were in schools that did not have such a statement. Even at EAL 325, EFL 475 and EFL 550, large percentages of learners were in schools without such a statement (see Figure 6.14, below).

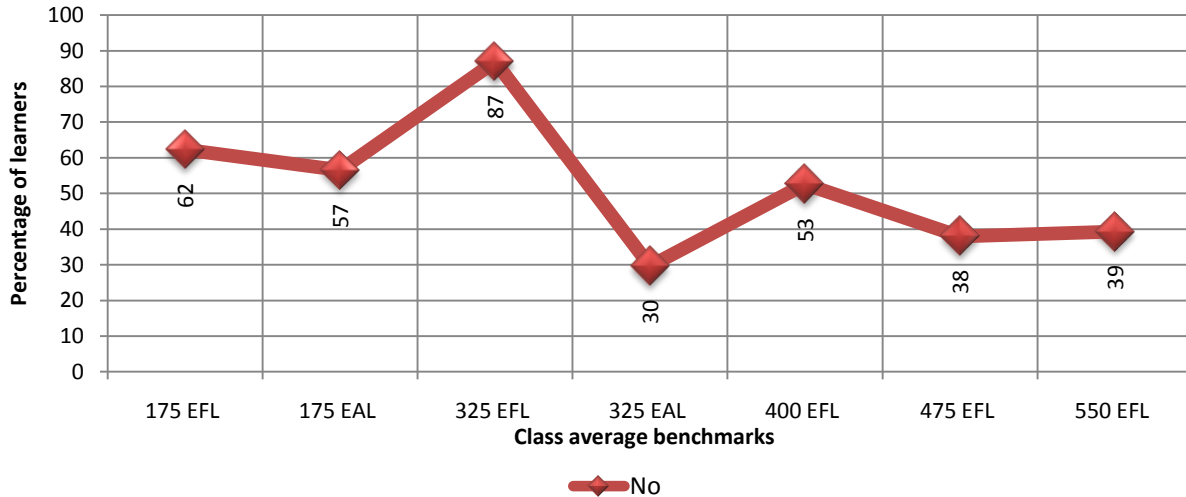


Figure 6.14: Reports on availability of a written statement of the reading curriculum to be taught in the school

Secondly, principals specified whether their schools had informal initiatives to encourage learners to read. Figure 6.15 (below) illustrates graphically the principals' responses at each of the class average benchmarks. Clearly, the majority of learners were in schools which had informal initiatives to encourage learners to read.

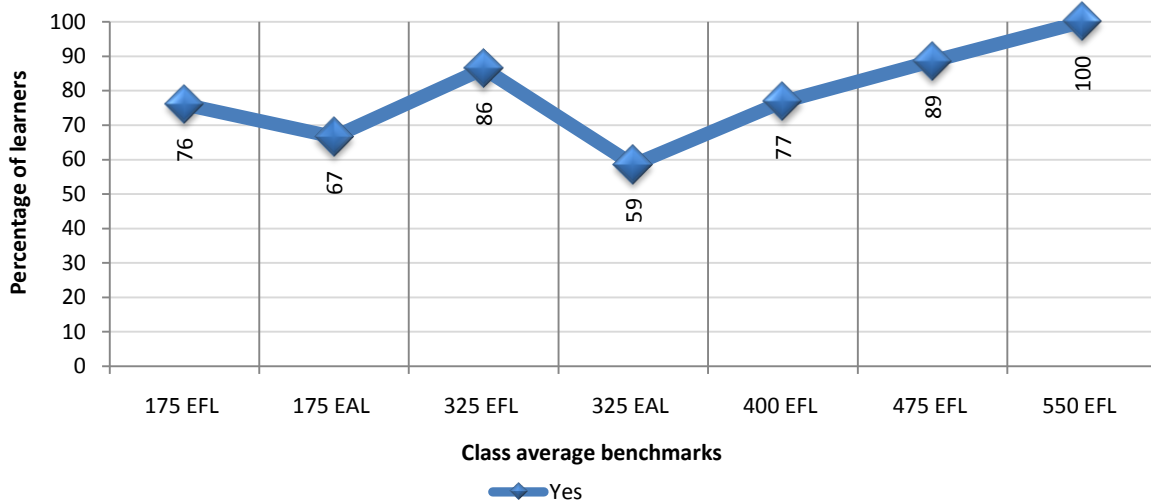


Figure 6.15: Reports on informal initiatives to encourage learners to read

Thirdly, principals indicated whether their school had school-based programmes for teachers geared towards the improvement of reading instruction. In consideration of the response distributions in Figure 6.16 (below), there is no distinctive pattern across the benchmarks. At EFL 550, all of the learners were in schools with such instructional development support for teachers. At three of the lowest class benchmarks of EFL and EAL 175 and EAL 325, small majorities of learners were in schools which did offer such programmes for their teachers. In these cases, and for the minority of learners in schools at EFL 325, EFL 400 and EFL 475, it would appear that there was an attempt to improve teachers' instruction skills.

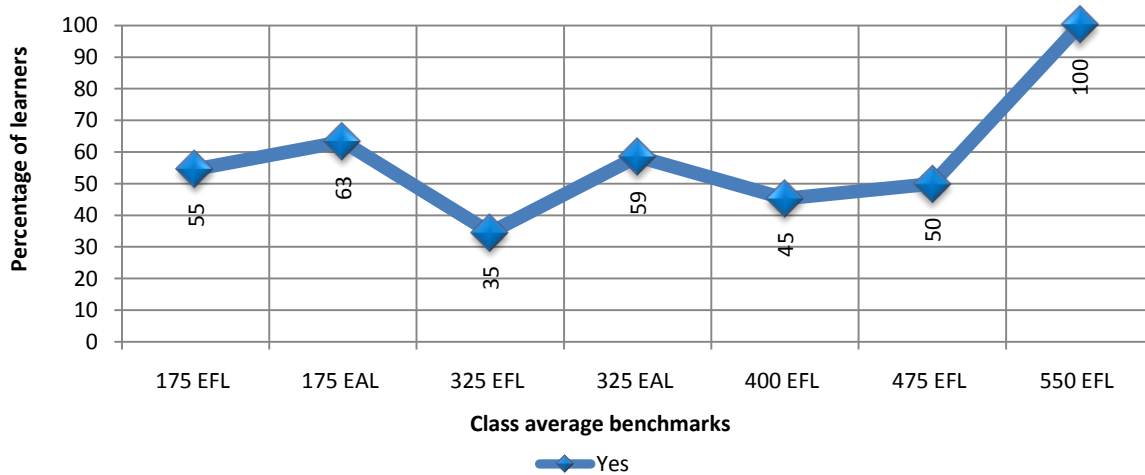


Figure 6.16: Reports on school-based programmes for teachers geared towards the improvement of reading instruction

Lastly, principals were asked whether or not their school had its own guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers (Figure 6.17, below). With the exception of

learners in schools at class benchmark EFL 325 and EFL 400, the majority were in schools which did have their own guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers. Even so, very high percentages of learners were in schools at EFL 175, EAL 175, EAL 325 and EFL 475 which did not have such guidelines. Again, it was only at EFL 500 where all learners were in schools which had guidelines in place.

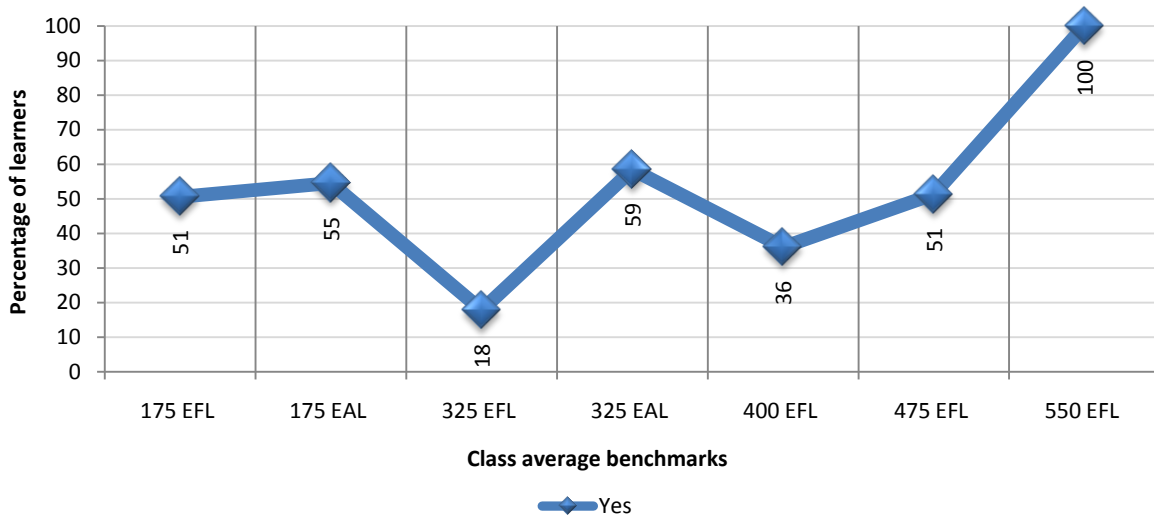


Figure 6.17: Reports on school’s own guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers

6.3.3 Discussion and summary of data on teacher professional organisation and environment

6.3.3.1 Opportunities for teacher collaboration and development

Except for learners in schools at EFL 550, the majority at the rest of the class average benchmarks did have an *official policy statement for promoting cooperation and collaboration among teachers*. Nevertheless, there were still large percentages at each of the class average benchmarks in schools which did not have such a policy. As evident in principals’ responses *regarding formally scheduled time for teachers to meet to share or develop instructional approaches or materials*, the existence of policy for teacher collaboration and cooperation does not guarantee implementation. It was only at schools reaching the highest benchmarks according to class average (EFL 400, 475 and 550) that by far the majority of learners had teachers who reportedly had formally scheduled time to meet to share or develop instructional materials and approaches *once a week* or more often. At schools at the lower benchmarks of EFL and EAL 325 and EFL 175 and EAL 175, such formal meetings were more sporadic. At EFL 325, although a small majority (58%) of learners in schools also

had teachers with weekly formally scheduled times to meet, the remainder (42%) had teachers who only had formally scheduled time either *once a month* or *less than once a month*. In stark contrast to the higher class average benchmark schools, whilst there is a wide response distribution at each of the benchmarks, the highest percentages of learners in schools at EAL 325, EFL and EAL 175 had teachers who only had formally scheduled time to meet *once a month*. The wide response distribution suggests a lack of standardisation regarding scheduled meeting times for teachers in schools. Also, if meetings are a measure of cooperation and collaboration amongst teachers at a school then policy alone does not lead to active collegial engagement.

Principals were also asked to mark which *teacher education opportunities* were available to teachers responsible for reading instruction in their schools. Every learner in all schools at each class benchmark had teachers who had opportunities to attend short courses, workshops and seminars and in-service training programmes. Given the availability of such opportunities, it might be expected that teachers would be able to address the teaching of reading comprehensively at schools. In light of the PIRLS 2006 achievement results, this is clearly not the case. Therefore, whether or not teachers utilise these opportunities optimally is questionable, as is the quality and/or relevance of the training teachers do attend.

6.3.3.2 *Organisation of the school reading literacy strategy*

Principals commented on the availability of a written statement of the reading curriculum to be taught, on informal initiatives undertaken to encourage learners to read, school-based teacher development programmes for improving reading instruction, and the availability of school guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers.

At EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325 and EFL 400, the majority of learners were in schools which did not have *a written statement of the reading curriculum to be taught at the school*. Even at EAL 325 and the highest benchmarks of EFL 475 and EFL 550, large percentages of learners were in schools without such a statement. Although formal strategy documents were reportedly lacking in many schools at each of the class benchmarks, for the majority of learners in schools *informal initiatives were undertaken to encourage* them to read.

In terms of school-based programmes for teachers geared towards the improvement of reading, there is no distinctive pattern across the benchmarks. Only at the highest class average benchmark of EFL 550 were all learners in schools with such instructional development support for teachers. Thus, it would seem that teachers in schools at this level

of achievement do not 'rest on their laurels', and teacher development is an ongoing process in spite of presumed learner success. At three of the lowest class benchmarks of EFL and EAL 175 and EAL 325, small majorities of learners were in schools that did offer such programmes for their teachers. In these cases, and for the minority of learners in schools at EFL 325, EFL 400 and EFL 475, it appears that there is an attempt to improve teachers' instruction skills. However, it would seem that ongoing school-based programmes for teacher improvement of reading are a necessity for all teachers in South African primary schools.

The majority of learners in schools at EFL 325 and EFL 400, and very high percentages of learners in schools at EFL 175, EAL 175, EAL 325 and EFL 475, had a principal who reported that the *school did have its own guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers*. Again, it was only at EFL 550 that all learners were in schools that had guidelines in place. A lack of guidelines on how to coordinate reading instruction across teachers either within a grade or across the primary school grades could perhaps indicate a lack of consensus on school goals for reading instruction. This lack of awareness of school goals could in turn lead to a lack of a quality standard for reading development outcome at each grade and a non-awareness of expectations of learners as they enter subsequent grades and phases of education.

6.4 LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS

In this section, principal reports on the characteristics of the learners who completed the PIRLS assessments are presented across the class average benchmarks. Indicators of learners' socioeconomic status are discussed (6.4.1). Learners' language of testing for the PIRLS 2006 versus their home language(s) is also deliberated upon (6.4.2). Reports about learners' early literacy skills are then presented (6.4.3).

6.4.1 Socioeconomic status

To help to establish the socioeconomic status of learners, principals were asked to indicate the approximate percentages of their learners who came from economically disadvantaged and economically advantaged homes. Response options included *0 to 10%*, *11 to 25%*, *26 to 50%* and *more than 50%*. Figure 6.18 (below) outlines the percentages of learners considered to be from economically disadvantaged homes at each class average benchmark. As evident in the graph, the vast majority of learners were in schools at the lower class benchmarks of EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325 and EAL 325 which had *more than 50%* of the learners from economically disadvantaged homes. Even at EFL 400, 35% of the learners

were in schools which had *more than 50%* of learners from disadvantaged homes. A further 33% of learners were in EFL 400 schools which had 26% to 50% of the learners from a disadvantaged home economic milieu. In comparison, at the two highest class benchmarks of EFL 475 and EFL 550, nearly all of the learners were in schools which had only 0 to 10% of learners from a disadvantaged background.

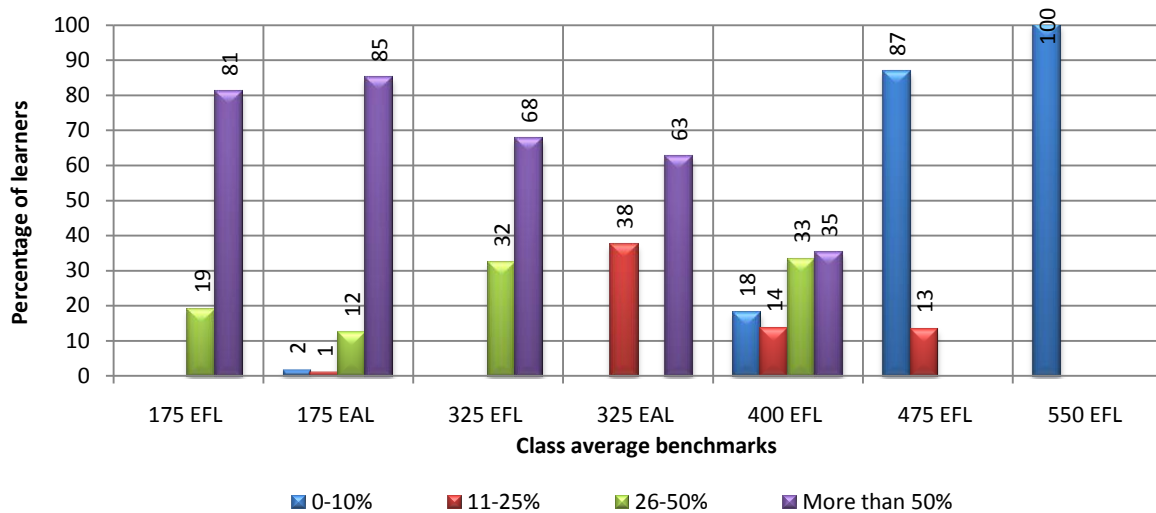


Figure 6.18: Principal reports on percentages of learners from economically disadvantaged homes

Therefore, as suggested by Figure 6.19, most learners were in schools at the lower class average benchmarks (between 175 and 400) where principals reported that only 0 to 10% of learners were from affluent homes. At the two highest benchmarks (EFL 475 and 550), most learners were in schools which had *more than 50%* of learners from affluent backgrounds.

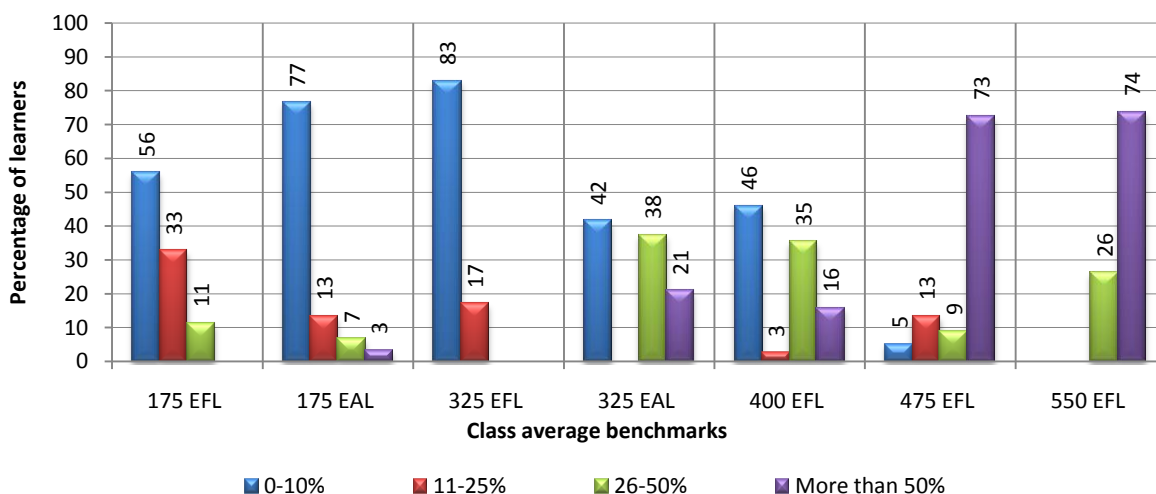


Figure 6.19: Principal reports on percentages of learners from economically affluent homes

Another indicator of the socioeconomic make-up of the school learner population is the percentage of learners who receive a free or reduced-price lunch. Principals were asked “*For the grade 4 learners in your school, about how many receive free or reduced-price lunch?*” On the basis of the patterns of response distribution across the class benchmark sub-sample, it can be seen that there are three clear response distributions aligned to various levels of the class average achievement continuum (Figure 6.20, below).

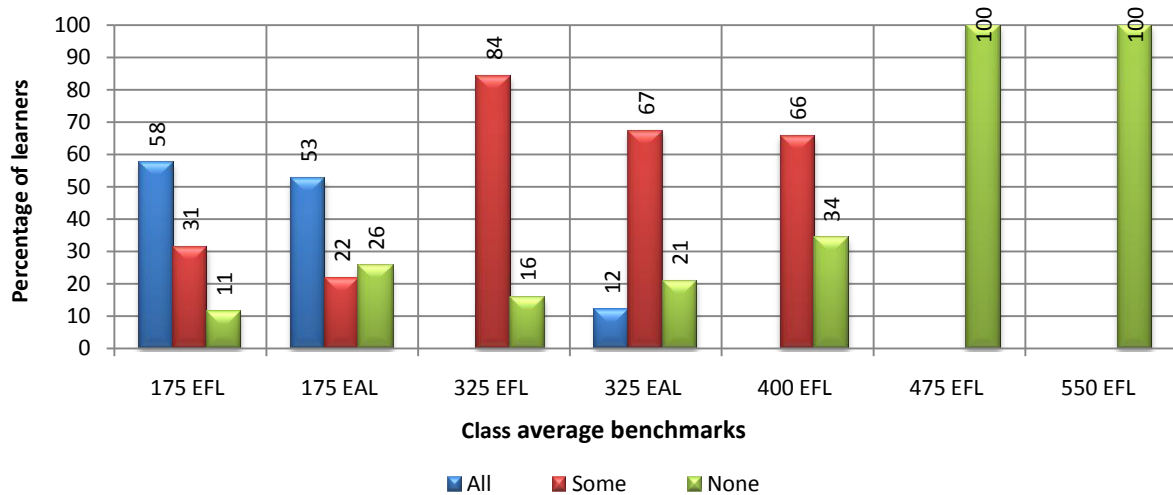


Figure 6.20: Percentage of Grade 4 learners receiving free or reduced-price lunch

At the lowest class average benchmarks of EFL and EAL 175, over half of the learners were in schools where *all* of them received a free or reduced-price lunch. At the mid-level class average benchmarks (EFL 325, EAL 325 and EFL 400) between 66% and 84% of the learners were in schools which had *some* of them receiving a free or reduced-price lunch. At the highest class average performance levels, *none* of the learners were in schools which had a free or reduced-price lunch programme.

6.4.2 Language of testing versus home language

Principals were asked what percentage of their learners did not speak the language of testing for the PIRLS 2006 at their school as a first language. Response categories included *0 to 10%*, *11 to 25%*, *26 to 50%* and *more than 50%*. For learners in EFL schools at the lower class average benchmarks of EFL 175 and EFL 325, most were in schools which had *more than 50%* of learners who did not speak English as the language of testing as a first language. Even higher up on the achievement spectrum at EFL 400, close to half of the learners were in schools in which *more than 50%* were tested in English which was not their first language and a further 51% were in schools with *26 to 50%* of learners tested in this

non-vernacular. At EFL 475, 51% of learners were in schools which had 26 to 50% of their learners without the test language as a home language and another 49% in schools which had 0 to 10% of learners who were not first language speakers of the test language.

At EFL 550, all learners were in schools which had only 0 to 10% who did not speak the language of the test as a first language. In comparison, at EAL 175, the majority of learners were in schools which had 0 and 10% who did not speak the language of testing as a first language. At EAL 325, half of the learners were in schools which had 0 to 10% who did not speak the language of testing as a first language (see Figure 6.21, below).

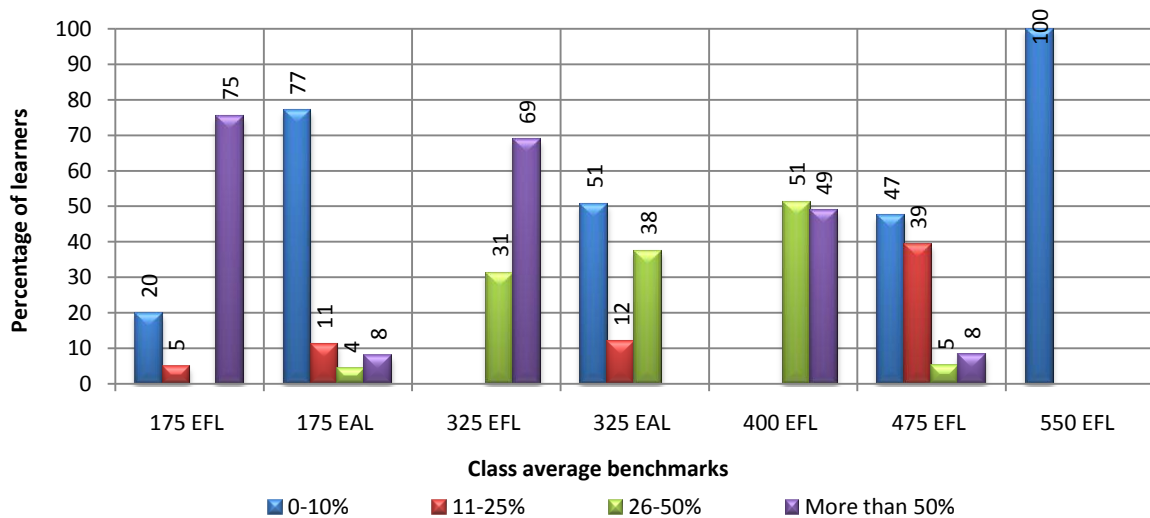


Figure 6.21: Principal reports on the percentage of learners who did not speak the language of testing as a first language

Principals also gave an indication of the percentage of learners at their school who received some instruction at school in their home language rather than the language of testing (i.e. the main language of learning and teaching from Grades 1 to 3). As evident in Figure 6.22 (below), the only extreme outlier is EFL 175, where 44% of learners were in schools which had *more than 50%* of learners who received instruction in a language other than the language of testing. Another interesting pattern of response distribution is at EFL 475, where 29% of learners were in schools which had *more than 50%* of the learners receiving some instruction in their home language other than English. At EFL 400, 40% of learners were in schools which had 26 to 50% of learners who also received some instruction in their home language.

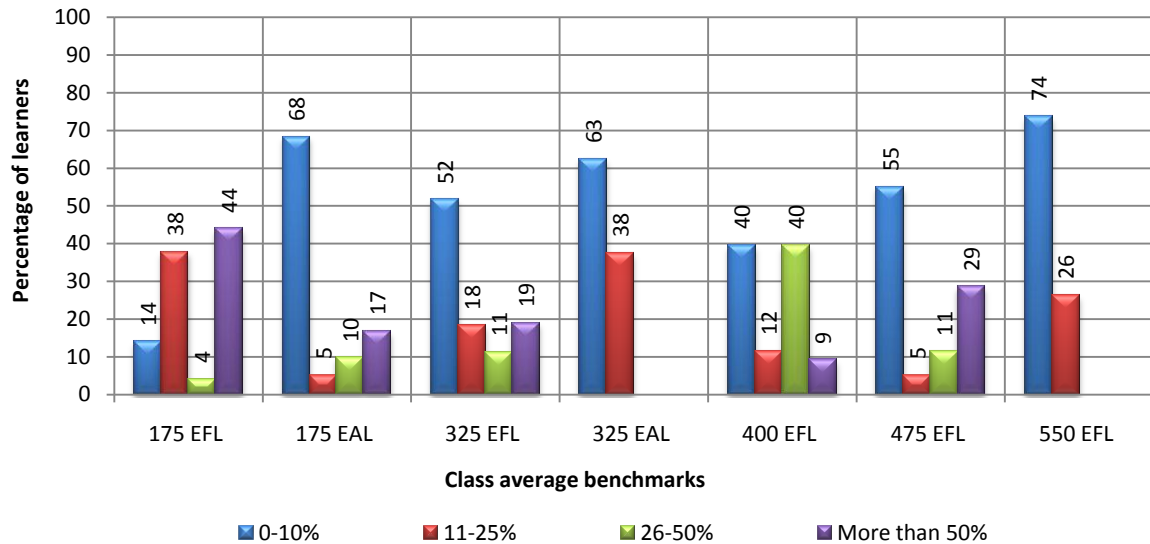


Figure 6.22: Principal reports on the percentage of learners who received some instruction in their home language which was not the language of testing

More specifically, principals were asked if, for learners in Grade 4 and below, their school made provisions for reading instruction in mother tongue for those students whose mother tongue was not English (Figure 6.23). Regardless of whether or not schools were EFL or EAL institutions, between approximately 26% and 85% of learners in these schools received mother tongue reading instruction from Grades 1 to 4 at each of the class average benchmarks. At EFL 175, 86% of learners had access to mother tongue reading instruction at these grades. The high percentage of learners in schools at EFL 400 (69%) receiving mother tongue reading instruction also stands out.

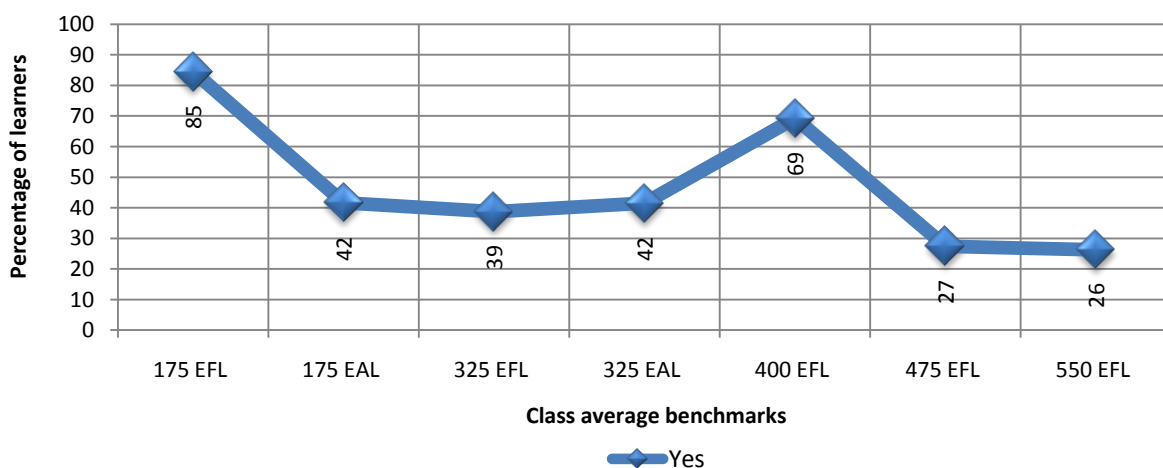


Figure 6.23: Percentage of learners in schools which made mother tongue reading instruction provisions for learners whose mother tongue was not English

6.4.3 Early literacy skills

Principals in schools at each of the class benchmarks identified how many of their learners had early literacy skills on entry to school. Figure 6.24 (below) reveals that the highest percentages of learners were in schools at benchmarks EFL 175, EAL 175 (65%, 4.6), EFL 325, EAL 325 and EFL 400 that had *less than 25%* of the learners entering school with early literacy skills. Even at class average benchmark EFL 475, nearly a third of the learners were in schools which had *less than 25%* of the learners entering with such skills. Seemingly, EFL 550 was the only class average benchmark at which early literacy skills did not present a major problem, with nearly three quarters of the learners in schools which had *more than 75%* of their learners entering with early literacy skills.

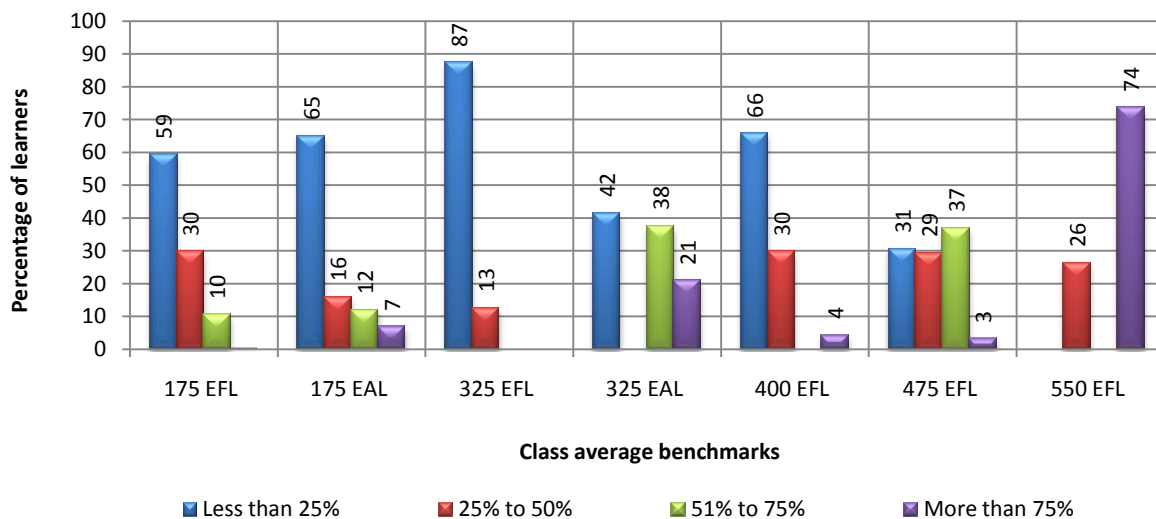


Figure 6.24: Principal reports on the percentages of learners with early literacy skills

6.4.4 Discussion and summary of data on learner characteristics

6.4.4.1 Socioeconomic status

The vast majority of learners in schools at the lowest class benchmarks had principals who reported that *more than 50%* of their learners were from economically disadvantaged homes. Even at EFL 400, 35% of the learners were in schools that had *more than 50%* of learners from disadvantaged homes. In comparison, at the two highest class benchmarks of EFL 475 and EFL 550 nearly all of the learners were in schools which had only *0 to 10%* of learners from a disadvantaged background. Confirming this trend further, most learners were in schools at the lower class average benchmarks (between 175 and 400) that had only *0 to*

10% of learners from affluent homes. At the two highest benchmarks, most learners were in schools which had *more than 50%* of learners from affluent backgrounds.

At the lowest class average benchmarks of EFL and EAL 175, over half of the learners were in schools which had *all* of their learners receiving a *free or reduced-price lunch*. At the mid-level range of performance (EFL 325, EAL 325 and EFL 400), the majority of learners were in schools which had *some* of their learners receiving a free or reduce-priced lunch. For No learners at the highest class average performance level schools received a free or reduced-price lunch.

Therefore, learner socioeconomic status does play a strong role in the achievement of learners at each of the class average benchmarks. On average internationally for the PIRLS 2006 main study, 18% of the learners were in schools which had *more than 50%* of their learners from economically disadvantaged homes, with the greatest percentages (more than 60% of learners) in South Africa and Indonesia. Moreover, on average internationally, the reading achievement of learners attending schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged learners was lower than for learners with fewer disadvantaged peers (Mullis *et al.*, 2007). Thus, it is not surprising to find this same low achievement and learner socioeconomic disadvantage trend for this study for learners across the class average achievement benchmarks.

6.4.4.2 *Language of testing versus home language*

At both of the lower EFL (EFL 175 and EFL 325) benchmarks, most learners were in schools which had *more than 50%* of learners who did not speak English as the language of testing as a first language. Therefore, these learners' second language status likely plays a strong role in their achievement outcomes. Even at EFL 400, close to half of the learners were in schools which had *more than 50%* of their learners tested in a non-vernacular language, and a further 51% of learners were in schools which had 26 to 50% of their learners tested in this non-vernacular.

In comparison, at EAL 175, the majority of learners were in schools that had the bulk of their learners tested in their home language. These learners would have been tested in the language of instruction from Grades 1 to 3, an African language. At EAL 325, half of the learners were in schools which had only 0 to 10% of their learners who did not speak the language of testing as a first language. On this basis, it would appear that differences in

learner home language and testing language do not offer the only explanation for poor learner achievement at these EAL class benchmarks.

At EFL 475, half of the learners were in schools with 26 to 50% of learners who did not have the test language as a home language, and another 49% were in schools which had 0 to 10% of learners who were not first language speakers of the test language. This language of testing scenario at EFL 475 indicates a multilingual learner cohort, and suggests that testing in a language other than the language spoken at home is not an issue for these learners. Socioeconomic status and/or early literacy skills could play a role in the higher class average achievement of these learners. At EFL 550, there was a very high level of congruence between reports of learners' home language and language of testing, suggesting a mostly homogeneous cohort in terms of language at this level of achievement.

In terms of the percentage of learners who received some instruction at school in their home language rather than the language of testing, the only extreme outlier is EFL 175, where 44% of the learners were in schools which had *more than 50%* of learners who received instruction in a language other than the language of testing. In an EFL schooling context at this very low level of class average achievement, this is indicative of the level of support learners still need in their home language to support their learning in English. Therefore, these learning environments are definitely not monolingual English learning environments. At EFL 400, 40% of learners were in schools which also had 26 to 50% of learners who received some instruction in a home language that was not their main instructional language. Nearly a third of the learners were in schools at EFL 475 which had *more than 50%* of their learners receiving some instruction in their home language other than English. At these two higher class benchmarks, this could be indicative of a learning support strategy implemented which could be beneficial for achievement.

Moreover, regardless of whether or not schools were EFL or EAL institutions, between approximately 26% and 85% of learners in these schools received mother tongue reading instruction from Grades 1 to 4 at each of the class average benchmarks. At EFL 175, perhaps confirming the aforementioned comments about the non-English instructional focus in school environments at this level of achievement, most of the learners had access to mother tongue reading instruction at these grades. The high percentage of learners in schools at EFL 400 (69%) who received mother tongue reading instruction also stands out. At this level of achievement one would not expect mother tongue reading instruction to be so prominent, especially in English medium schools.

6.4.4.3 *Early literacy skills*

The highest percentages of learners at benchmarks EFL 400 and lower were in schools which had *less than 25%* of their learners entering school with early literacy skills. Even at class average benchmark EFL 475, nearly a third of the learners were in schools where *less than 25%* of the learners entered school with early literacy skills. Seemingly, EFL 550 was the only class average benchmark at which early literacy skills did not present a major problem, with the majority of learners being in schools which had more *than 75%* of their learners entering school with early literacy skills. Generally, most South African learners therefore do not enter school with adequate preparation for literacy, and this may impact negatively on their achievement, as evidenced by these data. The DoE (2009a) reports that evidence from household surveys confirmed that by 2007, as many as 88% of six-year-olds and 60% of five-year-olds participated in some form of Early Childhood Development (ECD). The DoE (2009a) also acknowledges that the quality of such education varies in the country. The findings for this study stated above suggest that, at the least, this ECD preparation does not sufficiently address the development of early literacy skills.

6.5 **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

In this chapter, PIRLS 2006 principal questionnaire data were used to describe the meso level school contexts and characteristics of those learners at each of the class average benchmarks for the study.

In Chapter Seven, findings for the Phase Two qualitative case studies of schooling contexts for the development of reading literacy are presented.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

PHASE TWO FINDINGS:

CASE STUDIES OF SELECTED SCHOOL CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS OF PRACTICE FOR READING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

7.1 ORIENTATION

In this chapter, findings are presented for the Phase Two qualitative case studies of schooling contexts for the development of reading literacy. They complement and extend the results of the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire data presented in Chapter Six. As such, the chapter deals with further findings for research sub-question one for the study, namely:

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

The goal of the chapter is to present and compare characteristics of purposively selected schools which had a class average achievement at the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks of EFL 550 (School A), EFL 475 (School B), EFL 400 (School C), and the South African benchmarks of EFL 325 (School D), EFL 325 (School E) and EAL 175 (School F). The data presented in the chapter are an amalgamation of findings gleaned from the analysis of: interviews³⁹ with the Intermediate Phase Head of Department and the participating Grade 4 teacher at each school; selected PIRLS 2006 school questionnaire items; photographs of literacy resources in libraries and Grade 4 classrooms taken at each school; and classroom observation (see Chapter Five).

Firstly, in section 7.2, a general overview of each school's environment is provided. As it is theorised that learner attributes and parental involvement not only impact classroom teaching but also help to determine the nature of school environments overall, the characteristics of the learners and parental involvement at each of the schools are outlined in section 7.3. In section 7.4, resource adequacy for learners' reading literacy development at each school is considered in relation to the other case study schools. Thereafter, professional organisation

³⁹ Direct quotations taken from transcripts of the interviews conducted have been edited via the removal of obsolete words and phrases which impeded readability. Ellipses in the quotations signify where editing has occurred. No changes have been made to the quotations that would alter the original meaning as portrayed by the interview participants.

of reading literacy teaching and learning at each of the schools is compared (7.5). This is followed by discussion of perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation at each school (7.6). Lastly, discussion and summary of the data for meso level contexts and conditions of practice for the development of reading literacy is provided (7.7).

7.2 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

School A (EFL 550) was an exclusive private school situated in an affluent urban Gauteng neighbourhood in Johannesburg serving learners from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Average class size at the school ranged between 20 and 23 learners and the school catered for learners from Grades 0 to 12. Schools fees for Grade 4 in 2009 were R46 769. A total of 473 learners attended the primary school in 2009, and there were 38 teachers on the staff. It was estimated that the pupil: teacher ratio at the school was about 19:1. The vast majority of teachers and learners at the school were White. *Twenty-five to 50%* of the learners were considered to be from middle to upper class homes. *Less than 10%* of the learners did not have the language of teaching as a first language. An index of availability of school resources compiled via responses to the PIRLS school questionnaire was high, as were indices of the principal's perception of school safety and of school climate. The learners at School A were depicted as very spontaneous, confident, resilient, active and enthusiastic, and were outspoken and challenging in a respectful way.

School B (EFL 475) was a former Model C school situated in an urban residential neighbourhood in the midlands of KwaZulu-Natal. It offered dual-medium English and Afrikaans instruction although an English cohort of Grade 4 learners was assessed for PIRLS 2006. The school had balanced numbers of Black, White, Indian and Asian learners enrolled. The majority of teachers at the school were White. Only *0 to 10%* of the learners were considered to be from economically disadvantaged homes and no learners received a free or reduced-price lunch. The language of teaching was not a first language for *25 to 50%* of the learners. Indices of the principal's perception of school safety and school resources revealed a high level of both at the school. An index of the principal's perception of school climate was at medium level. At School B, the learners were described as being mostly from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds. In general, the HoD felt that learners had changed significantly in recent years in that they had a lack of self-discipline and no sense of responsibility. The Grade 4 teacher described her learner group as talkative and active but otherwise experienced very few discipline problems from them.

School C (EFL 400) was a former Model C school situated in an urban, industrial area on the East Rand in Gauteng. A charity had identified the school as a “needy school” as 90% of the learners were from township areas (P4, 4:4, 66:66⁴⁰) and some learners lived in informal settlements. Schools fees for 2009 were R4 000. A total of 860 learners attended the primary school in 2009, and there were 32 teachers on the staff. It was estimated that the pupil: teacher ratio at the school was about 40:1. Most children at the school were Black learners with a minority of Indian learners. The teachers at the school were diverse, representing nine South African official language groups⁴¹. At school C, 11 to 25% of the learners were reportedly from economically disadvantaged homes but none received a free or reduced-price lunch. Moreover, English as the medium of instruction was not the first language for *more than 50%* of the learners. According to the indices compiled, there were high levels of resource availability, safety and school climate.

School D (EFL 325) was a Roman Catholic private school located in a large urban township in Johannesburg, Gauteng. All learners and teachers were Black. Schools fees in 2009 were R2 600. Although private, the school still received a government subsidy. At school D, 11 to 25% of the learners were reportedly from economically disadvantaged homes and some received a free or reduced-price lunch. English as the medium of instruction was not the first language of 25 to 50% of the learners, suggesting that the others spoke it at home. High levels of resource availability, school safety and school climate were apparent from the PIRLS data. The School D teacher acknowledged that the learners were from a slightly higher socioeconomic background than most children in the general location. The Grade 4 learners at the school were experienced as motivated learners (P3, 3:72, 157:160).

School E (EFL 325) was situated in an urban, predominantly Coloured neighbourhood adjacent to a large township area south of Johannesburg. Both Coloured and Black children from the surrounding community attended the school. Teachers were Black or Coloured. The school was dual-medium English and Afrikaans, although a group learning in English were assessed for the PIRLS 2006. Some learners reportedly received a free or reduced-price lunch. At School E, *more than 50%* of the learners were reportedly from economically disadvantaged homes and *more than 50%* did not speak English as a first language. The PIRLS indices compiled showed a medium level of resource availability, safety and climate at

⁴⁰ For audit trail purposes, each participant comment or quotation is followed by a bracketed reference as to where the data can be found in the Atlas.ti hermeneutic unit in which it is situated. For example, the “P4” in the reference “P4, 4:4, 66:66” refers to primary document number 4; “4:4” refers to code 4 in primary document 4; and the numerals “66:66” refer to the line numbers of the verbatim quotations.

⁴¹ There were: 11 Afrikaans home language teachers; 10 English teachers; 1 Setswana teacher; 2 IsiXhosa teachers; 2 IsiZulu teachers; 1 Sesotho teacher; 1 Sepedi teacher; 2 Tshivenda teachers; 1 Xitsonga teacher; and 1 teacher who spoke another home language at the school.

the school. The teacher described most of the learners as inclined to being quiet, sedentary workers. She also reported that those learners who participated were respectful and inquisitive, asked questions and challenged her when they disagreed (P2, 2:49, 146:149) (P2, 2:50, 153:153). In spite of these positive learner attributes, the teacher felt that a major impediment to achieving her teaching goals with her learners was the level of learner absenteeism, even at Grade 4 level, with learners roaming the streets during school hours (P2, 2:69, 222:230).

School F (EAL 175) was located in a suburban township in a small town near Pretoria in Gauteng. It had been extended five years previously, to cater for an increase in learners from a growing informal settlement on the outskirts of the area, the closure of farm schools and the integration of a Grade R class. The school had just been afforded “no-school-fees” status at the time of data collection. In 2010, an amount of R855 per year was allocated to each learner at such schools. A total of 1 446 learners attended the school in 2009, and there were 38 teachers on the staff. The HoD estimated that the pupil: teacher ratio at the school was about 50:1. There was an active feeding scheme at the school which was used by all of the learners and a vegetable garden for the scheme and parents in need. Grade 4 learners at the school were assessed in English for the PIRLS 2006 main study. The principal reported that *11 to 25%* of the learners did not speak the language of instruction as a first language, here seemingly referring to Sepedi as the medium of instruction from Grades 1 to 3 and not to English as the medium of instruction from Grade 4. Medium levels of resource availability, safety and school climate at the school were calculated from the PIRLS 2006 indices. The HoD at School F pointed out that the learners were predominantly the children of farm workers who lived on the farms or in informal settlements in the area. Their parents had little or no income. Revealing the impact of an impoverished educational environment at home, the HoD also suggested that school holidays had a negative impact on the learners’ performance as teachers seemed “...*to have to start again...*” (P1, 1:4, 6:6).

7.3 LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT FOR READING LITERACY

Learner characteristics are broadly discussed in this section in terms of their language abilities (7.3.1) and the involvement of parents in these learners’ academic lives (7.3.2) at the six schools.

7.3.1 Learner language abilities

In this sub-section the following themes are considered: the language background and literacy skills of learners (7.3.1.1); the impact of preschool attendance on learners' literacy and language proficiency (7.3.1.2) ; the influence of mixed ability grouping in classes and learners' with learning problems on teaching (7.3.1.3); and the audiovisual-technological orientation of learners which effects their reading motivation (7.3.1.4).

7.3.1.1 *Language background and literacy skills*

In specific reference to reading at School A, a minimal number of learners still needed to decode during the Intermediate Phase grades. Also, there were a small number of learners at this phase who still pointed with their fingers, sounded out words and/or needed to refer to their phonics chart when reading. Moreover, once learners had mastered the skill of reading, especially from the age of 10 upwards, the HoD felt that reading became passé to them, that it was viewed as “nerdish” and that it bore a stigma. The School B HoD specifically noted a decline in learners' foundations such as writing sentences, the ability to summarise, and the ability to find main ideas in text. The HoD stated that, “*We are getting children that are missing out on things that we never had before... after 30 years of teaching English, you notice it*” (P1, 1:51, 38:38). As a result of a lack of reading by learners, the HoD at School B experienced that they had a poor vocabulary, nonetheless acknowledging that their abilities varied from year to year. She specifically felt that the national starting age for schooling has a negative impact on learners' reading development in the latter primary school years, as they are developmentally too advanced for their reading levels:

This starting school at seven is a major crisis... Those kids sitting in Grade One, when it comes to reading are bored. Bored becomes a habit. They get to Grade Seven or even Grade Six [and] they are emotionally, socially, sexually, too advanced for what they're having to do...and that is a huge problem, because they now can't cope with what we expect them to read in Grade Seven and so they become disinterested. They are bored all the way up through school, so they have lost that excitement for learning, reading... (P1, 1:63, 46:50).

A problem with literacy was noted at School C. Over and above their problems with the English medium of instruction, learners were considered to be disinterested in reading books and were “...*lazy to take the book and read it*” (P4, 4:25, 30:30). The Grade 4 teacher also felt that the children “... *are so spoon-fed ideas and concepts [that] they cannot think critically*” (P6, 6:18, 34:34). In reference to learners' reading skills, the School D teacher indicated that she had many good readers who could read with comprehension, however, similarly to School A, she had a few learners “*who read but... count words... go slowly, they*

are not confident enough to say 'I will read', making it difficult for them to understand and follow the story" (P1, 1:13, 31:31) (P3, 3:4, 8:14). When asked about the learners' written comprehension skills in particular, the teacher judged the learners' skills as being good, although some still spelt words phonetically when writing, unless they were copying words directly from the text (P3, 3:48, 107:108). At School E, learners' reading speeds varied (P2, 2:40, 131:131), with a few experiencing problems with reading. The teacher felt that the Foundation Phase teachers should have addressed these learners' difficulties, stating that "...I can't catch up what they've lost..." (P2, 2:55, 164:167).

Except for learners at School A, where language of instruction was not mentioned as an issue, learners' English language proficiency influenced language teaching and learning to varying extents at the other schools. At School B, the non-English vernacular speakers had a Zulu mother tongue, whilst their White and Indian peers were EFL learners. At Schools C, D, E and F, most if not all learners were non-English learners with an African language mother tongue.

At School B, the African vernacular learners' spoken English was reportedly good as many were brought up speaking English at home and had attended English preschools. Therefore, these learners only struggled with low frequency vocabulary and also sometimes with "... *the finer points, the hidden subtleties...*" of the language, which their peers seemed to pick up relatively easily (P2: 2:15; 27:31). Literacy difficulties at School C were linked to the non-English vernacular status of most of the learners. Some of the learners had poor spoken and written English skills (P4, 4:13, 24:24) (P4, 4:18, 26:26). The HoD also felt that they had lost interest in English and did not recognise its importance, in spite of the school's strategy to reward them for using English (P4, 4:16, 26:26). Many of the Grade 4 learners, especially those who did not speak any English at home, battled with basic comprehension (P5, 5:10, 14:14). Suggesting a lack of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1981) in English, the learners in the school still needed to think in their vernaculars.

As observed by the HoD interviewed:

...it doesn't seem to me as though they're thinking in English and writing in English. They are thinking in an African language but are trying to translate it into English language... you can see that the words are transcribed incorrectly and... the manner in which they write out their answers, you can see that the child was not thinking in English... (P4, 4:15, 26:26).

At School D, although the teacher found that the learners became increasingly proficient in English as opposed to their vernaculars as they progressed through the primary school years

(P3, 3:64, 239:140), they still sometimes switched to their vernaculars when trying to articulate themselves in English (P3, 3:63, 130:130).

As the only school in the sample with a switch to English at Grade 4, learners' EAL standing at School F seemed to have the most negative effect on their language abilities. The learners were not likely to have had any English exposure at school entrance, nor always understand Sepedi, the language of instruction at the school for Grades 1 to 3, (P1, 1:37, 112:122). This lack of English proficiency at school entrance seems to have been compounded by an ill-advised directive reportedly received from the DoE district office to introduce English only in the third term of the learners' Grade 3 year, which is counter to the National DoE's (2002b) policy to introduce the additional language in the Grade 1 year. The learners' lack of English proficiency in particular was likely to stay with them well into the Intermediate Phase, impacting their reading proficiency in the language (P1, 1:32, 91:93), as additionally revealed by the HoD:

Okay, the reading, it's very bad, very bad. First the learners, most of them are from the farms... they just spoke their mother tongue and that is it. And when they come to school it's a struggle to start from that [basis]. You find that even though they have moved from the Foundation Phase into the Intermediate Phase it's as if they have never heard any English... and so usually the first time you start them from scratch and you build on that (P1, 1:1, 4:4).

The School F Grade 4 teacher also pointed out that although the learners read and understood Sepedi very well by the end of Grade 3 the switch to English at Grade 4 created difficulties for them (P3, 3:8, 19:28) and was the “*main challenge*” that teachers experienced (P3, 3:10, 29:30). The teacher further explained that some of her learners could read very well but some could not read with understanding. Still others could not read the majority of English words. The teacher thus suggested that learners should be introduced to English as LoLT at Grade 4 from their Grade R year (P3, 3:23, 77:80). Despite the learners' difficulties with English language and reading, the HoD indicated that the learners performed better in other learning areas which were also taught in English (P1, 1:16, 32:36).

The perceived value of having learners start in English in the Foundation Phase was emphasised by comments made about their entering schools C and D in the Intermediate Phase with limited English proficiency. According to the School C HoD, if learners entered the school at a later stage and had not been attending English medium schools, teachers had to start again with Foundation Phase readers to help them to improve in English (P4, 4:28, 24:36).

Also, as suggested by the Grade 4 teacher, the trend for parents to send their children to an English medium school later in the primary school years impacted negatively on classroom practice:

I do notice that we've had a great influx of children who have come from other schools, predominantly because their parents want them to become more literate in English, but these children have not had any foundation in English and they tend to hold the class back and there is not enough time with forty children to give that child the focused attention that he or she needs (P5, 5:23, 26:26).

Moreover, when parents were not upfront about their child's English language proficiency, the school might have to retain the child, send the child to a support class or have the child assessed to determine his or her difficulties (P4, 4:71, 72:72). The School D teacher further stressed that those learners who did not have basic reading skills tended to have been at other schools prior to entering Grade 4 at the school (P3, 3:22, 37:39).

7.3.1.2 *The impact of preschool attendance*

At schools B, C and D it was acknowledged that learners' attendance of preschool had a positive influence on their language and literacy abilities at Grade 4. At School C it was estimated that about three quarters of the school's children had attended Grade R at the school (P5, 5:27, 36:36). The Grade 4 teacher articulated that, together with the school's policy of English conversation in all settings, by the time these learners got to Grade 4 they *"are able to hold a conversation very well and even if the parents don't speak to them at home, the brighter ones pick up the language amazingly fast and are able to function [academically] extremely well"* (P5, 5:25, 28:32). At School B, learners are only admitted from a satellite pre-primary school and the school's own Grade R, with the school reaching their quota of children in this way. Related to this, the school also has a policy to try to get learners into Grade 00 two years before they start Grade 1 to ensure that they first have at least two years in an English classroom. As a teacher stated *"...so that makes a big difference to our standard even as they enter Grade One"*⁴².

The School D teacher indicated that most of the learners did attend Grade R at the school, which made a difference to their basic skills. When entering Grade R some of the learners did already have *"... a little bit of background in English..."* due to attendance of good crèches (P3, 3:62, 131:136). The teacher related that *"sometimes you will find that we take a learner who went to maybe this crèche that has a Grade R and you take the child in Grade*

⁴² Interview with School B Foundation Phase Literacy coordinator- not included in *Atlas.ti* analysis for this study.

One and you find that the child doesn't know some of the things that our learners know, so it makes life easier if our [own] Grade R is feeding us" (P3, 3:27, 49:54).

7.3.1.3 *Mixed ability grouping and learners with learning difficulties*

At schools B and C, teachers experienced mixed ability grouping as problematic for teaching learners according to their academic abilities. As the School C Grade 4 teacher stated:

It creates extra stress for the teacher... and I think that is the biggest mistake the Department has made, because if you have children of similar ability working together you can move faster... I think children can reach their potential much better that way ... a child who is having problems, if they're in a class with other children who are having similar problems, as a teacher you are much better equipped to deal with it... especially things like reading, I think that you can equip children with skills much better if you are dealing with children of the same ability basically, because sometimes children feel inferior or not confident enough to speak up when there are brighter children in the class and we have some really above average brilliant children in our school... They are quick and they are smart and the others don't speak up for fear of being ostracised or being looked at as foolish or stupid... (P6, 6:2, 4:6).

In discussing the academic abilities of her learners, the School B Grade 4 teacher stated that, whereas during the previous six years she had taught "A classes", implying learners with above average academic ability, she had a mixed ability group at the time of the research visit. The teacher did find that, in comparison to having a group of learners with similar abilities, the mixed ability composition of the class was challenging due to the need to extend faster learners and assist those who were battling. In further reference to the impact of mixed ability grouping, the HoD at the School B expressed her beliefs about the need for streaming:

... they did away with streaming of children, which I feel we need to go back to, right from the beginning because the slow, slow child is being left out because they take too much time and there is no time for them, so it is the middle of the range of the class that's sitting in front of you, which is weak. The bright children are getting totally ignored. There are a lot of bright children, so they're being held back (P1, 1:62, 46:46).

According to both the HoD and the Grade 4 teacher at School C, having Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) in classes at the school was also having a negative impact on teaching and learning. The Grade 4 teacher estimated that 15 to 20% of the Grade 4 children she taught had a Grade 1 level reading ability with extremely poor basic word recognition. The DoE expected evidence of interventions to assist learners with barriers before approving retention of a learner, which the HoD described as "... *overwhelming...*" in terms of classroom practice (P4, 4:39, 56:56).

7.3.1.4 *The audiovisual-technological orientation of learners*

The School A subject area leader, the School B HoD and the School C Grade 4 teacher spoke of the impact of technology on the reading abilities and interests of learners. The School A subject area leader was concerned about the audiovisual orientation of learners which she thought impacted negatively on their literate language abilities, declaring that *“They’re so used to seeing everything presented visually on the television or audio. Everything’s seeing and hearing but there’s no thinking needed. There’s a huge lack of imagination. Children cannot write stories any more. They cannot tell stories any more”* (P3, 3:90; 107:107).

She further acknowledged that as a result of the technological age the learners live in, many had a strong dislike of books, especially the boys. Therefore, teachers at the school used multiple strategies to ensure that the learners developed an interest in reading and did not get bored with classroom teaching for reading.

In a similar vein, in describing learners’ literacy skills, the School B HoD noted that learners had no listening skills and as a result had poor pronunciation, which infringed on their reading skills. The HoD also found that the learners did not read. She specifically apportioned blame for this on their orientation towards technology and television. Perhaps revealing the impact of television on learners’ reading interests, the Grade 4 teacher experienced that the learners seemed to be oriented towards *“Americanised”* books based on popular television characters (P2, 2:259, 139:141).

Rather than focusing on the negative impact of technology on learners, the Grade 4 teacher at School C felt that she had to find ways to engage learners to retain their interest and advance their thought-processing. As she argued:

... Grade Four [learners] today are so advanced technologically, they are so aware of what’s going on in the world that dumbing down things [such as reading] and telling them about “John and Jill” and keeping it too basic, leads to boredom and it doesn’t stretch their minds (P6, 6:4, 12:12).

7.3.2 **Parental involvement**

On the whole, School A was the only one where teachers had mostly positive views of parental involvement in their children’s education. Parents were described as enthusiastic with a willingness to attend meetings and work with the staff. This positive parental involvement is likely a result of the school’s drive to elicit their involvement. At the beginning

of each school year, teachers at the school issued a list of learning area outcomes and expectations of learners to the parents. Also, there was a parents' initiation evening for each grade, at which the teachers spoke about their learning area and expectations, and gave parents clear guidelines about what was expected from them and from their children.

Teachers at Schools D and E also had positive experiences of parental involvement with their learners, albeit only in relation to parental attendance of meetings. Parents of learners at School D were described as being responsive to requests from teachers if they lived in the vicinity of the school. At School E specifically, the teacher reported that most parents would respond to requests for meetings and implemented whichever recommendations were made by the teacher. For the few parents who did not respond to a request for a meeting, the teacher reported trying to visit them at home or otherwise asking the principal or vice principal to telephone the parents to encourage them to attend a meeting with the teacher, which they would then do.

In contrast to the experiences of parental involvement at Schools A, D and E, experiences were less positive at the other schools. Teachers at Schools B, C and F specifically indicated that it was difficult to get the cooperation of parents of learners who were struggling. These parents would not attend meetings to discuss their children's difficulties and could even be hostile towards teachers when meetings were requested, as in the case of School F (P1, 1:20, 47:48). At school C, parents were required to monitor their children's reading via a reading record, but the HoD was not certain that they did so as she had seen no improvement in some of the learners' English skills (P4, 4:12, 24:24).

Regardless of whether or not parental involvement was experienced as positive, few learners at School A, B, C, D and F came from a background of literate language exposure at home, as evidenced by the following interview discussion with the subject area leader at School A:

....we find very few parents are actually reading to their children. Our children don't know their nursery rhymes [Researcher: That, I was interested in... do you find that they come to school from literate home environments, in terms of a love of reading?]... Absolutely not. Very, very few, very few. (P3, 3:131, 131:133).

At Schools C, D and F, parental literacy levels were specifically problematic. Reasons for this lack of an optimal home literate language environment were attributed to the busy lifestyles of parents, parents who were not interested in reading, or the poor literacy levels of parents themselves. At School F, most parents were seemingly illiterate and unable to assist their children with schoolwork. Furthermore, there was a stigma attached to attending the Adult

Basic Education and Training classes offered at the school. At School D, many of the learners lived with grandparents who could not read and write. Although they may have been able to read, the parents of learners at School C may not have been “... *functionally literate in English so they cannot provide the support with regard to homework or reading activities at home with regard to reading*” (P5, 5:24, 26:28). Moreover, the school C teacher felt that parents did not encourage learners to read at home due to ignorance about the importance of reading from a young age. The teacher estimated that roughly half of her learners did not come from a literate home environment (P5, 5:24, 26:28).

7.4 RESOURCE ADEQUACY

As suggested in Chapter Three, one of the reasons often given for variation in average learner achievement across different schools is resource adequacy. In terms of reading literacy resources, adequately resourced schools have ample textbooks, classroom and school library reading materials (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). In this section, school library availability and use at each of the participating schools is considered (7.4.1), followed by descriptions of classroom reading resource availability and management thereof (7.4.2), and learning support resources (7.4.3).

7.4.1 School library availability and use

At Schools A, B, C and D, a school library was available. However, it was only at Schools A, B and C that it was evident that well-resourced, well-managed libraries were actively in use. School E did have a library but it was not functional, and, perhaps suggesting that libraries are of little value in schools with space problems, the library at School F had been converted into a Grade R classroom. Schools A, B and C had either a full-time school librarian or a media teacher, which is the likely reason these libraries were well-managed and organised. Schools B and C also had senior learners volunteer as library monitors.

Whilst at face-value the School A library had the best facilities and reading materials availability⁴³, the School B and C libraries were also well-stocked, featuring books in good condition and with recent or new book publications available on the shelves. Each of the libraries for these schools was organised using the Dewey classification system, with clearly labelled sections for junior and senior fiction and non-fiction, subject area sections, and reference materials. At Schools A and C, there were also teacher reference sections

⁴³ See photographs of the literacy resources at each case study school in Appendix H.

featuring teaching methodology and subject area books. At School C, teachers had access to DVDs and posters from the library to use in their classrooms. Teachers could also do a block loan so that the children could take the books from class (P4, 4:43, 61:62). The school received second-hand book and magazine donations from a charity (P4, 4:4, 66:66).

At School B, while the library teacher did not work in conjunction with teachers, she did discuss with them which themes teachers were working on in class, and set aside these books so that they could be used in the classroom. There were also a number of magazine titles available in the School A and C libraries. At School C, these magazines were donated. At School D, the books were separated into fiction and non-fiction, references and subject areas in an orderly manner on bookshelves. However, in comparison to Schools A, B and C, the shelf labels were old, difficult to read or peeling. The books themselves were older, with little evidence of newer books on display. A number of books were damaged.

It was only at the two schools at the highest benchmarks that Grade 4 learners had formally scheduled time to visit the school library during teaching and learning time. At School B specifically, learners had a library lesson during which they worked on their research skills. There was no time for a library period for Intermediate Phase learners (P5, 5:32, 42:44) at School C due to DoE time allocation directives for teaching and learning (P4, 4:43, 61:62), although the learners did apparently use the library in their spare time. The School D learners seemingly visited the library when their teacher decided to take them to choose books, usually on a weekly basis. At School A and B, learners had access to the library at breaks and after school, while at School C, library access was limited to break times.

7.4.2 Classroom reading resource availability and management

In 7.4.2.1 reading resource access and management at school level are elucidated and print environments and policies for their creation at each school are discussed (7.4.2.2).

7.4.2.1 Resource access and management

There appeared to be substantial classroom reading resource availability differences between schools A, B and C at the PIRLS international benchmarks, and schools D⁴⁴, E and F, which did not reach these benchmarks. At schools A and C, no indication of resource access problems was suggested.

⁴⁴ Although the teacher did not refer to resource access problems, this judgement has been made on the basis of the materials used and the classroom observed.

The subject area leader at School A and teacher at School C affirmed this with the following statements:

... there's so much available in a variety of sources that I think [the children] don't get time to get bored and that's why they're active learners and really very spontaneous (School A, P3, 3:117, 117:117).

...At this school, we are fantastically fortunate that whatever resources we require for reading, they are provided almost immediately. My principal is passionate about reading and one of the school's goals is to improve literacy and to encourage a love for reading, so as far as resources go, its fine (School C, P5, 5:21, 26:26).

There was a budget allocation for books at school C to purchase whatever was needed (P4, 4:46, 64:64). Although School B could be considered very well-resourced in comparison to schools D, E and F, the HoD nevertheless referred to the negative impact of government budget cuts, meaning that school fees were used to supply resources. Rising costs meant that this was not adequate and funding for such resources had to be staggered with a grade receiving the money each year (P1, 1:65; 55:56).

The School B HoD also found it difficult to access appropriate information and reading material samples to help make decisions on reading material purchases at the school (P1, 1:155; 42:42) (P1, 1:68; 56:56). The HoD specifically commented about the need for differentiated reading materials at each grade. As she further explained:

...you have to make a decision and sometimes you make an incorrect decision... you know, sometimes it might be a book for Grade Five but our Grade Fours need that book because they are a bright bunch or vice versa, ... so it is no good saying [to publishers], 'right, I teach Grade Seven, bring what is available'. I need to know what's in Grade Eight and in Grade Six (P1, 1:69; 57:60).

The HoD also wanted to implement a reading series programme in the Intermediate Phase, as the teachers did not have access to one reading scheme. She felt that there was a need for a reading series programme and perceived that learners would benefit from the continuity offered from grade to grade (P1, 1:97; 134:140).

Monitoring of the success of purchased literacy programmes by all role-players was seemingly unique to School A. The process was described by the subject area leader:

[Management] would have reviewed... [the programme] first before giving us the go-ahead to purchase it. They will call us in first of all as subject leaders and they would say 'How is your staff finding it?' They would then go to the staff themselves and say 'How are you finding it?' and on the odd occasion they do call in children and say 'how are you finding it?' So every stakeholder will report back on the success of what has been purchased and then ultimately the subject leader would be responsible then to reporting to the principal of the primary school and then quite regularly a yearly interview with the executive head where we are questioned on the progress of

what has been done. So there's that constant monitoring to make sure that our standards are upheld (P3, 3:121, 123:125).

At School E, the teacher experienced reading materials resource problems not only in English but also in other subject areas (P2, 2:13, 33:33). The teacher had to buy books using her own salary (P2, 2:14, 33:33), or get worksheets from other schools as materials were not always available (P2, 2:11, 29:29). The teacher found this unacceptable and had spoken to the principal, who told her to ask other teachers which books they were using and then fill out a Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) form so that she could get new books (P2, 2:38, 122:131). The teacher acknowledged that she had to find a solution to the problems she experienced with resources in the class by asking the School Management Team (SMT) for assistance (P2, 2:13, 33:33). It thus seems that there was no proactive support on the part of school management to assist the teacher in this regard.

At School F, the HoD pointed out that there was a problem with availability of reading materials at each Grade (P1, 1:14, 27:30) and there were very few readers. At the time of the research visit, readers had been ordered (P1, 1:8, 10:10) as the school had just been declared a “*No-fee school*”, resulting in an LTSM budget allocation (P1, 1:10, 15:20). In the interim, the HoD reported that teachers would use the classroom chalkboard to write letters so that children would be able to see the letters to pronounce them (P1, 1:9, 10:14). Photocopy handouts of stories that the teachers had typed out were also being used for reading instruction (P1, 1:11, 18:22). Another strategy was to use stories available in the textbooks for other learning areas (P1, 1:14, 27:30). Older Sepedi materials were also used for instruction. Perhaps suggesting difficulties in identifying appropriate materials and confusion about links between curricula and reading materials, the HoD mentioned that they used phased out RNCS books:

Well, there are these old RNCS books that ...we requested them during that time [of the RNCS]. We are still using them now because we don't have anything of NCS. The teachers checked the latest material and they did not like them so there is nothing of them (P1, 1:41, 136:147).

7.4.2.2 *Policy on creation of literate classroom environments for learning*

At schools D, E and F, poor literate language classroom environments were observed. At School D, minimal handwritten posters for other subject areas were on the walls, as well as a few newspaper pullouts relating to government. The posters were old, torn and fading. When asked about the availability of readers in the classroom, the teacher at School D indicated that she collected books from the library for a library box for the learners to read during spare time at home, when they had finished their work in class, or if a teacher was out of the class.

Instead of returning the books to the library, the learners swapped them amongst themselves, reading them at their own pace (P3, 3:29, 55:60) (P3, 3:76, 168:168). Management were supposed to check whether or not teachers had books in their library box (P3, 3:77, 168:168). At School E, there was no classroom reading corner and only a few handwritten posters with language rules on the wall. The teacher attributed the lack of a reading corner and posters to a lack of space in the classroom and her recent move to the school (P2, 2:37, 115:121). At School F, there was only a partly visible handwritten English alphabet frieze on the poster boards, an unused birthday chart and one other handwritten poster relaying language rules. Three other handwritten posters containing content on the history of South Africa were displayed. The teacher said that she brought her own magazines to the school for the learners to read and had in the classroom a cardboard box containing readers (P3, 3:36, 151:151) (P3, 3:37, 153:155).

In contrast to these less than optimal print environments, at schools A, B and C there were more posters on the walls and a reading corner or bookshelf in each classroom. School A had the most posters on the walls in the classroom and learners were allowed to personalise the reading corner with their photographs, posters and writing. It was policy at the school for every classroom to have a reading corner and a language-rich environment featuring labels, flash cards, current affairs and events text (P6, 6:17, 89:89) (P6: 6:18, 90:90). Author boxes with stories written by a specific author also featured in classrooms, to introduce learners to different author styles and to encourage a love and enjoyment of reading (P6, 6:25, 88:88).

At School C, it was also school policy for teachers to have a reading corner and posters on the wall (P4, 4:23, 30:30) (P4, 4:44, 62:62). Nonetheless, at School C most of the commercially-bought posters evident in the class had content for other learning areas, with only a few posters related to Language.

At School B, no such policy on the creation of print-rich environment was mentioned. However, the Grade 4 teacher's classroom did feature picture posters and posters for different subject areas, a birthday chart and a 'thought for the day' chart. With regard to the books available on the bookshelf in the classroom, the school B teacher explained that the school did not have money to make books available in the classroom (P2, 2:293, 206:206) so the teacher provided them (P2, 2:89, 200:200), as well as old children's magazines (P2, 2:70, 157:165). In addition, some learners donated them (P2, 2:92, 206:206).

At schools C, D, E and F, it was interesting to note that although the Grade 3 classrooms at these schools were filled with posters and labels for incidental reading, there were minimal

such materials in the Grade 4 classrooms. Therefore, it seems that the creation of a literate classroom environment was no longer considered as important at Grade 4 in these schools.

7.4.3 Learning support resources

Whilst a strong focus was not placed on availability of learning support⁴⁵ resources for data collection for the PIRLS 2006, access to learning support services for learners was an important resource consideration in the six selected schools. All of the schools had learners experiencing learning difficulties to varying extents. At schools C, E and F, teachers' reports on the incidence of learning difficulties seemed to be more prominent than at the two highest performing schools, schools A and B, as well as School D, especially for those African language vernacular learners for whom English was the main language of learning and teaching. Even so, School A was the only school with comprehensive learning support resources for teachers and their learners experiencing difficulties. These resources were in the form of on-site educational support professionals⁴⁶, screening assessments for learning difficulties, tutorials and informal peer tutoring. There were on-site educational support professionals in the form of an educational psychologist, a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist at the school. In Grades 4 to 6, whole group screening assessments for literacy and mathematics were undertaken to "...*gauge the child's chronological age as opposed to their performance results*" (P3, 3:66, 83:83). On the basis of the results of these screening tests, decisions were made as to whether a full scholastic assessment was needed for a learner. Full scholastic assessments were either made privately by the parents or free of charge at the school by the school's educational psychologist with the parents' permission. Parents were reportedly given recommendations and asked to follow them up, while teachers were made aware of learners' areas of difficulty so that they could work on them in class (P3, 3:67, 83:83). Scholar tutorials were given once a week to assist weaker learners, as well as functioning as in-house training for staff to learn how they could address the children's difficulties (P3, 3:64, 89:89). This strategy suggests that learners were treated as partners in their own education at the school.

⁴⁵ Learning or educational support is commonly described as being in the service of the goal for learning and educational development to take place (Green, *et al.*, 1999). Learning support is not confined to a single activity and can be initiated in different ways to fulfil different purposes (Tennant, 2001).

⁴⁶ The term "educational support professional" is often used in the context of learning support (Engelbrecht, 2001, p.17). These professionals may include, but are not limited to, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and psychiatrists or psychologists who have been involved in specialised support provision from within the school context as well as outside the school environment (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002).

Peer tutoring, wherein other children in the class voluntarily help a child who is battling, was another strategy used. This strategy, which the teachers supervised, was used as teachers found that peers of the same age could sometimes explain better than other persons. As a specific learning support strategy for literacy, each learner from Grades 1 to 4 was given a phonemic chart for their desk. Thereafter, in Grades 5 to 7, each child had a photocopied reference of the phonemic chart. The chart was used to help learners who still needed to decode, regardless of which grade they were in.

None of the other schools had such an array of learning support strategies. At School B, with the exception of limited access to other learning support professionals, teachers were tasked with assisting learners experiencing difficulties. Although School B did have a full-time remedial teacher, this teacher was assigned to work with all of the learners at the school except for learner at Grades 6 and 7, as their timetable was too full for the inclusion of remedial tuition. The Grade 4 teacher suggested that the half-hour time allocation once a week was perhaps not enough as she did not see noticeable improvements in the learners who did attend. Teachers at the school were also encouraged to do their own remedial work. However, the HoD recognised that it was not always possible for teachers to do individual or even group work due to the large size of classes and time limitations caused by a full extracurricular timetable at the school. Therefore, teachers had to resort more and more to class tuition to help learners experiencing problems.

At schools C, D, E and F, learners experiencing difficulties were mostly reliant on the efforts of individual teachers and co-opting parental assistance to support them with any difficulties experienced. At schools C, D and E, a main strategy for learning support at Grade 4 was seemingly to obtain materials from the Foundation Phase to use for remedial assistance.

A few teachers at School C had remedial education experience (P4, 4:19, 28:28) and other teachers at the school consulted with them to find out what they could do to help their learners with difficulties (P4, 4:60, 98:98). The Grade 4 teacher specifically consulted with these teachers to find out at which level a child was functioning and what to expect from the child in terms of performance in class (P6, 6:26, 49:50). When the Grade 4 teacher needed to support a child who had severe literacy problems, she would also obtain sight word lists and readers from the Foundation Phase to use. As most learners at the school were ESL learners, teachers also tutored those experiencing problems with English (P4, 4:20, 30:30). When learners with poor English proficiency came to the school from other schools it was sometimes necessary for teachers to “...go back to square one...” by getting Foundation Phase readers to help them to improve their English (P4, 4:29, 34:36). Also, teachers

sometimes had to ask other children in the class to explain tasks to a child in their own languages (P4, 4:70, 72:72). When learners experienced difficulties, teachers sent extra work home for these learners to complete (P4, 4:64, 100:100).

At School D, the teacher reported photocopying Foundation Phase work, calling in the child's parents, giving them the materials and asking them to help the child at home (P3, 3:8, 18:18). Nor was seeking parental support always possible, as parents were absent and the grandparents with whom children lived were not always literate (P3, 3:11, 20:20). Moreover, even though the teacher would "... *take the child for ten minutes maybe after school...*" many of the children were unable to remain behind after school due to transportation issues (P3, 3:11, 20:20). Staff at the school were apparently looking into the possibility of employing a remedial teacher because the existing teachers did not have the time to work individually with a child, due to administrative commitments in the afternoon (P3, 3:24, 44:44).

The teacher at School E reported trying to give learners with difficulties lessons in reading after school (P2, 2:56, 165:165). The teacher would also ask one of the Grade 3 teachers for an advanced Grade 3 level reader so that she could make photocopies of it, and would then ask for assistance from the child's parents by requesting them to read the material with the child at home (P2, 2:57, 167:167). At school F, there was one support teacher for the whole school who would come into the classroom to help learners when requested by the teachers (P1, 1:34, 96:99). Other than consulting with the support teacher, help for children experiencing difficulties was undertaken by the teacher herself. In particular, the Grade 4 teacher would work with learners experiencing difficulties after school hours. She would also work with parents who were willing and able to assist their children by giving the parents worksheets to do with the children.

In contrast to School A, which had onsite educational support professionals, access to such professionals was more limited at the other schools. Schools B and C did appear to have more access to learning support professionals than did Schools D, E and F. School B specifically had a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist who visited the school weekly to work with learners. The occupational therapist did offer lower rates to parents who could not afford her services. Also, if parents at the school could not afford the services of learning support professionals, there was a limited fund to assist these parents. At School C, an educational psychologist from the DoE came to the school to make assessments, which were paid for either by the parents, using medical aid funds, or by the school. Prior to consulting with the educational psychologist, the school's guidance counsellor would speak to the child and review his or her work so that she could write a

report to give to the educational psychologist before assessment. Nonetheless, this educational psychologist was only able to visit the school perhaps once or twice a term as he worked with many other schools. When the educational psychologist did assess learners, he gave a report to the remedial teacher and guidance counsellor. He was able to tell teachers: what areas the child needed support in; whether or not the child had a learning disability; whether the child could cope in mainstream education; what the teacher needed to do; and if it was advisable that the child needed to see other educational support professionals. The teachers would then try to adapt instruction to assist the child (P4, 4:58, 83:96). Although the school did not work in conjunction with these providers, when learners experienced difficulties teachers would also refer them to external remedial education providers (P4, 4:63, 100:100).

At School D there were seemingly no visiting education support professionals, and parents were requested to take their children for an assessment when their child experienced a learning problem (P3, 3:23, 37:40). When learners in her class had specific learning disabilities, it was difficult for the School E teacher as she had to request information and strategies for dealing with these learners from specialists outside of the school (P2, 2:60, 167:179). The teacher reportedly had to make an appointment with a DoE official, seek the parents' permission to take the child to see the official, and then wait for the official to advise the teacher what to do (P2, 2:62, 184:187). The only form of help the school received directly was from a DoE psychologist, who would evaluate the child and offer advice. However, the psychologist had only recently visited the school for the first time and the teacher had not met with this support specialist. Also, this psychologist worked with the whole school. As the teacher said in this regard:

So, it's quite difficult because you never get to see... and speak to her... about the problems that you encounter in class, because... as a teacher, I'm not specialised on that level, I don't know, I also need some guidance there (P2, 2:60, 167:179).

The only other learning support option the teacher mentioned was filling in support forms and referring the child to a school for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN). The teacher also sought informal advice from the vice-principal of the school, who, even though she taught Economic Management Sciences, knew the learners well as she had been teaching at the school for a long time (P2, 2:63, 188:195). The school did not have any remedial teachers as these had been removed by the DoE (P2, 2:60, 167:179).

Although Schools C and E appeared to receive minimal and likely ineffective support from DoE officials for educational support, due to time lapses between visits and lack of contact

with teachers. School F had even less support. Although the school had also sought help regarding remedial support from the DoE district office, the person responsible had only been to visit the school once during the school year, two months earlier. As stated by the teacher *“She wouldn’t have come had we not invited her... when she came we expressed our concerns and then she also saw what we gave her and then she said she will render the support she can ...”* (P1, 1:35, 99:107).

7.5 PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION OF READING LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING

In this section, school-level organisation and initiatives for reading literacy teaching and learning are discussed, in particular, planning and monitoring (7.5.1); management of phase and grade transitions (7.5.2); opportunities available for continuing professional teacher development (7.5.3); collegial support and cooperation between teachers at each school (7.5.4); initiatives for learners’ reading literacy development (7.5.5); and time allocation for English language (7.5.6).

7.5.1 Planning and monitoring

Perhaps impacting planning, at Schools A, B and D, all of the Grade 4 teachers were responsible for teaching English language. Whereas, at Schools C, E and F, one teacher taught English Language only at Grade 4, at the other schools the teachers taught other subject areas too.

Although their occurrence varied, formally scheduled planning meetings were in place at Schools A, B and C, which had class averages at the PIRLS international benchmarks in 2005. At School A, there were monthly grade-based planning meetings between the subject area leader and the Grade 4 teachers. At these meetings, book and assessment quality control occurred; feedback was given on cluster meeting attendance; ideas were shared; goals were set for teaching; and reflection on the success of previous approaches took place. Teaching methods, specifically new methodologies, were discussed and flexible problem-solving was employed to explore options. Another feature of literacy programme planning at the school, was so-called *“road mapping”* in which staff met to plan for the following year, discussing strategies that worked, those that had not and goals for the future (P3, 33, 47:47). The primary school principal was involved in strategising teaching:

And then we’ve got... our principal who will bring us feedback from the principals’ meetings and

she'll say 'this is what's happening at other schools. Would you like to try it?'. So it's quite democratic, there's nothing autocratic. It's not set in stone. So we'll say 'you know we tried it. It didn't work. Can we try something else?' (P3, 3:119, 121:121).

The Grade 4 teacher also provided insights into classroom-level planning. She mentioned having a year plan and a weekly plan for teaching. The weekly plan was adjusted according to current events to maintain learners' interests whilst adhering to the broad objectives of the year plan. As the HoD stressed:

There's intense planning and I must say in my thirty-one years of teaching, twenty-one were spent at another school and ten here, I have never in all my talks with other colleagues seen a school that puts so much emphasis into their work structures and the remediation (P3, 3:183, 89:89).

Besides active involvement in planning for learning at School A, the subject area leader acted as chief moderator of assessments; a teacher at the grade would set the assessment obtaining input from a teacher at the grade which follows this grade (P3, 3:13, 28:35). In this way cross-grade assessment quality control was achieved.

With the exception of meetings at the beginning and end of the school year, formal planning for teaching at School B was driven by teachers via weekly grade meetings. The HoD was unable to attend any of these, explaining that there was not enough time for meetings as teachers worked all of the time between classes and extra-murals (P1, 1:8, 10:10). As an alternative, she conducted informal "veranda meetings" if she had ideas to share with individual teachers or if teachers were experiencing problems they wanted to discuss. The Grade 4 teacher also provided some insights into her experiences of planning at School B, saying that all of the Grade 4 teachers did the same work and their learners wrote the same tests. The learners had to write the same tests with the same marking standards to allow for decisions to be made for streaming them at the end of Grade 4 (P2, 2:95; 213:216).

The teacher also declared that: "...we're actually just redoing all our planning to put [in] all the LOs and ASs⁴⁷..." (P2, 2:48; 90:91), and, perhaps revealing her frustration with the changes, went on to explain that:

... we used to have like a very old fashioned traditional planning where we had our day book... and weekly and yearly planner, but now that we are changing over to the new system. We're actually 'very up in the air' with planning at the moment... [Researcher: Is it a school system or a district...] It's what the government wants... and the union has given guidelines, and then... [the HoD] has given guidelines, but putting it all together is taking forever... we've done quite a lot of subjects. We've left Maths and English because they're more difficult... So, we've been doing this since the beginning of the year (P2, 2:97; 210:212).

⁴⁷ LOs = Learning Outcomes; ASs= Assessment Standards

When asked about planning at School C, the HoD cited staff meetings, phase meetings, subject area meetings, standards head meetings, and school management team meetings (P4, 4:35, 54:54). When planning, role-players involved discussed ideas and strategised the best options available (P4, 4:36, 56:56). The Grade 4 English teacher explicated phase-based planning at the school (P6, 6:24, 43:44). For English as a learning area, each grade in the phase followed the same eight themes, but the content became more advanced as the learners moved into the higher grades of the phase (P6, 6:21, 38:38). The language teachers in the Intermediate Phase met once a term to discuss activities, progress made and any problems experienced. In this regard, the teacher experienced the school as a very supportive environment (P6, 6:25, 45:48). Beyond formal planning strategies, teachers were constantly discussing strategies in an informal manner. As the HoD noted “...*Teachers never stop being teachers, because it is during the break, after school, in our spare time we’re always discussing ‘maybe we can do this right or do that right’*” (P4, 4:34, 54:54).

Whereas formal planning strategies were in place at schools A, B and C, teachers were less clear on how planning took place at schools D, E and F. There were three Grade 4 English teachers at School D, with each teaching one English class. A discussion around the planning of teaching between these teachers was somewhat vague and mostly seemed to revolve around the sharing of materials, with no indication of any formal arrangements. The HoD and teacher explained that “*so what we do, we sit together and we follow a certain plan and if I have got extra material... I would photocopy for the other teachers, if they have extra material they photocopy and give me*” (P3, 3:18, 31:32). The four Grade 4 teachers at School E did grade-based preparation, which was also theme-based with a goal of cross-curricular integration across the subject areas (P2, 2:21, 55:59) (P2, 2:61, 180:183). Teachers at the school had a year-plan file containing work schedules, but each teacher was able to decide whether he or she wanted to do daily, weekly or monthly lesson planning (P2, 2:21, 55:59) (P2, 2:61, 180:183). The teacher herself planned her lessons according to a two-week cycle, mainly as a result of monitoring of planning implementation by the DoE. As the teacher expressed:

I normally work on a two weekly cycle, because you tend to find that you prepare your lesson for over two days and then you don’t finish it within that two days and then you can either finish it in that time over a period of the two weeks, you can still finish it ... because the Department comes and they say: ‘you said you were going to finish this within two days, why haven’t you?’... So, it’s just to cover yourself (P2, 2:22, 60:75).

Given the teacher’s discussions around planning and organisation at the school, one can surmise that she may have had little support from the HoD for teaching and learning. When the teacher started at the school two months prior to data collection it was frustrating for her

as she needed to go to the previous teachers to find out at which level her learners were. The teacher also had to teach English to the Afrikaans and English Grade 4 classes, and was confused about whether or not to use first or second language material as the learners were mostly second language learners. Once this was cleared up, she had to go back and draw up work for both learner groups, perhaps suggesting that no existing materials were made available for her use. The teacher stated that “...it was actually a bit frustrating, because I couldn’t find my feet at first, I was [thinking] ‘what should I do now?’” (P2, 2:7, 29:29). On this basis, it seems that school management had provided little or no assistance to the teacher when she started at the school.

The School F HoD admitted that planning structures at the school were remiss. There had been a change of school administration which made meeting and planning for learning difficult:

... We have a new administration, we have a new principal. And then, a lot of things changed... but, mostly, even the educators themselves thought, now we... will relax... And then there was that conflict that took place, it’s not yet over, but... We are getting there... And as a result we had to sit in long unending meetings... Trying to fix up ourselves as management first and then getting to the educators and getting our things in order first... It has been a lot of work (P1, 1:50, 213:227).

Prior to the changes, the HoD indicated that teachers used to meet informally in the afternoons to help each other with work, although not necessarily in learning area groupings (P1, 1:51, 229:235). The HoD further pointed out that the last time any active planning on the learning programmes and work schedules took place at the school was in 2006, when the teachers worked together and did planning for 2007, 2008 and 2009. As such, teachers worked individually following the work schedule and learning programme and the HoD made sure that they stuck to this planning in their teaching (P1, 1:45, 165:169). The HoD had “...to see to it that the language is improved” (P1, 1:22, 60:60), render whatever support possible and make sure that teachers had what they needed (P1, 1:23, 60:60). The HoD also had to monitor teachers by making sure that they did teach in class and by checking their files. However, this monitoring of teachers was not always easy as “... the attitude of teachers it’s not that good” (P1, 1:25, 60:65). The Grade 4 teacher mentioned that although she was the only English teacher at Grade 4, teachers usually tried to teach using the same theme across the learning areas as cross-curricular integration was encouraged (P3, 3:18, 48:50).

7.5.2 Phase and grade curriculum implementation coordination

School A was the only school with an active strategy to deal with the coordination of teaching and learning across the phases at the school. Grade 4 reading literacy teaching at School A

took place within a larger school-wide framework for the teaching of reading literacy and promotion of reading literacy development. Reading literacy teaching programmes at each phase in the primary school (including the pre-primary) were co-ordinated to meet the reading literacy requirements for the next grades and phase of schooling. One of the tasks of the Intermediate Phase English language subject area leader was to meet with the Foundation Phase literacy leader and high school teachers during the school year to ensure that learners entering and exiting the phase would be able to meet the standards of reading literacy development expected of them at the first grade in their next phase of education.

At Schools B and C, teachers were in the early stages of grappling with the issue of coordination and continuity either between the grades or between the phases. Although the School B HoD recognised the importance of coordination and continuity of teaching between the Intermediate Phase grades, no active strategy was yet in place. The HoD was experimenting with strategies to get learners reading specifically at Grade 7 with the intention of trying to implement these strategies at other grades at a later stage. She wanted the Intermediate Phase to go back to the basics of reading. As the HoD pointed out, *“we want to have a filter from Grade Three so that there is continuation right through to Grade Seven and should there be problems, then we go back to Grade Four and see what we can do ...”* (P1, 1:6; 10:10). Although, the School C HoD monitored progression in curriculum implementation across the Intermediate Phase grades, in interacting with the DoE, teachers had also realised that there was a gap between Grade 3 and Grade 4 education. As a result, teachers in the Intermediate Phase had started to interact with the Grade 3 teachers *“to find out exactly where they are with their literacy and numeracy and we try to bridge the gap with them”* (P4, 4:31, 37:40). Plans were also in place to provide the work schedules for Grade 4 Mathematics and Languages to work on the gaps between the two phases (P6, 6:29, 52:54).

At Schools D and F, interactions between grades only took place at the end of each school year to exchange information on where each learner was. At School D, the Grade 4 teachers interacted with the Grade 3 teachers to obtain information about their learner group for the following year. Also, if a child experienced problems at Grade 4 the teacher could go back to the Grade 3 teacher for information about their experiences of the child (P3, 3:26, 45:46). At School F, the teacher met with both the Grade 3 and Grade 5 teachers at the end of each year so that they could discuss the learners’ progress in reading and each teacher would know where to begin the following year (P3, 3:9, 28:28).

7.5.3 Opportunities for Continuing Professional Teacher Development

Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) was only acknowledged as a feature at Schools A and C. Ideas for teaching at School A were generated via: attendance of cluster meetings each term; attendance of courses; workshops; inviting guest speakers to the school; research; and conference attendance. The expertise of School C teachers was utilised for further CPTD. During staff meetings “mini workshops” where teachers with more experience in a certain topic, e.g. remedial education, discussed with the other teachers what could be done to help their learners (P4, 4:59, 98:98). Also, when there was an issue that needed to be addressed at the school, workshops with people from the school or from outside were organised. The DoE also provided information on workshops that teachers at the school would sometimes attend (P4, 4:59, 98:98). In contrast, in reference to the challenges of CPTD for teachers at School B, the HoD outlined that *“There is always so much more we could do, but (a) we don’t have any exposure, (b) we don’t have the money, (c) we don’t have the time”* (P1, 1:94; 120:120).

7.5.4 Collegial support

The only two schools where collegial support for teaching was strongly evident from the data were Schools A and C. At school A, teacher teamwork was emphasised with teachers parallel teaching, making parallel assessments and parallel marking. There was an open-door policy in each classroom and colleagues would observe each other’s lessons and offer peer critique and support. The subject area leader observed that *“... everything is done as a whole. We always emphasise that there is no - and I know it sounds clichéd - but that ‘there is no ‘I’ in team”* (P3, 3:21, 31:33). As further emphasised by the subject area leader:

Lately we’ve really just ‘all come to the party’... [teachers] say ‘I don’t really agree with what you’re saying, can we try it this way?’... it’s trial and experiment. We [management] don’t profess to know everything and ... [the teachers] will say ‘sure, let’s give it a shot’ and we’ll reconvene and we’ll say ‘you know it really didn’t work. Are there any other avenues that we can explore?’ so it’s really superb (P3. 3:26, 43:43).

Likewise, there was evidence of collegial support for the development of language at School C too. As noted by the HoD:

...we have realised that if there is a problem in English it flows... onto the next subject and the next and the next. So, if the Maths educator for example says: ‘you know what, these kids really do not understand this concept’ then we will try and figure out... how we can make these kids understand it. For example if the child does not understand a concept in maths and it is a specific word then we will say ‘take out your dictionary, use it, even if it is Maths period you still take the dictionary because you are learning a skill...’ and we have realised that English leads onto everything else

and if the child doesn't understand English we are going to have a major problem in everything else. So as educators we work together, we realise that you must have a support system, you have to work together, if you cannot work together then everything else falls apart. So at the moment I am happy to say that we are working together as a team and we try to address whatever problem we have... for example if there is a concept that my children are having a problem with and the next educator is teaching it in their subject they can explain it better I would tell the teacher: 'you know what, I had a problem with this, just explain to them again' and I then I will help out again when they come to me, so in that way we help each other out (P4, 4:41, 59:60).

7.5.5 Initiatives for learners' reading literacy development

School-level initiatives to encourage learners to read were apparent at Schools A and C. School A had a number of strategies to encourage learners to read across the primary school. A 'readathon' was held every year for the Foundation Phase grades and every alternate year for the Intermediate Phase grades. There was a "character in theme day" held at the school every year, in which learners dressed up as their favourite book character. A literacy quiz was also held every alternate year. Moreover, drama productions of novels were undertaken at the school (P3, 3:123, 127:127). At School C, there was a reward system in place wherein the best reader in each grade as determined by a reading record was given a bursary (P4, 4:75, 8:8). Moreover, learners had to donate a book to the school on their birthdays, stating from whom it was received to make the donor feel special. It was also policy at the school for learners to speak English at all times to improve their proficiency (P4, 4:26, 30:30).

No formalised strategies to encourage reading literacy development were mentioned at Schools B, D, E and F. When asked about strategies in place at school D, the HoD responded that management encouraged teachers to: take learners to the library; use extra materials for reading; and share these materials with other teachers (P3, 3:73, 161:164). Although no mention was made of any direct school-wide strategy to improve learners' reading literacy at School B, there were a number of organisational plans in place that could play a major role in learner achievement in reading literacy at the school. Firstly, the school streamed learners according to ability from Grade 5 onwards. In 2005, when the PIRLS 2006 assessments were administered, the school still used streaming from Grade 4. Secondly, as highlighted above, the school was very much involved in ensuring that learners' entered Grade 1 with at least two years of English language exposure. Thirdly, although it was acknowledged as being against policy, the school only introduced Afrikaans as an Additional language in Grade 3. Lastly, the school tried to ensure a supply of quality teachers by employing student teachers so that they were experienced in the school's methods and also understood the learners. These teachers then remained at the school for a certain period after their training (P1, 1:75; 63:74).

7.5.6 Time allocation for English language

There was slight variation in the time allocated for English language instruction at each of the schools. At Schools A and C, four hours per week were allocated. Of the four hours allocated at School A, one-and-a-half to two hours were spent on reading instruction. The Language timetable at School C was reportedly structured according to the DoE time guidelines for teaching certain areas of the language, such as listening, speaking and writing (P4, 4:8, 18:18). At School B, five hours for English language instruction were allocated per week (P1, 1:49, 34:36). The amount of time allocated to reading instruction in each class was dependent on the individual teacher. The HoD had told teachers that they should dedicate one hour a week to writing and the rest to all of the language activities that encompassed reading (P1, 1:104, 153:160).

At School D, the teacher estimated that approximately four-and-a-half hours were assigned to English language instruction per week. Half-an-hour per week was allocated to formal reading instruction. Learners at School E had five periods of English a week. Judging by the class timetable provided by the teacher, the periods were approximately 40 minutes each, meaning that learners had about four hours of English language instruction a week. School F had a six-day timetable. English was allocated six periods during this cycle of 35 to 45 minutes each (P3, 3:27, 112:119). The district reportedly had recently told the school that this was not enough time and recommended one hour periods, which the teacher felt was not practical (P1, 1:46, 172:183).

Time allocation for Grade 4 English language instruction was experienced as problematic at Schools A, B, E and F. Time constraints could impede implementation of the curriculum. The HoD at School A pointed out that the time allocation was not enough to fulfil the school's goal of making their learners better and consistent readers, which is why parental involvement was needed (P3, 3:40, 53:53). Moreover, covering the curriculum was quite pressurised, especially as the school had to fit a second additional language into the timetable too (P3, 3:180, 198:198). At School B, teaching time allocation was also experienced as problematic. The HoD found that as learners were "...so slow these days..." with poor skills, curriculum implementation had also slowed down (P1, 1:49, 34:36). Emotional, home and discipline problems also impinged on teaching time (P1, 1:159, 42:42). The School E teacher found that the teaching time allocation was inadequate and wished to have less administration and longer periods so that she could have more teaching contact time with the learners (P2, 2:27, 81:81). As a result of time constraints, she found that she did not always get through the planned content for the week and so had to continue with it in the following week (P2, 2:32,

97:101). A time-consuming problem at School F was that the teacher had to revert to work from prior grades to help the learners with their English reading, with the result that she too battled to keep up with her work schedule. This sometimes meant that she used after-school hours to do the work (P3, 3:13, 34:38).

7.6 PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

A number of themes regarding perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation came to the fore. In this sub-section the following themes are discussed: curricular implementation strategies and problems experienced in this regard at each of the schools (7.6.1); the teachers' critique of: curriculum documents (7.6.2); DoE support for curriculum implementation (7.6.3); administrative tasks associated with the curriculum (7.6.4); pace of curricular implementation (7.6.5); indications of experiences with the Foundations for Learning Campaign (DoE, 2008a) (7.6.6).

7.6.1 Overview of curriculum implementation strategies and challenges

Differences in understandings of and approaches to curriculum implementation emerged. At schools A and C, although the approaches followed in achieving this were different, there appeared to be much more focus placed on coverage of the LOs and ASs for the Language curriculum than at the other schools. Moreover, at Schools A, B and D, traditional approaches to teaching were reportedly combined with curricular approaches.

Of the six schools, School A seemingly had the most comprehensive strategy of curriculum implementation. The teaching curriculum at School A was strongly aligned to the LOs and ASs for English Home Language learning as outlined in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2002b). The importance of curriculum alignment at the school was noticeable by: the allocation of an LO and AS to every task written or pasted into the learners' workbooks; parent meetings at the beginning of the year to discuss curriculum requirements; the placement of posters depicting the LOs for English Language in each classroom; and the provision of an assessment rubric with LOs and ASs stated for each assessment task. Furthermore, the Grade 4 learners were aware of how their learning tasks aligned to the LOs and ASs, as highlighted by the following:

"The kids are so [familiar with the RNCS Learning Outcomes]... It's actually amazing... If I say 'LO 6', they say 'what AS?'" (P11, 11:70, 340:344).

Operationalisation of the LOs and ASs at the school was, however, deemed necessary as it was considered difficult to ascertain what teachers should teach from the curriculum documents:

... OBE is very broad-based and it is 'do whatever you feel comfortable with'... whilst we adhere to the Assessment Standards... we've got formal teaching methodologies in those places. So we'll say 'the children need to be able to focus on...' but we will be specific. We won't just say 'Spelling' because spelling can have a wide variety of interpretations (P3:79, 94:99).

Teachers at the school also continuously reflected on and adapted these operationalised curricular goals as a result of the outcomes that they experienced with their learners (P3, 3:79, 94:99). When commenting on OBE specifically, the School A subject area leader expressed that OBE was failing in South Africa and that the teachers were resorting to the traditional strategies of 'talk and chalk', building the basics, drilling and repetition (P3, 3:172, 188:188). The subject area leader also pointed out the need to ensure consistency of implementation of the curriculum across schools, especially as *"...some people are following the curriculum and others aren't. Some are focusing on certain Assessment Standards and others aren't"* (P3, 3:162, 171:171).

At School B, the formal curriculum did not appear to play such an incremental role in teaching practices. The teacher at School B generally linked her ideas of the curriculum to her impression of OBE and her strategy to combine traditional methods with some aspects of OBE, which she felt worked at the school. In comparison to curriculum implementation at Schools A and C, there did not seem to be a cohesive strategy for implementation, as revealed by the following statements:

... you see we are not really a very OBE sort of a school, to be honest. [The principal] announced five years ago that OBE won't work and then at prize giving at the end of last year, he just said to the parents, ... 'I was on record five years ago saying OBE won't work and now the government has admitted that it's not working...'... So, we combine traditional methods, but ...we take what's best from OBE, but ... [the HoD] she's very into OBE, she loves it, she thinks it's the best thing ever... (P2, 2:107, 259:260).

But I wouldn't say we're very, maybe 'OBEfied' [at Grade 4]...The same in Grade Five... I think Grade Six as well. I think it's only Grade Seven where... [The HoD] is really pushing [OBE] (P2, 2:111, 270:275).

As did the teachers at School A, the School B HoD further reported using the curriculum by operationalising it in terms of her experience and according to the needs of her learner group each year. In this regard, she maintained that *"...you've got to be flexible. You cannot use work that you did last year exactly the same as this year. You've got to adapt to the children that you've got"* (P1, 1:39; 31:32).

At School C, teachers reportedly understood the curriculum and were able to implement it (P4, 4:11, 20:20). In preparing lessons, teachers apparently tried to make sure that there were cross-curricular links between the various learning areas, even if it was just via incidental learning (P4, 4:40, 58:58). The Grade 4 teacher further reported using “...a lot of simple common sense” (P6, 6:22, 38:38) in implementing the curricular guidelines. The HoD at the school specifically used curriculum documents to ascertain what the learners should have been able to do at each grade. The HoD had to check teachers’ lesson preparation to make sure that: all aspects of the curriculum were covered sufficiently; the work set for learners was age-appropriate; there was progression in the level of difficulty of the work covered from grade to grade; and that the work was appropriate for ESL learners in terms of their ability to understand it (P4, 4:1, 4:6). The HoD also moderated examinations and tests to ensure maintenance of standards, developmental appropriateness of questions and increase in assessment difficulty from one grade to the next (P4, 4:4, 8:12). The HoD was perhaps in this way checking quality of curricular implementation at the school.

When speaking about curriculum implementation at School D, similarly to the focus on cross-curricular links at School C, the HoD/ teacher acknowledged that teachers were supposed to work on cross-curricular themes. However, this did not always work as curriculum implementation was dictated by the needs of her learners, and sometimes she had to go back to basic skills, meaning that theme-based teaching was not practical (P3, 3:19, 33: 34). The teacher felt that some of the language ASs were acceptable for learners at Grade 4, others were too easy and others were above the level of a Grade 4 learner. Therefore, the HoD adjusted the work to a Grade 4 level if it was too easy. In this regard, she used traditional materials: *“if it is too easy I kind of move it to the Grade Four level, especially using the old books. I have the old books, the material you know that they used on us when we were still at school”* (P3, 3:40, 79:80).

The School E teacher showed little insight into the school’s curriculum implementation. When asked about her thoughts of the curriculum, she said that she did not experience problems with whatever the curriculum required, and explained that nobody prescribed what she should do. Nor did she have to work only from one source but could do research and use multiple sources (P2, 2:35, 110:113). At School F, the HoD admitted that teachers had difficulties in implementing the curriculum (P1, 1:48, 201:210).

A balanced approach to implementation of the Language curriculum was followed by teachers at School C with all of the LOs assessed (P4, 4:73, 4:4). The teacher reportedly did much integration of each Language LO into each of her lessons (P5, 5:37, 55:56). Likewise,

at School A, no learning outcome was considered more important than the others, and therefore equal focus on all of the LOs for Languages was promoted (P3:35, 51:51). In contrast to the experiences of School A and C in following a balanced approach to implementation, the School F HoD found that the teachers would try to focus on just one AS in their lessons, not realising that they could also indirectly be touching on other ASs (P1, 1:48, 201:210). The School F teacher indicated trying to work on all of the Language LOs during each six day cycle (P3, 3:27, 112:119) but gave no indication of integration. The HoD further admitted that the school had a problem with assessment (P1, 1:47, 188:196).

Despite advocating a balanced approach, the School C HoD acknowledged that the Listening and Speaking LOs were recognised as “...*extremely important*...” (P4, 4:73, 4:4). The HoD at School D was further concerned about what she perceived to be too much focus on oral performance outcomes in the curriculum. The HoD cited the negative impact of this focus instead of on other language abilities:

My problem is that it would say: ... if a learner is orally good, then pass the learner... And then you find out the learner is bad in writing, the spelling is awful... Now the problem is, it catches up with the learner, the higher... [they] go the more problems the learner is going to encounter. When you get to university level, then we've got learners who are very good in speaking, but when it comes to writing, it's a problem. That's my problem with this new curriculum (P3, 3:32, 68:70).

7.6.2 Critique of curriculum policy document

Participants at Schools A, B, C and D conveyed that the RNCS documents for Language were vague and difficult to follow due to complex terminology use (P3, 3:170, 180:188) (P5, 5:34, 45:48) (P3, 3:38, 80:82). Teachers at Schools A and B revealed that with experience and expertise they were able to work with the document.

However, they raised concerns about the ability of other teachers to work with the document, especially non-English teachers:

Look fortunately for us, we've got the materials available and we've got the expertise. So we are able to manipulate the document to suit our needs. But I think even for an underprivileged school teacher that isn't very well versed in the English vernacular. For them to interpret that document even as a second language is very difficult (school A, P3, 3:174, 192:192).

... I know instinctively what I am looking at and I can link it up, but what about these poor teachers that don't have the vocabulary and they are given that thing in English? No wonder we are not getting anywhere in this country. The curriculum needs to be written in plain easy language... (School B, P1, 1:37; 26:26).

The School A subject area leader suggested that the documents needed to be condensed with examples given. The School C Grade 4 teacher in particular had experienced many discrepancies regarding what needed to be done at a certain Grade; found that it was difficult to ascertain whether her learners were progressing at an acceptable level as the RNCS allowed too much leeway; and felt that a curriculum that is much clearer about what children are supposed to do at each Grade is needed (P5, 5:35, 50:54). The teacher stressed that:

Tell us what we need to teach them so that the teacher in Grade Five knows exactly what they are dealing with... and as a Grade Four educator I can do my best and my children are equipped with the skills when they go into Grade Five (P5, 5:38, 58:58).

The School B HoD was concerned that she could not find any direct reference to comprehension in the curriculum (P1, 1:37; 26:26). She further criticised the way teachers might interpret and implement the curriculum:

Well, you see, this is the problem, ...[the curriculum] relies on interpretation. Me, I can keep going for the next twenty years with the same class because there is so much to do, but if you look at the way it's written there... I mean it's a list a mile long, so you do one of everything and tick it off and you say you have done it. I mean, that's not teaching... [teachers are] happy if they can tick it off... To me, if I only do half of it, but the kids can do it properly, then I'm happier than just saying 'well yes I've done everything, aren't I a good teacher?' I'm a blooming rotten teacher because they might have done everything, but they can't do anything (P1, 1:38; 27:30).

The School B teacher also recognised that resources play a role in curriculum implementation, meaning that there could not be one strategy for implementation at all schools. As she indicated, “*there are so many discrepancies between what one school has and what another school has that to blanket treat and say 'this is what needs to be done'. Yes. I don't know*” (P2, 2:114, 282:282).

7.6.3 Critique of support from the Department of Education

Teachers at School B, D and F were critical of the DoE in terms of constant changes and a lack of adequate support. The School B HoD was critical of system changes, stating that “*... it is just the system and everything else, with this OBE nobody actually knows what is going on anymore*” (P1, 1:30; 22:22). The comments of the School D HoD/ teacher dovetail with the School B HoD's concerns about instability due to changes:

... this whole new curriculum thing it's like ...okay we had OBE and it didn't work out. We had RNCS it didn't work out, now we are having NCS and [if] we have new [government education] ministers... [they] will say 'okay, we are moving from NCS to CS' you know (P3, 3:31, 66:66).

The School B HoD pointed out that poor guidance from the DoE contributed to teachers' confusion because "*Everybody comes along and tells you something different, half of it doesn't make sense, because they have never done it in their lives before anyway*" (P1, 1:30; 22:22). She suggested that practical training was needed from enthusiastic people rather than people who "*...just stand there and read from a piece of paper*" (P1, 1:72; 174:174).

At School C, DoE support for curriculum implementation came in the form of memoranda collected from the DoE by the school's principal and cluster meetings. The district facilitator at the cluster meetings was experienced as knowledgeable about her subject and the Foundations for Learning. However, perhaps sharing the experiences of School B, facilitators in the past had not been able to assist with queries as they had been "*...starting off in their subjects for the very first time...*" (P4, 4:9, 19:20).

The School F HoD blamed poor training and support from the DoE on the difficulties teachers at the school had in understanding assessment as the district just sent NCS circulars and memoranda, and did not provide training as they had previously with the RNCS (P1, 1:47, 188:196). According to the HoD, since early in 2007 the District had not had a subject facilitator for English, meaning that the school had received no support until the week before the research visit when officials came for the first time in three to four years (P1, 1:30, 78:87). With regard to district involvement the HoD expressed that:

... and you see the problem with them is that when they come they don't say 'oh we have not done this and we should have done this'. No, all they come is to say 'this is a mess, now you will have to do this' and they will just impose things ... And it becomes difficult because now to the teacher, it is, yes, 'now the boss is here and he has found this and this and this wrong, now I'm guilty, now this is what's going to happen, I will be logged'...all these negative things and now as we speak, teachers are not happy because of the visit, whereas there should have been support. There hasn't been a support just criticising... (P1, 1:30, 78:87).

Moreover, the HoD found that when the district wanted something from the school, they gave unreasonable deadlines. As a result, teachers were forced to be out of the class dealing with the request, which destabilised teaching and learning activities and so led to delays in implementation of the curriculum (P1, 1:52, 235:251). The teacher also affirmed that "*...things that we attend to as a school...*" led to the leaving out of certain AS (P3, 3:24, 83:84).

7.6.4 The impact of administration on teaching and learning

Teachers at five of the schools linked their curricular experiences to time-consuming administration and preparation. At School A, adherence to curriculum-based preparation for teaching and learning was experienced as very time-consuming, involving much after-hours work by teachers (P3, 3:166, 175:177). At School D, the HoD complained about the amount of administrative work. DoE district officials would apparently check the teachers' files, which *"... makes teachers run around fixing... file[s]"* (P3, 3:36, 75:78). However, the HoD thought that teachers should rather get into classes and teach, as files could be in perfect order but this did not guarantee that teachers actually did what was in the file in the classroom (P3, 3:36, 75:78). This line of thought about the DoE's checking of files was echoed by teachers at Schools B, E and F:

you as a teacher have to do everything. You have to work out an assessment task, you have to work out a rubric,... you say... what you're looking for in the lesson, what you want the child to achieve... You have to record marks in a mark book, you have to have an observation book on what the child did in the lesson... personally I think there's too much admin work and too little time in class to spend with the children (School E, P2, 2:26, 79:81).

You will find that someone who is doing well in class, but he is not doing well in the ... the administration and the one who does the administration work is not doing that good in class (School F, P1, 1:26, 65:67).

...That's the last... priority on my list... Contact with the children is priority number one... You know, this other paperwork is, that is the biggest thing that needs to stop. In education, with reading and everything, we don't have time to go and read extra books, extra journals, find out about new ways of reading, explore different computer things, we don't have time because we are too busy filling the date here and ticking there... [rather than doing]... what is necessary, what is needed... (School B, P1, 1:84; 101:108).

7.6.5 Slow implementation of the curriculum

The HoD at School B maintained that there was definitely something wrong with curriculum implementation. She felt that implementation was perhaps too slow in the Foundation Phase, stating that *"...something is not right... it's going too slowly..."* (P1, 1:50; 36:36). She also felt that *"...we are underestimating children..."* (P1, 1:52; 40:40) and that *"it's not that we've got stupid children... there is something wrong in the system and the system's been rocked too many times in the last 10, 15, 20 years. We need stability"* (P1, 1:108, 174:174). Perhaps as an illustration of the School B HoD's concerns about slow implementation, although the School F teacher cited using the curriculum to aid her planning, her discussion suggested difficulties in following the curriculum assessment standards:

...we have a policy document where we see which level to use in Grade 4, but that usually...

[doesn't] work because we have many things that we attend to as a school. As a result there are some.... assessment standards which we miss, so when I consult with a Grade Three English teacher, she will tell me where she left off and then I take over from there (P3, 3:24, 83:84).

The School D teacher also made comments which suggested a curriculum implementation lag. Although specific guidelines were given as to how often to assess learners for a specific LO, it was not always possible as *“there is nothing to assess, the learners are not yet where I need them to be, I think that's the problem”* (P3, 3:33, 70:72). The teacher further explained that she found it better to work at the learners' pace, making sure they were at a certain level before she moved onto the next level (P3, 3:33, 70:72).

7.6.6 Exposure to the Foundations for Learning Campaign

Exposure to the Foundations for Learning Campaign was discussed by teachers at schools B, C and F, with the teacher at School B and HoD at School C mostly positive about it. The School B teacher thought the campaign was good, although it still needed *“... fine tuning...”* (P2, 2:103, 238:242). She also mentioned that *“the whole school was still in the early stages”* (P2, 2:103, 238:242) of exposure to the campaign. The School C HoD experienced its guidelines as being much more specific, telling teachers exactly what the child should be achieving at a certain level and giving teachers *“... a clearer picture of how they go about preparing their lessons”* (P4, 4:6, 14:16).

Differing from the outlooks at Schools B and C, the teachers at School F had ambivalent experiences and feelings about the campaign, as they felt that it had been imposed on them with no explanation (P1, 1:27, 69:77), thus leading to confusion. The HoD thought that that the campaign was no different from what they were already doing at the school, except that plans for the first term were now implemented in terms two or three. Some teachers had thus left their plans as they were and others had made the changes (P1, 1:27, 69:77). The teacher herself mentioned that she did not realise the significance of the campaign:

We had a problem with implementing Foundations for Learning, but our facilitators were here just last week and they encouraged us to implement that because we didn't think it's that important, yes, but we found out that we must do that. So from this week onwards we are planning to implement that. We are fitting the Foundations for Learning, especially... the milestones, we are fitting them in our lessons” (P3, 3:21, 66:66).

The teacher viewed the Foundations for Learning Campaign as *“an old way of teaching”*, as it introduced reading every day and assessed written and spoken work, which she thought was an effective strategy (P3, 3:22, 68:76). Apparently, the school did follow the Foundations for Learning directive to do ten minutes of reading every morning regardless of the learning

area. The school also got a learner to read during assembly. Although the school already had done this previously they were now forced to do it at certain times, which was not always practical (P1, 1:27, 69:77).

7.7 DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF DATA

A number of main themes emerged in the analysis of the meso level school data for the six case study schools. The main themes as summarised in this sub-section are: overall school environment (7.7.1); learner characteristics and parental involvement (7.7.2); resource adequacy and management (7.7.3); professional organisation of reading literacy teaching and learning (7.7.4); and perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation (7.7.5). As to be expected, given the maximum variation sample, schooling conditions varied immensely across the six schools. Nonetheless, there were commonalities between the cases for a number of themes.

7.7.1 Overall school environment

In terms of overall school environment at each of the schools, there were differences in school fees and percentages of learners from economically disadvantaged homes. The highest performing school was an exclusive private school with high fees and few if any learners who were from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (A), both aspects likely to play a fundamental role in achievement levels at the school.

There was variation in socioeconomic status of learners at the two former model C schools sampled (B and C). Similarly to the highest performing school, School B at the next highest benchmark had few if any learners from an economically disadvantaged background, whereas School C at 400 according to class benchmark had 11 to 25% of learners from such a background. School D below the international benchmarks also had 11 to 25% of learners from an economically disadvantaged background. The other two schools (E and F), which were both low-performing, reported that the majority of learners were from economically disadvantaged homes, with School F as the lowest performing school having learners from extremely deprived backgrounds. As indicated in Chapter Three, variation in learner achievement has been linked to whether schools serve privileged or less privileged communities (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992). Given these school profiles, whether or not the school was privileged or not certainly does seem to play a role for the case study schools.

7.7.2 Learner characteristics and parental involvement for reading literacy

- Learner characteristics

The only school environment with little diversity in terms of learners' language and race was School A, the highest achieving school. School B had the most heterogeneous learners in terms of race. However, the ESL status of some did not seem to have a major impact as reportedly they only battled with the finer nuances of the English language. Schools D and F were homogeneous in terms of language and race, however, the majority of the School F learners did not speak English at home, whereas only 25 to 50% of the School D learners did not speak the language at home. Although Schools C, E and F reported that the majority of the learners did not speak English at home, School C had the highest performance level of the three schools, reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks in 2005. Therefore, School C is significant as it reflects a relatively high performing school in spite of a predominantly ESL learner cohort who were not from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

At each of the schools, various insights were provided into the learners' language abilities. At Schools A and B, the LoLT was not mentioned as a major issue for the learners, with ESL learners at School B only struggling with low frequency words and finer subtleties of the language. The LoLT was more problematic at Schools C and F. At School C, Intermediate Phase learners reportedly battled with English, were disinterested in the language and had not yet achieved CALP. The learners also struggled to think critically. This could explain why the class average in 2005 was at the Low International benchmark, which required basic reading skills and the retrieval of straightforward information from the text, not at higher benchmarks which required more advanced levels of comprehension. At two of the schools below the international benchmarks, learners code-switched to their vernaculars when struggling to express themselves in English, suggesting that they had not yet achieved optimal BICS in English. As the only school with a switch to English at Grade 4, the School F learners had only been exposed to English in the third term of Grade 3, with detrimental consequences throughout the Intermediate Phase. Another relevant issue for teachers was the negative impact of ESL learners with little English background entering the school after the Foundation Phase.

For reading specifically, only a few Grade 4 learners at Schools A, D and E reportedly experienced problems with reading, such as slow reading speed, needing to sound out words, finger pointing to follow text and lack of confidence. Teachers at schools D and E could view reading success as decoding only, given generally poor performance levels at the

schools in 2005. At School B, much reading ability variation was reported and a decline in learners' foundation skills and vocabulary had been noted. Teachers at schools A, B and C were concerned about learners' lack of motivation to read, reporting loss of interest in reading once they had mastered the skill, laziness to read and disinterest. The School B HoD shared her opinion on a lack of learner motivation to read by indicating that learners in South Africa start school too late, with the result that they are later too developmentally advanced for their reading levels and reading content leading to boredom.

At the three schools reaching the international benchmarks another prominent issue was the audiovisual-technological orientation of learners. Learners' orientation towards technology had a negative impact on their reading skill and motivation to read. According to teachers, this orientation also led to a lack of learner imagination, thinking and listening skills and poor pronunciation. The School C teacher felt that texts had to be challenging to retain learners' interest.

Mixed ability grouping was problematic at schools A and C, with such classes experienced as stressful for teachers. They had a negative impact on learners in realising their potentials as those requiring extension were held back, and those with difficulties were left out. Teachers could be forced to teach to the middle range of the class and pace of curriculum implementation could be negatively affected. The requirement to provide proof of interventions for LSEN could also be overwhelming for classroom practice. Mixed ability grouping therefore may not be optimal as teachers do not have the support needed to deal with such grouping, especially with large class sizes and a lack of support staff.

Learners' attendance of preschools with English exposure, especially the school's own Grade R, was thought to have a positive impact on learners' language abilities later on in schooling. The School B learners had to have two years of exposure to English at either the school's satellite preschool or its own Grade R, which may have helped ESL learners at the school.

- Parental involvement

School A had positive parental support for their children's learning. This was likely a result of the school's drive to elicit their involvement by means of provision of a document explaining the school's reading development strategy and outlining strategies for parents to assist their children with reading; meetings to explain expectations of parents and learners, as well as provision of LOs for the year to the parents. No other schools had such strategies in place to

encourage parental involvement, and, although parents at School C were required to monitor their children's reading it was unclear whether or not they did. Two other schools reported positive parental support, albeit only by means of meeting attendance. At schools B, C and F it was particularly difficult to get the cooperation of parents whose learners were struggling with some parents at School F even being hostile to teachers.

7.7.3 Resource adequacy for reading literacy teaching and learning

- School library availability and use

Four of the six schools had a library. The three schools at the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks had well-managed and well-resourced libraries featuring recent reading materials. A librarian was appointed at each school and two of the schools had senior learners as library monitors or volunteers. Learners at these three schools had either access to their libraries at breaks and/or after school. However, it was only at the two highest performing schools that Grade 4 learners had formally scheduled time each week for a library period. In contrast, only one school with an average below the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks had a functional library, which did not feature recent materials and did not appear to be as well-managed as the other libraries.

- Classroom reading resource availability and management

There were vast differences in reading resource availability and management between schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks and those that did not. Although the two schools had major differences in school fee structures, no difficulties with reading resource access were reported at Schools A and C. At School B there were however indications that government budget cuts had started to impact negatively on funding for reading resources, meaning that the school had to carefully manage the resource allocation process by means of staggered funding across the grades.

At two schools below the international benchmarks, reading material availability was a major problem. At one school the teacher did not seem to have adequate information or support from school management to obtain much needed LTSM materials. At the other school, there was no budget available for LTSM materials, with the result that teachers had to improvise by using the chalkboard and photocopy handouts of stories and textbooks from other learning areas. At this school, reading material adequacy also seemed to be equated to whether or not the materials were RNCS or NCS aligned. The teachers may not have understood that

there is no distinction, and may not have been able to judge for themselves whether materials were developmentally appropriate for their learners regardless of whether or not labelled by publishers as curriculum-based.

School A was the only one which seemed to have managerial structures in place to monitor progress made in using reading programmes and materials purchased. Multiple role-players were involved in providing feedback on the success of implementation of materials purchased.

Other important issues that were mentioned regarding reading resources were: a perceived lack of appropriate information and samples from publishers to help make informed decisions about LTSM purchases; a need for differentiated materials at each grade due to mixed ability learner groupings; and the need for affordable reading series.

At the three schools below the PIRLS international benchmarks, poor literate classroom environments were observed, with few or no posters or other visual texts for incidental reading. None of the three schools had a reading corner or bookshelf and only class book boxes were reported. At the schools at the PIRLS international benchmarks, there were more posters evident and a reading bookshelf or corner in each Grade 4 class. Indeed, at Schools A and C, posters and other texts, as well as reading corners, were school policy. At School B, this was teacher-initiated without monitoring at school level. At School A, it was also policy for classrooms to have author boxes, flash cards and current affairs texts displayed. Importantly, at School A, each classroom had posters with the RNCS LOs and ASs displayed for the learners, encouraging greater engagement with the curriculum. The discrepancy between literate classroom environments at Grade 3 and Grade 4 were noticeable at Schools C, D, E and F, with Grade 3 classes being superior in this regard.

- Learning support resources

Each school had different processes or structures in place to assist learners experiencing difficulties. Only the highest performing school had ample learning support resource access and structures in place. There were screening assessments to detect difficulties that learners experienced; tutorials for teachers and learners; informal peer tutoring and full scholastic assessments carried out on-site or privately by parents. At the next highest performing school, there was one remedial teacher who worked with all learners. Teachers did not have time to give support to learners due to large class sizes and time limitations caused by a full extracurricular timetable.

At the other schools, learners experiencing difficulties were mostly reliant on teacher and/or parental assistance. At Schools C, D and E, Foundation Phase materials were specifically used for learners experiencing difficulties at Grade 4. The School D teacher pointed out that there was not time to assist learners in the afternoon. At School C, resourcefulness was displayed with teachers consulting with other teachers who had training in remedial education.

Access to external support professionals was not ideal at Schools B, C, D, E or F. At School B, occupational and speech and language therapists visited the school weekly to provide services. However, although a limited school fund was available for parents without the financial means, they had to pay for these services. Teachers at schools C, E and F were reliant on support from DoE-appointed psychologists. Given that a psychologist was appointed for the whole school and other schools in the district, only visited infrequently and did not have contact with the teachers, it would be unlikely that this would be of any help to teachers and their learners. Also, the manner of help afforded would in no way empower teachers to assist their learners as these educational support professionals did not seem to consult directly or collaborate with teachers to render support.

7.7.4 Professional organisation of reading literacy teaching and learning

- Planning and monitoring

The schools at the international benchmarks were the only ones at which it was clear that formally scheduled planning meetings took place regularly. Furthermore, Schools A and C had better planning and monitoring structures in place than School B. School A had monthly meetings for the Language learning area, with the subject area leader's participation. School B Grade 4 teachers had weekly meetings and phase meetings at the beginning and end of the school year. School C used staff, phase, subject area, standards head, and SMT meetings for planning.

During meetings at School A, book and assessment quality control took place. The subject area leader gave feedback from cluster meetings, while teachers set goals, reflected on the success of approaches implemented and shared knowledge and ideas. Yearly 'road-mapping' meetings also contributed to planning structures and monitoring of curriculum implementation. There was also cross-grade assessment quality control at the school. School A was the only one where the principal was also involved in strategising teaching and learning. Teachers followed year plans and week plans which were adjusted according o

current events at the time of implementation. At School C, teachers discussed ideas and best strategies during meetings. Once a term, phase-based meetings were held to discuss progress, difficulties and activities. The HoD monitored curriculum implementation at the school by checking teachers' work.

It was less clear how planning took place at the other schools. At school E, grade-based planning took place, with the teacher working from a year plan and work schedules. Individual teachers could decide how to do planning, which suggested a lack of a school strategy. At School D, there were no direct indications of formal planning arrangements, with the teacher suggesting that teachers met to share materials. At School F, teachers also worked individually, following a work schedule. No planning took place as management was in disarray. It was apparent that teachers also resented any attempts by the HoD to monitor or check their work.

- Phase and grade curriculum implementation coordination

The three schools at the international benchmarks had recognised that it was imperative to coordinate language teaching and learning between Grades 3 and 4. Schools B and C were in the early stages of grappling with the problem of how to go about achieving coordination. At School B, the HoD was investigating how to coordinate teaching between the Intermediate Phase grades only, but whereas the School C HoD monitored progression in teaching in these grades, the school had only just realised the gap between Grades 3 and 4, meaning that teachers were interacting and swapping work schedules to work on the gap. School A had a comprehensive strategy in place to coordinate teaching and learning across all phases and grades at the school. All reading literacy programmes at pre-primary, Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase, Senior Phase including the school's high school, were coordinated to ensure that learners would be able to meet the requirements for the next grades and phase of their schooling. The Intermediate Phase subject area leader met with the Foundation Phase literacy leader and high school to ensure learners would meet standards at the next phase. In stark contrast, at schools D and F, teachers either met with the Grade 3 and 5 teachers to indicate where they left off for reading or to discuss learner characteristics in general only.

- Opportunities for Continuing Professional Teacher Development

Schools A and C were proactive in organising CPTD for teachers. At school A, they attended courses, workshops and conferences, conducted research or invited guest speakers to the

school. At School C, teachers utilised their own teachers' expertise by getting staff with specific skills or knowledge to present mini-workshops to other staff. The teachers also attended external CPTD courses. At School B, the HoD indicated that there was no time, money or opportunities for CPTD, because the school was not in a main centre. No information was available from the three other schools in this regard.

- Collegial support

Collegial support for teaching and learning was only apparent at Schools A and C, with teacher teamwork emphasised at the former. Teachers did parallel teaching, marking and assessment, and there was an open-door policy wherein they could observe and critique their colleagues' lessons. They also explored teaching options together. At School C, regardless of their subject area, they worked together on language development as they all realised its importance for teaching and learning.

- Initiatives for learners' reading literacy development

Only Schools A and C had formalised initiatives to encourage learners' reading literacy development. No formalised strategies were reported at the other schools.

- Time allocation for English language

There was a slight variation in the amount of time allocated for English language instruction at each school, from roughly 3 hours and 45 minutes a week at School F, to five hours a week at School B. Teachers at schools A, B, E and F complained that the time allocation was not enough for curriculum implementation. Learners with difficulties and teacher administration could impact negatively on the time available.

7.7.5 Perceptions and experiences of curriculum implementation

- Overview of curriculum implementation strategies and challenges

In comparison to the other schools, much more focus was placed on curricular coverage at Schools A and C. School A had the most comprehensive strategy of curriculum implementation, as evidenced by curricular alignment of all learning tasks, learner awareness of LOs and ASs, and LO and AS posters displayed in classrooms. At School C, teachers

used curriculum documents for planning, which the HoD checked to ensure curricular coverage. Teachers also tried to create cross-curricular links in their teaching.

At Schools A, B and D, traditional approaches to teaching reading literacy were combined with curricular approaches. Operationalisation of the curriculum to specific goals was deemed necessary at the two highest performing schools, with School A implementing specific teaching methodologies, reflecting on and adapting curricular goals, and School B implementing the curriculum according to experience and learner needs. Similarly, at School D, learner needs dictated implementation and the teacher adjusted curricular goals according to these needs and her experience. However, this meant that cross-curricular linkages were not always feasible. There was concern about a lack of consistency in curriculum implementation across schools in the country. At schools A and C, a balanced approach to using all of the LOs was followed. However, the school C HoD recognised the importance of the Listening and Speaking LOs. Nonetheless, at School D there were concerns about too much focus on oral work in the curriculum and at School F it was felt that teachers did not recognise that a balanced approach meant that they could integrate more than one AS into their lessons. At School E, the teacher seemed to have little insight into the curriculum, while at School F the HoD acknowledged that teachers had difficulties with it.

- Critique of curriculum policy document

At four of the schools, the curriculum was regarded as vague and difficult to use, due to complex terminology. Teachers at Schools A and C felt that teachers needed expertise and experience to successfully interpret it for classroom practice. The School C teacher noted discrepancies in the expected ASs and found it difficult to ascertain if her learners were progressing to an acceptable level. She therefore thought that the curriculum allowed too much leeway for interpretation by teachers and needed to be much clearer. The school B HoD felt that curricular documents needed to be condensed with examples given. It was also her perception that there was no direct reference to comprehension development in the curriculum and she was further concerned that its implementation was reliant on schools having access to resources.

- Critique of support from the Department of Education

Teachers criticised constant changes to the curriculum and a perceived lack of adequate support from the DoE for its implementation. DoE officials were perceived as being either ineffective, with a lack of understanding, or critical rather than supportive of teachers. At

School F, district DoE demands and unreasonable deadlines were experienced as interfering with the process of teaching and learning at the school.

- The impact of administration on teaching and learning

Teachers at five of the schools pointed out that administrative tasks had a negative impact on their teaching practices. These tasks were experienced as time-consuming and led to teachers working on their files instead of focusing on teaching.

- Slow implementation of the curriculum

There was concern that curriculum implementation was occurring too slowly in the Foundation Phase, with teachers underestimating children's abilities. The School D teacher admitted that she sometimes worked at the pace of her learners and not according to curricular expectations, so as to ensure learners adequately grasped the work. External factors at School F also meant that teachers missed addressing some ASs.

- Exposure to the Foundations for Learning Campaign

Exposure to the Foundations for Learning Campaign was only mentioned at Schools B, C and F. Schools B and C were positive about the campaign, while it was experienced as much more specific for planning lessons at School C. However, at School F, it was felt that it had been imposed on teachers, and teachers did not see its relevance.

7.8 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This chapter has dealt with the presentation of data to partly answer the first sub-question for the study. Each of the school cases were compared for similarities and differences in the conditions of practice for Grade 4 learners' reading literacy development.

Findings for the phase 1 secondary analysis of the micro level PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data partly answering research sub-question two are dealt with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PHASE ONE FINDINGS:

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS, CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS AND TEACHING PRACTICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING LITERACY

8.1 ORIENTATION

Findings for the phase one secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data are dealt with in this chapter. The goal is to describe and compare the characteristics of micro level classroom environments and teaching practices across the identified PIRLS 2006 class achievement benchmark re-classification sub-samples identified for this study. This chapter therefore partly addresses research sub-question 2 for the study, namely:

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

In section 8.2, the backgrounds of teachers who completed the PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire are illustrated and, class composition and reading specialist availability is then considered (8.3). Access to and use of reading resources by teachers in their classrooms is then outlined (8.4) followed by discussion of time allocation for instruction (8.5). Thereafter, reported classroom reading instruction activities and comprehension development practices are presented (8.6) followed by reports about homework and assessment activities (8.7).

The descriptive statistics for PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data are presented from the perspective of learners' educational experiences and thus the unit of analysis for this chapter is the learner allocated a class average reaching each of the designated benchmarks and not the teacher who completed the questionnaire (see Appendix I for all of the teacher questionnaire data tables). Again, the data associated with class average benchmarks of EAL 325 and EFL 550 are based on small sample sizes due to the sampling strategy used which means that findings associated with these benchmarks are not generalisable. To determine whether there was an underlying structure for the items comprising selected scales from the teacher questionnaire, exploratory factor analysis⁴⁷ of each scale's items for four merged benchmarks (EAL 175-325; EFL 175- 325; EFL 400; and EFL 475-550) was undertaken. As discussed in Chapter Five, a number of criteria for the factorability of the

⁴⁷ See Chapter Five for an explanation of the process undertaken for the factor analyses.

items were used. Only those factors and benchmarks meeting these criteria are included in the reporting for this chapter (see Appendix J for all of the factor analysis statistics). Furthermore the factors were also tested (see Chapter 5 for details) to explore if there were differences in the factors between benchmarks.

8.2 TEACHER BACKGROUND, TRAINING AND PREPARATION

In this section, trends in Grade 4 teacher age ranges are considered across the class average benchmarks (8.2.1), as are trends in their number of years of teaching experience (8.2.2). The teachers' formal education is also considered (8.2.3). A summary of the findings on teacher background, training and preparation is then presented (8.2.4).

8.2.1 Teacher age range trends

The language teachers indicated their age ranges (Table 8.1). The highest percentages (between 36% and 78%) of learners at each of the class average benchmarks were taught by teachers in the age range of 40 to 49 and the next highest percentages (22% to 40%) were taught by teachers in the age range of 30 to 39. Very few learners were taught by teachers either *under 25* years of age or between 25 and 29 years.

Table 8.1: Percentage of learners taught by teachers at each age range

PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks	Under 25		25 - 29		30 - 39		40 - 49		50 - 59		60 or more	
	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)
175 EFL	-	-	79	20.4 (12.2)	321	22.8 (11.3)	359	35.9 (13.9)	121	21.0 (7.8)	-	-
175 EAL	-	-	22	1.2 (1.2)	2643	39.5 (4.8)	3374	40.9 (4.8)	1038	18.5 (3.6)	-	-
325 EFL	37	7.3 (6.7)	-	-	176	31.6 (13.2)	217	48.5 (15.2)	73	12.6 (9.2)	-	-
325 EAL*	-	-	-	-	55	35.6 (19.7)	62	43.1 (21.1)	67	21.3 (22.6)	-	-
400 EFL	-	-	-	-	101	40.3 (17.1)	159	57.0 (17.3)	37	2.8 (2.9)	-	-
475 EFL	57	17.3 (13.4)	19	11.4 (9.9)	48	29.6 (19.2)	86	39.0 (16.9)	-	-	31	2.7 (2.8)
550 EFL*	-	-	-	-	14	21.7 (23.1)	38	78.3 (23.1)	-	-	-	-

8.2.2 Years of teaching experience

There were generally not large differences in the mean number of years of overall teaching experience for teachers at benchmark EFL 400 and lower (Table 8.2 below). The teachers at

the highest class average benchmark of EFL 550 had the most years of teaching experience altogether with a mean of about 19 years which was also higher than the overall national mean of 15 years for the PIRLS main study (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

In comparison to their mean years teaching altogether, the teachers had fewer average years of experience teaching at Grade 4 specifically. The EFL 325 teachers had the least experience teaching at Grade 4 with approximately a 3-year mean. The EAL 325 and EFL 550 teachers had the most experience teaching at Grade 4 with a mean of nearly nine years at each benchmark.

Table 8.2: Trends in number of years teaching altogether and at Grade 4

PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks	Years teaching altogether		Years teaching at Grade 4	
	<i>n</i>	Mean (SE)	<i>n</i>	Mean (SE)
175 EFL	880	17.0 (4.0)	836	6.5 (2.7)
175 EAL	6557	15.6 (0.7)	6609	6.2 (0.6)
325 EFL	422	16.1 (3.0)	464	3.8 (0.9)
325 EAL*	184	15.5 (2.3)	184	8.9 (3.5)
400 EFL	297	16.6 (1.6)	297	8.0 (2.5)
475 EFL	241	10.1 (3.0)	241	4.8 (1.1)
550 EFL*	80	19.3 (4.1)	80	8.6 (4.5)

8.2.3 Teachers' formal education and training

The highest level of formal education that the Grade 4 teachers reported completing is considered in sub-section 8.2.3.1. This is followed by discussion of the type of degree or diploma certifications teachers across the benchmarks held (8.2.3.2) and the focus areas for education and training reported by teachers (8.2.3.3).

8.2.3.1 Teachers' highest level of formal education completed

Teachers were asked to indicate the highest level of formal education that they had completed (Table 8.3 below). Responses were mostly spread across three categories: (1) *finished college or post Matric certificate*, (2) *finished degree or Technikon diploma* and (3) *finished postgraduate degree*. With the exception of EFL 475, the highest percentages of learners at the rest of the benchmarks had teachers who indicated that their highest level of formal education was the completion of *college or a post Matric certificate*. A small majority of learners (56%) at EFL 475 and another 43% of learners at EFL 550 had teachers who had

finished a postgraduate degree. Below the PIRLS international benchmarks only between 20% and 28% of learners had teachers who had finished a postgraduate degree. Although no learners were taught by teachers with a postgraduate degree at EFL 400, 23% were taught by teachers who had completed a degree or Technikon diploma.

Table 8.3: Teachers' highest level of formal education completed

PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks	Did not complete Grade 12/ Std 10		Finished Grade 12/ Std 10		Finished college or post Matric certificate		Finished degree or Technikon diploma		Finished postgraduate degree	
	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)
175 EFL	-	-	-	-	553	71.5 (10.0)	157	8.3 (5.8)	134	20.3 (7.8)
175 EAL	192	3.9 (2.4)	-	-	4057	62.2 (4.6)	1720	23.6 (3.8)	747	10.3 (2.6)
325 EFL	-	-	43	9.3 (9.7)	199	49.1 (16.0)	79	16.3 (10.2)	144	25.3 (12.5)
325 EAL*	-	-	-	-	118	45.0 (22.0)	28	27.0 (18.6)	38	28.0 (19.0)
400 EFL	-	-	-	-	253	76.9 (16.0)	44	23.2 (16.0)	-	-
475 EFL	-	-	28	5.1 (5.4)	71	27.2 (17.6)	29	12.2 (12.9)	113	55.5 (18.4)
550 EFL*	-	-	-	-	24	56.6 (46.1)	-	-	28	43.4 (46.1)

8.2.3.2 Teacher certification

Between 95% and 100% of learners across the class average benchmarks had teachers who were certified to teach. Related to their certification, teachers were also asked what type of diploma or certificate they held, either: a Junior Primary Teacher Certificate (JPTC); a Senior Primary Teacher Certificate (SPTC); a 3-year College of Education Diploma; a 4-year College of Education Diploma; an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE); a Further Diploma in Education (FDE); a university or Technikon Higher Education Diploma (HED); a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE); or Other qualification. Table 8.4 (see below) outlines which qualifications were held at each class average benchmark. The highest percentage (48%) of learners at EFL 550 was taught by teachers with a 4-year college diploma with a further 39% taught by teachers with a JPTC. The highest percentage of learners at EFL 175 (49%), EAL 175 (36%) and EFL 325 (29%) and 31% of learners at EFL 400 were taught by teachers with a 3-year college diploma. An ACE was the most prominent qualification held by teachers of those learners at EAL 325 (53%) and the highest percentages of learners at EFL 475 (37%) were taught by teachers with a PGCE. About 41% of learners at EFL 400 were taught by teachers with another type of diploma or certificate not listed.

Table 8.4: Type of diploma or certificate held

	175 EFL		175 EAL		325 EFL		325 EAL*		400 EFL		475 EFL		550 EFL	
	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)	<i>n</i>	% (SE)
JPTC	40	20.5 (15.0)	689	13.1 (3.5)	67	20.7 (13.5)	-	-	37	2.8 (2.9)	19	17.0 (14.8)	2 8	39.3 (42.9)
SPTC	30	2.0 (2.1)	491	10.1 (3.4)	-	-	-	-	41	11.6 (12.2)	31	4.1 (4.3)	-	-
3 year college diploma	234	49.0 (18.0)	2036	35.9 (3.4)	12 3	28.7 (14.3)	24	29.8 (19.6)	104	31.0 (15.8)	-	-	-	-
4year college diploma	121	2.6 (2.4)	499	11.8 (2.6)	39	10.8 (3.2)	-	-	34	13.7 (11.3)	23	24.2 (26.2)	3 8	47.5 (33.6)
ACE	-	-	274	4.8 (1.7)	-	-	28	53.4 (21.7)	-	-	-	-	-	-
FDE	51	14.2 (11.7)	350	7.3 (2.9)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HED	90	11.7 (9.8)	441	9.8 (3.4)	57	6.1 (4.4)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PGCE	-	-	142	1.8 (1.2)	37	9.5 (8.3)	-	-	-	-	47	36.6 (25.3)	-	-
Other	-	-	431	5.4 (1.1)	87	24.2 (13.2)	27	16.8 (13.9)	81	41.0 (17.7)	29	18.2 (20.1)	1 4	13.2 (16.0)

8.2.3.3 Focus areas for education and training

Teachers specified to what extent (*not at all, overview or introduction to the topic or it was an area of emphasis*) they studied certain focus areas as part of their formal education and/or training. The response options included: language; literature; pedagogy/teaching reading; psychology; remedial reading; reading theory; children's language development; special education; and second language learning. The merged benchmarks of EAL 175-325 and EFL 175-325 met the inclusion criteria set (Table 8.5) for an exploratory factor analysis of the items.

All of the communalities were above .4 at the two merged benchmarks with the exception of one item (psychology) at both EAL 175-325 and EAL 175-325, and it was therefore removed from the analysis for each. Two components were identified at EAL 175-325 and three components at EFL 175-325 (Table 8.6 below). Table 8.7 (below) shows the factor loadings after rotation at EAL 175-325 and EFL 175-325. A Kreskas-Wallis test revealed that there are significant differences between the factors at each of the benchmarks (see Appendix J).

Table 8.5: Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin (KMO)⁴⁸ and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity for teachers’ focus areas for education and training

Merged benchmarks		<i>EAL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475- 550</i>
Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.756	.697	.488	.287
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx chi-square	12846.014	5211.893	3748.657	3129.230
	Df	36	36	36	36
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 8.6: Total variance explained for teachers’ focus areas for education and training

Component	<i>EAL 175-325</i>			<i>EFL 175-325</i>		
	Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values		
	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %
1	3.501	38.897	38.897	3.559	39.550	39.550
2	1.486	16.515	55.412	1.624	18.040	57.590
3	.822	9.130	64.542	1.174	13.044	70.634
4	.797	8.850	73.392	.976	10.849	81.483
5	.669	7.432	80.825	.679	7.547	89.030
6	.596	6.620	87.445	.323	3.590	92.620
7	.474	5.267	92.712	.269	2.993	95.613
8	.359	3.986	96.698	.233	2.593	98.206

Table 8.7: Factors loadings⁴⁹ for teachers’ focus areas for education and training

Items	Factor loadings				
	<i>EAL 175-325</i>		<i>EFL 175-325</i>		
Component	1	2	1	2	3
Language		.741			.884
Literature		.827			.779
Pedagogy, teaching reading		.780		.844	
Psychology	-	-	-	-	-
Remedial reading	.753		.844		
Reading theory	.621		.780	.441	
Children’s language development	.781		.762	.418	
Special education	.718		.883		
Second language learning	.538	.435		.722	

For EAL 175-325 the items that cluster on component 1 suggest that teachers at EAL schools below the PIRLS international benchmarks had teacher education focused mainly on

⁴⁸ Based on Field’s (2009) criteria where values greater than .5 are acceptable, with the further acknowledgement that values between .5 and .7 are judged as mediocre, values between .7 and .8 are good, values between .8 and .9 are great and values above .9 are superb.

⁴⁹ For each factor loading table presented in this chapter, negative factor loadings and factor loadings under .4 are suppressed. Items retained for each component after analysis are highlighted in Bold in each table.

addressing learning diversity (i.e. remedial reading, special education, second language learning, and children’s language development) together with reading theory. Although remedial reading and special education were conceptually linked to the other items of the component, a review of the descriptive statistics for the two items at each benchmark for the merged benchmark revealed that whereas the other items were reported as areas of emphasis, neither of these items were reported as receiving any emphasis. Component 2 for EAL 175-325 has item clusters suggesting a secondary focus on traditional *language subject matter training* (language and literature) coupled with reading pedagogy. Second language learning loaded onto component 2 as well. As learners in these EAL schools were learning in English as a second or additional language, it could be that if their teachers were trained to teach English then they could have perceived this as training second language learning.

For EFL 175 -325, factor loadings for component 1 were similar to the items comprising component 1 for EAL 175 -325 in that training *addressing learning diversity* together with reading theory was key. However, unlike component 1 for EAL 175 -325, second language learning only loaded onto component 2 (*reading literacy teaching*) together with reading pedagogy, reading theory and children’s language development. Items (language and literature) for component 3 suggested traditional *language subject matter training*.

Reliability analyses were calculated to determine whether the factors formed reliable scales at each of the merged benchmarks using Cronbach’s Alpha. Table 8.8 provides the case processing summary for the scale under consideration at each.

Table 8.8: Case processing summary for scale of teachers’ focus areas for education and training

<i>Merged benchmarks</i> <i>Cases</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Valid cases included	4799	63.1	1241	85.9	503	100.0	550	89.0
Excluded	2812	36.9	203	14.1	0	.0	68	11.0
Total	7611	100.0	1444	100.0	503	100.0	618	100.0

With Cronbach’s alpha coefficients between .7 and .8, the scale met the criterion of .5 set for exploratory analysis at each of the merged benchmarks (Table 8.9 below). Furthermore, a review of the item-total statistics (see Appendix J) revealed no conceptually viable possibilities to enhance the reliability of the scale at any of the benchmarks via the deletion of any of the items. Table 8.10 (below) provides the scale statistics across the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.9: Reliability statistics for scale of teachers' focus areas for education and training

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>							
<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>
.798	.790	.743	.777	.770	.809	.727	.769

Table 8.10: Scale statistics for teachers' focus areas for education and training

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475- 550</i>
Mean	20.62	19.55	19.92	19.82
Variance	14.514	12.163	13.110	10.138
Standard deviation	3.810	3.487	3.621	3.184

8.2.4 Summary and discussion of teacher background, training and preparation

Most of the learners at each benchmark had teachers aged between 30 and 59 years. This could mean that many of these teachers, especially those with classes at the lower benchmarks, could have attended inferior teacher education programmes and/or did not receive prolonged training for teaching the RNCS (DoE, 2002a) unless via inservice teacher education initiatives. Very few learners had teachers aged *under 25* or between *25 to 29* years. If ongoing replenishment of the teaching force is to take place, one would expect that almost equivalent percentages of learners would be taught by teachers in their twenties, thirties, forties and fifties (Howie *et al.*, 2007).

There were not large differences in the mean number of years of overall teaching experience that teachers at EFL 400 and lower had. Teachers at EFL 550 had the most years of teaching experience altogether. All of the teachers had less average years of experience teaching at Grade 4 in comparison to their average number of overall years in the profession.

With the exception of EFL 475, the highest percentages of learners at the other benchmarks were taught by teachers who had completed *college or a post Matric certificate* as their highest level of formal education. At the two highest benchmarks, more learners had teachers who had *finished a postgraduate degree* than those learners at EFL 400 and lower.

Most learners across the benchmarks had teachers who were certified to teach. Nearly 50% of learners at EFL 550 were taught by teachers with a 4-year college diploma with a further 39% taught by teachers with a JPTC. The highest percentage of learners at EFL 175, EAL 175 and EFL 325 and a high percentage of learners at EFL 400 were taught by teachers with a 3-year college diploma. The highest percentages of learners at EFL 475 were taught by teachers with a PGCE. About 41% of learners at EFL 400 were taught by teachers with another type of diploma or certificate not listed. The majority at EAL 325 were taught by teachers with an ACE. The fact that the EAL 325 learners were the only majority grouping whose teachers had an ACE could suggest that this qualification was beneficial to these learners especially if one considers that this group of learners was the highest performing EAL benchmark grouping.

From the factor analysis it is also evident that for teachers at schools below the international benchmarks a main focus of their training was on addressing learning diversity such as remedial reading, special education, second language learning, children's language development and reading theory. Secondary focus was placed on reading pedagogy and language from a traditional subject matter orientation.

8.3 CLASS COMPOSITION AND READING SPECIALIST ACCESS

In this section, class composition attributes at each of the benchmarks are described (8.3.1). Thereafter, access to reading specialists in light of class composition is considered (8.3.2). A brief summary and discussion of the findings presented is then provided (8.3.3).

8.3.1 Class composition attributes

Table 8.11 (below) provides the mean: Grade 4 class size; number of learners experiencing difficulties with the spoken language of testing for the PIRLS 2006 assessment; number of learners in need of remedial reading assistance; and the number of learners receiving remedial assistance at each of the class average benchmarks. As evident in the table, the higher the class average benchmark achieved, the lower the mean class size apparent. Taking into consideration the high mean class sizes at EFL 400 and lower, it was also apparent that high means of learners experienced difficulties with the spoken language of testing or were in need of remedial reading assistance at these benchmarks. For example, at the lowest class average benchmark of EFL 175, a mean of about 22 learners per class reportedly experienced problems with spoken English, the language they were tested in for the PIRLS 2006, suggesting that these learners had not yet achieved BICS in the language

in spite of being in an EFL school. A mean of about 16 learners per class needed remedial reading assistance whilst a mean of only seven learners reportedly received it.

Table 8.11: Class composition

PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks	Class size		Learners experiencing difficulties with the spoken language of testing		Learners needing remedial reading assistance		Learners receiving remedial reading assistance	
	n	Mean (SE)	n	Mean (SE)	n	Mean (SE)	n	Mean (SE)
175 EFL	880	51.3 (4.1)	854	22.0 (2.7)	834	15.6 (1.6)	402	7.0 (2.0)
175 EAL	7076	45.0 (1.1)	5809	10.8 (0.9)	6712	12.5 (1.0)	5479	9.1 (1.0)
325 EFL	503	43.0 (3.0)	503	11.7 (3.3)	503	9.9 (0.9)	379	4.6 (1.6)
325 EAL*	184	40.3 (8.3)	146	4.1 (1.5)	146	3.9 (0.5)	146	3.3 (0.8)
400 EFL	297	38.4 (1.1)	227	4.7 (1.8)	263	7.9 (1.2)	182	5.8 (2.1)
475 EFL	241	24.6 (1.0)	241	0.8 (0.4)	241	2.5 (0.5)	241	1.5 (0.5)
550 EFL*	80	23.5 (4.0)	66	0.9 (0.2)	66	0.6 (0.8)	66	0.0 (0.0)

Teachers described the reading level of the learners in their class. With the exception of EFL 175, the majority of learners (54% to 100%) across the rest of the benchmarks had teachers who reported that their reading levels were *average* or *above average* (see Figure 8.1). At EFL 175, 46% of learners had teachers who reported that their reading skills were *below average*. Even so, 34% had teachers who reported that they had *average* reading skills.

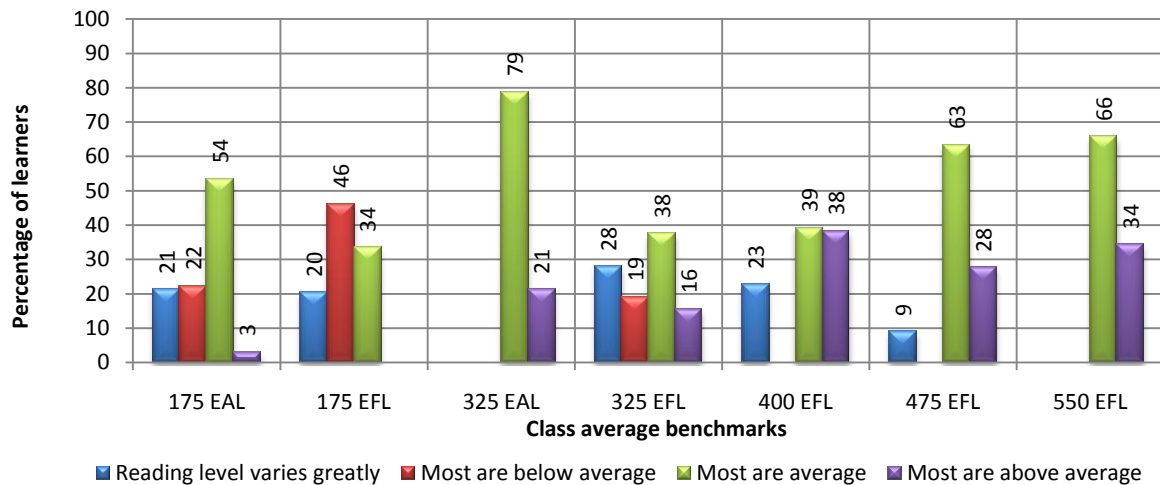


Figure 8.1: Teacher reports on the reading levels of learners

8.3.2 Reading support specialist access

Teachers were asked to what extent they had access to reading specialists, teacher aides and other educational support professionals to deal with learners experiencing difficulties

with reading in their classes. Vast majorities of learners at EFL 400 and lower had teachers who had no access to any reading specialists (see Table 8.12). It was only at EFL 475 and EFL 550 that more learners had access to reading support specialists.

Table 8.12: Non-availability of access to reading support specialists⁵⁰

PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks	No reading specialist to work with learners in the classroom		No reading specialist to work with learners in a remedial reading classroom		No teacher-aide/teaching assistant or other adult to work in my classroom		No other professionals (e.g., learning specialist, speech therapist) are available	
	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)
175 EFL	735	93.4 (4.3)	735	94.5 (4.1)	652	75.5 (10.0)	724	92.9 (5.0)
175 EAL	5708	90.2 (2.4)	5466	86.6 (2.7)	4973	80.8 (3.4)	5951	92.5 (2.2)
325 EFL	465	92.8 (6.6)	465	92.8 (6.6)	426	81.9 (15.8)	503	100.0 (0.0)
325 EAL*	156	100.0 (0.0)	156	100.0 (0.0)	156	100.0 (0.0)	156	100.0 (0.0)
400 EFL	223	95.5 (4.4)	115	56.2 (17.8)	260	100.0 (0.0)	192	86.0 (10.9)
475 EFL	241	100.0 (0.0)	85	28.3 (17.2)	241	100.0 (0.0)	124	58.3 (17.2)
550 EFL*	56	65.6 (30.5)	28	39.3 (42.9)	56	65.6 (30.5)	-	-

8.3.3 Summary and discussion of class composition and reading specialist access

The higher the class average benchmark achieved, the lower the mean class size apparent. At benchmarks below EFL 400 with a high mean class size a high mean number of learners also experienced difficulties with the spoken language of testing or were in need of remedial reading assistance which not all were likely to receive. This would make teaching conditions in such a class extremely difficult with the teacher having to address the varied learning needs of an excessively large class whilst attending to the specific language problems and reading difficulties of large groups in the class. Thus, the fact that few if any learners at these benchmarks had teachers with access to reading support specialists to assist them is especially worrisome. In contrast, despite less need for reading specialist access it was only at the two highest benchmarks that more learners had access to learning support specialists.

With the exception of EFL 175, the highest percentages of learners at the rest of the class average benchmarks had teachers who reported that their reading levels were *average* or *above average*. One might expect teachers in classes reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks to indicate that most of their learners had *average* to *above average* reading levels. However, one would not expect the same for learners at the lower benchmarks where most were clearly struggling with even the most basic reading skills. This suggests that

⁵⁰ This table only reports the *never* response category for this item. Other response categories included *sometimes* and *always* (see data tables in Appendix I).

teachers had inaccurate perceptions of learners’ reading abilities at these lower benchmarks which would impact the goals they set and the level of cognitive demand placed on learners.

8.4 AVAILABILITY AND USE OF READING RESOURCES

In this section, the availability and use of Grade 4 classroom libraries and reading corners and access to school libraries are outlined (8.4.1). Materials used for reading instruction and activities are then considered (8.4.2). Indications of teachers’ use of fiction or non-fiction materials (8.4.3) and their differentiation of reading instruction materials (8.4.4) are also provided followed by a summary and discussion of the data presented (8.4.4).

8.4.1 School libraries, classroom libraries and reading corners

In sub-section 8.4.1.1, availability of classroom libraries or reading corners⁵¹ is discussed together with indications of the materials available in such libraries and frequency of access. Whether learners had access to libraries outside of the classroom is also examined (8.4.1.2).

8.4.1.1 Classroom libraries

Nearly all of the Grade 4 learners at the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks had access to a classroom library (see Figure 8.2). At EAL 325, EFL 325 and EAL 175 the majority of learners did not have access to a classroom library whereas only a small majority of learners at EFL 175 (54%) did have access to such a library.

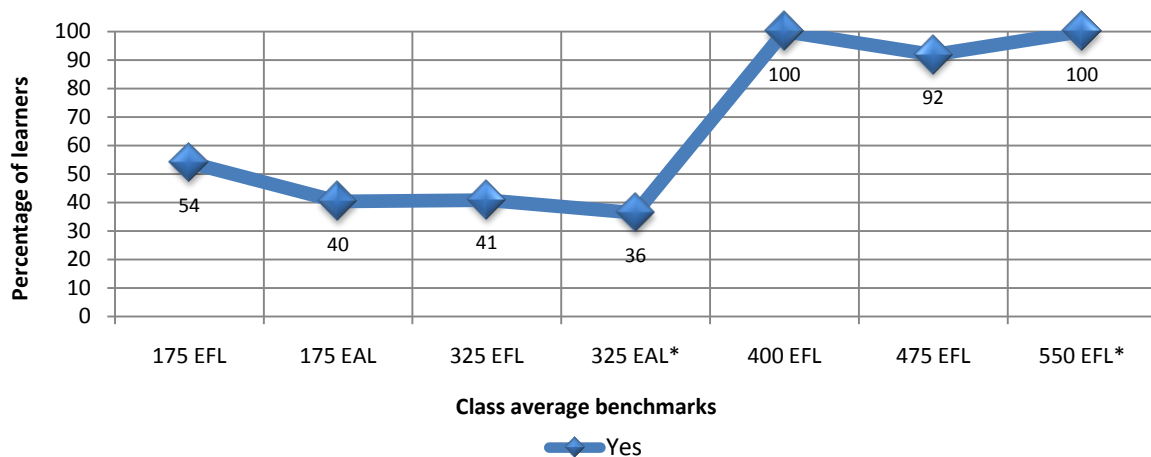


Figure 8.2: Teacher reports on availability of a classroom library

⁵¹ “Classroom library or reading corner” is referred to as “classroom library” in the rest of sub-section 8.4.1.1 to simplify reporting.

For those teachers who indicated that they did have a classroom library, they were also asked about the amount of book and magazine titles available, how much time they gave learners in their class to use this library and if their learners were allowed to borrow books to take home from it.

Table 8.13 reports the mean number of books and magazines with different titles in class libraries. With the exception of the two EAL benchmarks, EAL 175 and EAL 325, there appeared to be sufficient mean numbers of books with different titles at the rest of the class average benchmarks. There were also no magazine titles available at EAL 325 and a low mean of magazines with different titles available at EFL 475. EFL 550 learners had the highest mean number of magazines with different titles available to them.

Table 8.13: Number of book and magazines with different titles in the classroom library

PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks	Number of books with different titles		Number of magazines with different titles	
	<i>n</i>	Mean (<i>m</i>) (<i>SE</i>)	<i>n</i>	Mean (<i>SE</i>)
175 EFL	247	84.8 (44.1)	185	7.4 (3.0)
175 EAL	2077	28.1 (8.6)	1543	5.6 (0.8)
325 EFL	186	74.3 (47.5)	93	8.4 (3.5)
325 EAL*	67	6.0 (0.0)	67	0.0 (0.0)
400 EFL	260	77.5 (9.0)	37	10.0 (0.0)
475 EFL	224	69.0 (20.2)	149	4.3 (1.9)
550 EFL*	80	49.3 (4.7)	80	16.8 (3.9)

For those learners that did have access to a classroom library (Figure 8.3 below), the majority were given class time to use this reading resource *every day or almost every day or once or twice a week*.

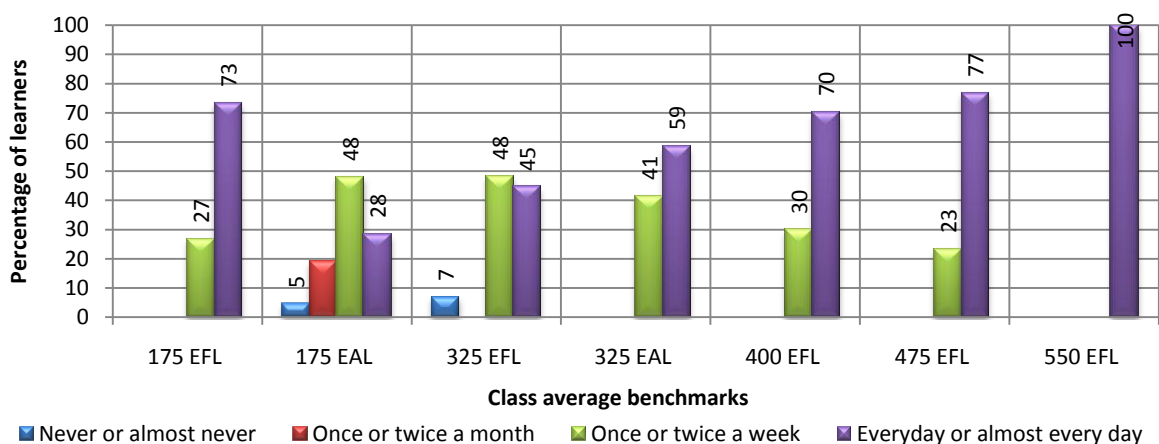


Figure 8.3: Teacher reports on frequency of access to a classroom library

Response distributions as to whether or not learners could borrow books from their classroom library to take home varied (Figure 8.4). The majority of learners in classes at benchmarks EFL 175, EAL 175, EAL 325, EFL 475 and EFL 550 were allowed to take books home but at EFL 325 and EFL 400 the majority could not.

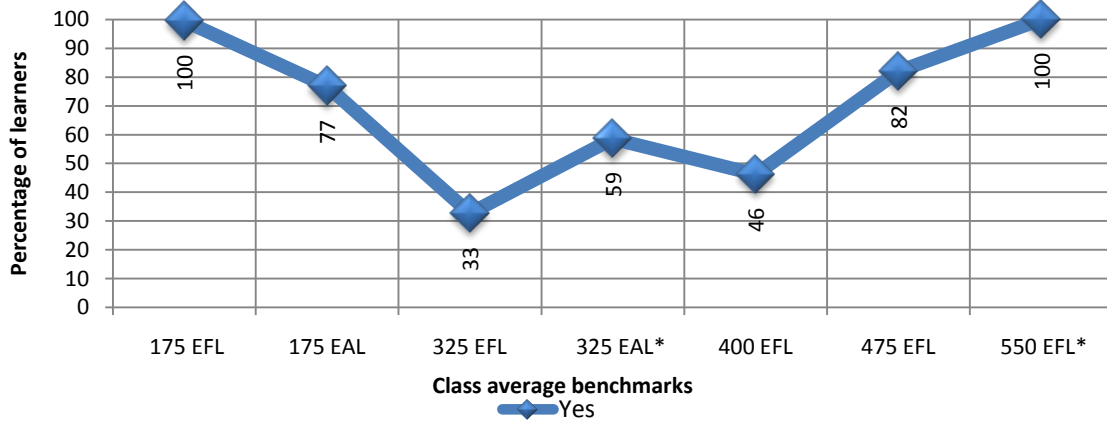


Figure 8.4: Teacher reports on whether or not learners could borrow books to take home from the classroom library

8.4.1.2 Access to libraries outside of the classroom

Most learners in EFL 475 and EFL 550 classes had access to another library outside the classroom *once or twice a week* (see Figure 8.5). In stark contrast, the majority of learners at EFL 400 and lower only had access to another library *once or twice a month* or *never or almost never*.

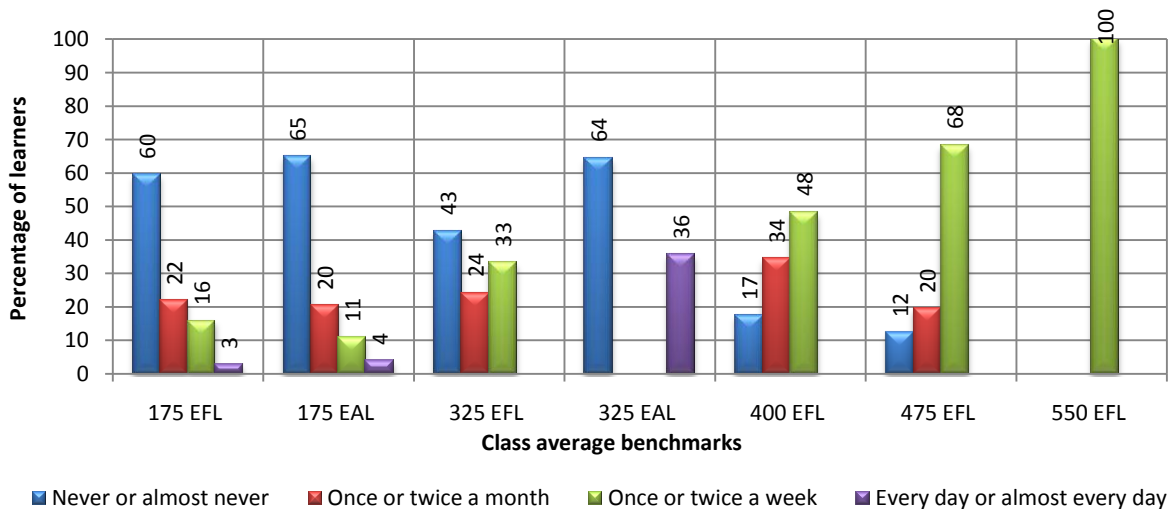


Figure 8.5: How frequently learners went to a library outside of the classroom

8.4.2 Materials used for reading instruction and activities

Teachers were asked how often they used a selection of resources for reading instruction and/ or reading activities with their learners. These resources included: textbooks; reading series; workbooks or worksheets; children’s newspapers and/ or magazines; computer software; reading material on the Internet; a variety of children’s books; materials from other subjects; and materials written by students. The response options were: *every day or almost every day*, *once or twice a week*, *once or twice a month*; and *never or almost never*.

For the PIRLS main study, textbooks were the most often used reading instruction materials followed closely by workbooks and worksheets and reading series (Howie *et al.*, 2007). The descriptive statistics across the class average benchmarks for this study also revealed clear patterns of response distribution for these three items. With the exception of EFL 400, textbooks were used *every day or almost every day* or *once or twice a week* for the majority of learners across the benchmarks. At EFL 400, 55% of learners had teachers who reported using this resource *once or twice a month* or *never or almost never* (Figure 8.6).

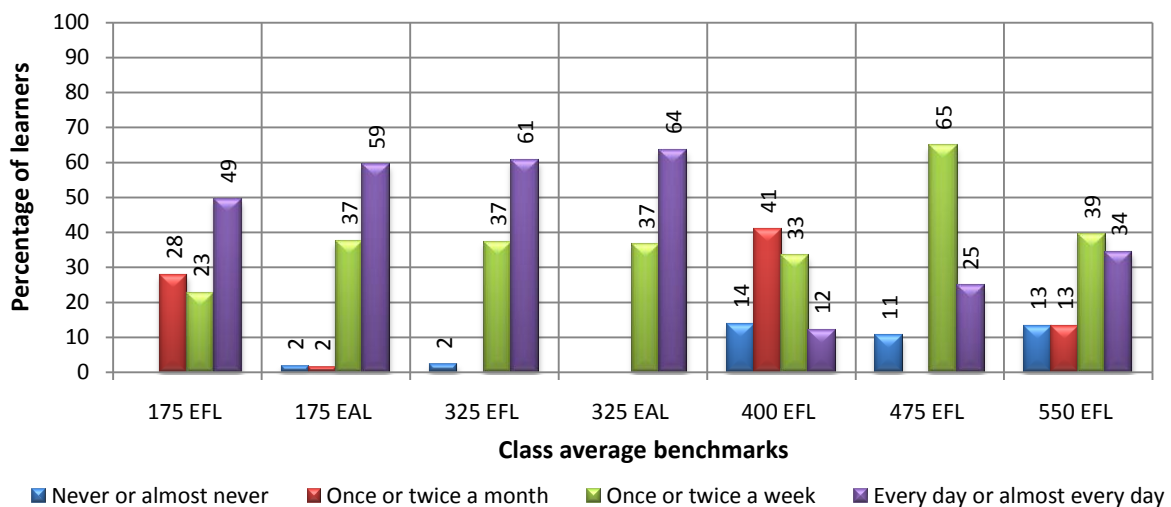


Figure 8.6: Teacher reports on how frequently learners used textbooks

Reading series were reportedly used *once or twice a week* for the majority of learners at the lower benchmarks. At EFL 400, 69% of learners *never or almost never* used reading series or only used reading series *once or twice a month*. At the two highest benchmarks the majority used reading series *every day or almost every day* or *once or twice a week* (Figure 8.7 below). Workbook or worksheet use was also dominant with large majorities of learners across the benchmarks reportedly using these *every day or almost every day* or *once or twice a week* (Figure 8.8 below).

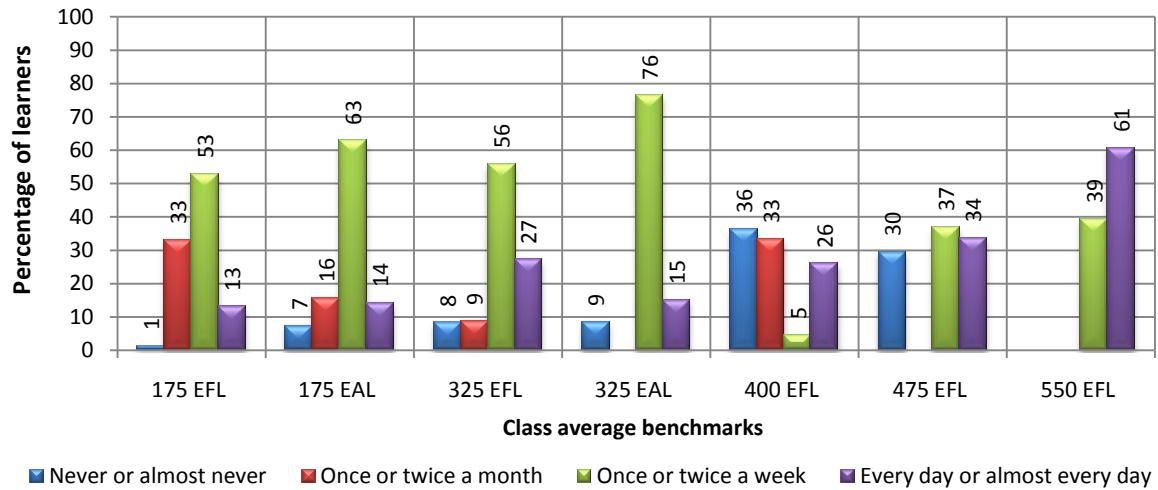


Figure 8.7: Teacher reports on how frequently learners used reading series

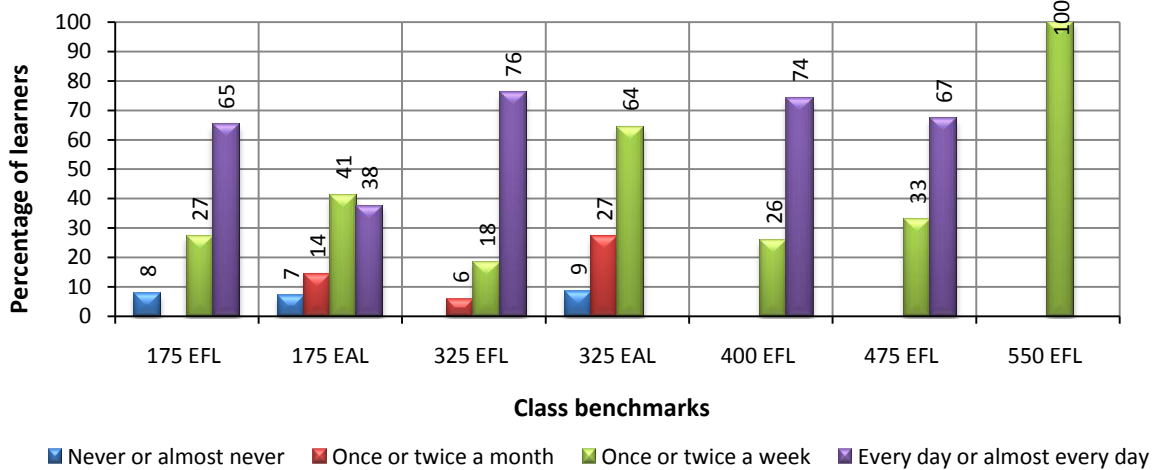


Figure 8.8: Teacher reports on how frequently learners use workbooks or worksheets

Other items with clear patterns of response distribution included the use of newspapers and magazines, a variety of children’s books, PC software and reading materials on the Internet. The majority of learners at all of the benchmarks only used newspapers and magazines *once or twice a month* or *never or almost never*. The majority of learners at EFL 400 and lower either *never or almost never* had exposure to a variety of children’s books or only had so *once or twice a month*. In contrast, most learners at EFL 475 and EFL 550 had teachers who used a variety of children’s books for reading instruction or reading activities *every day or almost every day* or *once or twice a week*. With the exception of the 96% of learners at EFL 400 and 42% of learners at EFL 475 whose teachers indicated that they used PC software *once or twice a week*, large majorities at the other class benchmarks *never or almost never* used PC software for reading instruction or activities. Material on the Internet did not feature at all for instruction at any of the benchmarks.

For the other items, patterns in response distribution were not readily discernable due to variation in reporting within and across the benchmarks. Thus, to determine whether there were underlying structures for all of the items of the scale, an exploratory factor analysis of the nine items for the four merged benchmarks was undertaken. The EAL 175-325 and EFL 175-325 merged benchmarks met the inclusion criteria set for the analysis (Table 8.14). All of the communalities were above .4 with the exception of one item (reading series) at EAL 175-325, which was therefore removed from the analysis. Three components were identified at EAL 175-325 and four at EFL 175-325 (Table 8.15).

Table 8.14: Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity for teachers’ reading instruction materials use

Merged benchmarks		EAL 175- 325	EFL 175- 325	EFL 400	EFL 475- 550
Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.695	.593	.163	.401
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx chi-square	61111.343	1981.821	3007.47	1943.765
	Df	36	36	36	36
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 8.15: Total variance explained for teachers’ reading instruction materials use

Component	EAL 175-325			EFL 175-325		
	Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values		
	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %
1	2.381	26.450	26.450	2.519	27.991	27.991
2	1.401	15.566	42.016	1.313	14.594	42.585
3	1.086	12.070	54.086	1.202	13.351	55.936
4	.914	10.159	64.245	1.064	11.828	67.764
5	.792	8.799	73.044	.992	11.021	78.785
6	.709	7.881	80.925	.687	7.632	86.416
7	.622	6.916	87.841	.519	5.772	92.188
8	.567	6.297	94.139	.425	4.727	96.915

Table 8.16 (below) shows the factor loadings after rotation at EAL 175-325 and EFL 175-325. Four items (workbooks or worksheets, a variety of children’s books, materials from other subjects and materials written by learners) loaded onto component 1 at EAL 175 -325. With the exception of workbooks and worksheets which were frequently used, the descriptive statistics for these items at both EAL 175 and EAL 325 revealed their infrequent use. Therefore, due to lack of conceptual coherence with the other items in terms of *infrequent use in teaching*, workbooks or worksheets was removed from the component. The two items (Internet reading materials and PC software for reading) that loaded onto component 2 involve *technology as a reading resource*. The descriptive statistics also suggest that this

component did not feature for instruction in EAL schools below the PIRLS international benchmarks. Component 3 has item clusters suggesting that textbook use, workbooks and worksheets and newspapers and magazines were *core reading resource materials* at EAL 175 -325. As the descriptive statistics showed that the majority of learners only used children’s newspapers and magazines *once or twice a month*, it is likely that this material was used as a supplementary source in conjunction with textbooks and workbooks and worksheets although on a less frequent basis.

Table 8.16: Factor loadings for teachers’ reading instruction materials use

Items	Factor loadings						
	EAL 175-325			EFL 175-325			
Component	1	2	3	1	2	3	4
Textbooks			.817				
Reading series (e.g. basal readers, graded readers)							.827
Workbooks or worksheets	.466		.420			.483	
Children’s newspapers or magazines			.690	.708			.406
Computer software for reading instruction (e.g. CD, DVD)		.811		.778			
Reading material on the Internet (Web pages)		.821				.651	
A variety of children’s books	.645				.864		
Materials from other subjects	.754				.799		
Materials written by learners	.710			.746			

Significant differences regarding the teachers’ reading instruction were also found between the factors of the benchmarks (see appendix J). Items loading onto component 1 (children’s newspapers and magazines, computer software for reading instruction and material written by learners) and component 2 (a variety of children’s books, materials from other subjects) for EFL 175-325 also seem to share the feature of *infrequent use in teaching* based on patterns of response distribution from the descriptive statistics. Although reading material on the Internet loaded onto Component 3 together with the use of workbooks or worksheets, no conceptual link was evident between these two items especially as reading material on the Internet was not a frequent reading resource whereas workbook or worksheet use was. Thus, only workbook or worksheet use was retained as a *core instructional resource* for Component 3. Further core materials were revealed for Component 4 with reading series and children’s newspapers or magazines loading onto the factor.

Reliability analyses were calculated for each of the merged benchmarks to determine whether the factors formed reliable scales at each using Cronbach’s Alpha. Table 8.17 below provides the case processing summary for the nine items of the reading instruction materials scale at each of the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.17: Case processing summary for scale of reading instruction materials

<i>Merged benchmarks</i> <i>Cases</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Valid cases included	5767	75.8	1149	79.6	465	92.4	525	85.0
Excluded	1844	24.2	295	20.4	38	7.6	93	15.0
Total	7611	100.0	1444	100.0	503	100.0	618	100.0

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were between .6 and .7 and thus the scale met the criterion of .5 set for exploratory analysis at each of the merged benchmarks (Table 8.18). Furthermore, a review of the item-total statistics at each benchmark did reveal possibilities to enhance the reliability of the scale at each the benchmarks via the deletion of an item for the scale. PC software at EAL 175-325, textbooks at EFL 175-325 and at EFL 400 and reading series at EFL 475 were possibilities for deletion based on the item statistics. As the descriptive statistics revealed that PC software did not feature in reading instruction at EAL 175-325 this was a viable possibility for removal. The removal of textbooks at EFL 175-325 would not have made any difference to the factors reported as it was omitted based on its factor loading value. Table 8.19 provides the scale statistics across the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.18: Reliability statistics for scale of reading instruction materials

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>							
<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>
.619	.649	.532	.644	.516	.704	.439	.657

Table 8.19: Scale statistics for reading instruction materials

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475- 550</i>
Mean	24.27	22.78	22.99	22.68
Variance	12.009	9.087	8.265	8.123
Standard deviation	3.465	3.014	2.875	2.850

8.4.3 Teachers' use of fiction and non-fiction materials

Teachers indicated how often they had their learners read fiction⁵² or non-fiction⁵³ texts (Table 8.20 below). Except for non-fiction which was used *less than weekly* for most learners at EAL 325, the majority of learners across the benchmarks used fiction and non-fiction

⁵² Short stories, longer books with chapters, poems, and plays.

⁵³ Descriptions and explanations about things, people or events, instructions or manuals about how things work, and charts, diagrams, graphs.

materials *at least weekly*. Even so, many learners at each of the class average benchmarks were in classes where fiction and non-fiction materials were used *less than weekly*.

Table 8.20: Teachers’ frequency of use of fiction or non-fiction for reading

PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks	Use of fiction				Use of non-fiction			
	At least weekly*		Less than weekly**		At least weekly		Less than weekly	
	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)	n	% (SE)
175 EFL	653	73.1 (10.8)	157	26.9 (10.8)	677	83.0 (11.6)	133	17.1 (11.6)
175 EAL	5718	84.7 (3.2)	1176	15.3 (3.2)	5413	79.6 (3.8)	1368	20.4 (3.8)
325 EFL	388	76.2 (15.9)	115	23.8 (15.9)	339	67.9 (15.9)	164	32.1 (15.9)
325 EAL*	184	100.0 (0.0)	-	-	118	45.0 (22.0)	66	55.0 (22.0)
400 EFL	182	70.0 (17.7)	81	30.0 (17.7)	219	88.1 (12.5)	41	11.9 (12.5)
475 EFL	241	100.0 (0.0)	-	-	190	76.6 (16.1)	51	23.4 (16.1)
550 EFL*	52	60.7 (42.9)	28	39.3 (17.3)	38	54.7 (47.7)	28	45.3 (47.7)

* Response options *every day or almost every day* and *once or twice a week* were combined as *at least weekly*.

**Response options *once or twice a month and never or almost never* were combined as *less than weekly*.

8.4.4 Differentiation of reading instruction materials

Teachers gave an indication of their use of reading materials to differentiate instruction for learners at different reading levels. At all of the class benchmarks except EFL 550, teachers of the majority of learners reported using *the same materials with learners at different reading levels working at different speeds* (Figure 8.9 below). Teachers of most learners (61%) at EFL 550 reported using *different materials with learners at different reading levels* with the next highest percentages of learners at the rest of the benchmarks teachers who also used different materials for these purposes.

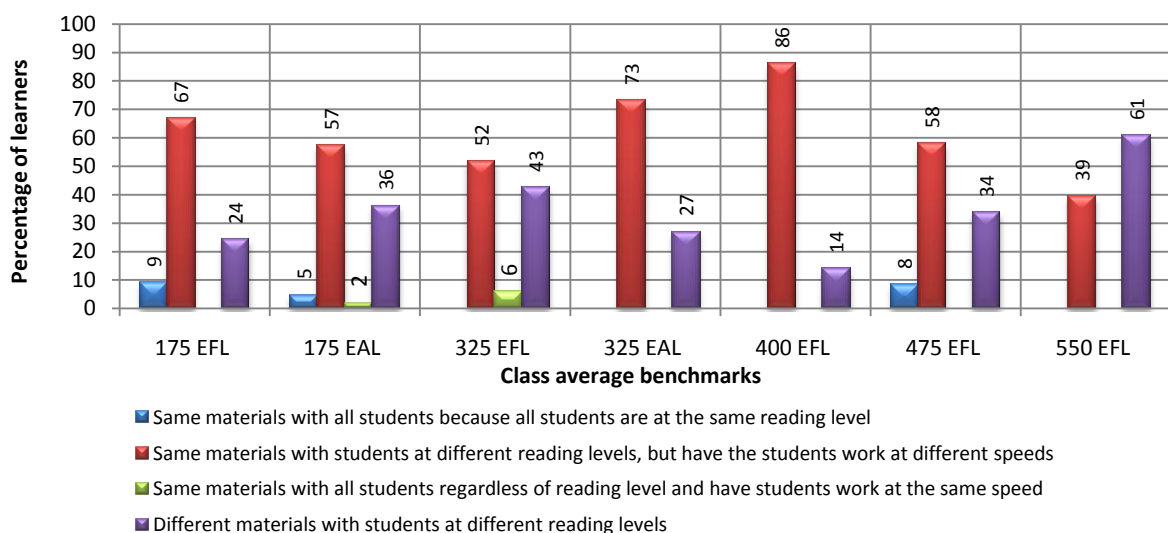


Figure 8.9: Teacher reports on material differentiation for learners at different reading levels for reading instruction

8.4.5 Summary and discussion of reading resource availability and use

Nearly all of the Grade 4 learners at the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks were in classes with a library. At the EAL 175 and EFL 325 benchmarks the majority of learners did not have access to a classroom library whereas only a small majority of learners in classes with an average at EFL 175 did have access to such a library. Thus, most learners in the lowest performing classes did not have adequate access to a variety of resources in their classrooms to stimulate their reading literacy development. With the exception of the two EAL class average benchmarks, there appeared to be sufficient mean numbers of books with different titles in the classes which did have libraries at the other benchmarks. At EAL 325, there were also no magazine titles available. EAL learners especially need access to a wide variety of reading materials. The majority of learners who had access to a classroom library were given class time to use it *every day or almost every day*. Therefore, it does seem that if a classroom library was available then it was a frequently utilised resource. With the exception of most learners at EFL 325 and EFL 400 who were not able to take books home from the class library, the majority of learners at the other benchmarks were able to do so. Most learners at EFL 400 and higher had access to another library outside the classroom *once or twice a week*. In stark contrast, the highest percentages of learners at the lower benchmarks *never or almost never* had access to a library outside of the classroom.

Descriptive statistics revealed that textbooks were used *every day or almost every day or once or twice a week* for instruction for most learners except for the majority at EFL 400 who used them infrequently. Reading series were used *once or twice a week* for the majority of learners at the lower benchmarks. At EFL 400, most learners used reading series infrequently but at the two highest benchmarks the majority used reading series *every day or almost every day or once or twice a week*. Workbook or worksheet use was frequent across the benchmarks with the majority of learners using these *every day or almost every day or once or twice a week*. Newspapers and magazines were not used frequently for majorities at all of the benchmarks. Newspapers and magazines are readily accessible and a relatively inexpensive source to use. It is thus surprising that they were not a more regularly used resource. It was only at the two highest benchmarks that a variety of children's books were used daily for most learners whereas at the other benchmarks most learners *never or almost never* used them or only had exposure to such books *once or twice a month*. If one takes into consideration that many learners the lower benchmarks did not have access to a classroom library or any other library during school hours, this lack of frequent access to a variety of children's books could also contribute to a dearth in these learners' exposure to a variety of literature experiences for their reading literacy development.

Factor analyses at the merged benchmark of EAL 175-325 further revealed that a variety of children's books, materials from other subjects and materials written by learners linked together as infrequently used instructional materials along with technology for reading instruction. Core materials at the merged benchmark included textbooks, workbooks and worksheets as well as newspapers and magazines. At EFL 175-325 reading series, workbooks or worksheets and children's newspapers or magazines were core materials and similarly to EAL 175-325 materials from other subjects, technology for reading instruction and materials written by learners were infrequent reading materials used for instruction.

Apart from reporting about non-fiction material use at EAL 325, the majority of learners across the benchmarks had teachers who reportedly used fiction and non-fiction materials *at least weekly*. National policy guidelines (DoE, 2002b) for Grade 4 advocate the use of newspaper clippings, books, brochures, magazines and poems for reading instruction, as examples. Recommended texts vary from short written pieces to full-length literary works (DoE, 2002b). At all of the class benchmarks except EFL 550, teachers of the majority of learners reported using *the same materials with learners at different reading levels working at different speeds*. Teachers of the majority at EFL 550 reported using *different materials with learners at different reading levels*.

8.5 TIME ALLOCATION FOR INSTRUCTION

This section reports mean time allocation for language instruction at each of the class average benchmarks (8.5.1). It also reports mean time allocation for reading instruction and frequency of reading instruction and activities (8.5.2). In sub-section 8.5.3, the data presented in the section are summarised and discussed.

8.5.1 Teaching time allocation for Language

Teachers gave an indication of the amount of time (hours and minutes) allocated for instruction and/or activities in the language which their learners were tested in for the PIRLS 2006 assessments⁵⁴ (Table 8.21 below).

⁵⁴ For learners in EFL classes, English was the language of testing and for learners in EAL classes, an African language was the language of testing.

Table 8.21: Mean time spent on language instruction and/or activities for language of testing in a typical week

<i>PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>HOURS Mean (SE)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>MINUTES Mean (SE)</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
175 EFL	713	4.6 (0.4)	713	18.3 (4.9)	4 hours 54 minutes
175 EAL	4756	5.2 (0.3)	4756	16.8 (1.5)	5 hours 30 minutes
325 EFL	415	5.5 (0.6)	415	20.9 (4.5)	5 hours 54 minutes
325 EAL*	184	4.1 (0.6)	184	10.1 (6.9)	4 hours 27 minutes
400 EFL	179	6.8 (0.7)	179	17.6 (12.0)	7 hours 06 minutes
475 EFL	224	5.1 (0.4)	224	15.5 (5.8)	5 hours 24 minutes
550 EFL*	80	6.8 (1.9)	80	6.9 (6.1)	6 hours 54 minutes

Learners in classes at EFL 400 followed closely by those at EFL 550 had the most time allocated for English language instruction on average. At EAL 175, EFL 325 and EFL 475 a mean of about five-and-a-half to six hours was spent on instruction in the language of testing whereas at EFL 175 and EAL 325 a mean of about 4-and-a-half to five hours was spent.

8.5.2 Time allocation for and frequency of reading instruction

Teachers indicated, regardless of whether or not they had formally scheduled time for reading instruction, how much time they spent on reading instruction and/or activities in a typical week (Table 8.22 below). Mean time allocation across each of the class average ranged from 3 hours each at EFL 175 and EAL 325 to 9 hours and 24 minutes at EFL 475.

Table 8.22: Mean time spent on reading instruction and/or activities in a typical week**

<i>PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>HOURS Mean (SE)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>MINUTES Mean (SE)</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
175 EFL	767	2.7 (0.5)	801	15.1 (5.0)	3 hours
175 EAL	6156	3.2 (0.3)	6156	16.5 (1.5)	3 hours 30 minutes
325 EFL	430	5.1 (1.9)	465	24.1 (6.4)	5 hours 30 minutes
325 EAL*	184	2.8 (1.1)	184	10.7 (5.9)	3 hours
400 EFL	219	6.6 (2.3)	219	21.4 (6.1)	7 hours
475 EFL	202	9.2 (2.7)	202	11.3 (6.3)	9 hours 24 minutes
550 EFL*	80	2.4 (1.2)	80	15.7 (17.2)	2 hours 42 minutes

**Including cross-curricular reading instruction and formally scheduled time for reading

As indicated in Figure 8.10 below, the majority of learners had teachers who pointed out that some of the time allocated for reading instruction activities was explicitly appointed to formal reading instruction. However, lower percentages of learners at EFL 175, EAL 175 and EFL 475 had such scheduled time compared to their peers at the other benchmarks.

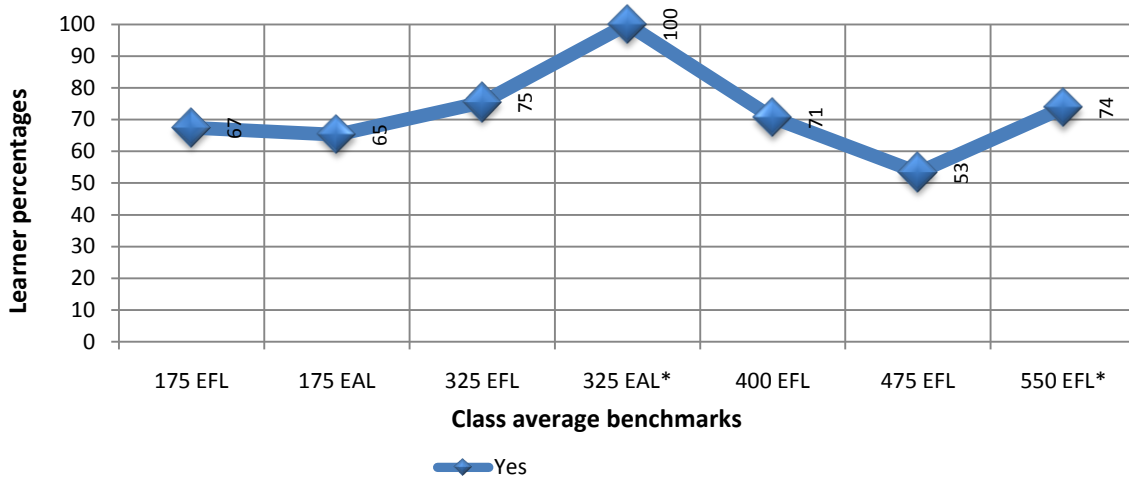


Figure 8.10: Percentage of learners who had time specifically given to formal reading instruction

Those teachers that indicated that time was explicitly dedicated to formal reading instruction, outlined how much time was given (Table 8.23 below). Mean time allocation at each of the benchmarks ranged between 1 hour 18 minutes at EFL 475 and 2 hours 48 minutes at EFL 400. Less mean time was allocated to formal reading instruction at the two highest benchmarks than to such instruction at the other benchmarks.

Table 8.23: Mean time spent explicitly on formal reading instruction

<i>PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>HOURS Mean (SE)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>MINUTES Mean (SE)</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
175 EFL	592	2.2 (1.0)	592	14.4 (4.8)	2 hours 24 minutes
175 EAL	4110	1.7 (0.2)	4110	13.9 (1.9)	1 hour 54 minutes
325 EFL	393	1.4 (0.3)	393	15.9 (6.0)	1 hour 42 minutes
325 EAL*	117	1.8 (0.6)	117	3.3 (2.9)	1 hour 54 minutes
400 EFL	104	2.6 (0.7)	104	8.9 (9.6)	2 hours 48 minutes
475 EFL	123	1.1 (0.2)	123	11.2 (7.5)	1 hour 18 minutes
550 EFL*	52	0.9 (1.1)	52	45.3 (5.6)	1 hour 42 minutes

Teachers also indicated how often they had reading instruction and/ or did reading activities with their learners in a week. Response options were *every day*, *three or four days a week* or *fewer than three days a week*. Whereas one would anticipate that struggling learners would have had reading instruction and/ or reading activities every day, the data does not suggest that this is the case (Table 8.24 below). Most learners at EFL 175 and EAL 175 only had reading instruction or did reading activities either *three or four days a week* or *fewer than three days a week*. High percentages of learners at EAL 325 (50%) and EFL 325 (50%) had teachers who reported having reading instruction or activities *every day*. Despite this, there

were still very high percentages of learners in at these benchmarks who had reading instruction or activities *fewer than three days a week*. At EFL 400 and EFL 475 the majority of learners (97% and 61% respectively) had reading instruction or activities *every day*.

Table 8.24: Teacher reports on how often learners had reading instruction and/or did reading activities

PIRLS 2006 Class Benchmarks	Every day		Three or Four days a week		Fewer than three days a week	
	n	% of learners (SE)	n	% of learners (SE)	n	% of learners (SE)
175 EFL	199	19.0 (9.6)	447	42.1 (13.1)	234	38.9 (14.4)
175 EAL	1641	25.7 (4.2)	2975	43.0 (4.3)	2323	31.3 (3.9)
325 EFL	204	49.7 (15.1)	66	9.0 (6.7)	233	41.4 (14.1)
325 EAL*	91	49.9 (26.9)	-	-	65	50.1 (26.9)
400 EFL	260	97.3 (2.9)	-	-	37	2.8 (1.0)
475 EFL	168	61.3 (18.4)	50	22.4 (14.1)	23	16.3 (5.0)
550 EFL*	24	34.4 (30.5)	28	39.3 (17.3)	28	26.3 (18.3)

8.5.3 Summary and discussion of time allocation for instruction

Learners at EFL 400 followed closely by those at EFL 550 had the most mean time allocated for language instruction. Like their peers at the lower benchmarks (see sub-section 6.4.2), high percentages of learners at EFL 400 did not speak English as a first language. Thus, the higher mean time allocated to English language at EFL 400 in comparison to allocation at the lower benchmarks may have been beneficial for their achievement. For those learners tested in an African language at EAL 175 and EAL 325 the majority of the allocated language instruction time may have been given to instruction in an African language even though it was likely that these learners had to learn in English at Grade 4.

Mean time allocation for reading instruction and/or activities across each of the class average benchmarks ranged from about three to nine hours. Perhaps the vast differences in mean time allocated are a reflection of differences in reporting by those teachers that either only taught their learners language as opposed to those who taught them all learning areas and could thus better judge the amount of cross-curricular reading undertaken. The majority of learners had some of this time for reading instruction activities explicitly appointed to formal reading instruction. Mean time allocation for formal reading instruction at each of the benchmarks ranged between 1 hour 18 minutes at EFL 475 and 2 hours 48 minutes at EFL 400, again suggesting that this may have been positive for the EFL 400 learners given their majority second language status. Less mean time was allocated to formal reading instruction

at the two highest benchmarks than at the others perhaps suggesting less need for such instruction at these benchmarks.

Most learners at the lowest benchmark of 175 only had reading instruction or did reading activities either *three or four days a week* or *fewer than three days a week*. At EAL 325 and EFL 325, although high percentages of learners had reading instruction or activities *every day*, still many others had reading instruction or activities *fewer than three days a week*. At EFL 400 and EFL 475 large majorities of learners had reading instruction or activities *every day*. Daily reading instruction and/or activities is crucial for further reading development.

8.6 INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

In this section reported classroom reading instruction practices (8.6.1) and reading comprehension development practices (8.6.2) are considered across the class average benchmarks followed by a discussion and summary of the data presented (8.6.3).

8.6.1 Classroom reading instruction practices

In this sub-section, teachers' reading instruction activities are discussed (8.6.1.1) followed by consideration of their organisation of learners for reading instruction (8.6.1.2).

8.6.1.1 Reading instruction activities

Teachers indicated how often they undertook a selection of ten different reading activities when they had reading instruction and/or did reading activities with their learners. These activities included: reading aloud to the class; asking students to read aloud to the whole class; asking students to read aloud in small groups or pairs; asking students to read silently on their own; asking students to read along silently while other students read aloud; giving students time to read books of their own choosing; teaching or modelling for students different reading strategies; teaching students strategies for decoding sounds and words; teaching students new vocabulary systematically; and helping students understand new vocabulary in texts they read.

An exploratory factor analysis of the seven items for the four merged benchmarks was undertaken to determine if any underlying structures were apparent for the scale. The merged benchmarks of EAL 175-325, EFL 175-325 and EFL 475 -550 met the inclusion criteria set for the factor analysis (Table 8.25 below). All of the communalities were above .4

at the three benchmarks. Four components were identified at EAL 175-325, three at EFL 175-325 and four at EFL 475-550 (Table 8.26 below).

Table 8.25: Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity for teachers’ reading activity undertakings

Merged benchmarks		<i>EAL 175-325</i>	<i>EFL 175-325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475-550</i>
Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.673	.578	.440	.642
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx chi-square	12591.786	4243.216	5160.388	3352.916
	Df	45	45	45	45
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 8.27 below shows the factor loadings after rotation at EAL 175-325, EFL 175-325 and EFL 475-550. A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences in factors comprising the teachers’ use of reading instruction at different benchmarks (see appendix J). Component 1 for EAL 175-325 comprised teaching strategies for decoding sounds and words, teaching new vocabulary systematically and helping learners understand new vocabulary in texts. The descriptive statistics for these items also suggest that the *vocabulary and fluency development* characterising this factor featured frequently at both benchmarks comprising the merged benchmark.

Component 1 for EFL 175-325, *vocabulary and fluency development with independent reading*, had the same items loading onto it as those for component 1 of EAL 175-325 with the addition of *independent silent reading activities* (reading silently on own and reading silently whilst other learners read aloud). From the descriptive statistics it was evident that learners’ reading silently on their own was prominent with most doing this either *every day or almost every day* or *once or twice a week*. However, the majority of learners did not read silently whilst other learners read aloud and, as such, the item was removed from the component due to its lack of frequency coherence with the other items comprising the factor. Like those items loading onto component 1 for the other two merged benchmarks, at EFL 475-550 items loading onto component 1 also involved *vocabulary and fluency development* (teaching learners strategies for decoding sounds and words and teaching new vocabulary systematically). Moreover, like component 1 for EFL 175-325, the factor featured *independent reading activities* (reading silently on own and giving time to read books of own choosing). The descriptive statistics for these items confirmed the frequency of independent reading activities and vocabulary development but revealed that teaching strategies for decoding sounds and words was infrequent and therefore it was removed from the factor particularly as it loaded onto another factor for the merged benchmark.

Table 8.26: Total variance explained for teachers' use of reading instruction activities

Component	EAL 175-325			EFL 175-325			EFL 475-550		
	Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values		
	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %
1	2.831	28.305	28.305	3.216	32.157	32.157	4.015	40.149	40.149
2	1.489	14.892	43.197	1.563	15.628	47.785	1.542	15.424	55.573
3	1.182	11.819	55.017	1.474	14.736	62.521	1.278	12.778	68.351
4	1.040	10.402	65.419	.948	9.480	72.001	1.029	10.285	78.636
5	.754	7.536	72.955	.727	7.274	79.274	.696	6.956	85.592
6	.734	7.336	80.291	.684	6.839	86.114	.614	6.143	91.735
7	.665	6.645	86.936	.499	4.993	91.107	.345	3.453	95.188
8	.577	5.768	92.704	.395	3.952	95.059	.280	2.796	97.984
9	.389	3.886	96.590	.307	3.072	98.131	.137	1.375	99.359
10	.341	3.410	100.000	.187	1.869	100.000	.064	.641	100.000

Table 8.27: Factor loadings for teachers' use of reading instruction activities

Items	Factor loadings											
	EAL 175-325				EFL 175-325				EFL 475-550			
Components	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	
Read aloud to the class		.753					.705				.873	
Ask learners to read aloud to the whole class		.852					.834			.813	.412	
Ask learners to read aloud in small groups or pairs		.671				.653					.638	
Ask learners to read silently on their own			.796		.709			.430	.583			
Ask learners to read along silently while other learners read aloud				.812	.766				.852			
Give learners time to read books of their own choosing			.770			.679		.759				
Teach or model for learners different reading strategies			.466	.585		.700			.862			
Teach learners strategies for decoding sounds and words	.684				.400	.678		.775	.411			
Teach learners new vocabulary systematically	.839				.719			.825				
Help learners understand new vocabulary in texts they are reading	.791				.657					.896		

Component 1 for each of the merged benchmarks explained the highest percentage of variance. The remaining components at each benchmark had comparable percentage values explaining variance and therefore it does seem that each played a secondary role.

The descriptive statistics for how often the teacher read aloud and how often learners read aloud to the whole class revealed that reading aloud by both parties was a weekly or daily instructional activity for high majorities of learners across the class average benchmarks. Teachers also reportedly got the majority of their learners to read aloud in small groups or pairs either *once or twice a week* or *every day or almost every day* at benchmarks of EFL 400 and lower. At EFL 475 and EFL 550 reading aloud in small groups or pairs only featured *once or twice a month* for the highest percentages of learners. For the factor analysis of the merged benchmarks, reading instruction activities involving *reading aloud* (the teacher reading aloud, learners reading aloud to the whole class and learners reading aloud in small groups or pairs) as an instructional activity loaded onto component 2 at EAL 175-325 and component 4 at EFL 475-550. Two items involving *reading aloud* (teachers reading aloud to the whole class and learners reading aloud to the whole class) loaded onto component 3 of EFL 175-325. Learner reading aloud coupled with helping learners to understand new vocabulary in text also loaded onto component 3 of EFL 475-550. Thus *reading aloud* instructional activities played an important auxiliary role at each of the benchmarks.

Component 3 of EAL 175-325 had two items suggesting *independent reading activities* (asking learners to read silently on their own and giving learners time to read books of their own choosing) as part of instruction, activities that were part of the core instructional strategies for component 1 of EFL 175-325 and EFL 475-500. Teaching or modelling different reading strategies for learners also loaded onto this component but was removed as it does not seem to link practically with independent reading activities.

Component 2 of EFL 175-325 comprised items (asking learners to read aloud in small groups or pairs, giving learners time to read books of their own choosing, teaching or modelling different reading strategies and teaching decoding strategies) different to those which clustered onto component 1 for the benchmark with the exception of teaching decoding strategies. According to the descriptive statistics reading aloud in small groups and pairs and giving learners time to read books of their own choosing occurred frequently for the majority of learners at the benchmarks comprising EFL 175-325. Teaching or modelling different reading strategies was removed from the factor as it was an infrequent activity according to the descriptive statistics and teaching learners strategies for decoding sounds

or words was also removed as it did not relate conceptually to the other two *independent reading activities* and also featured as part of component 1 for the merged benchmark.

Component 4 of EAL 175-325 consists of asking learners to reading along silently whilst other learners read aloud, which was a frequent feature of instruction according to the descriptive statistics, and teaching or modelling different reading strategies for learners which was not frequently used as part of instruction. There appears to be no latent variable for the component and therefore the factor seems to be redundant.

Component 2 for EFL 475-550 had four items loading onto it (learners reading silently on their own, learners reading along silently while other learners read aloud, teaching or modelling different reading strategies for learners and teaching learners strategies for decoding sounds or words). According to the descriptive statistics at each benchmark comprising the merged benchmark, both forms of independent silent reading were frequently undertaken. Teaching strategies for decoding sounds and words and teaching or modelling different reading strategies were infrequent. As component 1 for EFL 475-550 already established the position of independent silently reading these were removed from the component. The other two items were retained as *infrequent reading instruction activities* at the merged benchmark.

Reliability analyses were calculated for each of the merged benchmarks to determine whether the factors formed reliable scales at each using Cronbach's Alpha. Table 8.28 below provides the case processing summary for the scale under consideration at each of the merged benchmarks. With Cronbach's alpha coefficients between .6 and .8, the scale met the criterion of .5 set for exploratory analysis at each of the merged benchmarks. Furthermore, a review of the item-total statistics (see Appendix K) revealed that there were no significant differences between the reliability of the scale and its reliability if any of its items were deleted at any of the benchmarks (see Table 8.29).Table 8.30 provides the scale statistics across the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.28: Case processing summary for scale of teachers' use of reading instruction activities

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Valid cases included	6538	85.9	1319	91.3	503	100.0	581	94.0
Excluded	1073	14.1	125	8.7	0	.0	37	6.0
Total	7611	100.0	1444	100.0	503	100.0	618	100.0

Table 8.29: Reliability statistics for scale of teachers’ use of reading instruction activities

Merged benchmarks							
EAL 175- 325		EFL 175- 325		EFL 400		EFL 475- 550	
Cronbach’s Alpha	Highest Alpha if item deleted	Cronbach’s Alpha	Highest Alpha if item deleted	Cronbach’s Alpha	Highest Alpha if item deleted	Cronbach’s Alpha	Highest Alpha if item deleted
.693	.695	.749	.749	.871	.867	.817	.816

Table 8.30: Scale statistics for scale of teachers’ use of reading instruction activities

Merged benchmarks	EAL 175- 325	EFL 175- 325	EFL 400	EFL 475- 550
Mean	21.18	20.58	20.75	18.12
Variance	18.763	18.966	29.481	24.068
Standard deviation	4.332	4.355	5.430	4.906

8.6.1.2 Organisation of learners for reading instruction and/or activities

Teachers were asked how often they organised learners in a number of ways for reading instruction and activities. Six items were included for consideration, namely: teaching reading as a whole class activity; organising same-ability groups for reading; organising mixed-ability groups for reading; using individualised instruction for reading; students working independently on an assigned plan or goal; and students work independently on a goal they choose themselves. At EFL 550, EFL 475, EAL 325, EFL 325 and EAL 175, the majority of learners *often* or *always* or *almost always* had reading as a whole class activity. For many of the learners at class benchmarks EFL 175 (53%), EAL 325 (43%) and EFL 400 (59%), reading as a whole class activity occurred *sometimes* (Figure 8.11).

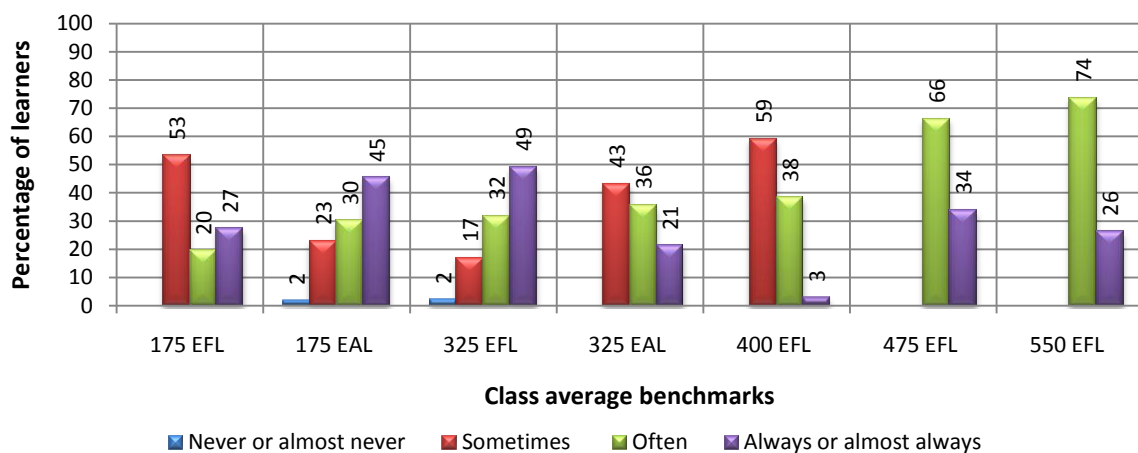


Figure 8.11: Teacher reports about teaching reading as a whole class activity

The creation of same-ability groups for reading instruction occurred *sometimes* or *often* for most learners at each of the class average benchmarks (Figure 8.12).

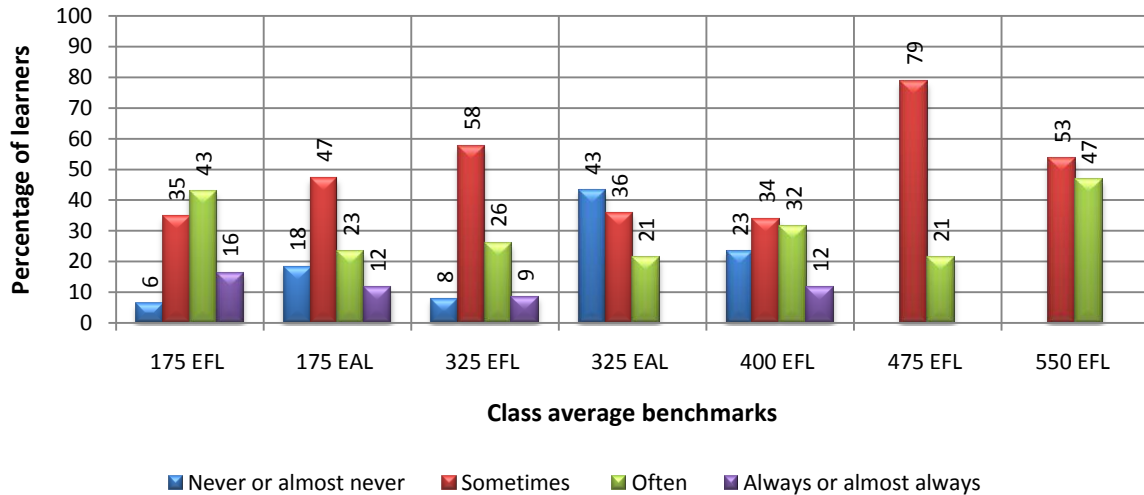


Figure 8.12: Teacher reports about organising same-ability groups for reading

Mixed-ability grouping for reading instruction appeared to be more prominent than same-ability grouping for instruction at EFL 400 and lower with the highest percentages of learners reportedly being grouping for reading in this manner *often* or *always* or *almost always*. However at the two highest benchmarks of EFL 550 and EFL 475 the majority of learners only had reading instruction in mixed-ability groups *sometimes* or *never* or *almost never* (Figure 8.13).

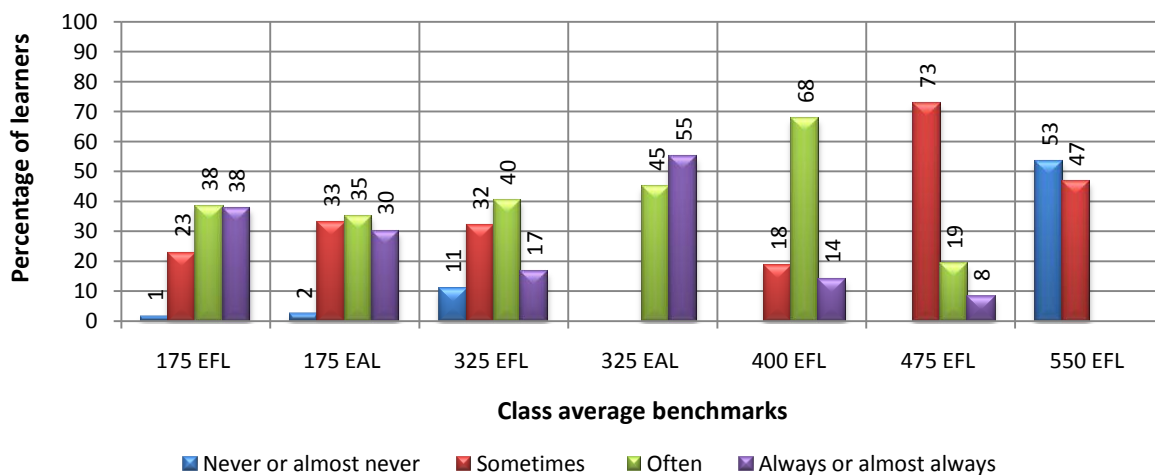


Figure 8.13: Teacher reports about organising mixed-ability groups for reading

Individualised instruction for reading *sometimes* occurred for the majority of learners in classes reaching each of the PIRLS international benchmarks. However, in comparison,

there was much more variation in the use of individualised instruction at the lower class average benchmarks. Perhaps indicative of the level of intensive support for reading still needed by these learners, the majority at EFL 175, EAL 175 and EFL 325 *often* or *always* or *almost always* and 30% of learners at EAL 325 *always* or *almost always* received such instruction (Figure 8.14).

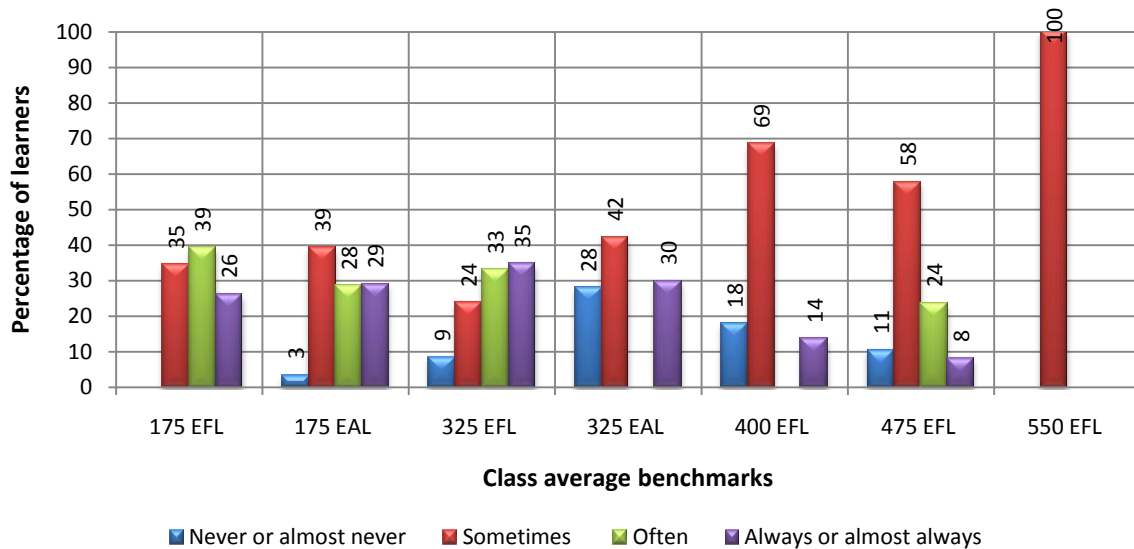


Figure 8.14: Teacher reports about using individualised instruction for reading

The majority of learners at EFL 475 and lower reportedly *often* or *sometimes* worked independently on an assigned plan or goal for reading instruction whereas all the learners at EFL 550 only *sometimes* did so (Figure 8.15).

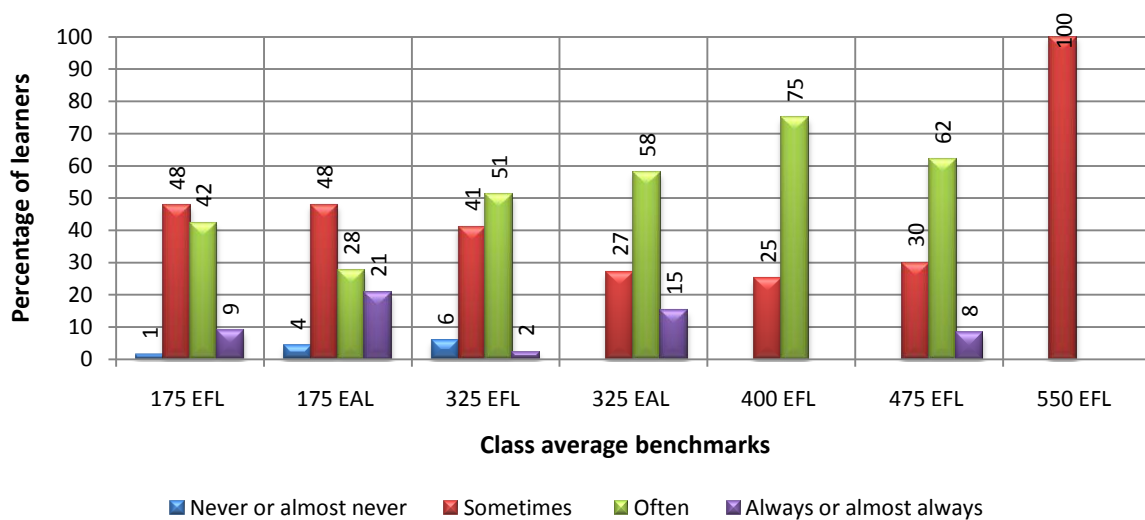


Figure 8.15: Teacher reports about learners working independently on an assigned plan or goal

Teachers reported that the highest percentages of their learners at each of the class average benchmarks *sometimes* worked independently on a reading goal they chose themselves (Figure 8.16 below).

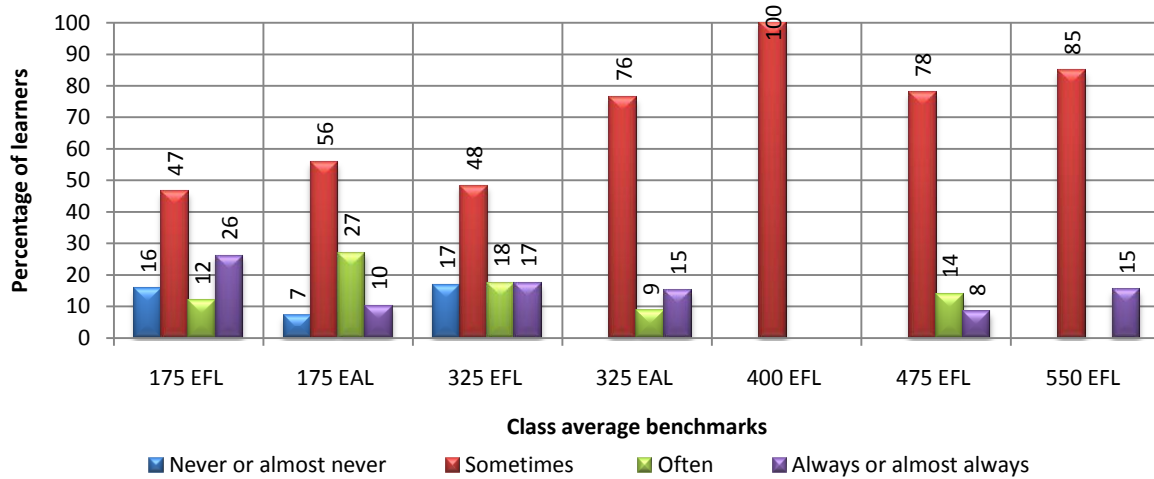


Figure 8.16: Teacher reports about learners working independently on a goal they choose themselves

8.6.2 Reading comprehension development practices

In this sub-section, teachers' reported reading comprehension skill and strategy development practices (8.6.2.1) are presented together with consideration of their post-reading comprehension activities (8.6.2.2).

8.6.2.1 Reading comprehension skill and strategy development practices

Teachers were asked about the frequency of seven activities to develop learners' reading comprehension skills and strategies. These activities included: identifying the main ideas of what they had read; explaining or supporting learners' understanding of what they had read; comparing what they had read with experiences they had; comparing what they had read with other things they had read; making predictions about what would happen next in the text they were reading; making generalisations and drawing inferences based on what they had read; and describing the style or structure of the text they had read. To determine whether there was an underlying structure for these items, an exploratory factor analysis of the seven items for the four merged benchmarks occurred. The merged benchmarks of EAL 175-325, EFL 175-325 and EFL 475- 550 met the criteria for inclusion in the analysis (Table 8.31 below).

Table 8.31: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity for activities to develop reading comprehension skills and strategies

Merged benchmarks		EAL 175- 325	EFL 175- 325	EFL 400	EFL 475- 550
Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.838	.811	.414	.713
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx chi-square	25403.526	5714.099	3367.927	2646.884
	Df	21	21	21	21
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

All of the communalities were above .4 at the three benchmarks. One component was identified for EAL 175-325, and two components for EFL 175-325 and EFL 475-550 respectively (Table 8.32 below).

Table 8.33 (below) shows the factor loadings after rotation at EFL 175-325 and EFL 475-550 and the factor loading at EAL 175-325. Significant differences were found for factors comprising teachers’ activities to develop reading comprehension skills and strategies across the benchmarks (see appendix J). All seven items clustered onto component 1 at EAL 175-325 showing a lack of latent variables for the items of the scale at this merged benchmark. Six items loaded onto component 1 of EFL 175-325. Some of the items for component 1 also loaded onto component 2 of the merged benchmark which comprised five items. Similar to component 1 of EFL 175-325, component 1 at EFL 475- 550 comprised 5 reading comprehension skills and strategies. Some of these items also loaded onto component 2 at EFL 475-550 too. No latent variable could be determined for any of the components. After the lowest factor loading for items loading onto both components was deleted at each merged benchmark, it was evident that component 1 at EFL 175-325 and EFL 475-550 had the same remaining factors loading onto them (identifying the main ideas, explaining or supporting understanding, making predictions about what will happen next, making generalisations and drawing inferences, describing the style or structure of the text) suggesting that these were core reading comprehension skills and strategies taught at each of the merged benchmarks. After the deletion of the items with lower factor loadings for component 2 at EFL 173-325 and EFL 475-550, two items remained at each (comparing reading with other things read and comparing reading with experiences) suggesting that *comparison* played a secondary role at each of the benchmarks.

Reliability analyses were calculated for each of the merged benchmarks to determine whether the factors formed reliable scales at each using Cronbach’s Alpha. Table 8.34 (below) provides the case processing summary for the scale under consideration at each of the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.32: Total variance explained for teachers' activities to develop reading comprehension skills and strategies

Component	EAL 175-325			EFL 175-325			EFL 475-550		
	Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values		
	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %
1	4.087	58.390	58.390	4.241	60.591	60.591	3.753	53.614	53.614
2	.979	13.989	72.379	1.014	14.488	75.079	1.381	19.732	73.346
3	.646	9.235	81.614	.615	8.784	83.862	.733	10.473	83.818
4	.438	6.251	87.865	.417	5.957	89.820	.513	7.327	91.145
5	.325	4.641	92.505	.316	4.508	94.327	.314	4.480	95.625
6	.287	4.107	96.612	.253	3.607	97.935	.192	2.743	98.368
7	.237	3.388	100.000	.145	2.065	100.000	.114	1.632	100.000

Table 8.33: Factor loadings for teachers' for activities to develop reading comprehension skills and strategies

Items	Factor loadings				
	EAL 175-325	EFL 175-325		EFL 475- 550	
	1	1	2	1	2
Identify the main ideas of what they have read	.745	.886		.659	
Explain or support their understanding of what they have read	.732	.697	.489	.529	.520
Compare what they have read with experiences they have had	.776	.412	.734		.907
Compare what they have read with other things they have read	.822		.916		.921
Make predictions about what will happen next in the text they are reading	.768	.657	.506	.889	
Make generalisations and draw inferences based on what they have read	.759	.527	.723	.470	.708
Describe the style or structure of the text they have read	.744	.812		.919	

Table 8.34: Factor loadings for teachers' activities to develop reading comprehension skills and strategies

<i>Merged benchmarks</i> <i>Cases</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Valid cases included	6896	90.6	1313	90.9	503	100.0	618	100.0
Excluded	715	9.4	131	9.1	0	.0	0	.0
Total	7611	100.0	1444	100.0	503	100.0	618	100.0

With Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .8 the scale met the criterion of .5 set for exploratory analysis at each of the merged benchmarks. Furthermore, a review of the item-total statistics revealed that there were no significant differences between the reliability of the scale and its reliability if any of its items were deleted at any of the benchmarks (Table 8.35). Table 8.36 provides the scale statistics across the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.35: Reliability statistics for scale of teachers' activities to develop reading comprehension skills and strategies

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>							
<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>
.879	.868	.881	.883	.849	.860	.846	.836

Table 8.36: Scale statistics for scale of teachers' activities to develop reading comprehension skills and strategies

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475- 550</i>
Mean	14.66	14.69	15.86	15.35
Variance	22.412	20.795	17.371	17.720
Standard deviation	4.734	4.560	4.168	4.209

The descriptive statistics revealed frequent use of the majority of the items comprising the scale at each of the benchmarks. Teachers reported getting their learners to identify the main ideas of what they had read *once or twice a week* for most learners at all of the class benchmarks except EFL 550 where most learners used this comprehension strategy *once or twice a month*. Most learners had teachers who indicated that they explained or supported their learners understanding *once or twice a week* or *every day or almost every day*. At all of the benchmarks except EFL 550, the majority of learners had teachers who reported getting learners to compare what they had read *every day or almost every day* or *once or twice a week*. At EFL 550, this was a weekly or monthly activity for the majority.

At the lower class benchmarks most learners were in classes with teachers that reported getting them to compare what they had read with other reading either *once or twice a month* or *once or twice a week*. In classes reaching the PIRLS International benchmarks teacher responses to this question were more varied. At EFL 400, 29% of learners were in classes where the teacher reported doing this activity *once or twice a month* and 30% were in classes where this activity featured *every day or almost every day*. At EFL 475, 58% were in classes where they teacher got them to do this activity *once or twice a week* whereas at EFL 550, most of the learners were in classes where the teacher reported this activity *once or twice a month* or never or almost never.

At EFL 175, most learners had teachers who *never or almost never* got them to make predictions about what would happen next in the text they were reading or only did so *once or twice a month*. All of the learners at EFL 550 reportedly *never or almost never* did this activity either. At EFL 325, EFL 400 and EFL 475, most learners had teachers who reported that they made predictions about what would happen next *once or twice a month* or *once or twice a week*. At EAL 325 and EAL 175 most learners did this activity *once or twice a week* or *every day or almost every day*. Except for learners at EFL 175, it seems that this activity was more prominent at the lower class achievement benchmarks. Most learners in classes across the benchmarks had a teacher who reported getting them to make generalisations and draw inferences based on what they were reading *once or twice a month* or *once or twice a week* although the former was most prominent. It does appear that not enough learners in classes at the lower benchmarks did this activity frequently to encourage their higher order comprehension skills. At all of the EFL benchmarks, most learners were *never or almost never* asked to describe the style or structure of texts they were reading or were only asked to do so *once or twice a month*. At EAL 175 most learners either did this activity *once or twice a month* or *once or twice a week*. In contrast to response patterns suggesting little subscription to this comprehension activity at most of the benchmarks, 72% of learners at EAL 325 described the style or structure of text they read *once or twice a week*.

8.6.2.2 *Post-reading comprehension activities*

Teachers indicated how often their learners did a range of activities after they had read something including: answering reading comprehension questions in a workbook or on a worksheet about what they had read; writing something about or in response to what they had read; answering oral questions about or orally summarising what they had read; talking with each other about what they had read; doing a project about what they had read; and taking a written quiz or test about what they had read. To ascertain whether there was an

underlying structure for these items, an exploratory factor analysis of the six items at the four merged benchmarks occurred. All of the merged benchmarks met the criteria for inclusion in the analysis (Table 8.37).

Table 8.37: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity for teachers’ post-reading comprehension activities

Merged benchmarks		<i>EAL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475- 550</i>
Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.750	.801	.716	.746
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx chi-square	8372.401	3810.884	2429.708	1121.381
	Df	15	15	15	15
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

With the exception of three variables at EAL 175-325, all of the communalities were above .4 at the other benchmarks. The variables *answer reading comprehension questions in a workbook or on a worksheet about what they have read, answer oral questions about or orally summarise what they have read and take a written quiz or test about what they have read* were removed from the analysis at EAL 175-325. One component was identified for EAL 175-325, one component for EFL 400 and two components for EFL 175-325 and EFL 475-550 respectively (Table 8.38 below). Table 8.39 (below) shows how the items loaded onto each factor at each of the benchmarks.

Three items (*write something about or in response to what they have read, talk with each other about what they have read and do a project about what they have read*) clustered onto component 1 at EAL 175-325. All of the items loaded onto component 1 for EFL 175-325 and EFL 400 revealing no latent structures for the scale at either merged benchmark. With the exception of asking learners to write something about or in response to what they had read which loaded onto component 2, 5 items of the scale loaded onto component 1 of EFL 475-550 and an underlying commonality was also not evident. Significant differences were revealed by a Kruskal-Wallis test between benchmarks for factors related to teachers’ post-reading comprehension activities (see appendix J). Reliability analyses were calculated for each of the merged benchmarks to determine whether the factors formed reliable scales at each using Cronbach’s Alpha. Table 8.40 (below) provides the case processing summary for the scale under consideration at each of the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.38: Total variance explained for teachers' post-reading comprehension activities

Component	<i>EAL 175-325</i>			<i>EFL 175-325</i>			<i>EFL 400</i>			<i>EFL 475-550</i>		
	Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values		
	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %
1	2.591	43.188	43.188	3.504	58.393	58.393	4.091	68.188	68.188	2.841	47.352	47.352
2	.966	16.098	59.286	.987	16.453	74.846	.703	11.720	79.909	1.192	19.871	67.223
3	.865	14.419	73.705	.531	8.850	83.697	.534	8.905	88.813	.739	12.313	79.536
4	.621	10.346	84.051	.454	7.574	91.270	.379	6.311	95.124	.508	8.459	87.994
5	.526	8.769	92.820	.296	4.939	96.210	.237	3.945	99.070	.414	6.899	94.893
6	.431	7.180	100.000	.227	3.790	100.000	.056	.930	100.000	.306	5.107	100.000

Table 8.39: Factor loadings for teachers' post-reading comprehension activities

Items	Factor loadings				
	<i>EAL 175-325</i>	<i>EFL 175-325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475-550</i>	
Components	1	1	1	1	2
Answer reading comprehension questions in a workbook or on a worksheet about what they have read	-	.772	.793	.821	
Write something about or in response to what they have read	.740	.743	.850		.934
Answer oral questions about or orally summarise what they have read	-	.783	.692	.856	
Talk with each other about what they have read	.734	.647	.871	.672	
Take a written quiz or test about what they have read	-	.856	.902	.687	
Do a group project about what they have read	.551	.768	.829	.706	

Table 8.40: Case processing summary for scale of teachers' post-reading comprehension activities

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>								
<i>Cases</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Valid cases included	7048	92.6	1328	92.0	503	100.0	618	100.0
Excluded	563	7.4	116	8.0	0	.0	0	.0
Total	7611	100.0	1444	100.0	503	100.0	618	100.0

With Cronbach's alpha coefficients between .7 and .9, the scale met the criterion of .5 set for exploratory analysis at each of the merged benchmarks. A review of the item-total statistics revealed that there was only one significant difference between the reliability of the scale for EFL 475-550 and its reliability if the item *ask learners to write something in response to what they had read* was deleted (Table 8.41). Table 8.42 provides the scale statistics across the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.41: Reliability statistics for scale of teachers' post-reading comprehension activities

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>							
<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>
.732	.723	.851	.848	.904	.894	.711	.794

Table 8.42: Scale statistics for scale of teachers' post-reading comprehension activities

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475- 550</i>
Mean	13.13	12.76	14.00	13.44
Variance	8.589	14.828	16.488	6.970
Standard deviation	2.931	3.851	4.061	2.640

A review of the descriptive statistics for each of the items comprising the scale also revealed no major patterns of response distribution. Answering questions in workbooks or on a worksheet, writing something about or in response to reading, answering oral questions and oral summaries of reading were a part of instruction on a daily or weekly basis at each of the benchmarks. The majority of learners across the benchmarks answered reading comprehension questions in a workbook or on a worksheet about what they had read every day or almost every day or once or twice a week. Except for at EFL 325 and EFL 550 where

the majority of learners did this activity *once or twice a month*, the highest percentages of learners at the rest of the class wrote something about or in response to what they had read *once or twice a week*. Most learners at each of the benchmarks also did oral comprehension tasks *every day or almost every day* or *once or twice a week*.

Teacher reports about how often they got learners to talk with each other about what they had read showed much more divergence at each of the benchmarks. At the lowest class benchmarks most learners either did this activity *once or twice a week* or *every day or almost every day*. At EFL 400, most learners did this activity *every day or almost every day* or *once or twice a month* whereas at EFL 475 most did this activity *once or twice a week* or *once or twice a month*. The majority at EFL 550 only did this activity *once or twice a month*.

The highest percentages of learners (between 41% and 82%) at all of the class average benchmarks reportedly did a project about what they had read *once or twice a month*. The highest percentages of learners (35% to 87%) at EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325, EAL 325 and EFL 550 also only did a written quiz or test on reading *once or twice a month*. The majority of learners at EFL 325 (58%) and EFL 475 (51%) did a written quiz or test *once or twice a week* whilst the rest of their peers did this activity *once or twice a month*.

8.6.3 Summary and discussion of instructional strategies and activities

Factor analysis of the items comprising the scale of teachers' use of different reading activities when they had reading instruction and/or did reading activities revealed that vocabulary and decoding skill development were key features of instruction at the lower class average benchmarks. In EFL medium classrooms at these low benchmarks these activities also featured with independent reading activities as a core focus for instruction. Vocabulary and decoding skill development as a core feature for reading instruction makes sense for these learning environments characterised by poor achievement, low reading skill and the EAL status of most learners. Also, independent reading would be unlikely for learners in EAL medium schools due to their switch to English at Grade 4 and likely lack of independent reading ability in the language. Vocabulary development coupled with independent reading activities were core instructional practices at the highest class average benchmarks. Notably, the teaching of strategies for decoding sounds and words was an infrequent feature of reading instruction activities at these highest benchmarks likely as learners had already achieved some level of automaticity in this skill by Grade 4. Reading aloud activities and other combinations of silent and/or independent reading activities were factors apparent from the analysis which seemingly played secondary roles to the core activities of the principal

factor across the benchmarks considered. The descriptive statistics for the item and the analysis of how it loaded onto the components for the factor analysis revealed that teaching or modelling different reading strategies did not play any major complementary role in reading teaching at any of the benchmarks which may be an instructional oversight.

In terms of organisation of learners for reading instruction activities, at EFL 550, EFL 475, EAL 325, EFL 325 and EAL 175 reading was *often* or *almost always* undertaken as a whole class activity. At EFL 175, EAL 325 and EFL 400 reading as a whole class activity occurred *sometimes* for many of the learners. Same-ability grouping for reading instruction occurred *sometimes* or *often* for most learners at each of the class average benchmarks. Although not a feature at the two highest benchmarks, mixed-ability grouping for reading instruction appeared to be more prominent than same-ability grouping for instruction at EFL 400 and lower with many learners *often* or *almost always* doing it. Perhaps the use of more same-ability grouping at these lower benchmarks would make the task of teaching reading to diverse learner groups easier for teachers, especially in large classes. Individualised instruction for reading *sometimes* occurred for the majority at PIRLS international benchmarks. Perhaps indicative of the levels of intensive support for reading still needed by learners at the lower benchmarks, the majority *often* or *always* or *almost always* received such instruction. The feasibility hereof in large classes is uncertain.

The prominence of the teaching of certain reading comprehension skills and strategies versus others was difficult to ascertain. It was only at the EFL 175-325 and EFL 475-550 merged benchmarks where factor analysis revealed that identifying the main ideas, explaining or supporting understanding, making predictions about what will happen next, making generalisations and drawing inferences, describing the style or structure of the text were core reading comprehension skills and strategies taught. Comparing reading with other things read and comparing reading with experiences played a secondary role at each.

Moreover, a review the descriptive statistics revealed frequent teaching of the majority of the skills and strategies at each of the benchmarks such as: getting learners to identify the main ideas of what they had read; explaining or supporting understanding of what they had read; and getting them to compare what they had read with their own experiences. At the lower benchmarks, most learners had teachers that reported getting them to compare what they had read with other reading either *once or twice a month* or *once or twice a week*. Responses were more varied in classes at the PIRLS international benchmarks. Surprisingly, the highest percentages of learners at EFL 175 and EFL 550 had teachers who *never* or *almost never* got them to make predictions about what would happen next in the text they

were reading. In comparison, at EFL 325, EFL 400 AND EFL 475, most learners made predictions about what would happen next *once or twice a month* or *once or twice a week*. At EAL 175, EAL 325 and EFL 325 most learners did this activity *once or twice a week* or *every day or almost every day* making it a more prominent activity at the lower class achievement benchmarks. Making generalisation and drawing inferences was also not a frequent activity for high percentages of learners at EFL 550, EFL 400 and all of the lower benchmarks with most reportedly doing this *once or twice a month*. A lack of such an activity at the lower class average benchmarks could explain learners' difficulty with answering higher order comprehension questions from the PIRLS 2006. Describing the style or structure of texts was an infrequent activity at most of the benchmarks.

Variation in post-reading activities across the class average benchmarks was also difficult to ascertain as latent factors were not apparent from a factor analysis of the items comprising the scale. A review the descriptive statistics for each of the items also revealed no major patterns of response distribution. Generally, answering questions in workbooks or on a worksheet, writing something about or in response to reading, and answering oral questions and oral summaries of reading were a part of instruction on a daily or weekly basis for most learners across the benchmarks. At EFL 400 and lower, the highest percentages of learners spoke to each other about what they had read *once or twice a week* or *every day or almost every day* whereas at EFL 475 equal percentages of learners did this activity weekly or monthly and most at EFL 550 only did this activity monthly. The highest percentages of learners at all of the class average benchmarks reportedly did a project about what they had read *once or twice a month*. The highest percentages of learners at EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325, EAL 325 and EFL 550 also only did a written quiz or test on reading once or twice a month whilst the majority at EFL 325 and EFL 475 did so once or twice a week.

8.7 HOMEWORK AND ASSESSMENT

In sub- section 8.7.1 the frequency of assignment of reading for homework is considered followed by discussion of teachers' monitoring and assessment practices across the class average benchmarks (8.7.2). In 8.7.3, the data presented are summarised and discussed.

8.7.1 Frequency of assignment of reading for homework

Teachers reported how often they assigned reading as part of homework (for any subject) (Figure 8.17 below). It is evident that learners in classes with averages at the lowest benchmarks received far less homework for reading than their peers in classes with average

performance levels at the PIRLS international benchmarks. In fact, most learners in classes at the PIRLS international benchmarks of 400 (62%), 475 (73%) and 550 (61%) as well as 52% of learners at EFL 325 were assigned reading for homework *every day* or *3 or 4 times a week*. In contrast, most learners in classes with an average at EAL 175 (65%), EFL 175 (60%) and EAL 325 (58%) either never received homework, or got given homework *less than once a week* or only *one or two times a week*.

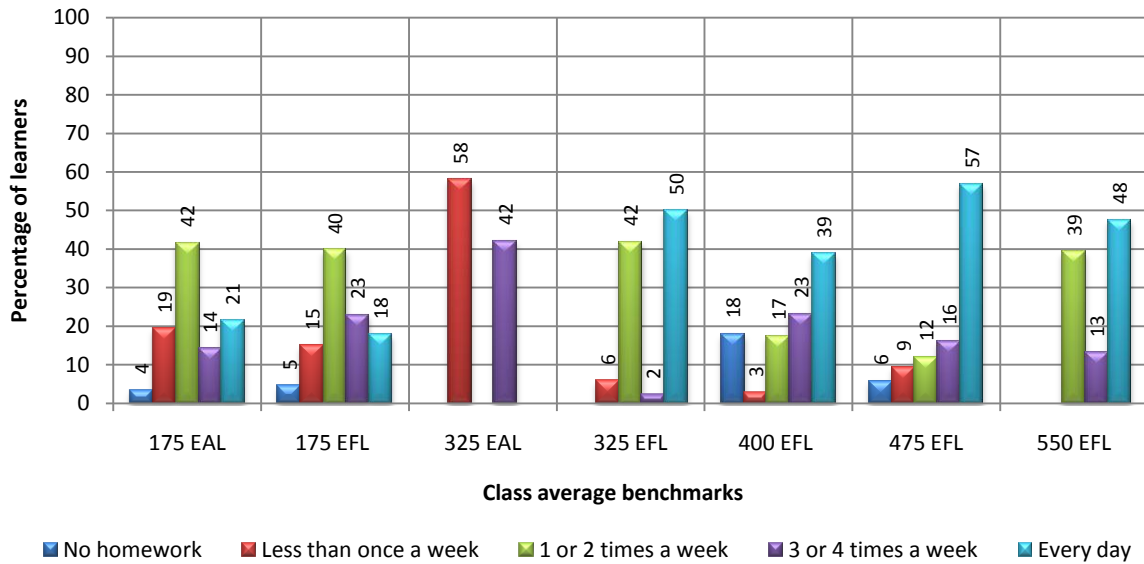


Figure 8.17: Teacher reports on assigning reading as part of homework

Teachers also indicated of how much time they expected learners to spend on homework involving reading (for any subject) when they assigned reading homework (Figure 8.18).

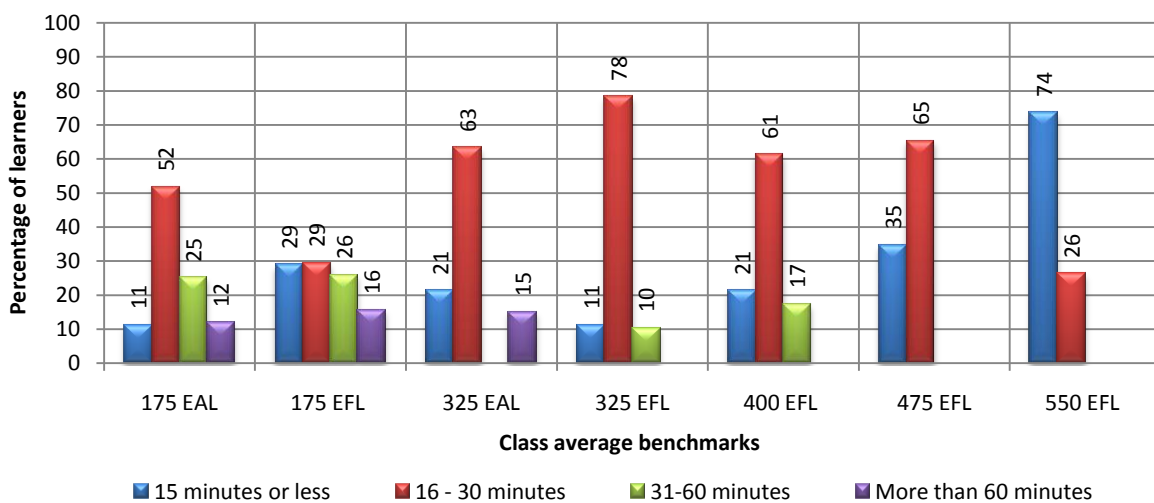


Figure 8.18: Teacher reports on time allocation in assigning reading as part of homework for any subject

At EAL 175 (52%), EAL 325 (63%), EFL 325 (78%), EFL 400 (61%) and EFL 475 (65%), most of the learners were in classes with a teacher that indicated that, in general, when reading homework was assigned for any subject, there was a 16-30 minute time allocation. Class benchmark EFL 175 had a greater spread of responses. About 29% of the learners received 15 minutes or less of homework for reading. Another 29% were assigned 16-30 minutes. The other exception was class benchmark EFL 550, where 74% of the learners received a reading homework time allocation of 15 minutes or less.

8.7.2 Reading performance monitoring and assessment practices

Teachers were asked about the amount of emphasis they placed on selected sources to monitor their learners progress in reading (Figure 8.19 to 8.22 below). All learners at EFL 550 had teachers who only placed *some emphasis* on their own professional judgement to monitor their reading progress. The majority of learners at EFL 475, EFL 400, EFL 325 and EFL 175 and high percentages at EFL 175 (41%) and EAL 325 (42%) had teachers who placed *major emphasis* on using their own professional judgement to monitor learners' progress in reading (Figure 8.19).

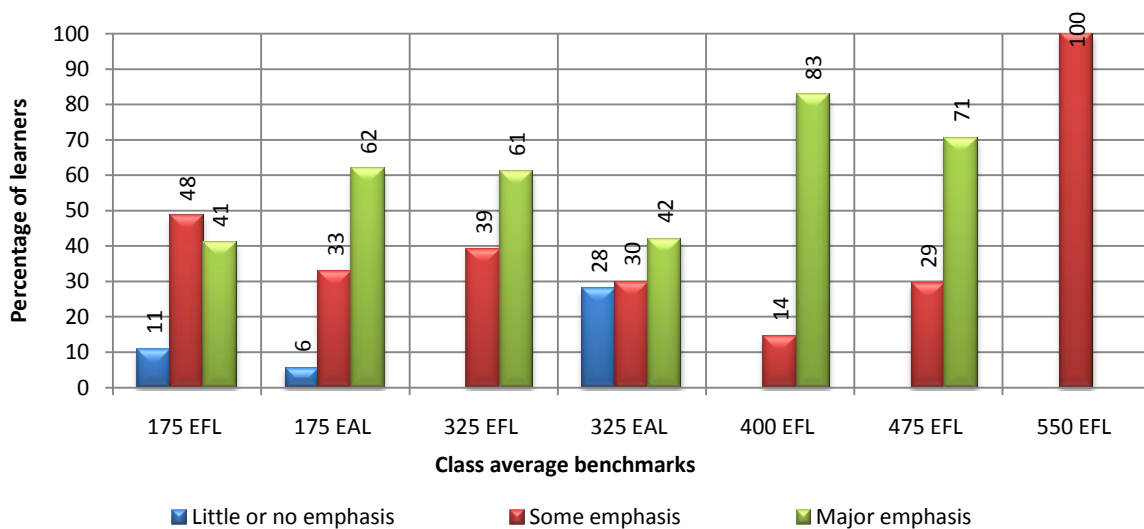


Figure 8.19: Emphasis placed on teachers' own professional judgement for monitoring

Another main assessment source involved *major emphasis* on the use of classroom tests for reading assessment for clear majorities at all of the class average benchmarks (54% to 82%) with the exception of EFL 325 and EFL 550 where most learners had teachers who reported placing *some emphasis* on classroom tests (Figure 8.20 below).

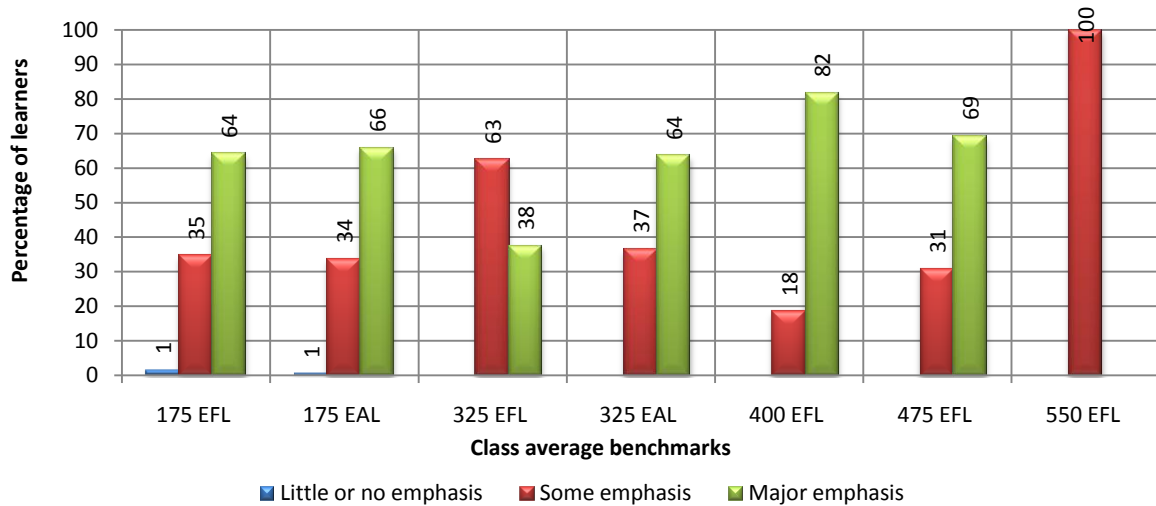


Figure 8.20: Emphasis placed on classroom tests for monitoring

As illustrated in Figure 8.21, diagnostic testing received *some emphasis* as a reading assessment source for small majorities at class average benchmarks of EFL 175, EAL 175, EFL 325, EAL 325, EFL 475 and EFL 550 and also for a small percentage of learners at EFL 400. For the majority at EFL 400 and next highest percentage of learners at each of the other benchmarks diagnostic testing received *little or no emphasis*.

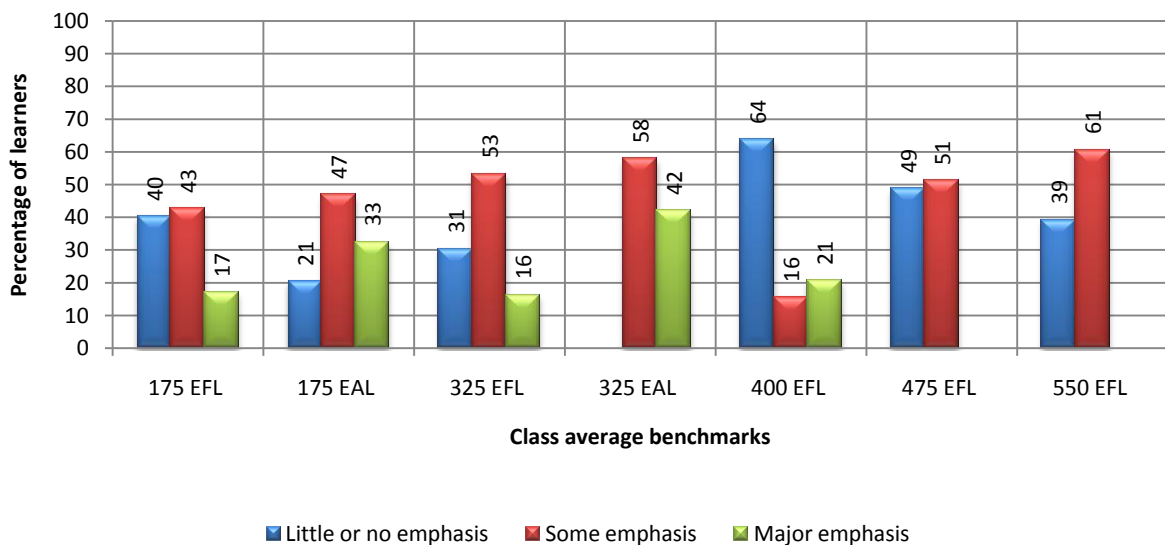


Figure 8.21: Emphasis placed on diagnostic tests for monitoring

To be expected, national or regional achievement tests clearly received *little or no emphasis* for most learners at all of the benchmarks (Figure 8.22 below).

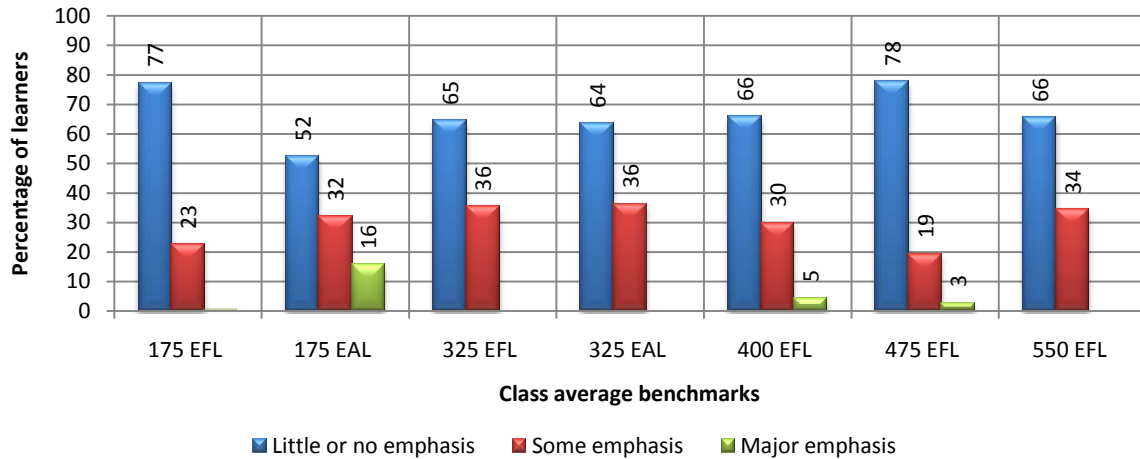


Figure 8.22: Emphasis placed on national or regional achievement tests for monitoring

More specifically, teachers' most frequent practices for the assessment of learners' performance in reading were also investigated. Teachers were particularly asked how often (*at least once a week, once or twice a month, once or twice a year or never*) they used: multiple choice questions on material read; short-answer written questions on material read; paragraph-length written responses about what students had read; listening to students read aloud; oral questioning of students; students give an oral summary/ report of what they had read; or meeting with students to discuss what they had been reading and work they have done. To determine whether there was an underlying structure for these items, an exploratory factor analysis of the seven items for the four merged benchmarks occurred as each met the criteria for inclusion in the analysis (Table 8.43).

Table 8.43: Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin and Bartlett's test of Sphericity for teachers' most frequent practices for assessment of learners' reading performance

Merged benchmarks		EAL 175- 325	EFL 175- 325	EFL 400	EFL 475- 550
Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.761	.756	.612	.551
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx chi-square	11431.425	2647.779	2780.606	1449.701
	Df	21	21	21	21
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

All of the communalities were above .4 at all of the benchmarks with the exception of one variable (*multiple choice questions on materials read*) at EFL 175-325 which was therefore removed from the analysis at this benchmark. Two components were identified at each of the benchmarks except for at EFL 475-625 where three components were found (Table 8.44 below). Table 8.45 shows the factor loadings after rotation at each of the benchmarks (below).

Table 8.44: Total variance explained for teachers' most frequent practices for assessment of learners' reading performance

Component	<i>EAL 175-325</i>			<i>EFL 175-325</i>			<i>EFL 400</i>			<i>EFL 475-550</i>		
	Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values			Initial Eigen values		
	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %	Total	Variance %	Cum %
1	2.928	41.825	41.825	3.060	43.717	43.717	3.631	51.866	51.866	2.909	41.554	41.554
2	1.093	15.617	57.442	1.091	15.592	59.309	1.679	23.983	75.849	1.210	17.291	58.845
3	.898	12.829	70.270	.837	11.955	71.264	.774	11.057	86.906	1.113	15.906	74.751
4	.656	9.366	79.636	.750	10.710	81.975	.499	7.126	94.031	.872	12.453	87.204
5	.607	8.670	88.306	.577	8.241	90.215	.234	3.346	97.378	.442	6.318	93.522
6	.432	6.169	94.475	.373	5.330	95.545	.131	1.872	99.249	.292	4.171	97.693
7	.387	5.525	100.000	.312	4.455	100.000	.053	.751	100.000	.161	2.307	100.000

Table 8.45: Factor loadings for teachers' most frequent practices for assessment of learners' reading performance

Items	Factor loadings								
	<i>EAL 175-325</i>		<i>EFL 175-325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475-550</i>		
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	3
Answer multiple choice questions on material read	.819		-	-		.809		.762	.455
Short-answer written questions on material read	.567			.870		.761			.952
Paragraph-length written response about what students have read	.793			.762		.875		.904	
Listening to students read aloud		.811	.689	.479	.638	.656	.751		
Oral questioning of students		.635	.730		.767		.684		.478
Students give an oral summary/report on what they have read		.685	.787		.952		.712		
Meeting students to discuss what they have been reading and work they have done	.551	.424	.586	.538	.878		.751		

A Kruskal-Wallis test found significant differences between the benchmarks for factors related to teachers' most frequent practices for assessment of learners' reading performance (see .appendix J). For EAL 175-325 two distinct factors were found (*written assessment* and *verbal assessment*). Component 1 revealed a key focus on *written assessment* (multiple choice questions, short-answer written questions, paragraph length written responses) with the possibility of meeting with students to discuss their reading. Component 2 has item clusters suggesting a secondary focus on *verbal assessment* (oral questioning, assessment of reading aloud, learners' provision of an oral summary or report and discussion of reading) at this benchmark. Similar factors were also evident at EFL 175-325. However, the items clustering onto component 1 suggest that *verbal assessment* (listening to reading aloud, oral questioning, oral reports on reading, and discussion with learners) instead of written assessment took precedence at the merged benchmark. The items clustering onto component 2 indicate that *written assessment* (short-answer questions, paragraph length responses) incorporating listening to learners reading aloud played a lesser role.

The items clustering onto component 1 for EFL 400 and EFL 475-625 were the same as those that clustered onto component 1 for EFL 175-325 indicating a strong focus on *verbal assessment* activities at these benchmarks too. Items clustering onto component 2 at EFL 400 also indicate *written assessment* (multiple choice questions, short answer and paragraph length written response) tasks as a secondary activity together with listening to learners read aloud as well. The answering of multiple choice questions clustered onto both components 2 and 3 at EFL 475-625, both of which comprised aspects of *written assessment*. Component 2 incorporated multiple choice questioning and paragraph length written response assessment tasks. Component 3 included multiple choice questioning and short-answer written response tasks. Although oral questioning clustered onto component 3 too it did not make conceptual sense and therefore was not retained.

Reliability analyses were calculated for each of the merged benchmarks to determine whether the factors formed reliable scales at each using Cronbach's Alpha. Table 8.46 (below) provides the case processing summary for the scale under consideration at each of the merged benchmarks. With Cronbach's alpha coefficients between .7 and .8 at each of the merged benchmarks, the scale met the criterion of .5 set for exploratory analysis at each of the merged benchmarks. Furthermore, a review of the item-total statistics revealed that there were no significant differences between the reliability of the scale and its reliability if any of its items were deleted at any of the benchmarks (Table 8.47).Table 8.48 provides the scale statistics across the merged benchmarks.

Table 8.46: Case processing summary for scale of teachers' most frequent practices for assessment of learners' reading performance

<i>Merged benchmarks</i> <i>Cases</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Valid cases included	6909	90.8	1354	93.8	503	100.0	553	89.5
Excluded	702	9.2	90	6.2	0	.0	65	10.5
Total	7611	100.0	1444	100.0	503	100.0	618	100.0

Table 8.47: Reliability statistics for scale of teachers' most frequent practices for assessment of learners' reading performance

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>							
<i>EAL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 175- 325</i>		<i>EFL 400</i>		<i>EFL 475- 550</i>	
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Highest Alpha if item deleted</i>
.763	.763	.736	.730	.808	.808	.736	.736

Table 8.48: Scale statistics for scale of teachers' most frequent practices for assessment of learners' reading performance

<i>Merged benchmarks</i>	<i>EAL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 175- 325</i>	<i>EFL 400</i>	<i>EFL 475- 550</i>
Mean	10.61	10.77	11.43	11.75
Variance	9.943	7.272	8.484	9.146
Standard deviation	3.153	2.697	2.913	3.024

8.7.3 Summary and discussion of homework and assessment

Opportunity-To-Learn is clearly related to the use of homework as this expands available learning time (Reynolds, 1998). It is evident that learners in classes with averages at the lowest benchmarks had far less homework for reading assigned than their peers in classes with average performance levels at the PIRLS international benchmarks. With the exception of learners at EFL 175 and EFL 550, most of the learners at the other benchmarks were in classes with a teacher that indicated that, in general, when reading homework was assigned for any subject, there was a *16-30 minute* time allocation.

Teachers were asked about the amount of emphasis they placed on selected sources to monitor their learners progress in reading. Key monitoring sources at each of the class average benchmarks were teachers' use of their own professional judgement and classroom tests. Teachers' strong reliance on use of their own professional judgement and self-constructed classroom tests without other monitoring sources could be problematic

especially if they are not able to judge the appropriate developmental level at which to set tests or are unable to determine whether learners are experiencing reading difficulties. Diagnostic testing was less prominent but still received some emphasis for high percentages of learners at each of the class average benchmarks. The use of national or regional achievement tests did not feature as a monitoring source for most learners across the benchmarks. Perhaps this is an area in need of investigation given the possibility of teachers' misperceptions of their learners' reading abilities.

The factor analysis of frequency of assessment practices for learners' reading performance revealed two main foci across the benchmarks. Verbal assessment activities comprising listening to reading aloud, oral questioning, oral reports on reading and discussion with learners were the central focus for reading assessment at most of the benchmarks with lesser emphasis given to written assessment tasks. This trend was reversed at EAL 175-325 where written assessment tasks were a key factor and verbal assessment tasks were secondary. However, as verbal assessment tasks were a main factor for most, perhaps learners did not have enough exposure to written assessment activities.

8.8 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This chapter has presented findings for the phase one secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data to partially address research sub-question 2 for the study. The backgrounds of teachers were described and class composition and reading specialist availability considered. Access to and use of reading resources by teachers in their classrooms were outlined followed by discussion of time allocation for instruction. Reported classroom reading instructional activities and comprehension development practices were reviewed and reports about homework and assessment activities were discussed.

To complement and extend the results of this secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data, the micro level classroom environments of selected Grade 4 teachers, the teachers' characteristics, their classes and teaching practices for the development of reading literacy are described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER NINE

PHASE TWO FINDINGS:

CASE STUDIES OF TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS, CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS AND TEACHING PRACTICES FOR READING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

9.1 ORIENTATION

To complement and extend the results of the secondary analysis of the PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire data presented in Chapter Eight, the micro level classroom environments of selected Grade 4 teachers, the teachers' characteristics, their classes and teaching practices for the development of reading literacy at the six participating schools⁵⁶ are examined. Data presented in this chapter thus further address research sub-question 2, which is:

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

The data presented in the chapter are derived from the analysis of: interviews with the Intermediate Phase Head of Department (HoD) and the participating Grade 4 teacher at each school; selected PIRLS 2006 teacher questionnaire items; learner workbooks; classroom observation; and the Opportunity-To-Learn (OTL) questionnaire. In section 9.2, each teacher's background and goals for teaching Grade 4 reading literacy are presented. This is followed by the discussion of: class size and learners' reading profiles (9.3); overall language teaching strategies (9.4); reading instruction activities (9.5); and reading comprehension practices (9.6) for reading literacy development in each teacher's class. In section 9.7, the data presented in the chapter are discussed and summarised.

9.2 TEACHER BACKGROUND AND GOALS

In this sub-section, the backgrounds of the Grade 4 teachers who participated in the research are described (9.2.1). This is followed by an exposition of these teachers' stated goals for the teaching of Grade 4 reading literacy (9.2.2).

⁵⁶The six purposively selected schools which had a class average achievement at the PIRLS 2006 international benchmarks of EFL 550 (School A), EFL 475 (School B), EFL 400 (School C), and the South African benchmarks of EFL 325 (School D), EFL 325 (School E) and EAL 175 (School F).

9.2.1 Teacher background

The Grade 4 teacher at School A was in the age range of 50 to 59 years, and had 31 years of teaching experience and 10 years at Grade 4. She had attended teacher training college and held a Further Diploma in Education (FDE). As part of her teacher education she reported *areas of emphasis* as having been: English language; literature; pedagogy; teaching reading; remedial reading; reading theory; special education and second language learners. She had also received an overview or introduction to psychology and children's language development. In the two years prior to data collection, she reported having spent *6 to 15 hours* in Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) workshops or seminars. For her professional development, she read books or professional journals related to teaching in general and teaching reading in particular, *once or twice a year*. She also read children's books *at least once a week* for professional development. She reportedly read at home for enjoyment *every day or almost every day*. The teacher's discussions about her practices revealed a strong sense of responsibility at the school:

Obviously they trust us with their children so it's our responsibility and it's our duty and I think it comes naturally certainly to everybody here ... to just go the extra mile for the learners (P3, 3:182, 200:200).

The School B teacher was in the age range of 40 to 49 years. She had been teaching for 15 years altogether and reported that by the end of 2009 she would have eight years experience teaching at Grade 4. She had joined School B in 2002, prior to which she had taught preschool in Swaziland and had done relief teaching in the United Kingdom. The teacher held a 4-year College of Education Diploma but she did not indicate which topics formed part of her formal education or training. In the two years prior to data collection she had not spent any time in CPTD workshops or seminars that dealt directly with reading or teaching reading. For her professional development, she read books or professional journals related to teaching in general and teaching reading in particular, as well as children's books *once or twice a year*. During interviewing, she revealed a personal love of reading, mentioning that "*Well, I love reading, I'm like a bookaholic. I go through a book a week*" (P2, 2:60, 131:131).

The School C teacher, in the age range of 30 to 39 years, had been teaching English to Grade 4 learners at the school for two years, during which time she estimated she had spent *16 to 35 hours* in CPTD workshops or seminars. For her professional development, she read books or professional journals related to teaching in general and teaching reading in particular *once or twice a month*. She read children's books for these purposes *at least every week*. She was qualified to teach at both primary and high school levels. As part of her

formal training, she reported that English language; literature; pedagogy/ teaching reading; and reading theory had been *areas of emphasis*, but not psychology or remedial reading. She had received an overview or introduction to the topics of children's language development, special education and second language learning. Like the teachers at Schools A and B, the School C teacher read at home for enjoyment *every day or almost every day*. She had previously taught English and Life Orientation to Grade 10 to 12 learners for 11 years. She did admit that the change from high school teaching with predominantly EFL speakers to primary school teaching with mostly ESL speakers was:

... an incredible shift in the way you think, the way you teach, your entire approach to the subject. It's like going back the basics, especially when you go from Grade Twelve English to teaching Grade Four English and especially to second language speakers, so it's been a learning curve and I am constantly learning even now (P5, 5:1, 4:4) (P5, 5:2, 5:6).

Nonetheless she felt that teaching at high school level had provided her with insights into teaching at primary school level:

... there are many children who are at high school level who don't have a grasp of the basics, so that has influenced me in trying to make sure that ...[my Grade Four learners] have a very good grounding in English, especially as far as basic literacy is concerned... (P5, 5:3, 7:8).

The School D teacher was between 30 to 39 years and had completed an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE). She had been teaching Grade 4 learners at the school for 15 years, and, had been appointed as HoD for Grades 4 to 7 in 2009 (P3, 3:79, 179:188). She reported spending *more than 35 hours* in CPTD for reading or teaching reading in the previous two years. For her professional development, she read books or professional journals related to teaching in general and teaching reading in particular *once or twice a month*. She read children's books *at least once a week* for professional development and reported reading for enjoyment at home *every day or almost every day*.

The School E teacher was in the age range of 30 to 39 years and had been teaching for 14 years and at Grade 4 for seven years. Having taught in many different school settings, when data collection took place at School E at the end of July 2009, she had been at the school for just over two months (P2, 2:2, 6:6), and in January 2009 had returned from teaching at a school for Maori learners in New Zealand. At this school, she had taught *"...the new entrants class, it was age 4 to 5, but then I had a combined class for age 11 and 12, 4, 5 and 11, and 12. I had to give them English, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation and golf"* (P2, 2:3, 7:25). Before moving to School E, she had taught Arts and Culture and Life Orientation to Grades 8, 9 and 10 learners at a high school and had also taught Grade 9 English at another private

school. Before teaching in New Zealand she had also taught a combined class of Grades 2 and 3 learners at a primary school, and also Business Economics, English and Afrikaans at a high school (P2, 2:3, 7:25). The teacher had a Senior Primary Teacher Certificate and three-year College of Education Diploma. She reported that English language; literature; pedagogy/ teaching reading; psychology; remedial reading; reading theory; children's language development; special education and second-language learning were all *areas of emphasis* as part of her training. The teacher had spent *6 to 15 hours* in CPTD workshops or seminars in the last two years, and read books or professional journals relating to teaching and learning or to teaching reading and children's books for her own professional development *at least once a week*. She read for enjoyment at home about *once or twice a month*. The teacher was enthusiastic about teaching, mentioning that "*I enjoy it myself every day each lesson that I give them, I enjoy every moment of it*" (P2, 2:1, 5:5).

The teacher at School F was in the age range of 30 to 39 years and had been teaching for 12 years altogether. She reported that she would have one year of experience teaching at Grade 4 by the end of 2009, prior to which she had taught in the Foundation Phase. The teacher held a three-year College of Education Diploma, for which she reported that English language, literature, pedagogy/ teaching reading and second-language learning were *areas of emphasis*. Reading theory and remedial reading were reportedly not part of her formal education and training. In the two years prior to data collection she had spent *less than six hours* in professional development workshops or seminars that dealt directly with reading or teaching reading. The teacher also indicated that she read books or professional journals related to teaching in general as well as children's books for her own professional development perhaps *once or twice a year*. She indicated reading books or professional journals related to teaching reading *once or twice a month*, and stated that she read at home for enjoyment *every day or almost every day*.

At Schools A, B, D, E and F, all of the teachers *agreed a lot* with the statements '*I am content with my profession as a teacher*', '*I am satisfied with being a teacher at this school*' and '*I do important work as a teacher*'. The School C teacher however *disagreed a little* with the statement '*I am content with my profession as a teacher*' and only *agreed a little* with the statement '*I am satisfied with being a teacher at this school*'. Like the other teachers, she *agreed a lot* with the statement '*I do important work as a teacher*'.

9.2.2 Teacher goals

Five themes were apparent in the cross-case comparison of teachers' responses to a query about their goals for teaching Grade 4 reading literacy:

- The improvement of learners' spoken English
- Encouraging positive emotional responses to reading
- The development of learners' comprehension
- Reading skill development
- Vocabulary development.

The improvement of learners' spoken English was a teaching goal at Schools A, C and D with teachers expressing goals to improve learners' verbal expression and pronunciation. For example, at School C a goal was to:

...Have the child be able, at the end of Grade Seven to... be able to express themselves in proper English, verbally and written work... to be able to speak in fluent English... (P4, 4:51, 70:70).

Encouraging positive emotional responses to reading was a goal for teachers at all schools, with the exception of School E. At schools A and B, the teachers wanted the learners to develop confidence in reading and expressing their opinions. A love for or enjoyment of reading was stated as a goal by teachers at Schools A, C and F. The School C teacher indicated:

...I want them to love reading...As long as they enjoy the story and they want to know what's coming next, I think that the love for reading is fostered (P5, 5:5, 12:14).

Another positive emotional response goal was for learners to have empathy with what they had read at School B. The School C teacher specifically wanted the learners to become much more involved in and excited about English language and *"...to understand the importance of English in their everyday lives..."* (P4, 4:53, 70:70).

The development of learners' comprehension was a goal at Schools A, B, C, D and F. At Schools A, F and B this goal was voiced in terms of learners' ability to understand what they were reading. At School F, this was further expressed as a goal for learners to have the ability to retrieve information for themselves. The overall goal of comprehension was explicated as more specific processes by teachers at Schools A, B and C. The comprehension development goals at School A were for learners to find contextual clues in

texts and use them as well as their development of accurate transcription of answers for comprehension. At School B, a goal was to establish learners' reading strategies to aid comprehension by teaching them to skim, scan, and summarise the main ideas in texts (P1, 1:88, 112:112). At School C, the teacher linked her comprehension improvement goal to learners' English skills and the need to reinforce certain comprehension strategies:

...to improve their comprehension skills because I think a lot of them especially second language speakers, children who don't speak English at all at home, have a problem with understanding why, what, when, how. And so I want to reinforce those skills because without those skills they cannot function in any other learning area (P5, 5:9, 14:14).

Various goals linked to learners' reading skill development were stated by the teachers at Schools A, B, C, D and F:

Our focus is on improving the reading because... that infiltrates into every other subject... so our aim is to make the children better readers and consistent readers (School A, P3, 3:36, 53:53).

... the fluency of reading. Because [I am] trying to encourage them not to break the words up at this stage... try and scan the whole word, because some of them are still in the habit of...[breaking it up]... which hampers comprehension. I know that's how they do it lower in the school and it's necessary there, but by now they need to be reading the whole word (School B, 2:77, 171:173).

I also want my children to be able to read the kind of passages that we have in class (School C, P5, 5:8, 14:14).

I expect them to be very, very fluent in reading (School D, P3, 3:67, 148:148).

... I want them to be able to read with understanding and be independent in their reading without somebody's assistance be able to read and understand... (School F, P3, 3:33, 142:145).

At School E, the only teaching goal provided by the teacher was related to learners' reading development. The teacher's explication of her goals for teaching reading literacy perhaps revealed a lack of depth in her understanding of reading literacy development:

... I want them to become excellent readers... I always tell them, if you can't read, then you can't write... it's important for me that you must read... I really want them to become excellent readers... (P2, 2:67, 218:221).

Another specific goal for learners' reading literacy development at Schools B and D was the development of learners' vocabulary. The School D teacher linked this goal to the improvement of learners' English proficiency by stating that

you know and increasing their vocab[ulary], you know because sometimes they want to say something in English...and they want to switch to Zulu (P3, 3:61, 130:130).

A few other goals were stated for reading literacy teaching. At School A the goal was to "... make children more language aware through the six outcomes [of the RNCS for languages]"

with each receiving equal attention (P3, 3:35, 51:51). At School C, improvement of parental involvement was also indicated as a goal (P4, 4:54, 70:70).

9.3 CLASS SIZE AND LEARNERS' READING PROFILES

Although learner characteristics have been discussed in Chapter Seven, a few more indications of their reading profiles and class composition were provided by the teachers. As outlined in Table 9.1 (below), the teacher at the lowest performing school, School F, had the most learners in her class.

Table 9.1: Grade 4 class composition

	<i>Number of learners in class</i>	<i>Number experiencing problems with spoken English</i>	<i>Number needing remedial instruction</i>	<i>Number receiving remedial instruction</i>	<i>Learners' reading levels</i>
SCHOOL A 550 EFL	22	0	5	5	Above average
SCHOOL B 475 EFL	36	0	4	4	Varies greatly
SCHOOL C 400 EFL	120 (40)*	40	25	0	Average
SCHOOL D 325 EAL	39	-	-	-	-
SCHOOL E 325 EFL	40	20	6	6	Average
SCHOOL F 175 EFL	50	34	25	6	Below average

**The teacher response reflects the total number of Grade 4 learners she taught - 40 in each class.*

In contrast the teacher at the highest performing school, School A, had the least number of children in her class. Teachers at Schools B, C, D and E had between 36 and 40 learners in their classes in 2009. The lower the class average PIRLS 2006 achievement benchmark, the higher became the number of learners in each class. At School C, due to difficulties in addressing the learning needs of the learners in the Grade 4 classes due to class size, the school had restructured its Grade 4 classes so that instead of three classes of 40 learners, in 2010 there would be four classes with 30 learners (P4, 4:37, 56:56). It was felt that this was particularly important due to the changes with which Grade 4 learners needed support, such as moving from one classroom to another, larger classes and interacting with multiple teachers instead of just one for the first time (P4, 4:32, 40:48).

Very high numbers of learners in each of the classes at School E and F experienced problems with spoken English, whereas none of the learners at Schools A or B did. The teacher at School F specifically indicated that half of her class needed remedial instruction, although only an estimated six learners actually received it.

In the PIRLS teacher questionnaire, with the exception of the teacher at School D, teachers responded to the question “*According to your experiences, how would you describe the reading level of the Grade 4 learners in this class?*” The School A teacher reported that her 2009 learner group had ‘above average’ reading levels. The teacher at School B reported that she had a mixed ability class of learners, a point which is reflected in her response that her learners’ reading levels varied greatly. The School C and E teachers judged their learners’ reading levels as ‘average’. The School F teacher described her learners’ reading levels as below average.

9.4 OVERALL LANGUAGE TEACHING STRATEGIES

In sub-section 9.4.1, typical language teaching strategies at each of the schools are described. This is followed by an overall description of the language activities apparent in the review of learner language workbooks undertaken (9.4.2).

9.4.1 Typical language activities

Teachers were asked to give an indication of typical activities for Grade 4 Language during a school week. Some were able to provide more details than others. All of the strategies were different, revealing diversity in the manner in which teachers implemented the Language curriculum at Grade 4.

Learners at Schools A and B had a scheduled library period each week. Furthermore, at School A, the teacher read the learners’ set work novel to them every day for 10 minutes. Thereafter, learners would either give a written or verbal response to this reading regarding the plot, the characters, the setting and questioning about ‘who?’, ‘what’, ‘why?’, ‘when?’, ‘where?’ Other than this core activity, different activities were planned for each school week. As an example, in the week of the research visit, learners were scheduled to write a story, work on language rules, do a comprehension, and complete an exercise on prepositions. The use of an eclectic approach was thought to have a positive impact on their engagement with reading literacy development at the school:

... we vary our techniques and I think because the children aren’t given the chance to stagnate that they really just come to the party (P3: 3:110, 113:113).

The learners at School A had exposure to different varieties of hearing and seeing English (P3, 3:125, 127:127), attending plays and pantomimes, writing drafts (P3, 3:45, 63:63) and role-playing (P3, 3:42, 63:63). Teachers had switched backed to the “old school” methods of

“talk and chalk” (P3, 3: 72, 91:91). Whereas previously they had focused on sound families and extensions thereof, with no formal spelling testing, they had since reverted to the Schonell list, to the most commonly misspelt lists, to spelling scope and sequence (VAKT technique), to dictation, and to progressive exposure to the occasional rule (P3, 3:73, 91:91). Contextual teaching was also emphasised.

At Schools B and D, more rigid scheduling was apparent with certain activities occurring on the same day each week. A typical week of Grade 4 Language teaching at School B encompassed: handing out spelling worksheets and going through them on a Monday; a literature study, which included class reading of a set work novel and working in a booklet of worksheets for the book on a Tuesday; grammar once a week; and sometimes taking learners outside to read in groups (P2, 2:32, 69:69). The learners also did creative writing (P2, 2:38, 69:73), and the teacher included a “thought for the day”:

... some of them are not that easy, we've got a whole bunch of them... and one child would... come up and read the thought for the day and then we discuss it, it just takes two minutes in the morning (P2, 2:71, 165:169).

The School D teacher reported that from Monday to Thursday learners mostly worked on the grammar component of their textbook. Fridays were dedicated to reading from a class reader. Teaching was theme-based with the teacher discussing a theme, getting learners to take out their dictionaries to check words, followed by grammar using their book for the next four days (P3, 3:41, 83:84). At School C, the learners had at least two periods of reading a week but if they finished their other work quickly a third was included. The teacher also tried to do a comprehension from a short passage once every two weeks. Vocabulary, language, writing and listening activities stemmed from this comprehension as teaching was theme-based. Sometimes another comprehension would also be completed in this period. The School E teacher also reported using theme-based teaching, explaining that she would normally do a reading lesson. A comprehension and spelling test that made use of language structures would then be compiled from the reading lesson and the learners would be given an assessment task at the end of the week (P2, 2:31, 92:96). In response to questions about a typical week, the School F teacher only responded that during the six-day timetable she tried to cover all of the LOs for Language⁵⁷ (P3, 3: 27, 112:119).

⁵⁷ These LOs are: Speaking; Listening; Reading and viewing; Thinking and reasoning; Language structure and Use; and Writing.

9.4.2 **Learner workbook review: Language overall**

Each teacher provided a learner's workbooks for English language, presumably including those of one of her most competent learners, since the books had few errors, were neat and legible, and showed positive teacher feedback (marked correct and containing written praise). If this was indeed the case then it seems that the workbooks were representative of written activities undertaken for reading literacy development at each school. Table 9.2 (below) outlines part of the analysis of the books undertaken for the time period between January and the end of June 2009. The numbers of pages in each book overall and with learners' actual handwriting were counted and the number and type of language activities evident in the books determined. After the analysis of the individual workbook content and comparison with the other workbooks, an overall judgement of the quality of the work output in each class was made, as presented in this sub-section.

Much more work output was evident in the workbooks of the learners at the schools which reached the PIRLS international benchmarks as opposed to the learner workbooks at the schools with averages below the international benchmarks. As an example, there were 68 pages of work in the School A learner workbook, with 40 activities as opposed to the School F learner workbook which had only 16 pages of work in it with 36 activities for the same period. Although the learner workbooks at School D and School F had similar numbers of language activities to Schools A, B and C, many of these activities were very short entries of a few lines.

The School A goal of curricular alignment was evidenced in the assignment of an LO and AS to each task in the learner's workbook. There appeared to be a balance in the activities for each of the Language LOs in the book. Much variety and creativity was evident in the workbook activities, specifically with the choice of texts for comprehensions. Contextual as well as theme-based comprehensions were used and worksheets and texts pasted into the book were from a variety of sources. At School B, with all of the work taken together, there was comprehensive coverage of the Language learning area. Much reinforcement was also present via repetitive activities. There was not much variety evident in the comprehension texts although most comprehension activities seemed to be focused on the set work literature studies with other language activities integrated.



Table 9.2: Overview of language activities in the Grade 4 learner workbooks at each school

Workbook review foci	EFL 550 School A	EFL 475 School B	EFL 400 School C	EFL 325 School D	EFL 325 School E	EFL 175 School F
BOOKS PROVIDED	<u>BOOK 1</u> : English language activities at the front and assessment tasks at the back	<u>BOOK 1</u> : English language <u>BOOK 2</u> : Handwriting exercises and Mini-comprehensions <u>BOOK 3</u> : Language word finding, crosswords and word puzzles ('English Spelling') <u>LITERATURE STUDY</u> : Activity booklets for the three set work novels for the year. At the time of the research visit (08/08/2009), the learners were halfway through the second booklet.	<u>BOOK 1</u> : English language	<u>BOOK 1</u> : English language	<u>BOOK 1</u> : English language <u>BOOK 2</u> : Assessment for all learning areas	<u>BOOK 1</u> : English language
DATE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES	26/01/2009-25/06/2009	26/01/2009-04/06/2009	16/01/2009-22/06/2009	16/01/2009-17/06/2009	14/01/2009-19/06/2009	14/ 01/ 2009-24/06/ 2009
NUMBER OF PAGES PER BOOK	<u>BOOK 1</u> (front): ± 68 at front	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 22 <u>BOOK 2</u> : ± 39 <u>BOOK 3</u> : ± 45 <u>LITERATURE STUDY</u> : ± 14 per book	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 27	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 35	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 18 <u>BOOK 2</u> : ± 6 assessments	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 16
NUMBER OF PAGES PER BOOK WITH LEARNER'S WRITING	<u>BOOK 1</u> (front): ± 46	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 18 <u>BOOK 2</u> : ± 39 <u>BOOK 3</u> : ± 45 <u>LITERATURE STUDY</u> : ± 14	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 17	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 31	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 10 <u>BOOK 2</u> : ± 8	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 14
NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES PER BOOK	<u>BOOK 1</u> (front): ± 40	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 17 <u>BOOK 2</u> : ± 47 <u>BOOK 3</u> : ± 46 <u>LITERATURE STUDY</u> : ± 39 per booklet	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 24	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 49	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 16 <u>BOOK 2</u> : ± 6	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 36



Workbook review foci	EFL 550 School A	EFL 475 School B	EFL 400 School C	EFL 325 School D	EFL 325 School E	EFL 175 School F
LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES PER BOOK	<p><u>BOOK 1 (front):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared reading text • Alphabetical order • Punctuation rules and punctuation • Parts of speech (Nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns) • Conjunctions • Synonyms and antonyms • Rhyming words • Sentence types • Homonyms and homophones • Plurals • Prepositions • Contractions • Degrees of comparison • Letter writing • Essay writing • Summarising text • Spelling 	<p><u>BOOK 1:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing • Alphabetical order • Parts of speech (Nouns, Adjectives, adverbs) • Punctuation • Poem-writing • Statements to questions <p><u>BOOK 2:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handwriting <p><u>BOOK 3:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jumbled words • Synonyms and antonyms • Homonyms • Word-finding <p><u>LITERATURE STUDY:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts of speech (Nouns, verbs, adjectives) • Alphabetical order • Cloze procedure • Punctuation • Contractions • Opposites • Past tense • Similes • Creative thinking • Rhyming words • Masculine and feminine 	<p><u>BOOK 1:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts of speech • Punctuation • Vocabulary • Opposites • Prepositions • Creative writing • Apostrophes • Crossword puzzle • Handwriting • Conjunctions 	<p><u>BOOK 1:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing • Punctuation • Singular and plural • Grammar (10) • Spelling • Tense • Listening skills • Vocabulary • Prepared speech • Comparative adjectives • Opposites • Drawing 	<p><u>BOOK 1:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts of speech (Nouns, verbs) • Comparative adjectives • Rhyming words • Copy and complete sentences • Capital letters • Days of the week • Animal sounds • Tense <p><u>BOOK 2:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spelling tests • Labelling diagram of body parts • Sentences: fill in missing words from a list • Masculine and feminine nouns • Tense (am, is, are) 	<p><u>BOOK 1:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conjunctions • Vowel sounds • The alphabet • Sentences • Spelling • Dictation • Word order • Pronouns • Fill in missing letter • Days of week • Months of year • Vocabulary • Capital letters • Sight words • Punctuation (full stop, question mark, comma) • Past tense • Parts of speech (verbs)

The School C learner's book also had a variety of activities. Clearly much preparation had gone into the choice of activities which were theme-based. Many worksheets were used but the teacher had also included extension exercises for advanced learners. Many of the comprehension activities included other language activities and there were a variety of comprehension texts revealing the intention to expose learners to multiple texts. The work was developmentally suitable for Grade 4 learners.

The School D learner's book was dominated by writing exercises, especially grammar. This output confirmed the teacher's explanation that the learners focused on grammar for four days of the school week. The exercises were all very short with between five and ten lines written per activity. Few written comprehension activities were evident, and those which were seemed to be have been taken from a textbook as there were no texts or worksheets pasted into the book.

There was minimal work in the School E learner's book, and according to dates entered for activities there were long periods of time without evidence of any written activity having taken place. The activities present were basic and based on rote-principles, with no evidence of attempts to extend learners' thinking and reasoning.

The exercises in the School F book were elemental, suggesting that the learners were in the early stages of English exposure. For example, written output dealt with sight words, phonics, the alphabet, days of the week, and body parts. The work mostly appeared to be copied verbatim from another source, probably the chalkboard. There was no evidence of any comprehension activities that would extend learners' thinking and reasoning abilities. Some of the work was titled 'homework', meaning that not all of the activities were even class-based. Most activities were 5-to-10 lines at the most. A single small photocopy handout of a story in the book was the only sign of extra resource material.

9.5 CLASSROOM READING MATERIALS, READING INSTRUCTION AND READING HOMEWORK

Following from this exposition of overall practices, the reading materials and reading instruction practices disclosed by teachers are presented in sub-section 9.5.1. In sub-section 9.5.2 time allocation for reading instruction and reading instruction practices are discussed. Thereafter, reading homework practices are outlined (9.5.3).

9.5.1 Classroom reading material use

Teachers at Schools A, B, C and E reported that they used the same materials with learners at different reading levels but that the learners worked at different speeds. At Schools D and F, the teachers indicated using different materials with learners at different reading levels.

Whereas the Grade 4 teachers at Schools A, B and C ostensibly had no major problems with access to reading materials, at the other schools reading material access was less optimal. Learners in the Grade 4 classes at Schools A, B and C had access to reading series (SCH A, P6, 6:13, 77:77) (SCH C, P5, 5:31, 42:42), however at School B the reading series had to be shared between the Grade 4 classes for group reading due to the limited number of books available in the series. As the teacher explained:

I've got some [reading series] books. We've got one box that we share between the entire grade... and there's only three of each kind of book. So if you put [the learners] in reading groups you have to put them in groups of three. It's really tricky... because they're expensive... whenever we sit them outside in the sun to read, then they read that, but they don't take them home, because there's not enough (P2, 2:50, 98:103).

Perhaps revealing higher teaching expectations and/or learners' more advanced reading abilities, learners at schools A, B and C read set work novels, each of which were of similar length, genre and suitability for the Grade 4 learner's developmental status. At School A, learners read a set work novel per term, resulting in the completion of three novels (P5, 5:16, 44:50). At School B, the teacher also used three fiction titles per year for literature study, each with a workbook containing grammar exercises and comprehension questions for the learners to work through. Each Grade 4 class read these titles at different times of the year so that there were enough books for each class (P2, 2:91, 20:206). As an example of the type of novels used as set works, the three titles at School B were:

- *The Sheep-Pig* by Dick King-Smith (1983) (160 pages)
- *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White (1952) (192 pages)
- *Stig of the Dump* by Clive King (1963) (157 pages)

Learners at School C read two set work novels per year (P6, 6:12, 27:30), one less than learners at Schools A and B. The learners read *Charlotte's Web* and Roald Dahl's *Matilda*.

Suggesting the need to challenge learners in spite of their abilities, the teacher found that these novels were a positive reading experience for them:

...the choice of readers that I have requested for my Grade 4s this year... has really fostered an enthusiasm even in the weaker readers because once they get into the story even if the vocabulary is a little over their head[s]... As long as they enjoy the story and they want to know what's coming next, I think that the love for reading is fostered there and some of my children were bad readers, they didn't like reading, but after reading a little, they went and found Roald Dahl books in the library... so they're really enjoying it (P5, 5:7, 12:12).

At Schools D, E and F, reading series and set work novels were not used. At School D, a textbook reader and a grammar book which did contain some reading materials was used to answer questions (P3, 3:43, 84:84). The teacher also mentioned that teachers were encouraged to use extra materials, extra books and handouts, and informally shared materials by photocopying (P3, 3:74, 164:164). Another strategy was to let learners watch a film of a book in the library first, ask them questions and then show them the book, thus motivating them to read it (P3, 3:57, 122:124). The teacher also found that the learners liked it when she read extra stories which were not from their readers (P3, 3:58, 124:126).

As mentioned in Chapter Seven, the School E teacher had problems with access to reading resources, having only 20 English readers for the 40 learners in her class. The learners thus had to share books, which could be frustrating especially if paired with a peer of differing reading ability (P2, 2:38, 122:131). The teacher had also been confused about whether to use materials for EAL or EFL learners, as although the learners were EAL learners were actually in an EFL medium class:

These are second language children, must I use, must I make use of second language material or first language material, then they called me in and said: "Okay, the English classes are first language, the two Afrikaans classes is second language." So, I had to go back and then draw up some work for first language learners and then second language learners (P2, 2:8, 29:29).

At School F, learners did not have access to a class reader or any other reading books, so typed and photocopied stories were used for reading instruction. The teacher herself stated that she "... can't say reading material is a challenge because I can improvise..." (P3, 3:11, 30:30). The teacher also sometimes used magazine and newspaper articles where the learners read a text linked to the current theme for learning (P3, 3:31, 135:135).

Over and above reading series and set work novels, multiple text types were used for reading instruction at School A. As indicated by the Subject Area leader "We try to focus on contextual and current affairs as well as folklore, animal tales etcetera" (P5, 5:16, 44:50). Specific texts used for comprehension at Grade 4 included: newspaper articles; satirical

cartoons; pictures for visual literacy; recipes; and telephone directories (P5, 5:16, 44:50). Teachers at the school liked to work with current texts, meaning that they did not rely on published fiction and non-fiction texts. Current news texts were used instead, which meant that the learners could relate to them as they were hearing about them and seeing posters in their everyday environments. Sometimes two texts with a different slant on the same event would be used for comparative study purposes (P3, 3:81, 99:99). A variety of texts was evidenced in the School A learner's workbook too (see Table 9.1). At School C, the learner's workbook also had evidence of the use of a variety of texts types over and above reading series and set work novels, for example, visual literacy exercises, posters, poems, recipes, menus, a letter, advertisements, visual graphs and maps. Significantly, the School C teacher acknowledged that there was no single EFL textbook available that was appropriate for her ESL learners expressly as the language could be too abstract. Furthermore, the ESL textbooks had very simple language and she wanted her children "... to be more than that..." As a result, the teacher adapted to her learners' needs, using "a bit from here, a bit from there..." and making her own worksheets (P6, 6:23, 40:42).

At Schools B, D, E and F, the learners' workbooks did not reveal the same variety of exposure to different texts as those of Schools A and C. Nevertheless, the School B teacher reported making reading cards for her learners using expository texts from the children's sections of magazines. Moreover, she typed out comprehension cards to create work for them (P2, 2:70, 157:165), and they had a workbook containing crossword puzzles. In the School D, E and F learner workbooks, there was no evidence of use of a variety of texts. At School D there were no worksheets or texts pasted into the book and at School F there was only one photocopy handout of a story pasted into the book. At School E, there were three texts pasted into the book, all of which were short stories.

9.5.2 Classroom reading instruction time allocation and practices

Teachers specified via the PIRLS teacher questionnaire and interviews which reading instruction practices they undertook with their Grade 4 learners. At School A, one and a half to two hours were spent on reading instruction per week. At School B learners had one reading period a week. Nevertheless, due to the integrated nature of language instruction as part of her practices, it was difficult for the teacher to estimate how much reading instruction was done per week as the learners also read as part of other subject areas:

It's hard to say, because we do a lot of reading that's not English reading... We make booklets for, History, Geography. Like we did [Mahatma] Ghandi today. We read through about Ghandi and then we discussed Ghandi and then, and while I'm reading, they're reading along... and then they have

to answer questions about it. So, it's a lot of reading and answering questions... we drill it quite a lot actually (P2, 2:45, 82:89).

At School C the learners had two periods of scheduled reading a week, but sometimes if they had finished their other Language work three periods would be undertaken. At School D there was only one designated reading period a week, of 30 minutes. It could not be ascertained how much time was allocated to reading instruction at School E as the teacher gave no indication that formal reading instruction formed part of her teaching practices. The School F teacher reported that the children spent ten minutes on reading at the beginning of every English period as reading was such a problem for them, unless it was a reading lesson specifically on the day (P3, 3:20, 63:64).

Table 9.3 (below) outlines the frequency of the teachers' use of different groupings for reading instruction. Reading was most frequently taught as a whole-class activity with teachers at schools B, C, D and E indicating that they *often* taught reading in this way. The teacher at school A also indicated that this *always or almost always* took place.

Table 9.3: Teacher reports on grouping for reading instruction

Grouping strategies	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
Teach reading as a whole-class activity	Always or almost always	Often	Often	Often	Often	Often
Create same-ability groups	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	-	Sometimes
Create mixed-ability groups	Sometimes	Sometimes	Often	Always or almost always	-	Sometimes
Use individualised instruction for reading	Sometimes	Never or almost never	Never or almost never	Sometimes	-	Sometimes
Learners work independently on an assigned plan or goal	Often	Sometimes	Often	Sometimes	-	Sometimes
Learners work independently on a goal they choose themselves	Often	Sometimes	Never or almost never	Sometimes	-	Sometimes

Same-ability grouping tended to receive attention *sometimes* by five of the teachers. Mixed-ability grouping also only *sometimes* took place at schools A, B whereas it was a more frequent instructional strategy at Schools C and D. In comparison to their peers at Schools B and C who *never or almost never* had individualised reading instruction, *sometimes* learners at Schools A, D and F received individual instruction. Learners at School A and C *often* had opportunities to work on an assigned plan or goal. The School A learners also *often* worked on a goal that they had chosen themselves. In contrast, learners at schools B, D and F only *sometimes* had such opportunities.

In terms of types of reading instruction used, the teachers spoke mostly of teachers or learners reading aloud, silent reading and paired reading. Reading aloud in small groups or pairs occurred *once or twice a week* at Schools A and D and *every day or almost every day* at School E. Small group of paired reading was less frequent at Schools B, C and F occurring *once or twice a month*. Paired reading was used by the teachers at Schools A, B, C and D. Learners at School A did paired and shared reading, and, had to do a written review of their reading. Learners at School B did paired reading *once or twice a month* with three learners of the same ability reading together. A ‘good reader’ was paired with a ‘slow reader’ at School D so that the former could help the latter (P3, 3:53, 116:116). The School C teacher had learners do paired reading also, but did point out that she preferred guided reading so that she could assist learners with new vocabulary and pronunciation:

We do paired reading, but what I also found is that if children do paired reading, the pronunciations get all garbled and so sometimes I prefer guided reading rather than paired reading. I think it is more suitable for Grades Fives, Sixes and Sevens... when it's with a simpler passage perhaps, then paired reading work[s] but for something slightly more advanced, slightly new vocabulary, I find that guided reading works a lot better (P5, 5:19, 20:20).

Although only teachers at Schools A, B, D and F mentioned silent reading as a strategy used for reading instruction during discussions, all of the teachers indicated how often they undertook silent reading in their responses to the PIRLS teacher questionnaire (Table 9.4, below).

Table 9.4: Teacher reports on silent reading activities⁵⁸

Types of silent reading activities	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E ⁵⁹	School F
Ask learners to read silently on their own	Once or twice a month	Every day or almost every day	Never or almost never	Once or twice a week	Every day or almost every day	Once or twice a week
Ask learners to read along silently whilst other learners read aloud	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Every day or almost every day	Once or twice a month	Every day or almost every day	Once or twice a month
Give learners time to read books of their own choosing	Every day or almost every day	Every day or almost every day	Once or twice a month	Never or almost never	Every day or almost every day	Once or twice a week

The School A teacher reported getting learners to read silently on their own or whilst others read aloud perhaps *once or twice a month*. However, if one considers giving learners time to read books of their own choosing then they did do silent reading perhaps informally every

⁵⁸ Although only three variables for silent reading are reported in this table, 10 variables relating to reading instruction were included for the item in the PIRLS teacher questionnaire.

⁵⁹ The School E teacher’s responses must be viewed with caution as the teacher responded *every day or almost every day* for each variable of item, and this response pattern was also evident for other items too. Given her discussion of her practices, her reporting seems unlikely.

day or almost every day. Although silent reading was reportedly undertaken *every day or almost every day* at School B, the teacher explained that there was no formalised silent reading as part of her classroom practice. The learners mostly did silent reading when looking for answers as part of a comprehension or when taking a book to read from the reading corner after finishing work (P2, 2:44, 78:81).

The School D teacher reportedly got learners to read silently on their own *once or twice a week*. She further explained that she gave learners handouts to read silently so that she could then ask questions to assess their understanding (P3, 3:54, 116:116). Although the School E teacher reported doing some form of silent reading *every day or almost every day* in class, this was not mentioned during interview discussions. The School F teacher sometimes did silent reading so that she could then check her learners' understanding, albeit not often as learners needed the teacher's assistance to read (P3, 3:2, 4:4). This explanation was in contrast to her questionnaire response in which she stated that learners read silently on their own *once or twice a week*.

Reading aloud was done by learners individually, by the class or by the teacher. The teachers at Schools A, B, C and E indicated that they read aloud to their learners *every day or almost every day*, whereas the School D and F teachers reportedly only read aloud *once or twice a week*. Learners at Schools A, B, C and D also read aloud to the whole class *once or twice a week*. The teachers at Schools E and F reported that their learners read aloud to the whole class *every day or almost every day*.

Ten minutes of reading aloud by the teacher was undertaken daily at School A. The School B teacher explained that when reading the class set work novel:

Sometimes we'll just read for the whole hour, and they'll take turns reading going around the class. Other times we would read one chapter and then I let them work in their books (P2, 2:32, 69, 69).

Additionally, the teacher pointed out that:

When we do 'Charlotte's Web', I'm reading with, I've got my own book. I read a little bit because some of the parts are quite difficult, so then I read the difficult ones and then people take turns, that's what we'll do... and... I read along with them... (P2, 2:42, 77:79).

When reading their set work novel, the teacher at School C read aloud to the learners, stopping at points to let individual learners read aloud and discuss the text (P5, 5:17, 18:18). The School D teacher got learners to read aloud in class and also read to the learners. However, she found getting learners to read challenging as she had a class of 39 and only

one reading period a week (P3, 3:6, 18:18) (3:44, 84:84). The teacher read aloud for the School F learners and they had to follow in their books. A phonics approach using Grades 1 and 2 readers for reading instruction was still used for the learners at School F (P3, 3:6, 10:1) (P3, 3:12, 31:36). Although the teacher did not mention it, the HoD pointed out that teachers would read first and learners would then repeat to get used to the pronunciation of words (HoD, P1, 1:7, 10:10). Teachers also apparently had to use pictures or concrete examples and actions to aid learners' understanding (P1, 1:38, 119:123) (P1, 1:38, 119:123).

School A had a number of approaches to reading instruction, none of which were mentioned as instructional strategies by teachers at the other schools. The learners did half-an-hour of the *CAMI*⁶⁰ computer software reading programme, which involved language and comprehension skills. The learners also had half-an-hour of formal reading tuition a week, in which they are taught reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, analysis and synthesis (P3, 3:41, 53:63). An attempt was made to increase their reading speed, and progress in this regard was recorded every month (P3, 3:55, 72:75). Learners also did flash reading for word recognition (P3, 3:56, 72:75).

As indicated by Table 9.5 (below), teaching or modelling of reading strategies was a weekly activity at School A. Although the School E teacher indicated that she did this *every day or almost every day* there was no other evidence to support this. At the other schools, the teachers reported *never or almost never* teaching or modelling reading strategies, or only doing so *once or twice a month*.

Table 9.5: Teacher reports on teaching or modelling of reading strategies

School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
Once or twice a week	Never or almost never	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a month	Every day or almost every day	Never or almost never

Given the teachers' discussion of her learners' English reading abilities, it was surprising that the School F teacher reported only teaching strategies for decoding sounds or words once or twice a month. Perhaps the importance of still teaching decoding strategies is highlighted by it being a much more frequent activity for higher performing school environments, such as School A or C (Table 9.6, below). It may also be that the lack of use of this strategy at School B is a reflection of it being unnecessary due to learners' strong decoding abilities.

⁶⁰ *CAMI* offers educational software for Mathematics and Literacy: www.camiweb.com

Table 9.6: Teacher reports on teaching of reading strategies

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
Strategies for decoding sounds or words	Every day or almost every day	Never or almost never	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a week	Every day or almost every day	Once or twice a month

9.5.3 Reading for homework

As outlined in Table 9.7 (below), the frequency of assignment of reading for homework varied at each of the schools. At Schools C and E, learners reportedly did reading homework *once or twice a week*. At Schools B and D reading was assigned for homework *three to four times a week*. At Schools A and F reading homework was reportedly given *every day or almost every day*. Teachers at Schools A, C, D, E and F indicated that when reading homework was assigned for any subject, 16 to 30 minutes were allocated, while at School B 31 to 60 minutes were allocated. The School B teacher explained that in the first term of the Grade 4 year, 15 minutes of reading homework was assigned. In the second term 20 minutes were given and thereafter 30 minutes (P2, 2:52, 103:105).

Table 9.7: Frequency of assignment of reading for homework

Frequency	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
Every day or almost every day	●					●
3-4 times a week		●		●		
1-2 times a week			●		●	
Never or almost never						

The School F teacher's report on frequency of reading for homework did conflict with statements made by the school's HoD when he suggested that:

We have a difficulty giving learners homework. They will go [home], nobody will help them... we just have to do it here at school (P1, 1:18, 37:42).

The School B teacher relied on parental involvement in ensuring that reading homework was completed:

[The learners] must either take a book from the [school] library, the town library or [one] that their parents have bought them and their parents have to see that they read... I can't pick up [if they have not done it]. It's up to the parents and if they sign the book and say they've done the reading, I have to trust them, if they're lying... What can I do? (P2, 2:54, 105:111).

The reading homework strategy at School A was structured to ensure that homework was done. From Grade 4 onwards, learners had to do 15 minutes of reading at home every day

from an individual choice of books. Learners then had to do a written review of what they had read, describing the plot, characters, scene and providing a summary (P3, 3:51, 63:69). Moreover, the school requested parents to do 10-to-15 minutes of family reading a day, a so-called “...*DEAR period, ‘Drop Everything And Read’, or RIBIT, ‘Read In Bed It’s Terrific’*” (P3, 3:130, 131:131). The learners reportedly had little time for reading for enjoyment at home due to homework and extra-mural activities (P3, 3:129, 131:131).

9.6 READING COMPREHENSION DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

In this sub-section, the strategies for reading comprehension development that the teachers indicated using are presented (9.6.1). The reading comprehension lesson observed in each teacher’s Grade 4 class is considered (9.6.2) and an analysis of comprehension activities in the learners’ workbooks provided (9.6.3). This is followed by consideration of teachers’ responses to the Opportunity-To-Learn questionnaire regarding their learners’ ability to comprehend the PIRLS 2006 reading passages (9.6.4).

9.6.1 Comprehension development strategies reported

The teacher at School A revealed more strategies to improve learners’ reading comprehension than teachers at the other schools. For instance two models of teaching reading comprehension explicitly informed the teaching process. Both Barrett’s (1976) taxonomy of reading comprehension and Bloom’s taxonomy (1956) for thinking and reasoning (recall, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation) were often integrated in a variety of ways into comprehension tasks (P3, 3:30, 47:47).

For vocabulary development specifically, School A Grade 4 learners had individual index books and had to write two words daily that were useful to them. They also did work using a dictionary and a thesaurus (P3, 3:52, 69:69) (P3, 3:53, 69:69) and were gradually encouraged to answer reading comprehension questions in their own words. Grammar inclusions were also included in comprehensions (P5, 5:38, 70:70). Other comprehension strategies cited included: colour coding; visual literacy (P5, 5:38, 70:70); pictorial sequencing of stories and visuals for texts; listening skills to test understanding; consolidation of character, theme, plot and setting on a mind map for written responses (P5, 5:28, 63:63); and teacher questions formulation with key words visually presented as the story progressed (P5, 5:27, 63:63).

Even parents received a list of questions they could ask their children in Grades One to Seven after they had finished reading a book. These questions included:

- Did you enjoy the book? Why?
- Why did you choose it?
- Who were the characters?
- Who was your favourite character? Why?
- How would you describe the character?
- Was there anything about the story that you did not like?
- Are there any words you did not know the meaning of?
- Can you retell what happened in the story? (P6, 6:2, 49:58).

Key comprehension elements such as ‘Who? What? Why? When? Where? How?’ were also points of focus for questioning after reading at home with parents (P3, 3:154, 157:157). The teacher reiterated the importance of the development of thinking and reasoning skills and learners’ recognition of the importance of their own personal opinions, as suggested by the following:

We do a lot of ‘what do you think?’ [questions] and they know, [they say] ‘Mrs T, when it is what do you think, it’s our own thinking processes’. And I’ve said to them ‘It can’t always be wrong’, I said ‘everyone thinks differently’ (P11, 11:84, 412:416).

According to the School B teacher “*Set comprehensions are only done perhaps once a month as the learners do lot of comprehension as part of their literature study work*” (P2, 2:33, 69:69). There were class discussions when reading the set work novel for literature study, with inference questions involved (P2, 2:61, 131:133).

Learners also did mini-comprehensions (P2, 2:67, 156:157) which required some inference skills and some other comprehensions that the teacher typed out for them (P2, 2:69, 161:161). Moreover, comprehensions were part of other learning areas, meaning that the learners had much exposure to reading and answering questions (P2, 2:46, 87:89). When asked, the teacher did not make mention of any specific comprehension strategies taught (P2, 2:67, 156:157).

Revealing further insights into South African teachers' comprehension development practices, having interacted with many teachers in other schools in the area, the School B HoD⁶¹ was of the opinion that:

... the teachers are simply doing repetitive work which is good, to a point. They are doing question and answer, you know simple questions [like] "what colour was Joe's hair?" and that type of thing. They are not experimenting with clozed procedure, with open-ended questions and things like that (P1, 1:34, 24:24).

Therefore, perhaps teachers were not setting enough inference questions, and only did recall questions which do not develop learners' thinking or reasoning. The HoD further highlighted that her Grade 7 learners were not able to summarise or find the main ideas in texts as these skills were "not filtering through" (P1, 1:90, 112:116).

Similarly to School A, the School C teacher reinforced comprehension skills by asking 'Why? What? When? How?', especially as her group were ESL learners and also needed to use these skills in other learning areas (P 5, 5:11, 14:14). The learners did a comprehension lesson from a short passage every two weeks (P5, 5:12, 15:16), with all other language lessons built around this comprehension (P6, 6:14, 25:26).

The teacher explained the process undertaken to try to improve learners' comprehension during such a lesson:

We have a limited amount of time to go through a comprehension passage so usually I do the unfamiliar vocabulary first... we discuss the new words... once we're reading at least the children have an idea of what's going on or what that word means or a vague idea. They can put it into context... I know many teachers favour giving children a chance to read during a comprehension lesson but I prefer to read it myself to them and then when they are answering the questions they must read it at least once on their own before they start answering questions because I feel that when I read it to them I use the correct inflections, the correct expression and correct pronunciations, because pronunciation is always a problem, so that's one of, that's some of the strategies I use (P5, 5:12, 15:16).

The teacher felt that it was good to introduce the learners to new vocabulary in reading passages, even if it was not age-appropriate (P6, 6:5, 12:12). Sometimes a vocabulary lesson was held the day before a comprehension and sometimes the teacher introduced dictionary work for new vocabulary so that the learners learnt the lexical meaning and could then see the word contextually in the comprehension (P6, 6:16, 32:32). The teacher also tried to incorporate questions to encourage thinking and reasoning about what the learners

⁶¹ Although the HoD was not the focus for investigation of teaching practices, her insights are nonetheless important and have thus been included in this section.

would do in the same situation (P6, 6:20, 35:36). Extension exercises were given to learners who worked quickly or who needed more cognitive challenge (P6, 6:20, 35:36).

When asked about comprehension development activities at Schools D, E and F, the teachers' discussions about practices revealed very little depth in their understandings of comprehension development. The School D teacher listed a number of strategies used for developing her learners' reading comprehension, which mostly seemed to revolve around oral comprehension work. These included: explaining difficult words; giving the correct tempo and mode; variation of tone when reading the story; showing learners' pictures mentioned in the story; involving learners by getting them to predict what would happen next in the story; and asking them how they would feel or what they would do in similar situations to those of the story. Code-switching was also used when learners struggled with a word (P3, 3:65, 144:146). The teacher further stated that she would let the children read to see if they were able to understand the vocabulary in a passage (P3, 3:3, 5:6), or get them to read silently then ask them questions (P3, 3:54, 116:116). When doing a theme-based comprehension lesson, the teacher would first try to elicit learners' prior knowledge on the topic and also did dictionary work to check words (P3, 3:45, 84:84).

Discussion with the School E teacher did not provide any insights into her comprehension development strategies. Except for stating that she gave the learners questions (P2, 2:41, 133:133), let them act out stories or do role-plays, held debates (P2, 2:42, 133:133) and got the learners to understand topic content, particularly as she was working on cross-curricular themes (P2, 2:44, 133:133), no other insights were available. The School F teacher asked questions after reading to check her learners' understanding (P3, 3:3, 4:4), and used spelling as a vocabulary development exercise (P3, 3:5, 6:12). Another strategy was to get a group of learners to choose a word from a theme the class was working on, discuss it, write a sentence and get the learners to exchange their sentences with the rest of the class (P3, 3:5, 6:12). The teacher also concluded that theme-based teaching for all learning areas also led to repetition of vocabulary (P3, 3:17, 47:58). As with teaching at School D, code-switching was used to assist learners' understanding of words (P3, 3:5, 6:12).

9.6.2 Learner workbook review: comprehension activities

Table 9.8 (below) presents the learner workbook review for comprehension activities. An estimate of the number of comprehension development activities in the books was made and the type of texts used for comprehension development activities in the books noted, together with an indication of the type of written comprehension questions asked.



Table 9.8: Overview of comprehension activities in the Grade 4 learner workbooks at each school

WORKBOOK REVIEW FOCI	EFL 550 SCHOOL A	EFL 475 SCHOOL B	EFL 400 SCHOOL C	EFL 325 SCHOOL D	EFL 325 SCHOOL E	EAL 175 SCHOOL F
NUMBER OF COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES PER BOOK	<u>BOOK 1</u> (front): ± 20	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 3 <u>BOOK 2</u> : ± 29 Mini-comprehensions completed <u>LITERATURE STUDY</u> : 9 comprehensions in first literature study. Learners busy with second literature study which had 22 comprehensions	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 11	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 6	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 3 <u>BOOK 2</u> : ± 0	<u>BOOK 1</u> : ± 4
COMPREHENSION ACTIVITY TYPES PER BOOK	<u>BOOK 1</u> (front): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening comprehensions • Sequencing of a story • Text with multiple choice questions • Cloze procedure • Crosswords • Comic strips • Visual literacy • Fiction text with open-ended questions • Newspaper article review (headline, key words, main ideas, critical literacy skills) • Satire cartoon with questions • Questions for set work novel • Ordering of rambled sentences • Recipe and questions • Telephone directory entries and questions • Parts of story (title, author, illustrator, characters, setting, event, solution) • Book review 	<u>BOOK 1</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text-based comprehensions <u>BOOK 2</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each mini-comprehension has four statements with answer options e.g. <i>The sun set very late today. We played outside until 7 o' clock at night. You can tell it is a) winter b) snowing c) summer</i> <u>BOOK 3</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crossword puzzles with clues <u>LITERATURE STUDY</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is comprehension question answering per chapter of each set work novel. 	<u>BOOK 1</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text-based comprehensions • Visual literacy • Poster • Recipe • Poem • Menu (cross-curricular outcome with Mathematics) • Letter • Jigsaw sentences (sequencing of sentences) After June 2009: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverts • Visual graph • Map 	<u>BOOK 1</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text-based comprehensions • Visual graph • Summary of characteristics 	<u>BOOK 1</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text-based comprehensions • Visual text 	<u>BOOK 1</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text-based comprehensions • Clozed procedure

The comparison of the number of comprehension activities and type of questions asked in each of the books provided the most meaningful insight into learners' opportunity to develop written comprehension skills in response to comprehension questions. The highest performing schools in the sample, Schools A and B had completed the most written comprehension activities. At least 20 written comprehensions with about 10 questions each had been completed at school A. For the PIRLS 2006, comprehension questions for texts must include questions which require the learner to focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information and ideas; make straightforward inferences; draw on and justify complex inferences and interpretations; and examine and evaluate content, language and contextual elements.

At Schools A, B and C, learners did appear to have exposure to these types of questions, whereas at Schools D, E and F the limited number of comprehensions in the learners' workbooks did not meet these questioning criteria. At School B, 12 larger comprehensions of about 10 questions each and 29 so-called 'mini-comprehensions' with one multiple choice question each were apparent. Nine of the larger comprehensions were based on a set work novel. School C was not far behind with 11 comprehension tasks of about 10 questions each evident. In comparison, at school D there were only 6 comprehension tasks evident, of which only 3 were text-based comprehensions. At school E there were only 3 comprehensions and only two text-based comprehension activities each with 10 questions. At School F there were only 4 comprehension activities and 3 of these were text-based, each with 7 to 8 questions.

The comprehension activities in the School A learner's workbook had a strong focus on reinforcing learners' focus on establishing the text's setting, main ideas, and characters, as well as summarising content and providing explanation of answers. Other language activities were integrated into the comprehension activities, with application questioning also prominent. Comprehensions contained a balanced number of information retrieval questions, straightforward inference questions and more advanced questions that required justification of inferences and interpretations. At School B, all of the mini-comprehensions required straightforward inference and used multiple choice options for answer provision. The other comprehensions had information retrieval, straightforward inference and justification for inferences and interpretations as questions. Examination of content, language and textual elements was present in the set work literature study books. In the School C learner's workbook, a variety of text types were used for comprehension, all advanced with the use of low frequency words which would pique the interest of a Grade 4 learner. Each comprehension had between 5 and 10 questions requiring

information retrieval, straightforward inference and justification of inferences and interpretations.

In the School D workbook, there were only three text-based comprehensions with five questions each. The questions required one-word answers and information retrieval. There were only two text-based comprehensions in the School E workbook, each with ten questions. All of the questions were text-based, requiring information retrieval only. There were only three text-based comprehensions, each with 7 to 8 questions. Two comprehensions required factual everyday knowledge (i.e. days of the week, months of the year). Only one comprehension was based on a story and required information retrieval only.

9.6.3 Comprehension lesson observation

A comprehension lesson was observed in each teacher's classroom. The analysis of each lesson focused on time allocation (9.6.3.1) and the suitability of the text and questions⁶² chosen for the lesson (9.6.3.2). The teachers' lesson expositions were compared⁶³ (9.6.3.3) and the nature of teacher-learner interactions scrutinised (9.6.3.4).

9.6.3.1 Time allocation for lesson

School A had the shortest lesson time allocation of 29 minutes on the day of the research visit, as a result of shortened periods due to a school event. School F had only 33 minutes of lesson time too. However, no reason was given for this. Of the 33 minutes, the teacher only spent 16 minutes actively engaged in teaching the learners. At Schools A, C, D and E the majority of the lesson time allocated was utilised for active teaching by the teacher. At School B just under half of the lesson was used by the teacher for teaching.

9.6.3.2 Suitability of text choice and comprehension questions

The texts chosen for the lesson at Schools A, B, C and D were appropriate for Grade 4 learners in terms of storyline and cognitive level. Five of the teachers used a fiction text for the lesson, whilst at School B an information text was used. The text used at School D had the most words (932), whereas the one used at School F had the least words (175). School A had a 449-word text for the lesson while those used at Schools B, C and E were

⁶² See Appendix K which provides the text and questions used for the lesson at each school.

⁶³ See Appendix L for a table which summarises the comprehension lesson observed at each school.

between 217 and 311 words. The passages at Schools B and C were slightly more challenging than the School A and D texts in relation to language used, vocabulary and potential for cognitive challenge. Indeed, perhaps revealing the ability to reflect and adapt her lesson strategies according to classroom experiences, the School C teacher admitted that the text was too difficult for her learners:

...upon reflection I won't use that passage again next year with my new grade 4s, simply because I think there were too many new words for them and maybe I would choose something slightly simpler, but not too simple (P6,6:7, 17:18).

Nevertheless, the teacher did further indicate that:

... of course I don't always give them a difficult passage. Sometimes it is a simple passage from a first language textbook, but sometimes I think it's important for them to see there is more than just the basics and it's always good to introduce them to new vocabulary even if it is not totally age-appropriate vocabulary, in terms of words like 'startled' and 'dismay' but, once they get the words, even if half of them remember it, that's just equipping them with new knowledge (P6, 6:6, 9:12).

The School F text was simplistic with high frequency English words and a storyline offering no opportunities for invoking higher order thinking from learners. The text was below the cognitive level of a Grade 4 learner but appropriate for the learners in the class, given the little exposure to English that they had. Although the School E text was suitable for the interests of a Grade 4 learner, it did not provide any opportunities for cognitive challenge. The School A, B, C, D and E texts each had a supporting illustration, however, the School A teacher was the only one observed who used this illustration as part of her lesson as an exercise in visual literacy. Whereas the School F learners were reportedly still concrete-bound in their reading, needing pictures to support their understanding, no illustration was linked to the text read. With the exception of School E, the texts used at the other schools each had comprehension questions which were used as part of the lessons. The School F text had only five questions, which each required straightforward information retrieval with minimal response requirements. As examples, three of the School F questions were:

- *How old is Seipati?*
- *What sickness did Seipati have?*
- *Where did she get the sickness?*

At Schools A, B and C, the texts each had 10 questions with a balance of information retrieval questions and questions requiring inference or application. For example, information retrieval questions included:

- *What job did Mrs Abrahams have in the school?* (School A)
- *At what time of the day did the event take place?* (School C)
- *What happens when a minnow is separated from its school?* (School B)

Examples of inference and application questions at the three schools were:

- *What would be the advantages of having Miss Matthews for a teacher? What would be the disadvantages?* (School A)
- *The writer says scientists like to know about animal behaviour. Do you think this is useful to us? Give reasons for your answer* (School B)
- *Explain why: Jim sat still, not daring to move* (School C)

A further 10 questions, mostly requiring inference or application, were included in the comprehension lesson for the School C learners. Revealing attempts at differentiation of content according to ability, the teacher explained that:

There's a selection of comprehension questions. For my average learners they will answer the questions we asked in class in full sentences in their workbooks, then I've got an extension exercise, which are more challenging questions, I think there's about ten [for] my faster, sharper workers (P6, 6:10, 21:24).

At School D, most of the 10 questions required information retrieval. At School E, although questions for the text were available in the learners' reader, no questions were used as part of the lesson.

9.6.3.3 *Lesson exposition*

Table 9.9 (see below) presents a summary of the comprehension lesson undertaken at each school. In this section, each lesson process will be considered in terms of pre-reading activities, reading activities and post-reading activities.



Table 9.9: Summary of lesson process at each school

School A EFL 550	School B EFL 475	School C EFL 400	School D EFL 325	School E EFL 325	School F EAL 175
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of a contextual event leading into story • Vocabulary extension using words from story with naming of parts of speech included • Interpretation of illustration for story • Discussion of characters and how differences are apparent in the picture • Learners read paragraph from text silently • Learners read paragraph aloud • Teacher reads aloud • Read through comprehension questions • Learners highlight keywords in comprehension questions. • Teacher reads passage aloud, learners follow • Learners answer comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands out photocopied comprehension • Reads title of comprehension and asks what a minnow is • Reads story to children - stops to ask questions throughout this reading, also summarises key points in one of the main paragraphs, discusses the meaning of a word too. • Reads through questions with learners (discusses the answers for the first three questions and then discusses what is required to answer the rest of the questions without discussing the answers) • Children take out exercise books, paste comprehension into book and answer questions individually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tells learners they are going to read a story • Discusses title • Goes through new vocabulary by means of class discussion of meaning • Briefly refers to picture on page • Reads story, stopping to explain content and ask children questions • After story, asks learners what they would do in a similar situation. • At end, summarises discussion and gives a life orientation answer to how they should deal with such a situation • Goes through comprehension questions with learners which are discussed verbally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tells learners they are going to read a story • Hands out text • Reads title and discusses which animal is big and which is small. Explains that hare is cousin to rabbit • Individual children read aloud. Teacher interrupts while each child is reading to explain and discuss content and vocabulary. • As text is divided into sections with questions, the teacher reads and discusses the questions at the end of each section. • When the story is finished the teacher asks the learners what lesson they learner learnt from the story and also whether they enjoyed the story • Learners read other library books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of topic but teacher does not directly link this to story • 3 children read aloud and teacher asks questions in-between • Children underline vocabulary in the story that they do not understand • 8 children write one of their words on the board • Teacher goes through each of the 8 words explaining them and asking children for examples • Class reads story aloud • Teacher asks learners to write sentences with words that they underlined • Teacher asks a few questions about the story i.e. what happened? What next? • Learners do vocabulary exercise in their books. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell learners they will read a story and answer questions • Teacher reads aloud • Teacher reads story again. First points out "name" of story. • Asks one learner to read first sentence and another to read last sentence. • Teacher asks comprehension questions. Praises learner for answering and the class clap. • Teacher gets learners to list other illnesses they have learnt about in Life Orientation • Teacher writes comprehension questions on the board, learners must copy and answer the questions.

• Pre-reading activities for the lesson

Pre-reading activities for each of the lessons were analysed. The School B teacher did not provide any introduction to the lesson, whereas the School F teacher merely pointed out that she would read a story and asked the learners to listen carefully. In this way, both the School B and F teachers missed opportunities to extend learners' experiences beyond the

content of the text, particularly as both indicated that the lessons fed into cross-curricular themes from other subject areas at the time.

The School C and D teachers did indicate the title of the story the learners were about to read and had brief discussions about it. Whilst the School C teacher then explained what the story was about on the basis of the title, the School D teacher did not. Rather, the School D teacher's discussion centred on facts about the two animals named in the title of the text to be read. The School E teacher tried to have a general discussion with the learners at the beginning of the lesson, which presumably was meant to link to the text's topic. However, the teacher did not expressly make these links during her introduction, making the discussion redundant, especially as the learners could not relate to her approach to introducing the topic. After the lesson the teacher tried to explain the goal of her introduction, which had not been apparent, but did acknowledge that the approach had not worked:

...maybe I didn't do it properly... but I wanted them to know that... you get wild animals that stays in the wild and then you get animals, the dog, the cat, that you don't normally get in the wild... (P2, 2:17, 39:53).

In contrast, the School A teacher discussed a general event taking place at the time of the lesson and skilfully led this discussion onto the topic of the text to be read. Two other pre-reading activities were undertaken by the School A teacher following this discussion. Firstly, the teacher undertook a vocabulary extension activity using three words from the text to be read. She placed each of these words on the board, discussing them one-by-one. For one word, the teacher asked for a synonym, and for another word pointed out that it was a homonym. The teacher also asked what part of speech each word was and the learners did not hesitate to respond. Language structure and use was not integrated into any comprehension lesson observed at the other schools. The learners also had no difficulties in explaining each word's meaning. In explaining her approach to vocabulary extension, the teacher noted that:

...normally I would reinforce my parts of speech... all the time and say "okay, did you find the word weird? Give me a synonym" or- like I started - very basic and we'd really work with this... I would maybe say to them, "okay... find me a proper noun... see if you can find a conjunction, see if you can find a preposition" that kind of thing (P11, 11:78, 376:376).

Secondly, the teacher did a visual literacy activity using a picture from the text to be read. The learners were asked about the two characters depicted and how they could tell that they were not the same age. In this way, learners' interest in the story was piqued and

they were already using higher order thinking skills to engage with the comprehension text.

The School C teacher also went through a list of eight new vocabulary words at the beginning of the lesson, taking at least a quarter of the lesson to complete prior to the reading of the story, and perhaps illustrating the time needed to support ESL learners' understanding of new vocabulary. The teacher explained that

There are times when we do the vocabulary lesson a day before and then we do the comprehension a day later and sometimes I introduce dictionary work with new vocabulary, so they have a vocabulary exercise, learning how to use a dictionary and then we go on to the comprehension exercise so they are familiar the dictionary meaning, the general use meaning of it and then contextually (P6, 6:13, 31:32).

- Reading activities for the lesson

Table 9.10 (below) summarises the reading activities that took place in the lessons at each of the six schools.

Table 9.10: Summary of reading activities

School A EFL 550	School B EFL 475	School C EFL 400	School D EFL 325	School E EFL 325	School F EAL 175
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners read paragraph silently • Learners read paragraph aloud • Teacher reads story aloud twice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher reads aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher reads aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual learners read aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual learners read aloud • Silent reading to underline words not understood • Vocabulary extension • Class reads aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher reads aloud twice • Learner reads first sentence • Learner reads last sentence

The School B, C and F teachers read the text aloud to their learners. Both the school B and C teachers paused during the reading to explain words, summarise, emphasise a point or discuss content. The School C learners were also asked for their opinions. The School F teacher read the text aloud a second time but no discussions or explanations occurred during either reading. One learner read the first sentence and another read the last sentence after the teacher had helped him to find it. The School F teacher did later acknowledge that she

...should have allowed them to read more, because they only read about two sentences aloud, but they were reading with me when I was reading, but silently, so I should have allowed them to read more... But I did that because of time... In a double period, if I have double period at the same time, then they read, maybe four, five of them they read... (P3, 3:38, 156:164).

At Schools D and E a few learners read the story aloud individually. At School D, three learners read the first segment of text. As with the School B and C teachers, the School D teacher interjected during the learners' reading to ask questions or explain words. As the entire text was split into three segments, with questions after each, the teacher would also discuss the questions orally after each one. At School E, the teacher then did a vocabulary extension activity which required the learners to read and underline words in the text they did not understand. Eight of these were written on the board and discussed in class. Thereafter, the teacher got her learners to read the text aloud together.

It was only at School A where multiple reading activities were undertaken. Prior to handing out the text, the teacher placed a paragraph from the text on the overhead projector and asked the learners to read it silently on their own and then together aloud as a class. The teacher then asked questions about the paragraph before reading the whole text to the learners and asking them to predict what would happen next, at the end of the story, before getting them to apply the story to a scenario in their own life worlds.

- Post-reading activities for the lesson

Post-reading activities involved either discussion or the answering of comprehension questions or both of these activities for each of the lessons observed. Although undertaken differently in each class, reading through the questions was a strategy at Schools A, B, C, D and F.

At School B the teacher first asked one inference question after reading the text and got the class to respond orally to the first three comprehension questions for the text. Thereafter, the teacher read through the other questions with the learners without discussing the answers. She did however point out what some questions would require from the learners, e.g. number of reasons they had to provide. The learners then took out their books and spent the rest of the lesson answering the questions.

At Schools C, D and F, comprehension questions were discussed orally and then the learners answered them in their books. When initiating discussions of the questions, the School C and D teachers undertook further probing for meaning with their learners around the issue under consideration. Although minimal, the School D and F teachers also discussed factual content for cross-curricular integration with other subject areas. The teachers did not make any cross-curricular links explicit.

At School A, the post-reading phase was much more strategically organised than for the other lessons observed. Like the other teachers, the School A teacher also read through each question with her learners. Although she did not discuss the answers, as the comprehension was to be used as an assessment task, she did discuss the answering requirements for some of the questions. Learners had to circle those which required only a one-, two- or three-word response, and they had to highlight the keywords in each of the questions provided. At this point, the teacher first handed out the full text to the learners, then re-read the story to them and asked them to look for the answers to the comprehension while she read. As the teacher explained:

normally some people... give them... [the text] first... And then they would give them the questions, but I work differently from this because I feel if you are reading the questions you must know what you're going to be finding out. It is no use just reading this and then saying, "oh well, these are the questions"... so... I always give both but I always start with my questions. And I think very often, it's very important when you're actually giving a comprehension, that you should actually try never to say "we are going to do a comprehension today", it is always good to say "I want to share a story with you" and then already, the kids, the kids love stories, I mean I read so much to them, I really do, and you will see they now want to... what was also quite a good idea, was to bring out a part of the story and say, "okay, what do you think?" With the predictions, okay, predicting the outcome, that I think is also very important (P11, 11:72, 356:358).

At School E the teacher used the post-reading phase to continue the vocabulary extension exercise started during the reading phase. She explained that the learners should write a sentence with all of the words that they did not understand from the text. It was only at this point that the teacher briefly asked learners about what happened in the story. Only facts were described and the teacher did not probe for any further meaning from the learners. The learners then did the vocabulary extension activities in their books for the rest of the period.

9.6.3.4 Teacher-learner interaction

At School A, the teacher engaged in asking the learners questions which required them to think and reason throughout the lesson. Multiple learner perspectives were also encouraged. The following teacher (T) and learner (L) dialogue is an example of interactions in the class:

- T: *First of all, tell me how many characters do you see here?*
L: *Two.*
T: *Two. Okay, what do you notice about the character on the left?*
L: *It's a robot.*
T: *How do you know she's a robot?*
L: *Because they're plugging her in.*



- T: They're plugging her in. Right... if you compare the ages do you think they're similar or different in age?*
- L: Different.*
- T: How do you know that?*
- L: Because the one is older and the other one is younger.*
- T: What makes her look older?*
- L: Her skin.*
- T: Her skin. Yes?*
- L: It looks like she's worn out.*
- T: Okay. Yes?*
- L: She looks frail.*
- T: She looks rather frail, well done.*
- L: She's wearing glasses.*
- T: So you think older people wear glasses?*
- L: Yes*
- T: Okay, that's when we start losing the sight .Yes, you?*
- L: The dress that she's wearing, we don't normally wear that sort of dress.*
- T: Excellent. Okay, the fashion is different, well done.*

The School A learners actively participated in the lesson with little or no prompting by the teacher. They remained engaged throughout the lesson and had no difficulties in responding to questions and discussions initiated by the teacher. The answers and reasons provided by learners revealed their above-average cognitive skills and advanced vocabularies. Nor were the learners afraid to question further when they wanted clarification of a task. They responded very quickly to prompts to use certain comprehension techniques, perhaps suggesting that these skills had been inculcated in the learners to a point of automaticity.

At School B, the learners freely engaged in the lesson by stating their opinions, which were acknowledged and accepted by the teacher. The learners did not seem to have any difficulties with the vocabulary in the text or the comprehension questions. No detailed discussions were held around the content of or questions for the story.

The School C learners eagerly participated in the lesson, answering questions posed by the teacher and stating their opinions. The teacher asked questions while reading the story and discussed issues around the content of the text with the learners. The teacher encouraged multiple perspectives by seeking multiple answers to questions. The learners struggled with the vocabulary of the story but the teacher was able to scaffold their understanding through discussion.

The School D learners were interested in the lesson and participated in answering questions posed by the teacher. However, when questioned directly by the teacher it was obvious that a few learners were largely unaware of what was going on in the lesson, due

either to non-comprehension or distraction. The teacher sometimes code-switched to explain a concept and allowed the learners to do so when answering questions. Sometimes a child answered a question and the teacher repeated the answer, summarised it or elaborated. The teacher did listen to different opinions expressed and did attempt to probe for meaning, although sometimes she failed to follow through with these attempts. In one instance, the teacher's discussion moved off-task from the content of the text revolving around the discussion of facts.

The School E learners seemed to enjoy participating in the lesson. However, they were not always able to answer the teacher's questions. The teacher did attempt to probe for meaning during the introduction to the story but the learners could not relate, probably as a result of a lack of prior knowledge upon which to draw. Other questions that the teacher asked tended to be closed or required retrieval of information only. The teacher only asked the learners to explain their answers further in a few instances.

At School F, the learners were passive and non-responsive to the closed questions that the teacher posed. In some instances, when a learner did respond, it was clear that he or she had not understood the story at all. Question and discussion by the teacher was simplistic, involving no thinking or reasoning by the learners, as evidenced by the following teacher- learner dialogue:

T: Did Seipati have TB? What kind of sickness did she have?

L: HIV.

T: So do you think so?

L: No.

T: He is saying HIV.

L: Aids.

T: Aids, very good.

Later during the analysis of the learner workbooks it was discovered that the learners had already done a comprehension exercise with the same passage the week prior to the classroom observation. Thus, even with repetition the learners were not able to comprehend the text or answer the questions. The teacher did code-switch briefly to Sepedi at stages during the lesson.

9.6.4 Opportunity-To- Learn

The Schools A, B, D and F teachers completed an OTL questionnaire. As stated in Chapter Five, teachers were asked to read one of the released literary passages used for

the PIRLS 2006 reading assessments and then answer open-ended questions in relation to it. The teachers gave their opinion on the suitability of the story for their learners in terms of length, the level of vocabulary, the cognitive level and the cultural appropriateness. They also indicated whether or not their learners would be able to successfully read the story independently and with comprehension. Furthermore, the teachers commented on the similarities and differences between this story and the type of fiction stories that they would usually give their learners to read to develop their reading literacy. The teachers were also asked about what kind of teaching support they would need to give their learners to help them to read and understand the story. The teachers' responses to these questions are considered in sub-sections 9.6.4.1 to 9.6.4.4.

9.6.4.1 *Suitability of the PIRLS 2006 literary passage*

The Schools A, B and D teachers commented that the length of the story would be suitable for their 2009 classes. As the School D teacher stated, *"It's not too long, not too short. It would take enough time to read and explain difficult words in a single period and even give them time to ask questions/predict or give own opinion"* (P1, 1:1, 20:21). This suggests the need for teacher support in reading and understanding the story. In contrast, the School F teacher thought that *"the story is too long for a single lesson. It can be read and understood in two to three periods, excluding other skills"* (P2, 2:8, 4:5). The HoD at School B also read the passage and stated that *"... I read this comprehension... and I thought I'd like to give that to my class [Grade 7] and see how they cope with it, because it is long. These kids these days will no way be able to do that"* (P1, 1:96, 124:124).

Only the School A teacher thought that her learners would have no difficulty with the level of vocabulary used in the passage: *"much of the vocabulary comes easily to them as English is heard and spoken on a daily basis"* (P5, 5:9, 29:30). Although the School B teacher judged the passage's level of vocabulary as being *"perfect for [first] language readers"*, she argued that ESL learners in her class would battle with some of the words and they would need to be explained (P4, 4:2, 15:16). Similarly, although she indicated that the language used in the story was acceptable, the School D teacher felt that some easier synonyms could have been used for some of the words as her learners would not have had exposure to them. Also, the teacher suggested that some words would be difficult for the learners due to their life world experiences, wherein they would have had no exposure to the use of certain words, As an example, the teacher pointed out that *"...not all learners in our schools stay in big houses that have 'hallways' - maybe the learners can understand 'passage' better"* (P1, 1:5, 28:29). The School F teacher did not

think the vocabulary was appropriate for her class, suggesting that it would be better suited to learners at a Grade 6 level (P2, 2:9, 7:8).

In terms of the cognitive level of the story, the School A teacher expressed the view that the story was suitable for the developmental level of her learners, who would be able to absorb the details and process the information given to them. She suggested that if her learners used a “Who; What; Why; Where; When; How’ technique” they would be able to respond to the story with full understanding (P5, 5:10, 31:32). The School B teacher reiterated that although the story was appropriate for Grade 4 learners, some of her ESL learners could battle with some of the language used, which would require discussion and explanation (P4, 4:3, 18:19). Both the School D and F teachers were positive about the thinking and reasoning level of the story, the School D teacher adding that the story would challenge her learners to think about the events depicted and help them to learn about the animal characters (P1, 1:3, 24:25). The School F teacher reasoned that, using their imaginations, it would be easy for her learners to think and reason about happenings in the story (P2, 2:10, 10:11).

The School A and D teachers expressed no difficulties with the cultural appropriateness of the text for their learners. The School A teacher felt that as animals were the main characters in the story this did not create cultural barriers for the learners (P5, 5:11, 33:34). The School D teacher argued that “*young readers enjoy fictitious and adventurous stories regardless of the ‘racial’ background or culture. To them it is an exciting and grabbing story that that will keep them at edge of their seats - I think they would be aware that it’s fiction yet good to listen to*” (P1, 1:4, 26:27). Nevertheless, the School B teacher thought the story was more appropriate to Western culture (P4, 4:4, 21:22).

9.6.4.2 *Learners’ abilities to read the story independently with comprehension*

The School A teacher reasoned that as her learners were exposed to a variety of reading materials and many had an extensive vocabulary (P5, 5:13, 40:40) they would be able to independently read and understand the passage successfully. The Schools B, D and F teachers were of the opinion that some of their learners would battle to read the story independently with understanding. In particular, the School B teacher felt that learners who did not read regularly, or for whom English was a second language, would continuously ask for help with such a passage (P4, 4:5, 28:30). The School D teacher thought that most of her learners would cope with the story, even though they might need to refer to a dictionary for difficult words. Also, some of her learners still had to sound out

words and were worried about “calling the word correctly” when reading impacting their comprehension (P1, 1:6, 30:31). The School F teacher believed that barriers to language use would impede her learners in reading and comprehending the story (P2, 2:7, 19:20), further stating that 60% of the learners would not be able to read the story on their own but would require her assistance (P2, 2:12, 16:17).

9.6.4.3 *Comparison of PIRLS text and typical class texts used*

Regarding similarities between the passage provided and typical texts used, the teachers provided differing responses. The School A teacher stated that similarly to the type of texts typically used, the characters were easy for the learners to identify with, the style and register were age-appropriate and familiarity with the setting apparent. The teacher also noted that the mood or tone of the passage was similar to several novels the learners used which shared the same genre (P5, 5:14, 44:48). The School B teacher was of the opinion that the text was similar to typical texts used in terms of language and interest, as well as being Westernised in context (P4, 4:7, 34:35). The School D teacher suggested that her learners had a similar story in their class reader (P1, 1:7, 32:34) and the School F teacher responded that it was similar in the use of learners’ imaginations (P2, 2:2, 23:24).

The School B teacher could not think of any differences between the PIRLS passage and typical texts that she used (P4, 4:8, 37:38). The School D teacher also felt that there was little difference between the books her learners borrowed from the library and this story (P1, 1:8, 35:36). However, the Schools A and F teachers noted differences, the latter thinking that the story was too long as she usually used shorter stories (P2, 2:3, 26:27), the former acknowledging minor differences in that teachers at her school tried to focus on:

... contextual and current affairs as well as folk-lore, animal tales etcetera. This type of reading for understanding would be used occasionally, rather than regularly unless in the format of a class novel [set work] for the term (P5, 5:15, 49:50)

9.6.4.4 *Teaching support needed for reading the passage with comprehension*

Support for reading mostly centred around help with phonological processing and the development of reading fluency. Although the School A teacher stressed that the teachers aimed to use ‘a top down approach’ that focused on meaning-making, learners were supplied with a phonemic chart to help them to decode. Sometimes visuals of sound families were given and syllabification could be used to help learners sound out longer words. Moreover, they were encouraged to use a marker/ruler above the line being read

to enhance fluency (P5, 5:17, 55:60). The School B teacher supported her learners' reading fluency by encouraging them not to syllabify words but rather to read whole words (a so-called Gestalt approach to reading); to read ahead of the word being said if reading aloud; and to be aware of punctuation marks, making use of them correctly (P4, 4:9, 45:45). In much the same manner, the School D teacher would help her learners with sounds with which they were unfamiliar, pronouncing words correctly, and using correct punctuation, but would also encourage them not to rush through their reading so as to facilitate comprehension (P1, 1:9, 38:42).

For assistance with comprehension, the Schools A, B, D and F teachers cited vocabulary extension as a main strategy. The School A teacher would specifically get learners to underline words they did not understand and use their dictionaries to assist them (P5, 5:24, 63:63). A number of other strategies were used by the Schools A, B, and D teachers. The School A teacher reported the most strategies⁶⁴, specifying that she would formulate questions and visually present key words as the story being read progressed. Pictorial sequencing of the story using visuals was another comprehension strategy employed, and the teacher worked on consolidating the characters, theme, plot and setting for written responses, via a mind map. Listening skills to test understanding was another strategy used (P5, 5:24, 63:63).

The School B teacher indicated that she explained any similes or metaphors used in a passage (P4, 4:10, 49:51). The School D teacher cited the use of pictures to aid understanding and asking learners questions requiring projection and inference as strategies. The teacher also felt that reading at the correct tempo with the appropriate mood and tone variation would help her learners to understand the story (P1, 1:10, 44:50).

The School F teacher seemed to be less certain of how to go about supporting her learners to read and understand the passage. The teacher only stated explanation of vocabulary as a strategy, otherwise she focused on provision of remedial assistance, spending time helping learners with learning barriers, having a lower teacher: learner ratio and the teacher herself attending more literacy development courses (P2, 2:4, 29:33).

⁶⁴ These strategies were also witnessed during the comprehension lesson observed.

9.7 DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF DATA

9.7.1 Teacher background and goals

- Teacher background

All of the teachers who participated were qualified, and, judging by their age ranges and reported years of teaching, each had much experience. The Schools A, B and D teachers had the most experience in teaching Grade 4 learners. The School E teacher had taught high school and Foundation Phase learners but this exposure did not seem to translate into any insights into her teaching practice at Grade 4. The School C teacher had also taught high school learners and acknowledged that this had helped her in understanding the reading needs of her Grade 4 learners. The School F teacher had taught at the Foundation Phase previously. All but one of the teachers reported reading at home for enjoyment on a daily basis. Most of the teachers were generally content with their professions and recognised the importance of their work. Except for the teacher at School B who had not attended any training, all of the other teachers reported having spent time in CPTD for reading in the previous two years.

- Teaching goals

Five overall teaching goals were identified in the analysis of each of the teacher's Grade 4 reading literacy teaching goals. These were: improving learners' spoken English; encouraging positive emotional responses to reading; learners' comprehension development; learners' reading skill development; and vocabulary development.

Three teachers wanted to improve their learners' pronunciation and verbal expression. Three teachers also wanted their learners to develop confidence in expressing their opinions and promote their enjoyment of reading. Comprehension development was a goal for five of the teachers, with three wanting to increase their learners' understanding specifically. It was notable that the School F teacher equated her comprehension development goal to getting learners to retrieve information independently, but not to any type of higher order thinking or reasoning goal. Other comprehension goals were more specific and related to learners' development of the ability to use contextual clues, do accurate transcription and develop skills in skimming, scanning and summation of main ideas in a text. Only teachers at the schools reaching the international benchmarks made mention of wanting to work on specific comprehension strategies with their learners.

Teachers at five of the schools had a goal to improve learners' reading, with some mentioning fluency or independent reading as goals. The only goal the teacher at School E had was to ensure that her learners were excellent readers, thus leading to the conclusion that there was a lack of depth in her understanding of reading literacy development. Vocabulary development was only mentioned as a goal at two schools, with code-switching being a specific issue the teacher wanted to eradicate at School D.

9.7.2 Class size and learners' reading profiles

The higher the number of learners in each class, the lower the school's class average benchmark in 2005. The highest performing school had the least number of learners in the Grade 4 teacher's class and the lowest performing school had the most. At School C, a strategy had been developed to rectify the situation of large class sizes at Grade 4 as it was felt that learners needed more attention and support due to the upheaval of the transition.

Two low performing schools, E and F, had the highest number of learners experiencing problems with spoken English, whereas no learners at the two highest performing schools, A and B, experienced such difficulties. The lowest performing school, F, also had the most learners - half of the class - in need of remedial instruction, according to their teacher.

On the assumption that the 2009 learners would have had similar achievement as their 2005 counterparts, the School A teacher judged her learners' reading abilities realistically, indicating that they had above-average abilities. The School F teacher's judgement that her learners had below-average abilities, and School C judgement of average reading ability, were also seemingly realistic.

9.7.3 Overall language teaching strategies

- Typical activities

There was much diversity in the teachers' approaches to the teaching of language to their Grade 4 learners. At School A, many different approaches were employed and strategies were altered on a weekly basis. School A was the only school where the teacher did reading as a daily activity with a written or verbal response linked to this. Other than this a variety of approaches and contextual teaching were used.

At Schools B, C, D and E more rigid approaches were employed, with certain activities taking place on certain days or during the course of a specific time for lesson implementation. The School B teacher focused on a reading period that incorporated comprehension, grammar and spelling in a typical week, sometimes also paired reading or creative writing. At Schools C, D and E there was one central activity, a reading lesson, theme discussion or comprehension, and all other activities were built around this activity over a cycle, week or over two weeks. The School C teacher did two periods of reading a week and a comprehension activity every two weeks with writing, listening and vocabulary activities stemming from the comprehension. At School D there was one reading period a week and four days of grammar built around a theme discussion and vocabulary extension. The School E teacher did a reading lesson at the beginning of the week with language structure and use, comprehension and spelling following this. Theme-based teaching with cross-curricular integration goals was evident at Schools B, C, D, E and F.

- Learner workbook output

Much more work output was evident in the learner workbooks at those schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks. Although the School D and F workbooks had a similar number of activities to those of Schools A, B and C, the activities were much shorter and less cognitively engaging or challenging for the learners.

The School A workbook showed much variety and creativity on the part of the teacher as well as comprehensive curriculum coverage. The School B workbook did not have a variety of activities, but rather there was evidence of much reinforcement and repetition. There were signs of much coverage of the language use and structure, thinking and reasoning and reading and viewing LOs. At School C, a variety of activities were also evident with signs of coverage of all of the language LOs. There were also extension exercises for advanced learners linked to the overall activity. At Schools A and C there were worksheets and texts from multiple sources, an aspect missing from the learner workbooks at the rest of the schools.

The School D learner workbook was dominated by short writing exercises, none of which required written expression. Grammar exercises were especially prominent and there was little evidence of comprehension activities. At School E there was minimal work output in the learner's book and the work that was available for analysis appeared to be based on rote principles. At School F, work output was minimal and elemental, suggesting that

learners were in the early stages of acquiring the language with the teacher following a phonological processing approach to reading literacy development.

On this basis it seems that learners in low-performing contexts do not get enough opportunities to consolidate their learning via written application. One possibility for the lack of written output at the low-performing schools may be that too much focus is being placed on speaking and listening skills with no transfer to written expression – an important factor in achievement throughout the rest of schooling.

9.7.4 Classroom reading materials, reading instruction and reading homework

- Classroom reading materials

Four of the teachers used the same materials with learners at different reading levels but the learners worked at different speeds. The Schools D and F teachers used different materials with learners at different reading levels. At the schools reaching the PIRLS international benchmarks there were no problems with access to reading materials, but reading material access at the other schools was less than optimal.

At Schools A, B and C, reading series and set work novels were used for reading instruction. The use of set work novels perhaps revealed that their learners at these schools were challenged more in their exposure to reading materials and that they had more advanced reading abilities than their peers at the lower-performing schools. The School C teacher stated that although the set work novels were challenging for her learners, she did not want to underestimate their abilities by choosing easier texts. School D only had access to a textbook reader with some reading passages. The teacher also sometimes read extra stories or used photocopy handouts. At School E, the teacher only had readers for half of her class, with no other materials evident. The School F teacher had no materials but stated that she could improvise with photocopy handouts. There were however a few Grade 1 and 2 readers in the class. Both the School C and E teachers had difficulties with materials for their ESL learner groups. The School E teacher was uncertain whether to use EFL or ESL materials and the School C teacher found it difficult to find ESL books that would still challenge her learners. Schools A and C were the only schools where the use of multiple text types was evident. The use of multiple text types for reading instruction is encouraged in the RNCS for languages (DoE, 2002a) so it

is not clear why the other teachers did not make attempts to use multiple texts in their teaching.

- Reading instruction

The Schools A, B and C teachers reported the most time allocation to reading instruction during a week, with up to two hours at each school. At School D, only 30 minutes was allocated per week and it was not clear how much time the Schools E and F teachers allocated, suggesting that perhaps they had no formalised time for reading instruction. Reading was reportedly most frequently taught as a whole class activity at each of the schools. At Schools C and D, mixed ability groups were frequently used. Sometimes individual instruction was used at Schools A, D and F but at none of the other schools.

Teachers seemed to use combinations of reading aloud, silent reading and paired reading in their teaching. Reading aloud in small groups or pairs was undertaken at Schools A and D once or twice a week and every day or almost every day at School E. At Schools B, C and F, reading aloud in small groups or pairs was less frequent, occurring perhaps once or twice a month. Teachers used guided, shared or paired reading methodologies. Reading aloud was done by the teacher, by individual learners or by all of the learners as a group. The Schools A, B, C and E teachers reported reading aloud to their learners every day or almost every day, although this seemed doubtful at School E. At Schools D and F the teachers also reported reading aloud to their learners once or twice a week. Learners also read aloud in class on a weekly basis at all of the schools, but the School D teacher did admit it was difficult to get all learners to read due to large class sizes.

Silent reading was only mentioned as a strategy at Schools A, B, D and F. At school A learners only did silent reading once or twice a month, while the School B learners did silent reading in some form every day, albeit not as part of a formalised teaching strategy. The School D and F teachers used silent reading to check their learners' understanding although the School F teacher did not do this often as her learners needed much support for reading. The School F teacher reported still using a phonics approach to reading instruction.

School A was the only school where the teacher reported a number of other strategies for reading instruction, including computer software, monitoring and increasing reading speed, flash reading for word recognition and 30 minutes of formal reading instruction a week, during which reading strategies were taught.

- Reading for homework

The School A and F learners reportedly had reading for homework every day or almost every day and the School B and D learners had reading for homework three to four times a week. The School C and E learners reportedly had reading for homework once or twice a week. The amount of homework reported at Schools E and F is problematic, as the School F HoD reported that learners at School F could not be given homework and also as there were reportedly no reading materials at either school which could be given to learners for homework. Teachers had to rely on parents to ensure that homework was done and it was only at School A where parents were given guidelines on how to interact with their children when doing homework, and where children were given activities linked to their homework to make sure it was done.

9.7.5 Comprehension development practices

- Typical practices

The School A teacher reported more strategies to improve learners' reading comprehension than teachers at the other schools. Strategies used for comprehension were vocabulary extension, grammar inclusions, visual literacy, pictorial sequencing, consolidation of characters, plot, setting in mind maps, question formulation with key words, recognition of multiple perspectives and personal opinion and colour coding. School A was also the only school where the teacher reported use of theoretical models to guide their teaching practices for reading comprehension development.

Comprehension instruction at the other schools was less dynamic. At School B, most comprehension activities were centred on a literature study for the learners' set work novel. There were also mini-comprehensions and infrequent exposure to other comprehensions. The School C teacher did one comprehension every two weeks with the learners, reading aloud to them and going through difficult vocabulary. The teacher at School D seemed to do much oral comprehension work, focusing on prediction, vocabulary, tone, tempo, application to own life world and activation of prior knowledge. At Schools E and F, the teachers seemed to lack understanding of reading comprehension development techniques. No insights were provided into the School E teacher's strategies and the School F teacher focused on asking questions after reading and vocabulary linked to spelling exercises. The School D and F teachers used code-switching to aid learners' understanding.

- Comprehension exercise output in the learner workbooks

The highest performing schools, A and B, had the most written comprehension exercises evident in their learners' workbooks. At Schools D, E and F a limited number of written comprehension activities were apparent. For the comprehension exercises in the Schools A, B and C workbooks, it was clear that the learners had exposure to questions requiring information retrieval, inference and interpretation. At School A in particular there was a strong focus on learner identification of setting, main ideas, characters, summary and explanation of answers. The Schools D, E and F workbooks had a limited number of comprehension activities, focused on information retrieval questions only.

- Reading comprehension lesson observation

For the reading comprehension observed, School A had the shortest lesson but it did integrate more activities than those of the other teachers. At School F, the teacher only spent 16 minutes actively teaching her learners, whereas at Schools A, C, D and E teachers spent the majority of the lesson teaching their learners. The text choice for the lessons at Schools A, B, C and D were appropriate for Grade 4 learners. With the exception of School D, the number of words for each of the texts was below 450, meaning that the texts were not very long. The Schools B and C texts were slightly more challenging than those used at Schools A and D. The School C teacher felt that it was good to give her learners more challenging texts for exposure and experience in working with less simplistic texts. The School E text was also suitable but provided few opportunities for cognitive challenge. The School F text was basic and likely geared to the level at which the learners were functioning and not the one expected of a Grade 4 learner. The comprehension questions for the lesson were also scrutinised. School F learners had the least number of questions to answer, requiring information retrieval and mostly one-word responses. Although slightly more complex in terms of language, the School D questions also only required information retrieval. At Schools A, B and C, 10 questions were asked. There was a balance in information retrieval, inference and complex reasoning questions. No questions were used in the lesson at School E.

Each of the teachers approached their reading comprehension differently, which is not in itself unusual as one would expect a variety of strategies to be used by different teachers to address the needs of learners. However, although the lessons were presented in different orders with varying degrees of expertise by the teacher, the overall approaches were similar. Some form of reading (learners reading aloud, teacher reading aloud) would

take place followed by the answering of reading comprehension questions. At some schools vocabulary extension was included prior to reading (A and C) or during reading (B, D and E). For schools C and E, the vocabulary extension took up the most teaching time for the lesson.

The School A teacher made the most use of prior-reading activities, including scene-setting, vocabulary extension with language structure and use, and a visual literacy activity invoking higher order thinking. At School E, the teacher attempted to discuss the theme of the lesson prior to reading but did not link this activity to the content of the text, rendering the discussion somewhat superfluous. At Schools C and D the teachers only briefly discussed the title of the story, followed by consideration of further details around this. No prior-reading activities were undertaken at Schools B and F. Thus, most of the teachers did not make optimal use of strategies to elicit learner participation or comprehension prior to reading.

A number of different reading activities were undertaken during the lessons. At Schools B, C and F the teacher read the text aloud to the learners. The B and C teachers also re-phrased text, discussed, explained and summarised content during reading. Learners were also asked for their opinions. At Schools D and E individual learners read aloud. The School D teacher interjected to ask questions or explain words. During the reading phase the School E teacher included a vocabulary extension activity. The teacher read aloud at School F and two learners read a sentence each. Perhaps if only a few learners read aloud individually during a lesson the other learners would remain passive in their reading and so not gain further experience. At School A, multiple reading strategies involved all of the learners, as they silently read a de-contextualised paragraph, read aloud as a class, or the teacher read to them and asked them to predict what would happen next in the story.

With the exception of the teacher at School E who continued a vocabulary exercise and discussed what happened in the story for the first time, post-reading activities at the schools mostly involved discussion and answering of questions. The School A, B, C, D and F teachers read through the comprehension questions. The School B teacher read through the questions, discussing the answers for some and pointing out requirements for others. At Schools C, D and F, all of the comprehension questions were discussed orally. At Schools C and D the teachers probed for further meaning. At School D and F the teachers discussed factual content further, for cross-curricular theme-based learning. The post-reading comprehension exercise at School A was the most strategically organised. The teacher read through the questions, discussed the answering requirements, got the

learners to highlight key words in the questions and read the passage to the learners again so that they could look for answers before writing them.

Learners at Schools A, B, C, D and E were for the most part actively involved in the lessons, although learners at Schools C, D and E had more difficulties answering questions than their peers at the other schools. Learners at School F were passive and had difficulties following what was going on in the classroom.

- Opportunity-To-Learn

Only four teachers completed an OTL questionnaire. The School A, B and D teachers thought that the length of PIRLS text was suitable although the School D teacher approved the length in terms of a lesson with discussion and not as an individual assessment. The School F teacher did not think the text was suitable for her learners. The vocabulary in the text was considered appropriate for the School A learners and more appropriate for EFL than ESL learners at School B. The School D teacher thought that easier synonyms were needed in the text and the School F teacher did not think the vocabulary was suitable for her learners. All of the teachers were positive about the cognitive level of the story. Although the other teachers thought that the text was culturally appropriate for their learners, the School B teacher thought that it was more appropriate for Western cultures. The School A, B and D teachers felt that the text was similar to the type of texts they used in class. However, the School F teacher thought that the text was too long for her learners.

The School A, B and D teachers mostly focused on strategies to increase learners' fluency in reading the text, when asked about the support they would need to give learners to read the text. For assistance with comprehension the teachers at Schools A, B, D and F teachers stated vocabulary extension as a main activity. Again, the School A teacher reported the most strategies to assist with comprehension. The School B teacher explained similes and metaphors and the school D teacher used pictures to aid comprehension. The School F teacher seemed to be less certain of how to go about supporting her learners to read and understand the passage. The teacher only stated explanation of vocabulary as a strategy.

9.8 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This chapter has dealt with the presentation of data to partly answer research sub-question two for the study. Overall language teaching practices, reading instruction practices and comprehension development practices at each of the six participating schools were elucidated.

In the final chapter of this thesis, the data presented and discussed in this chapter and chapters Six, Seven and Eight will be integrated and interpreted to answer the overall research question for the study. Reflections on and implications of the study will also be considered

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CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 ORIENTATION

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

10.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS UNDERTAKEN

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

10.2.1 Overview of research design implemented

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

These sub-questions were:

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

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

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

10.2.2 Summary of the phase one research process

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

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

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

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

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

10.2.3 Summary of the phase two research process

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

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

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

10.3 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.3.1.1 *School, learner and parent characteristic influences*

- School characteristics

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

- Learner characteristics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Parental involvement influences

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

10.3.1.2 *School organisational attributes for reading literacy development*

- Planning, coordination and teacher cooperation influences

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

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

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

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

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

- Teacher development opportunity influences

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

- Language teaching time allocation

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

10.3.1.3 *School resource availability, adequacy and management*

- School library availability and use

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

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

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

- Specific resource shortages and inadequacies

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

- Classroom reading resource availability and management

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

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

- Learning support resource influences

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

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

10.3.1.4 *The perceived curriculum at school level*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.3.2.1 *Teacher background, training and preparation*

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

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

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

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

10.3.2.2 *Availability and use of reading resources by teachers*

- Classroom libraries and reading corners

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

- Classroom reading materials

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

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

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

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

- Teaching goals

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

- Typical language activities

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

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

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

- Reading instruction activities
- *Reading instruction time allocation*

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

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

- *Reading instruction activities*

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

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

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

- Reading comprehension development

- *Reading comprehension skills and strategies*

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

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

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

- *Comprehension exercise output in the learner workbooks*

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

- *Reading comprehension lesson observation*

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

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

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

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

10.3.2.4 *Homework and assessment*

- Homework

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

- Assessment

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

10.3.3 Main conclusions for the study

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

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

10.3.3.1 *Schooling conditions*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.3.3.2 *Teaching practices*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Frequent teaching of most skills and strategies for reading comprehension development were reported across the benchmarks. Making predictions, making generalisations and drawing inferences and describing the style or structure of texts were exceptions (8.6.2.1). However, these exceptions are fundamental to the development of higher-order comprehension skills which are needed to achieve more than just basic literacy involving information retrieval. They are also prerequisites for success in the PIRLS as the assessments require of the learner to: focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information; make straightforward inferences; interpret and integrate ideas and information; and examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements (Mullis *et al.*, 2006).

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.4 RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

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

10.4.1 Methodological reflections

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

10.4.1.1 Phase one of the study

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.4.1.2 *Phase two of the study*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.4.2 Conceptual framework reflections

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

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

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

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

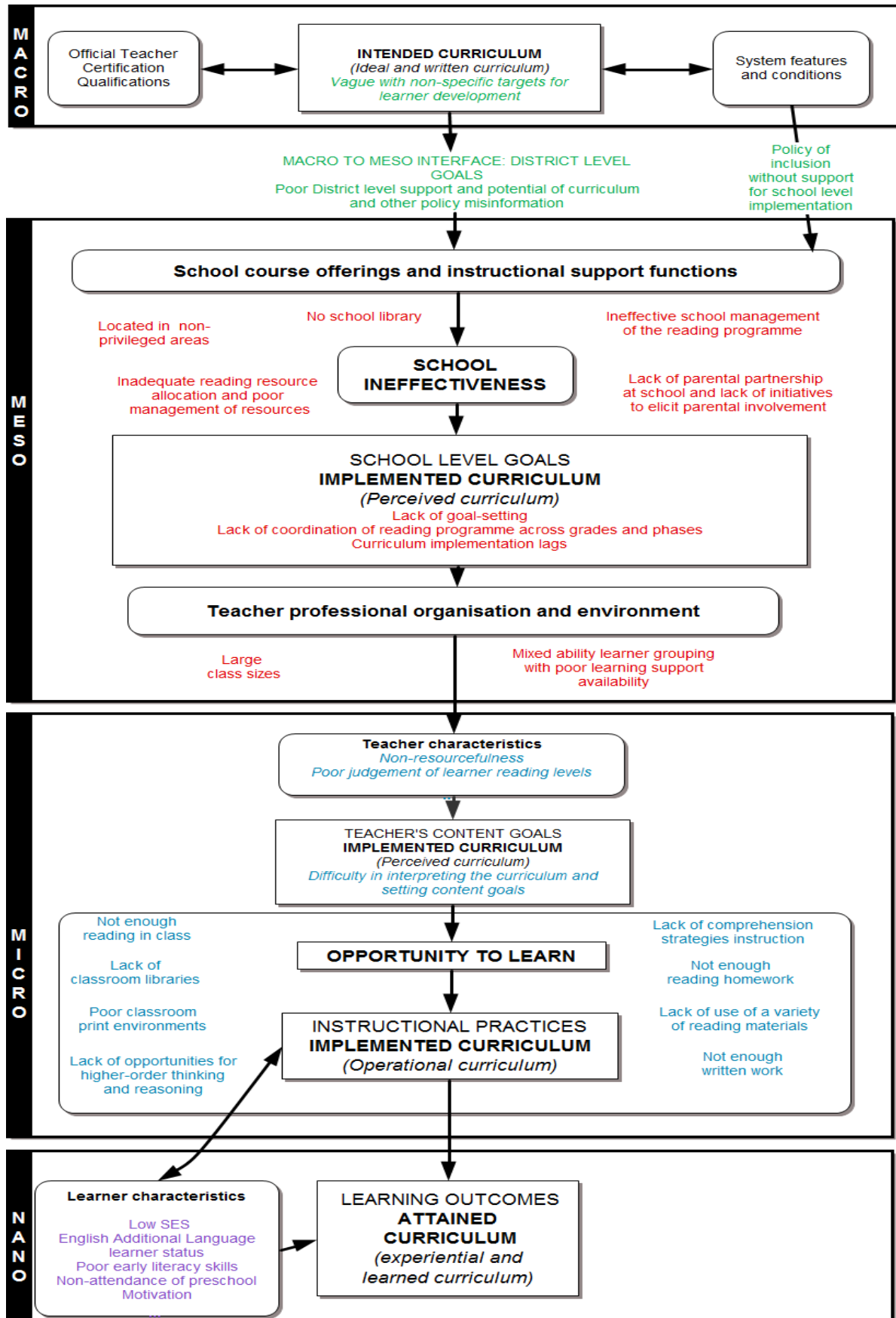


Figure 10.1: Factors impeding curriculum implementation for learners' reading literacy development

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

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

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

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

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

10.5 POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

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

10.5.1 Education policy recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.5.2 Teaching practice and teacher education recommendations

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

10.5.2.1 *Teaching practices for reading literacy development*

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

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

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

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

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

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

The following recommendations are offered for further teacher development:

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

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

10.5.3 Further research recommendations

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

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

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

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

10.6 CLOSING THOUGHTS

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

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

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

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

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