

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Chapter aim:** This chapter aims to draw conclusions from the results obtained in the study. The method as well as findings relevant to this research is critically evaluated, the clinical implications are discussed, and recommendations for continued research are stated.

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

*“Subjective belief must be checked against objective reality.”*

(De Vos, et al., 2005:45).

Research, within a profession such as Speech-Language Pathology, offers in the unique opportunity to lay scientific foundations through identifying possible generalisations from experiences of professionals in clinical practice on a daily basis (De Vos, et al., 2005). The aim of applied clinical research, as in the case of this research project, should be the improvement in the quality of service to clients, because it is newly acquired knowledge that may empower speech-language therapists to improve their service through application of this knowledge in their service delivery. Through the progressive improvement of knowledge, effective and efficient service delivery is enhanced and ethical service delivery is promoted (HPCSA, 2005).

Ethical and effective service delivery within the South African context needs to focus on areas where the speech-language therapist needs to provide intervention within a multi-cultural and multi-lingual context, since the majority of South African learners are functioning in this context. The results of the current study address an urgent need in clinical practice within the South African context because it provides an important expansion of knowledge in the field of phonological awareness, which is considered to be the most important predictor of later reading and spelling success (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, & McFadden, 1998).

The results of research projects such as this one should lead to a better understanding of the challenges that confront the speech-language therapist in intervention with a learner in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual South African context. Improvement in the application of the speech-language therapist's skills in collaboration, prevention, assessment, and intervention with the learner in the OBE system may, at least in part, be enhanced by findings of this research study (Roth & Baden, 2001). The results of the present study provide insight into context-appropriate clinical application of speech-language therapy. Such improvement may benefit many Black children being educated in English as Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT) in South Africa by improving their literacy skills, their academic performance levels, and their prospects for further education and training.

Based on the results of this research project, conclusions were drawn and certain recommendations were made. These should be of a practical nature in order to be utilised maximally in clinical practice (De Vos, et al., 2005). With this perspective, this chapter presents the conclusions, recommendations for future researchers, a critical evaluation of the study, clinical implications of the results, and suggestions for future research.

## 5.2 CONCLUSIONS

This description of the effect of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual context on the English phonological awareness skills of a selected group of Black grade 4-learners in a primary school setting in South Africa was made possible by the correlations determined between the phonological abilities, expressive and receptive language abilities, reading, and spelling abilities, and the phonological awareness skills of the participants in ELoLT. Based on the results of this study, the researcher came to the conclusions presented below.

*Firstly*, the participants' phonological skills in English as LoLT showed that 47% of the participants produced the target consonants with a consonant approximation, and vowel approximations were produced by all of the participants in single words. These results were attributed to a number of factors, namely the characteristics of BSAE

(Makalela, 2004), the influence of the learners' first language on the pronunciation of the words of BSAE (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004; Goldstein & Iglesias, 2004; Makalela, 2002; Van Rooy, 2002), the fact that English is an additional language of the participants (Bland-Steward, 2005; Makalela, 2004; Van der Walt & Van Rooy, 2002), as well as to the relatively limited vowel inventories of the different African Language Families (ALF) (Jones & Mollema, 2005; Wissing, 2002; Lanham, 1967).

The participants' phonological skills differed from the South African English norm. According to literature, there is a known relationship between a learner's phonological abilities and his/her phonological awareness skills (Carol, Snowling, Hulme & Stevenson; 2003). These findings indicate that, in this group of learners with ELoLT, their phonological abilities and its impact on their phonological awareness skills should be taken into account by speech-language-therapists working in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual context of South Africa.

*Secondly*, the participants' expressive and receptive language abilities in English as their LoLT showed that their expressive language abilities were more advanced as compared to their receptive language abilities. Generally, receptive language abilities are more advanced than expressive language abilities, since language development in a child shows that a concept has to be established before the child will correctly use the word that refers to the concept (Hoff, 2005; Owens, 2004). It was concluded that the participants were able to cope and interact linguistically on a functional and social level, but that their basic understanding of ELoLT was poor (Le Roux, 2005; Owens, 2004). The participants' limited vocabulary in English may possibly be ascribed to limited language stimulation in English. These participants appeared to cope well with phrases and other language structures that have a high frequency of use in colloquial language (BICS), but when demands of an academic kind were made on their LoLT; they were mostly unable to meet those demands, probably due to inadequacies in their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). The implicit differences that exist between the African languages and English (Seeff & Jordaan, 2000), and the intrinsic oral culture associated with African languages (Le Roux, 2005; Le Roux 2004) were also viewed as contributing to the results obtained related to participants' language abilities.

Since phonological awareness is a component of meta-linguistics, which develops because of language use on a higher cognitive level (Goldsworthy, 2001), it is clear that poor language abilities will lead to poor phonological awareness skills. From these results it appeared that a multi-lingual context possibly influenced the participants' competency in ELoLT. Furthermore, the significant discrepancies found in the language abilities of the participants in this study could possibly be ascribed to the fact that the tests that were used were originally designed for English first language speakers and, consequently, it cannot be taken for granted that they may be successfully implemented for the evaluation of learners with ELoLT where English is not their first language. Also, the participants in this study come from diverse cultural backgrounds, compounding the issue of culturally relevant testing.

In order to improve the phonological awareness skills of learners in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual South African OBE system, the speech-language therapist has to aim at improving the general language skills in the LoLT to a level where it will be age-appropriate. Until then it cannot be expected that these learners' phonological awareness skills in English would develop to an age-appropriate level.

*Thirdly*, the participants' phonological awareness problems were evidenced by their below average scores on three of the PhAB-subtests, namely *Rhyme*, *Naming speed: Pictures* and *Fluency: Rhyme*. Based on the PhAB manual (Frederickson, et al., 1997) these results were rated as a severe impairment in phonological awareness. The results substantiated those of other local studies that found that rhyming activities were difficult for EAL-learners, and that alliteration tasks, on the other hand, were easier (Haarhoff, 2001; McCord; 2000). The participants evidenced delayed rhyme development in ELoLT compared with the developmental norms stated in the literature concerning English first-language speakers. This may be attributed to the fact that rhyme does not appear in the African languages in the same way as in English. The above-average performance of the participants in alliteration tasks in this study were explained by the repetitive nature of sounds in neighbouring words in traditional African songs (Le Roux, 2005).

The EAL speaking participants' below average phonological awareness skills are regarded as having a negative impact on future academic success, since phonological

awareness is the single best predictor of successful reading and spelling development (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, McFadden, 1998).

The different order of development of the participants' phonological awareness skills (when compared to the development of phonological awareness skills in English) must be taken into consideration when working with a learner in the South African multi-cultural, multi-lingual educational context. This implies that the current school system, as well as speech-language therapists, should provide opportunities for these learners to improve their phonological awareness skills in a manner which takes their cultural background into account. Such consideration should enable these learners to reach their full academic potential.

*Fourthly*, the participants' level of reading ability was evaluated in terms of their reading decoding and reading comprehension abilities. The decoding results showed that only one third of the participants could be considered to be readers of an average standard, whilst the remainder of the participants struggled to implement their reading decoding abilities in the academic setting (Broom, 2004; Owens, 2001). These poor reading skills were attributed to the strategy within OBE where reading is not instructed on a formal level, but is assumed to develop 'incidentally' (Broom, 2004; Muter & Diethelm, 2001) and also to the fact that pre-literacy skills, which are important predictors of later reading success (Carrol, Snowling, Hulme, & Stevenson, 2003; Catts, 2001), may not have been adequately developed. It was noted that the high scores obtained in the reading comprehension-section could not be seen as a true reflection of the participants' reading comprehension abilities, because they were familiar with the content of the passage they were required to read (memory probably played an important role as well). The researcher's use of multiple-choice questions may also have contributed to the high score on the reading comprehension test (Tractenberg, 2002).

The reading comprehension abilities of participants were on a lower level compared to those of first language speakers of South African English. Literature has proven that there is a clear relationship between reading abilities and the phonological awareness skills (Van Kleeck, et al., 1998; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998). This

relationship was evident in the current study as well, since the participants' reading abilities as well as phonological awareness skills, were found to be poor. This implies that reading instruction in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual school setting should be considered a challenge, and extra assistance from the speech-language therapist is probably required.

In the *fifth place*, the participants' spelling abilities in English as LoLT was not age-appropriate. The spelling abilities of the participants may have been influenced by the learners' mother tongue (Makalela, 2002), the opaqueness of the spelling system of English (Seeff & Jordaan, 2000), the phonological context, poor phonological awareness skills, and by the method of instruction in the classroom. As English was the language of mutual understanding, the participants created new spelling rules in order to make sense of spelling – they did not implement the English spelling rules of South African English, but created their own rules which were easier to apply, resulting in an almost 'phonetic' spelling of words, seemingly prompted by their pronunciation of these words.

The participants' spelling abilities differed from the accepted spelling system of South African English. These results clearly indicated that these learners with ELoLT struggled to spell age-appropriately (or congruent with the required Grade 4 scholastic standard). The improvement of these skills and the teaching of basic general spelling rules in English require the urgent attention of speech-language therapists who provide intervention with learners in the OBE setting that constituted the context for this study.

*Lastly*, the relationship between the participants' phonological awareness skills on the one hand, and their language, reading, and spelling abilities on the other, was determined. Correlations were drawn between the participants' phonological awareness skills and phonological abilities, receptive and expressive language, reading decoding abilities, and spelling abilities. These results confirm research findings which state that:

- The phonological abilities of a learner may have an influence on the phonological awareness skills of that learner (Carol, Snowling, Hulme & Stevenson; 2003).
- The participants' language abilities are linked to phonological awareness skills, which predict literacy development (Catts, 1993), and poor language development provides a weak basis for the development of the higher meta-linguistic phonological awareness skills (Cooper, Roth, Speece & Schatschneider, 2002).
- The phonological awareness skills of a learner will determine the success of reading decoding (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, & McFadden, 1998).
- The phonological awareness skills of a learner may play a role in spelling success (Roth & Baden, 2001; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998).

The fact that no significant correlation was determined between the participants' reading comprehension and phonological awareness skills was attributed to the fact that, as mentioned already, memory played a role in the results obtained for reading comprehension. Therefore the results for reading comprehension need to be interpreted with caution.

The above correlations highlight the importance of the development of all of these abilities and skills –optimal development of these skills will greatly assist learners in this specific context to realise their full academic potential. Because the abovementioned skills are all integrated, intervention by the speech-language therapist should aim at developing all of them to an age-appropriate level.

In order to determine the relevance of the results of this research, it is important to provide a critical evaluation of the study in terms of its strengths and limitations.

### **5.3 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

A critical evaluation of this research is important because it will highlight its strengths and limitations, thereby enabling the speech-language therapist to apply the

knowledge gained from this study in clinical practice where relevant, and also in future associated research projects (HPCSA, 2005).

Through reflecting on the research process the researcher identified certain *limitations* regarding the method used in this study. Reporting on these limitations is important, as it may assist future researchers to improve in researching this topic. The limitations of this study were identified during the research process, accounted for and kept in mind throughout the discussion of the research, thereby limiting, to some degree, overcome their impact on the results. These limitations are discussed below.

- Fifteen participants were selected for the current study. Although purposive sampling was done according to the prescriptions in recent literature (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004; De Vos, 2005), the sample was limited, thus precluding generalisation of the results to larger populations. It is recommended that future researchers select a larger group of participants in order to obtain results that may readily be generalised to the broader population. Such results will be of great assistance for learners similar to those who participated in this study, and in like circumstances, reach their optimal academic potential (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004).
- *The Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation* (Goldman & Fristoe, 1986) was selected to evaluate the phonological abilities of the participants on the level of their production of vowels and consonants. However, as the data collection process progressed, it became clear that the participants' vowel productions needed in-depth analysis. This proved to be a problem, since the said test did not target vowel productions. Thus, the implementation of this test for the evaluation of vowels has to be considered inappropriate.
- In order to be able to describe and analyse the consonant and vowel productions of the participants, the researcher relied on the opinion of a panel of listeners. Analysis of the participants' vowel variations was important because vowels, being the most prominent segments of speech, are often indicative of a language variation such as BSAE and had to be taken into account when describing the participants' phonological abilities (Tesner, 2005,



Abercrombie, 1991). However, audio-taped samples of spontaneous speech, which would enable the researcher to conduct a more detailed analysis of the participants' vowels production, are recommended for future research (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004).

- In order to determine the participants' reading comprehension abilities, the researcher selected a curriculum-based passage from the participants' Grade 4 reader. This passage, however, did not provide a true reflection of the participants' reading skills, which led to a discrepancy between the results obtained and the current literature on reading comprehension abilities. The participants performed better than expected when their reading comprehension was compared to their reading decoding results and this can be attributed to the fact that they could recall certain information from memory, as they were familiar with the selected passage. In future research, a curriculum based reading book can still be used but it is recommended that a passage on the same level of reading proficiency, but perhaps from an unfamiliar book, be selected. This would rule out the possible role which memory may play in answering questions pertaining to the passage (Tractenberg, 2002).
- In order to evaluate the participants reading comprehension, the researcher formulated a number of multiple-choice questions focused on the participants' comprehension of the content of the selected passage. However, these questions were found to be too basic and undemanding to provide a true reflection of the comprehension skills of the participants. The participants could guess the correct answer from the answers provided in the multiple-choice lists. This obvious limitation in the research method led to better than expected scores for reading comprehension skills compared to their results for reading decoding (Pretorius, 2002; Owens, 2001; Liberman; Schankweiler & Liberman; 1989). The results influenced the relationship between the participants' reading comprehension and their phonological awareness skills, as no relationship was found to exist between these skills. This is contrary to findings reported in literature which state that there is a strong correlation between reading comprehension and phonological awareness skills (Roth & Baden, 2001; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Van Kleeck, Gillam & McFadden, 1998). The use of

open-ended questions in future research projects are recommended as this technique should reduce the possibility of a participant relying on memory (Tractenberg, 2002) or using the answers provided for the multiple-choice questions to guess the correct answer. By using these types of questions, a true reflection of a participant's reading comprehension abilities should be obtained.

- The standardised tests, namely *The Goldman Fristoe Test of Articulation* (Goldman & Fristoe, 1986), *The Clinical Evaluation of Language Functions* (Semel & Wiig, 1980), and the *Phonological Awareness Battery* (Frederickson, Reason & Frith, 1997) that were implemented, cannot be assumed to be culturally appropriate since none of these tests were not standardised for the South African EAL-context but for European and American populations. This may have had a contaminating influence on the accuracy of the results of this study. Given that no tests that were standardised for any South-African populations were available, the use of the selected tests was inevitable. This was taken into account in the study and therefore the researcher followed Goldstein's general guidelines (as discussed in Chapter 3) for conducting least-biased assessment (Goldstein, 2000).
- The specific educational setting was selected because the learners were Black with English as the only LoLT. Even though the research was conducted in a school where English is the language of mutual understanding, this school offered a unique setting, which is not necessarily a representative of the broader public school system in South Africa. The researcher purposefully selected this context because it could provide important information on the culturally and linguistically heterogeneous African speaking learners in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual educational setting. This specific context was also selected as all the learners are mother tongue speakers of an African language. Through selecting this context a host of variables which could influence the results were limited. In the broader public school setting there may be a combination of all the official languages as well as French, Portuguese, and others, but such schools would not have provided an optimal setting for the

purposes of this study. However, similar research needs to be conducted in a context such as the one described above in order to come to an understanding of learners' needs in a cross section of the 'average' public school system in South Africa.

As previously mentioned, it is also important to identify the *strengths* of this study as this may serve as a basis for improved research methods of future research in the field of phonological awareness skills. The strengths that were identified are discussed below.

- The research conducted in this study is both timely and topical. The multi-cultural, multi-lingual education context is a stark reality in South Africa (Broom, 2004; Chick, 2002; Mutasa, 2000). This context on education in the 'new South Africa', coupled with the controversial OBE system do not impact on scholastic education only, but also confronts service delivery by speech-language therapists with unique challenges (Stoop, 2003; Noble, 2002; Haarhof, 2001). Therefore, this research project and its findings can be viewed as a positive contribution to more effective, accountable service delivery by professionals in the field of Speech-Language Therapy (Van Kleeck et al., 1998). The results of this research are directly relevant for the unique South African context, and should inspire more appropriate intervention, because understanding a specific phenomenon leads to the development of new strategies and a more appropriate application of skills to meet the challenges inherent to the phenomenon. Seen in this light, the results of this study may help to remove some of the learning barriers that learners similar to the participants in this study, experience on a daily basis.
- When research is conducted, it is of utmost importance that it should be guided by a solid theoretical background (De Vos, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2004). The overview of the literature on the South African context, language-related aspects in the teaching and learning process, phonological awareness skills, the educational context, and the role of the speech-language therapist were properly referenced throughout and served as a sound basis for meaningful interpretation of the results.

- Phonological awareness is an integral part of academic success (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001; Van Kleeck et al., 1998; Majsterek & Ellenwood, 1995). For this reason the current research project included a broad spectrum of communication and academic skills as well as a thorough evaluation of the participants' level of functioning in the researched areas. This enabled the researcher to draw correlations between the participants' phonological awareness skills and their phonological, language, reading, and spelling abilities. It was important to evaluate this broad spectrum of communication and academic skills because, together, these skills constitute an integrated whole. The information gathered by this evaluation enabled the researcher to provide an in-depth description of the participants' phonological awareness skills.
- The pilot study improved the validity and reliability of the results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004). The raw data score sheet (Appendix K) that was developed on grounds of the results of the pilot study greatly assisted in the organisation of the obtained data. Through a logically structured organisation of the data, the researcher ensured that all the targeted data were obtained for each participant and this, in turn, aided in the statistical analysis – the organised data could be easily transferred to the statistical analysis sheets used by the statistician (Louw, 2005). The concept of a raw data score sheet can be useful in future research, as it was showed to effectively assist in the organisation of data.
- Ethical research implies that the participants are respected at all times (Louw, 2004). Informed consent from the participants and their parents were obtained. As the participants were minors, their consent was obtained by way of a verbal explanation followed up by a letter written on an age-appropriate level (Appendix D). The participants felt, from the beginning, that they were part of the research process and took responsibility for their contributions to the research, because they regarded their consent as a 'contract' with the researcher (Appendix D).
- Analysis of the participants' utterances as elicited by the *Goldman Fristoe Test of Articulation* (Goldman & Fristoe, 1986) by a panel of listeners determined the

vowel and/or consonant variations occurring in the participants' verbal responses. The panel of listeners for the analysis of the phonological abilities of the participants consisted of the researcher, a second speech-language therapist and a speech scientist specialising in phonetics. The use of three listeners reduced bias and increased the reliability and validity of the results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004).

- As far as could be determined, the execution of this research project is the first attempt to describe the phonological awareness skills of a group of ELoLT Grade 4 learners in the South African context. Furthermore, the researcher is of the opinion that the results of the study are of value, because they provide insight into the phonological awareness skills of learners in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual context, but with English as the only language of instruction.
- The results of this research project can provide the taskforce focusing on education in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual society with specific guidelines regarding the need for additional second-language support, increased emphasis on the importance of phonological awareness skills, and expansion of reading and spelling skills of ELoLT learners.

A reflection on the results of the current study led the researcher to the identification of certain *clinical* and *research implications* for further research. These implications are discussed forthwith.

#### **5.4 CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS**

The findings of this study have far reaching implications in terms of the role of the speech-language therapist in collaboration, prevention, assessment, and intervention that focuses on the development of the phonological awareness skills of learners in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual outcomes based education context, especially where the learner's mother tongue is not the assumed language of mutual understanding, namely English, which is the LoLT. The importance of fulfilling these roles becomes evident when the importance of adequate phonological awareness skills in the attainment of each individual's full academic potential is realised. Possible

applications of the results by the well informed (empowered) speech-language therapist are suggested below.

- The speech-language therapist may convey information pertaining to the importance of adequately developed phonological awareness skills of learners with ELoLT, by presenting workshops for teachers. This information will empower teachers to make timeous referrals to speech-language therapists and in so doing establish a model for closer collaboration between speech-language therapists and teachers. The role of the speech-language therapist in the educational context has been clearly delineated (ASHA, 2005). The findings of the current study indicated that the participants experienced delays in their phonological, language, reading, and spelling abilities as well as in their phonological awareness skills. These shortfalls clearly requires the speech-language therapist become a broker of information (Rossetti, 2001) in a collaborative setup (Du Plessis, 2005), especially regarding phonological awareness skills and its importance for the development of reading and spelling (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, & McFadden, 1998).
- Speech-language therapists need an in depth understanding of the important relationship between phonological awareness skills on the one hand, and reading and spelling abilities. Such understanding will ensure the inclusion of an assessment of phonological awareness skills in the basic evaluation of each school-aged client, which will lead to a better understanding of the learners' strengths and limitations in the academic setting. As phonological awareness skills and phonological, language, reading and spelling abilities are interconnected, it is important that the influence of these skills on academic performance is taken into account in the speech-language therapist's planning of therapy (Carol, Snowling, Hulme & Stevenson; 2003, Cooper, Roth, Speece & Schatschneider; 2002; Roth & Baden, 2001; Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, & McFadden, 1998; Catts, 1993).

- Many Black learners in the South African context pose a challenge to the speech-language therapist when it comes to expanding these learners' various language related abilities in order to enable them to cope with English as LoLT. Therefore, the speech-language therapist needs to provide support in EAL to these learners in order to reduce the influence of below-average language development on general scholastic/academic achievement. Because phonological awareness is a meta-linguistic skill, the learner's language development must be brought to a level where the learner is able to engage on a higher cognitive level of language use (Goldsworthy, 2001).
- The speech-language therapist not only has an obligation towards his/her clients, but also towards the broader community in terms of emphasising the importance of early exposure to English, even before the learner enters the school system where English is the inevitable LoLT. Early intervention aimed at the improvement of phonological awareness skills is of crucial importance, because these skills develop from as young an age as three years, when the child is, ideally, exposed to rhyme, alliteration and stories (Roth & Baden, 2001). Learners' phonological awareness skills enable them to embark on the process of mastering reading and spelling when they enter into the formal schooling system (Larrivee & Catts, 1999; Hodson, 1998; Van Kleeck, Gillam, McFadden, 1998).
- The results of the study emphasise the need for a change in the current school system on grounds of the limited accommodation afforded to the different languages and cultures in the current South African school context. This education policy has a negative impact on learners' academic performance. The education system as it currently functions in this country is not optimally equipped to accommodate all the country's sub-cultures (Olivier, 1997). This shortcoming is the direct cause of learners from different cultural and language backgrounds being 'accommodated' in one class where English is the only language of learning and teaching in English mainstream schools. This leads to a situation where individual cultures and customs are neglected and in most

instances disregarded (Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu & Sastri, 2005). The results of this study clearly show that urgent research needs to be conducted in the educational setting to assist learners from diverse backgrounds to overcome the learning barriers posed by the current situation in school education.

- The vowel repertoire of African languages differs greatly from that of English (Wissing, 2002; Seeff & Jordaan, 2000). Therefore, it is important to use a language-specific vowel chart for each of the African languages as this will provide a true representation of the vowels of any specific African language (Le Roux, 2005). This will enable speech-language therapists to analyse the speech production of their clients in terms of the characteristics of the vowels in the specific language of each client.

The results of this study also generated possibilities for further research. The implications for further research are presented in the next section.

## **5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Expansion of the body of existing knowledge in the field of phonological awareness skills of the learner in the South African context is, especially against the background of current education policies in this country, of crucial importance. The following recommendations for further research deserve consideration.

- The current study clearly indicated the barriers to service delivery and research posed by the lack of standardised tests for the South African context (Weinmann, 2004). In spite of previous research efforts by Weinmann (2004) and Visser (2005) to contribute to the development of tests for the South African population, a dearth of context-specific assessment tools still prevails. The results obtained in this study clearly indicate the urgent need for the development of tests to evaluate the South African learner's phonological awareness skills and his/her proficiencies in related areas of language. The



design of such tests should be aimed at cultural relevance and context specificity (Pakendorf, 1996).

- Researchers agree that there are a variety of pronunciations within BSAE, and that BSAE is characterised by striking differences in levels proficiency, ranging from complete fluency, to levels of hardly any proficiency at all. A 'standard' BSAE does not exist (Makalela, 2004) and this has serious implications for the evaluation of English proficiency in speakers of BSAE, posing a formidable challenge to speech-language therapists and other members in a collaborative team of professionals. For this reason, research should focus on the implementation of closer collaboration between speech-language therapists and linguists in the interpretation of data obtained in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual context where BSAE is increasingly regarded as the language of mutual understanding (Naudé, 2005; Makalela, 2004; Kavanagh, 2002; Wissing, 2002; De Klerk, 1999).
- The participants in this study were all learners with an African language as first language, but education was provided through the medium of English only. However, currently no information exists on the development of phonological awareness skills in the various African languages spoken in South Africa. The question arises whether, firstly, the development of phonological awareness skills in African languages would prove to be different from that in English and, secondly, what the impact of phonological awareness skills in the children's mother tongue would be on their phonological awareness skills in ELoLT. In order to answer these questions, a new direction for future research is strongly indicated. The results of research projects that focus on each language individually will lead to a better understanding of the different languages' unique characteristics and will enable clinicians to provide truly accountable intervention to learners with any of the nine African languages in question as first language.
- Although OBE is implemented throughout South Africa, there are different educational contexts in which the African learner receives schooling (Naicker, 1999; Olivier, 1997). Research focusing on the Black learner within the

various multi-cultural, multi-lingual educational contexts is required, as research findings will contribute to an awareness in speech-language therapists of the different educational contexts (for example private schools and public schools in rural and urban contexts). The influences of the context on intervention should be kept in mind when a learner's language and phonological awareness skills are addressed, because each context has its own unique characteristics (Naudé, 2005).

- The current method of reading and spelling instruction in schools is a matter of great concern, one of the principles of OBE being that reading and spelling are not instructed on a formal level, but that reading and spelling abilities should develop incidentally (Broom, 2004; Muter & Diethelm, 2001). Based on the current findings, the researcher is of the opinion that the current OBE system is not conducive to the development of phonological awareness skills to a level of acceptable adequacy. Research projects which address the current method of reading and spelling instruction in schools should be undertaken in order to create a better understanding of the dynamics of spelling and reading instruction. Collaborative research should be conducted where the professions of Communication Pathology and Primary Education combine research efforts that may lead to the development of a curriculum that will take the development of phonological awareness skills into account (Du Plessis, 2005; Naudé, 2005).
- As English was not the first language of any of the participants in this study, but their only LoLT, they had no choice but to spell in a language which, to them, was actually 'foreign'. The results of this study clearly indicated that the first language influenced the participants' spelling of English words (Makalela, 2004). Therefore, the influence of a learner's mother tongue on spelling skills should be investigated in the context of OBE in order to inform the relevant stakeholders.
- Currently, intervention guidelines regarding the development of phonological awareness skills in multi-lingual learners are limited, partly because of the controversial issues around the transference of phonological awareness skills

in the mother tongue to a learner's second or third language (Holm & Dodd, 1996). A comparative study could be undertaken where the phonological awareness skills of learners in their first language as well as in English as LoLT are determined and then compared. This will aid in the development of intervention strategies for multi-lingual learners.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

*“Evidence-Based practice implies the use of the current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients by integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research”*

*(Dollaghan, 2004:4)*

It is important for all speech-language therapists who serve Black learners in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual South African context to integrate their clinical expertise in the treatment of phonological awareness problems with the available evidence provided by research in this field. It is, primarily, the speech-language therapist who holds the key to developing the phonological awareness skills of learners similar to the participants in this study to an age-appropriate level. The result of such development will be a corps of learners who are able to adequately cope within the current context of education and who will, furthermore, be empowered to reach their full academic potential. Successful education breeds well adjusted individuals who will be able to contribute significantly to the overall welfare of our 'rainbow-nation' (Christie, 1991).